

Parable of the old and the new theology religion essay



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Stylistic Analysis Given below in the table is the Parable of the Old and the New from the synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Also quoted in the table is the version of the parable from the Gospel of Thomas. Table 5.

5. 2 Stylistic Analysis of the Parable of the New and the Old

5. 2. 1 What is it?

Form: Similitude

The text given in Table 5. 2 is a parable of Jesus Christ. It is commonly known as the Parable of the New and Old. The Parable of the New and Old is a Similitude. This similitude briefly narrates typical experiences from life which are recognizable as something familiar and true. Most similitudes are narrated in the present tense but sometimes past tense too is used. This Similitude however, is narrated in the present tense. The parable of the old and the new can be said to have three parts. The first part of this tripartite parable is an analogy followed by the parable of the old and new garment and wineskins. The first part i. e. ' the Children of the Bride Chamber' is an analogy and not mentioned separately in the list of the 40 parables attributed to Jesus Christ, but it occurs in all three synoptic Gospels , and is placed before the parable of the Old and new garments and wineskins.

5. 2. 2 Location and Setting in the Text

The Parable of the Old and the New is located in the New Testament as follows: Matthew 9: 15-17 Mark 2: 19-22 Luke 5: 36-39 Thomas 47

5. 2. 2. a In Matthew

In the Gospel of Matthew the Parable of the New and the Old occurs in Chapter 9 verses 15-17. It is an answer to the disciples of John who object to <https://assignbuster.com/parable-of-the-old-and-the-new-theology-religion-essay/>

see the disciples of Christ eating their meal while they fasted, and put forth a question to Jesus Christ (in verse 14) while he along with his disciples was taking a meal, asking why they (the disciples of John) and the Pharisees fast often but his disciples did not.

5. 2. 2. b In Mark

In the Gospel of Mark the Parable of the New and the Old occurs in Chapter 2 verses 19-22. In Mark too the parable occurs as an answer to the disciples of John and the Pharisees, who had asked Jesus why they fasted often but his disciples do not. Although the manner of narrating the events in Mark is different but the order of event which precede the parable are the same as Matthew.

5. 2. 2. c In Luke

In the Gospel of Luke the Parable of the New and the Old occurs in Chapter 5, verses 36-39. In Luke too the trilogy follows the same sequence of events and occurs at the same occasion as in the other two Gospels. It becomes evident from the above discussions that this parable occurs in all three of the synoptic gospels. The occasion for this trilogy occurs after the recruitment of Levi the tax collector. It takes place at his house, when Jesus sits at 'meat' at his table along with other publicans (tax collectors) and others. The Disciples of John and the Pharisees sees this and raise objections and question Jesus Christ to which He gives this series of parables as answer, it is a part of a discussion held there.

5. 2. 2. d In Thomas

One version of the parable is also found in the gospel of Thomas verse/saying 47. It resembles the ending of Luke's version of the parable, which suggests or hints at Luke's dependence on Thomas as his source. The order of the parable in Thomas is reverse. In the synoptic Gospels the parable of the old and new patch of garment occurs before the old and new wineskins. But in Thomas we see that the parable starts with the phrase with which Luke has concluded his version of the parable.

5. 2. 3 Content

The Parable of the Old and New preaches through example the appropriateness of action, and also that the mixing of the new and old ways (laws/traditions) can result in damage and disaster. The parable is presented as an explanation to a question posed by the disciples of John the Baptist. They asked Jesus why his disciples did not fast whereas they fasted frequently as was their custom. The parable of the New and the Old preaches through example the valuable questions that Jesus Christ is giving his disciples that the mysteries of the message of God will be revealed to them. It contains an instruction to the disciples that they may go out and through their good works let the people see the greatness of God. It also contains the assurance that the word of God is for everyone who is willing to hear it and accept it.

5. 2. 4 Intention or purpose

The purpose of this parable is to warn against syncretism or fusion (i. e. the union of different systems of belief especially in religion or philosophy). Its

intention is to tell that it is not wise to mix beliefs. It intends to show that Jesus has introduced a new era in God's plan. It does so by giving three similitudes which in their own way ultimately speak of doing what is appropriate and not mixing up things that cannot go together or do not suit well with one another. One of the intentions of this parable as is seen in the conclusion by Luke is to point out that it is not always easy to accept or adopt new ways readily and most people prefer to cling to the old ways.

