The Exegetical Significance of Meta-Comments for Identifying Key Propositions

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1. Introduction

When people speak, they typically spend most of their time communicating what they want you to know. However, at times they step back from the actual topic and make a comment *about the topic* like:

- *"It is very important that you understand that …"*
- *"I want you to know that …"*
- *"Don't you know that…"*
- *"Of all the things that you have learned so far, the most important one is that…"*
- *"If you remember nothing else that I say, remember that…"*

Each of these statements has the common characteristic of interrupting what is being said in order to make an abstract statement about what is *going to be said*. These are all English examples of *meta-comments*.[1] Here is a working definition:

> **Meta-comment**—When a speaker stops saying what they are saying in order to comment on what is *going* to be said, speaking abstractly about it.[2]

Very often in narrative speeches or in the epistles of the NT, speakers will meta-comment on what they are about to say. Examples of this include:

- "I say to you…"
- "I tell you the truth…"
- "We know that…"
- "I ask that…"
- "I want you to know that…"

Meta-comments are used to introduce significant propositions, ones to which the writer or speaker wants to attract extra attention. There is a litmus test for identifying a meta-comment. Can you remove the potential meta-comment without substantially changing the propositional content?[3] Is the speaker interrupting what is being talked about in order to comment on what is *going* to be talked about? If it could be removed from the

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[1] Berlin describes a similar phenomenon in Biblical Hebrew that she calls 'frame breaks.' This is where "the narrator leaves his story for a moment to make a comment about it", referring to the narrative comment about the practice in Israel from Ruth 4. Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Atlanta: The Almond Press, 1983), 99.

[2] Steven Runge, *The Lexham Discourse Greek New Testament: Glossary* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2008).

[3] The complement of many meta-comment verbs is inflected as an infinitive verb. When I propose removing the meta-comment, I also mean that the non-finite verb forms would be re-inflected to be a finite verb.

discourse without substantially altering the propositional content, it is probably a meta-comment.

There is a wonderful meta-comment in the movie *Ocean's Eleven* used for comic effect. Just before the men leave to rob the vault, Brad Pitt gives Matt Damon pointers about how to conduct himself:

> You look down, they know you're lying and up, they know you don't know the truth. Don't use seven words when four will do. Don't shift your weight, look always at your mark but don't stare, be specific but not memorable, be funny but don't make him laugh. He's got to like you then forget you the moment you've left his side. And <u>for God's sake, whatever you do, don't, under any circumstances</u>...

Pitt is interrupted mid-speech and never finishes the thought. If you remember this part of the movie, you may remember laughing. Why? Because you expected some really crucial information to follow the big build up, only it never comes. If there had not been the big meta-comment, there would have been nothing funny; Matt Damon would not have been left hanging.

Meta-comments are used in Greek, English and many other languages to accomplish the same kinds of effect, attracting attention to something surprising or important that follows. Another meta-comment example was described to me from the Punjabi language of India. Just before a surprising part of the story, a speaker may interrupt the story to say "Stop ignoring me!" even if the listeners are paying close attention. This interruption has the comparable effect of building suspense and attracting attention to whatever follows.

Consider this example from Rom 12:1; the 🖵 symbol marks the meta-comment.

PRINCIPLE	¹‹🖵 Παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς 🖵› ἀδελφοί [SP διὰ τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν
	I exhort therefore you, brothers through the mercies
	τοῦ θεοῦ SP] παραστῆσαι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν
	of God to present — bodies your
BULLET	θυσίαν ζῶσαν
	sacrifice [as] a living
BULLET	ἁγίαν εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ
	holy pleasing to God
BULLET	‹👤 τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν 👤›
	— reasonable service your

Paul could have more simply said, "Present your bodies as living sacrifices…" Omitting the meta-comment would not change the basic content, but it would significantly change the tone of the call to present ourselves as sacrifices. Meta-comment serves as an introduction, in this case moderating the tone of the imperative by mitigating the directness of it. It does not convey content needed to understand what follows, but it does effect the tone and rhetorical effect of the proposition that follows.

The Exegetical Significance of Meta-Comments

2. Conventional Explanation

The phenomenon that I describe as a meta-comment is most often discussed in biblical studies under the rubric of form criticism.[4] Form criticism seeks to understand a text by classifying the similarly structured or phrased portions of discourse as a 'form', based on the function that it serves.[5] In this case, the forms are considered to be derived from Greco-Roman letter writing conventions, like our "Dear John" and "Sincerely yours" in English.