5. 2. 5 Audience

Original audience—direct and indirect addresses:

The disciples and the followers of Jesus Christ, along with the guests at the table and the disciples of the prophet John the Baptist and the Pharisees present there.

Focused audience:

The disciples of John the Baptist and the Pharisees who objected to and questioned Jesus and his disciples for not fasting are the focused audiences of this parable.

Modern audience/readers:

The modern day audiences of the parables are the readers of the Gospel—including Christians and non-Christians.

5. 2. 6 Language/ Figures of Speech

5. 2. 6. a Analogy or Extended Metaphor

The first illustration or analogy used in this tripartite parable comes from the contemporary marriage customs of Jesus' time (<http://biblenotes>).

homestead. com/files/bn9940. htm). As a tradition the chamber for the bride and groom known as numphon in Greek (<http://biblenotes. homestead. com/files/bn9940. htm>) was prepared by the family and close friends of the groom. Here the analogy of the bridegroom could also be a reference (allusion) to the saying of John the Baptist (John 3: 29):" He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled" (John 3: 29). If we look at the symbols used in this analogy they are the bridegroom and the children of the bridechamber, which symbolize Jesus and his disciples respectively. The second illustration or analogy is that of patching up a new piece of cloth on an old garment. And the third illustration is of putting new wine into old wineskins. Although all three are referring to not mixing old and new practices yet the three images are totally different. They can each be seen as three extended metaphors.

5. 2. 6. b Rhetorical Question:

In the following verses from the synoptic Gospels we see Jesus putting forth a question in answer to the question put forth to him. This question posed by Jesus is not a literal one but rather a metaphorical and a rhetorical one (which usually has a Yes/No response), which is taken from the marriage traditions and customs of the Jews, and thus familiar to the people present at the time the parable was first spoken. This question is used to elicit a positive response from the audience as well as to emphasize a point:" 15 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast" (Matthew 9:

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15)." 19 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast" (Mark 2: 19)." 34 And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them" (Luke 5: 34)." 35 But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days" (Luke 5: 35). Taking a closer look at the text from the three synoptic Gospels we find great resemblance in their reporting however there are significant differences in word choices and syntax. The illustration in Matthew and Mark start in almost exactly the same words but Matthew uses the word " mourn" whereas Mark uses ' fast', these words are taken to be synonymous, ' fast' is also used by Luke. In Luke the phrasing is different at the beginning. But in the middle we see a difference in Matthew where he uses ' as long as' in place of ' while' used in Mark and Luke which too give synonymous meaning. According to the parable Jesus further elaborates his point by answering his own question. Here we see that Mark has added a statement to the answer, which Matthew and Luke have not. Mark has added Jesus' declaration that as long as the bridegroom is with the children of the bridechamber they cannot fast. It is again a statement pertaining to the Jewish customs of marriage which is being used here to signify a point that while Jesus is among them it is a time of rejoicing and celebrating and not of fasting and mourning. According to the Jewish wedding culture, once the betrothal with the bride has been made, the groom goes to make a habitation, a " bridechamber", for them to live in (H. Smith). Traditionally, the friends of the bridegroom help in the preparations. When the groom comes for his bride to take her away to the place that he prepared for them

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the friends of the bridegroom hear the voice of the bridegroom, they know the wedding feast has begun (H. Smith). The next statement which is present in all the three occurrences of the parable is the part where Jesus tells of a time when the bridegroom (Jesus) will be "taken away". Here also we observe a slight difference in wording: In Matthew and Mark: "..... shall be taken away..."; and in Luke: "...will be taken away..." In Mark and Luke: "... then shall they fast in those days."; and in Matthew: ".. they shall fast." Some of these difference could just be due to translation others due to difference of wording in the original texts. Since Luke's Gospel is thought to be the last of the synoptic Gospels therefore the similarities it shares with the other synoptic Gospels suggests its dependence on both Matthew and Mark as well as Thomas for his sources. The point of emphasis in this illustration is the appropriateness of action in accordance with time, which is a partial theme of this tripartite parable. This rhetorical question further leads to two more illustrations, that of the old and new cloth and the old and new wineskins.

5. 2. 6. c Aphorism

The whole parable is a collection of aphoristic sayings. After the initial rhetorical part, comes the next part where Jesus tells his audience that it is a bad idea to mix the old and the new. The putting together of the new and old is incompatible. These aphorisms are taken from common practices and experiences of the general public since they would be familiar with these experiences and practices. So it indicates the knowledge of socio-cultural norms; which are being employed to convey a concept.