In other words, they focus on the repeated use of a specific collocation of words in a specific structure, but not necessarily in a rigid order.[6] Critics then seek to understand the meaning of the text by understanding how the particular form was used. Meta-comments of the NT have been variously classified as disclosure formulas,[7] request formulas, hearing forms, petition formulas, and introduction formulas.[8]

According to form-critics, it is not the *context of usage* that identifies the form, but the *formal requirements* being met.[9] Sanders states that the disclosure formula "is generally

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[4]The *Anchor Bible Dictionary* describes form criticism as "'a systematic, scientific, historical, and theological methodology for analyzing the forms, and to some extent the content, of the primitive Christian literature, with special reference to the history of the early Christian movement in its reflective and creative theological activities' (Doty 1972: 62)." Vernon K. Robbins, "Form Criticism, New Testament," *ABD* 2:841.

[5] Though this sounds rather simple, it is more difficult in practice. One often finds disagreement in analyses and classification of forms, e.g. "Some analyses identify vv. 13–15 as also belonging to the thanksgiving, but the disclosure formula in v. 13 and the content of these verses lead me to the identification of vv. 13–15 as a *narratio* that explains the background and rationale of Paul's forthcoming visit". Robert Jewett et al., *Romans: A Commentary* (Hermeneia-- a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006),117.

[6] Cf. Terence Y. Mullins, "Disclosure: a Literary Form in the New Testament." *Novum Testamentum* 7 (1964), 46-48.

[7] Jewett et al. define a disclosure formula as "a standardized way of saying, 'I want you to know…'". Jewett et al., *Romans*, 1016.

[8] Cf. John L. White, "Introductory Formulae in the Body of the Pauline Letter." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90 (1971): 91-97; J. T. Sanders, "The Transition from Opening Epistolary Thanksgiving to Body in the Letters of the Pauline Corpus." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71(1962): 348-362; Terence Y. Mullins, "Petition as a Literary Form," *Novum Testamentum* 5 (1962): 46–54.

[9] Cf. Mullins' describes the disclosure form as follows:

[T]here is one peculiar use of θέλω which properly deserves to be recognized as a distinct literary form, for θέλω, when used with a noetic verb in the infinitive, serves as a rhetorical stereotype for the presentation of specific information. Its form follows pretty well the description given of the second type by Sanders. I call this form the Disclosure. Four elements constitute the Disclosure. They are:

1. θέλω,
2. *noetic verb* in the infinitive,
3. *person addressed,*

used to introduce new material, to change the subject of discussion, or when the argument takes a new tack."[10] There are times when the rigidity of the strictly defined forms crumbles under the weight of the counter examples.[11]

There is an important difference between using 'I say to you' in a context where it is semantically required to understand what follows, versus using the same collocation in a context where it is *not* semantically required. There are contexts where the verbs of knowing or volition are semantically required to process what follows. They cannot be removed without making the proposition unintelligible. It is the redundant usage that makes the meta-comment achieve its effect, not just the collocation itself as a formula.

Mullins sought to reign in what he considered misapplication of forms. He makes the point that not every occurrence of a collocation means it is a 'form', though he does not specify exactly what the meaningful criteria are that make it a form versus not being one. He states,

> In order to have clean distinctions, I feel we must restrict forms to pure types. Thus, 2 Cor. xii 8 would not properly be classed as a Petition. And nothing is to be gained by calling it a pseudo-Petition or a quasi-Petition. We may better say simply that sometimes phrases which resemble the form stand in lieu of a form, or that they serve the formal operation of a form.[12]

His caution is well-founded about 2 Cor. 12:8: it is semantically required, and thus not a meta-comment. This illustrates the importance of distinguishing when something is semantically required versus being redundant; the former would not be a meta-comment, the latter would be since it could be removed without changing the propositional content. The redundancy is what achieves the effect, not the inherent meaning of the form.

Furthermore, it is not just one specific collocation of words that can function as a meta-comment. Anything that satisfies the requirements of a meta-comment can serve as one.

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4.   *information.* (Mullins, "Disclosure," 46).
He notes that there is the option of adding a vocative of address. "Thus the elements which constitute the Disclosure follow a fairly regular but not a rigid order in the New Testament. It is an order different from that usually occurring in the epistolary papyri, but found in one, P. Oslo. 50." Ibid, 49.

[10] Sanders, "The Transition," 349.

[11] Cf. Sanders' discussion of the use of περί versus ἐπί to introduce the topic of an injunction ("The Transition," 350), or the use of λέγω as possibly being an acceptable substitute for "the more prevalent παρακαλώ" (Ibid, 353). The same holds true with his discussion of οἴδατε in 1 Thes 2:1:

> Though the form here is not as precise as in some other places, still all the necessary elements are present to justify placing this clause among these opening formulae: the use of αυτοί οἴδατε easily replaces the more prevalent οὐ θέλω ἀγνοεῖν; and the characteristic υμάς is, of course, out of place with the use of a verb in the second person (ibid, 356).

[12] "Disclosure, 45

It is not the semantic meaning of the collocation that makes it a meta-comment, it is the pragmatic effect of using the collocation in a specific context.

Conversely, there is evidence that scholars observed certain collocations accomplishing a similar form-critical function, collocations that had not been properly classified as forms.[13] Though these collocations may be legitimate ancient epistolary forms, the fact that they are used much more broadly in ancient Greek discourse than just in letters (as well as in other languages both ancient and modern) calls for a more unified definition and description.

3. Discourse Explanation

There has been a growing interest among linguists in studying discourse-related phenomenon loosely referred to as 'meta-discourse'. Mao defines meta-discourse as "various kinds of linguistic tokens that an author employs in her text to guide or direct her reader as to how to understand her, her text, and her stance toward it" (1993:265). He argues that meta-discourse plays an integral role in the overall rhetorical shaping of texts.[14]

Mao's definition makes some significant points. First, meta-discourse *guides* or *directs* the reader, which means that it is an indicator of the author's intent. Second, it not only helps us understand the text, but also the writer's *stance* toward the text. This again speaks to authorial intent. While meta-comments might indeed have a formulaic quality, they also represent the writer's choice to mark the presence of some feature that might otherwise have been overlooked.

Below is a sampling of the claims that NT commentators have assigned to the function of what I am referring to as meta-comments. They illustrate that NT scholars have correctly

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[13] Sanders makes reference in a footnote that the "word λέγω sometimes is used in place of the more prevalent παρακαλῶ" ("The Transition," 353), though he does not apply this claim outside the Pauline corpus. This raises the question of whether this usage is something more widespread than an epistolary form, since they are sound in the Gospels as well. Similarly, Longenecker comments, "In most of Paul's letters there is an εὐχαριστῶ ("I am thankful")-παρακαλῶ ("I exhort") structure. In Galatians, however, the verbs θαυμάζω ("I am amazed/astonished") and δέομαι ("I plead") appear and serve a similar function." Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (*Word Biblical Commentary* vol. 41, Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 184. Bruce observes that a disclosure formula is found in 1 Thes 2:1 "although here nothing is being disclosed (as in 4:13); an appeal is rather being made to what the Thessalonians already know (as in 1:5)" (2002:24). Bauckham notes regarding Jude 5, "'I wish to *remind* you that …' is superficially an example of conventional polite style (cf. Rom 15:14–15; 2 Pet 1:12; 1 Clem 53:1) but also makes a serious point." (Richard J. Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude* (Word Biblical Commentary vol. 50, Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 48.

[14] Similar claims have been made within biblical studies, such as that by L. Ann. Jervis, *The Purpose of Romans: a Comparative Letter Structure Investigation* (JSNTS 55, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991) 30, cited from Arthur G. Patzia, "Review of L. Ann Jervis, *The Purpose of Romans: A Comparative Letter Structure Investigation, Journal of Biblical Literature* 111(1992): 729.

intuited the function of the meta-comments, even if they could not specify exactly what it is that brings about the observed effects.