5. 2. 7 Symbols and Images

The symbols and images used in this tripartite parable are: children of the bridechamber—disciples of Jesus Christbridegroom—Jesus Christfast/mourn—observance of strict and solemn religious ritualsold and new cloth—old and new beliefs or teachingssewing of the patch—fixing up the older teachings with newer onestearing of the cloth—destruction of the belief system probablyold and new wineskin—old and new beliefs and religious practicesnew wine—new ideas or teachingspouring new wine into old wineskins—putting new ideas and beliefs with the older system of beliefs and teachings etc. destruction of the wineskins and the wine—destruction of the belief systemAccording to the context in which the parable was told the above mentioned symbols are discussed below:

5. 2. 7. a Children of the Bridechamber

The term Children of the bride chamber would signify the disciples of Jesus Christ who were dining with him at Levi's house. The image is taken from the known Jewish marriage customs, according to which the friends of the groom celebrated the marriage festivities as long as the groom was with them. The festivities end when the groom leaves his friends. In this illustration Jesus is seen as the groom who is still among his disciples and thus they do not fast as the Pharisees and the followers of John the Baptist did. They had made the ritual of fasting stricter than it was written in the scriptures.

5. 2. 7. b Old and New Garment

The old garment refers to the old teachings and beliefs which had undergone a lot of wear and tear, the new garment refers to the new set of beliefs. The

example of repairing the old garment with the new one suggests trying to fix the problems and wear and tare of the older belief system by patching up newer ideas and beliefs. The tear getting worse suggest the futility of this practice.

5. 2. 7. c New wine into Old Wineskins

This illustration shows that by doing a wrong action or practice there is a two way loss. It is common knowledge that the older and used wineskins are stretched to it maximum and also that the new wine gives off gases and expands, thus if new wine would be put into old wineskins they would naturally burst and thus the new wine too will be spilled. So this part of the parable suggests that it is not a good idea to mix up the old and new beliefs because in this manner neither would be able to survive.

5. 2. 8 Argument

This parable takes the material for its content from the practices and customs of the time when Jesus spoke the parable. It gives three different illustrations which point out the acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and practices. Each part follows the end stress pattern. In Matthew and Luke we find that the end stress of the first illustration is that the ' children of the bridechamber' will fast when the groom is taken away from them. In Mark there is an addition of the assertion that they cannot fast as long as the bridegroom is with them. Then in the next illustration we see that again the stress is at the end. In Matthew and Mark and Luke we see that the stress is on the tear becoming worse due to the new patch. Although the wording is different but the argument is the same, that the new and old garments are not compatible with each other, because the new garment will make the tear

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worse. The third illustration also stresses in the end. In Matthew we find the wisdom of putting new wine into new bottles/wineskins so that they do not perish and the wine doesn't spill out. In Mark the wording stresses on the action of the new wine which causes the bottles/wineskins to break and thus the new wine to be put into new wineskins/bottles. In Luke we find that the narration is closer to Mark's in wording, but the ending verse alludes to Thomas.

5. 2. 9 Characteristics of the Parable Compiled

1. Simplicity—traditional and domestic practices: wedding traditions, mending clothes, and storing wine. 2. Concise—simple, uncomplicated thrusts and direct action, no unnecessary details 3. Tripartite—three verbal illustrations which warn against the futility of mixing the old and new ideas, and show the logic of the appropriateness of action 4. Parallelisms—factual incidents are told to give a concept that the ideas are presented in parallel terms which need to be understood in terms of what they imply. 5. End stress—the most important point is given at the end 6. Listener relatedness—the audience (esp. the original one) or readers (mostly) are familiar with the traditions, and practices or behaviours presented in the parable.

5. 2. 10. Focus and Style

In each of the gospels the parable is narrated in a declarative and assertive style. The parable is recognizable as it occurs in three to four different versions (also counting Thomas) and thus seems to be an authentic parable told by Jesus. There are differences in detail but essentially the message is the same. Luke's version of the parable is more detailed than the others.