- George describes "I want you to know" and its negative counterpart "I do not wish you to be ignorant" as "Paul's way of saying, 'I want to make this perfectly clear'".[15]

- Longenecker states, "Paul also uses [a disclosure formula] to introduce somewhat formal and solemn assertions (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3; 15:1; 2 Cor 8:1)".[16] He notes that clusters of disclosure formulas with vocatives of address tend to signal breaks or turning points in the development of a writer's argument.[17]

- Burton comments on the significance of the proposition introduced by the disclosure formula of Gal 1:11 stating, "The assertion that follows is in effect the proposition to the proving of which the whole argument of 1:13–2:21 is directed.[18]

- Jewett et al. state that a disclosure formula "prepares the audience for something significant,"[19] and that "the formulation θέλω / θέλομεν ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί is uniquely Pauline…and always introduces a point of great importance."[20]

- Cranfield describes the disclosure formula in Romans 11:25 as "a formula which Paul uses when he wishes to bring home to his readers with emphasis something which he regards as of special importance."[21]

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[15] Timothy George, *Galatians* (The New American Commentary vol. 30, Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 107-108).

[16] Longenecker, *Galatians*, 22.

[17] Ibid, cviii. He later states, "Even the various stages within the development of Paul's rebuke section in Galatians are fairly well set off by certain rather conventional epistolary expressions, which tend to be grouped at the start of each new subsection in the argument or to bring matters to a close. For example, the rebuke formula of 1:6 (θαυμάζω ὅτι, "I am astonished that") and the reminder of past teaching at 1:9 (ὡς προειρήκαμεν καὶ ἄρτι πάλιν λέγω, "as we have said before, so now I say again") serve as the epistolary pegs for 1:6–10. Likewise, the disclosure formulae of 1:11 (γνωρίζω δὲ ὑμῖν, "I want you to know") and 1:13 (ἠκούσατε γὰρ, "for you have heard") serve as the beginning points for their respective sections, 1:11–12 and 1:13–2:21—with these two subsections being closely related, the first as the thesis for what immediately follows and the second as an autobiographical elaboration in support of that thesis… Also to be observed is the fact that the disclosure formula of 3:7 (γινώσκετε ἄρα ὅτι, "you know, then, that"), which draws a conclusion from the quotation of Gen 15:6 in 3:6, provides a transition to the extended argument from Scripture in 3:6–4:10" (Ibid, 11).

[18] Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1920), 35.

[19] Jewett et al., *Romans*, 695.

[20] Ibid, 697.

[21] C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* Vol. 2 (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 573

The Exegetical Significance of Meta-Comments

These comments regarding the discourse function of forms like disclosure formulas are the exception rather than the norm. Biblical scholars are generally more interested in their role as structural markers that segment the various form-critical strands of the epistle, rather than in their rhetorical function to attract extra attention to significant propositions.

The comments above are consistent with what I am claiming to be a more broadly occurring phenomenon than just an epistolary form. When a writer or speaker desires to attract extra attention to a proposition, they have the choice to suspend the discourse in order to *comment on* what is to follow. They pause what they are saying, and talk about what they are *going* to say. Though there is overlap between what I call a meta-comment and what form-critics classify as disclosure, request, introduction and petition formulas, they cannot be equated. Form critics fail to distinguish between semantic meaning and pragmatic effect, leading them to incorrectly analyze some instances as a formula that are actually semantically required.[22]

4. Application

Meta-comments are often used to create a mitigated form of command, one that makes the point less directly than an imperative verb form.[23] Recall that there are two identifying criteria:

- the suspension of what was being said in order to comment on what is about to be said, and

- the ability to remove the meta-comment without substantially changing the propositional content.

The first few examples will illustrate this usage to mitigate an exhortation. This will be followed by examples illustrating their use to strengthen the force of a command.

Example 1   Romans 12:1

PRINCIPLE

¹‹🖳 Παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς 🖳› ἀδελφοί [ˢᵖ διὰ τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν
I exhort   therefore you,   brothers   through the   mercies

τοῦ θεοῦ ˢᵖ] παραστῆσαι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν
of   God   to present   —   bodies   your

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[22] Longenecker identifies ἠκούσατε ("you have heard") in Gal 1:13 as a disclosure formula, which it may well be. It indeed orients the reader to the context that follows. However, it does not meet our standard of being redundant. Verse 13a introduces a new topic which would not have been explicitly identified otherwise. Further research into meta-commentary is needed to better understand the relation of disclosure formulas and meta-comments. They are distinct concepts even though there is indeed overlap. The same holds true for Sander's claim regarding Philippians 4:2 being a 'personal petition' form ("The Transition," 353).