Luke's version is different in its phrasing as well as its ending. To look at how <https://assignbuster.com/parable-of-the-old-and-the-new-theology-religion-essay/>

the style each version of the parable is similar to or different from the other let us look into the points of stress in each part of this tripartite parable as well as the details which are found in one or the other version as it occurs in the Synoptic Gospels. To start let us take a look at the end stress in part one of this tripartite parable that is the children of the will/shall fast/mourn once the bridegroom is taken away from them. It is the same in Matthew, Mark, and Luke although we see that the style in Matthew is more compact than in Mark and Luke. In Mark we find a declarative statement which shows a possibility through the use of the words ' have' and ' cannot': ' As long as they have the groom with them they cannot fast' (KJV Bible, Mark 2: 19). This suggests that the presence of the groom is indicative of feasting and not fasting, it indicates celebration and not mourning. Fasting and mourning are both indicative or symbolic of a somber time which is tough on the individuals. Each account ends with a prophecy. The prophecy suggests that the time will come when the groom will be taken away from his friends and that would be the right time for

In part two the opening statement is declarative and assertive in all three versions, but the ending is different. Matthew and Mark assert that the new garment which is used to patch up or mend the old garment will make the tare (' rent') worse i. e. if an attempt is made to mend the worn out and tattered fabric of the older ways or ideas with the help of newer ways and ideas then the new ideologies will not mend or preserve the older ones but rather cause them to be more ruined. In Luke however we find more detail and explanation. More detail is added to make the parable more explicit. Here two points are made one that the new cloth which is put in to mend the old cloth will make the rent or tare worse and two that the patch which was taken from the new fabric will not agree with

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or be suitable for the old torn fabric. This implies that the new and old ideologies are incompatible therefore one will neither be suitable to mend the older worn out thinking or beliefs or practices nor will the new ideologies go along with the older ones. It implies the intolerance and incompatibility. Thus in all three accounts though the end stress is different yet the point of commonality is the futility of mixing the old and the new. In part three we see that the beginning point is the same in Matthew, Mark and Luke although in Matt the statement starts with the modal auxiliary verb (a verb which is used with another verb to express possibility, permission or obligation) 'neither' showing possibility whereas Mark and Luke use the conjunction 'and' which draws a link and show a continuation of discourse from the previous part. Each of the gospel writers is talking about not putting the new wine in the old bottles or containers, which was a common practice at the time and which is still a common practice for preserving and storing wine. They use 'neither do men' and 'no man' to make the argument more persuasive, this also makes it difficult to present a contrary view. After stating the common practice they go on to tell the reason why this is so or what the consequence will be if they act otherwise. Matthew in his compact and simple style states "else the bottles break and the wine runneth over" (KJV Bible, Matt. 9: 17). This statement points it out to be a natural process. In Mark and Luke the statement differs at this point, they say that the consequence is that the new wine will break the old container. So here they are both explicitly putting the responsibility for the destruction of the old container on the new wine. "...else the new wine doth/will bust the bottles" (KJV Bible, Mark 2: 22, Luke 5: 37). The other action which is told is that the wine will/shall spill. In Matthew and Mark simple present tense is used which <https://assignbuster.com/parable-of-the-old-and-the-new-theology-religion-essay/>

is also used to show that something is a usual happening or habit or practice. The use of ' will' and ' shall' in Luke are indicative of the statement being a warning to those who might follow the incorrect practice in future. Matthew and Mark us just one verse to complete this part of the parable, but in Luke we see that the third part of this parable is spread over three verses. This indicates Luke's extensive study because as mentioned in an earlier section the ending of Luke's version of the parable alludes to the beginning of the parable of the old and new wineskins in the Gospel of Thomas, and consequently his like for details. Matthew ends the parable in a narrative manner stating that ' they' meaning the men put the new wine in new bottle which preserves them both. It shows a logical conclusion to the parable. Whereas, in Mark the parable ends in an imperative statement stating that the new wine must be put in new bottles, leaving it to the audience and readers to understand the implications of the action and to draw the conclusion. In Luke also this portion is added but it is not the end of the parable. As mentioned in the previous paragraph Luke ends the parable differently from both Matthew and Mark. The implication of the last part of the parable in Luke is that those who are used to the older ways and appreciate it will not readily accept the new ideas for they will think that their old beliefs ideas and practices are better than the new ones. So we see that in each Synoptic gospel we find this tripartite parable, and each gospel writer has reported the parable in his own style, according to his own point of emphasis and his own style for giving details. But though there are differences the point of commonality is to show the appropriateness of action in accordance to time and situation and the futility of incompatibility.