[23] Levinsohn, referring to meta-comments as a kind of 'orienter', states, "Orienters often introduce exhortations in Greek. The exhortations themselves are most often expressed in infinitival clauses, though they may be encoded as imperatives (see below) or final clauses. Some orienters act as mitigating expressions. Others provide motivation for obeying the exhortations and may even highlight them." Stephen H. Levinsohn, *Self-instruction materials on Non-Narrative Discourse Analysis* (Online URL at https://mail.jaars.org/~bt/narr.zip, 2007), 84.

BULLET	θυσίαν ζῶσαν
	sacrifice [as] a living

BULLET	ἁγίαν εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ
	holy pleasing to God

BULLET	‹👤 τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν 👤›
	— reasonable service your

This verse introduces an inferential principle drawn from the preceding discourse, essentially describing what the audience ought to do in response to what precedes. Paul has stopped his exhortation in order to state that he exhorts the Romans to do something: to present their bodies as living sacrifices. Instead of using the meta-comment, he could have more easily commanded them, "Present your bodies…" using an imperative or hortatory subjunctive.[24] The pragmatic effect of the meta-comment in this context is to attract extra attention to the proposition that it introduces. It also serves to 'mitigate' or lessen the severity of an exhortation.[25]

Example 2   Romans 12:3

Though the form-critics have noted that such formulas occur at major seams of a text (i.e. between Romans 9-11 and 12-15), they are not *only* found in such contexts. Consider the impact that the meta-comment a few verses later in v. 3 has on the proposition that follows.

SUPPORT	³‹🖵 Λέγω γὰρ διὰ τῆς χάριτος τῆς δοθείσης μοι παντὶ
	I say for by the grace — given to me to everyone

τῷ ὄντι ἐν ὑμῖν 🖵› ‹✕ μὴ ὑπερφρονεῖν παρ᾽
—   who is among you   not to think more highly of than

ὃ   δεῖ φρονεῖν ✕›
what one ought to think

SUB-POINT	ἀλλὰ ‹✔ φρονεῖν εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν ἑκάστῳ ὡς
	but to think so as — to be sensible to each one as

[TP] ὁ θεὸς [TP] ἐμέρισεν μέτρον πίστεως ✔›
—   God   has apportioned a measure   of faith

Paul has begun the chapter by urging the readers to present themselves as living sacrifices, followed by a point-counterpoint set of commands in v. 2 (i.e. not to be conformed to this age, but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds). Verse 3 is

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[24] The prepositional phrase διὰ τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ 'through the mercies of God' could be construed either as part of the meta-comment (i.e. describing the basis on which Paul makes his exhortation), or as a spatial frame of reference for the proposition that it introduces (cf. Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis* (Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, Forthcoming), Section 11.2. For this reason it has been excluded from the meta-comment annotation. The analysis of the prepositional phrase does not affect the reading of παρακαλῶ ὑμᾶς as a meta-comment in any case.

[25] Cf. Levinsohn *Non-narrative*, 79-89.

introduced by γὰρ, indicating that what follows is intended to strengthen or support what precedes. Rather than signaling a significant break in the discourse, the meta-comment of v. 3 functions to attract extra attention to the complex exhortation that it introduces. Just as Paul bases his appeal of v. 1 on the mercies of God, rather than on his own authority or something else, he makes a comparable appeal based upon the grace that he has received.

Paul could have more easily commanded them, "Do not think more highly of oneself… rather have sound judgment…" This command could have been simplified even more by omitting both the meta-comment *and* the negative counterpoint. Stated as it is, the use of the meta-comments in vv. 1 and 3 have the effect of attracting extra attention to the propositions that they introduce They also mitigate the harshness that a simple imperative would have conveyed. The combination of meta-comment with the two bases of the exhortations introduced by διὰ likely carry more rhetorical force than using a simple imperative. It also avoids any sense of harshness or condescension. He makes a more powerful rhetorical impression even while using a mitigated grammatical form.

Example 3   Galatians 1:9

In contrast to the mitigating effect observed with the use of meta-comments in Rom 12:1, the usage in Galatians 1:9 has the opposite effect. Instead of toning down the harshness, the meta-comment has the effect of intensifying it. Note that the main exhortation is a third-person imperative, not an infinitival form which is dependent upon the meta-comment.

> **8** But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. (ESV)

SENTENCE

9[CP ☐ ὡς προειρήκαμεν CP] ‹+ καὶ ἄρτι πάλιν +› λέγω ☐›
    as   we said before   also now again   I say

[CE εἴ τις ὑμᾶς εὐαγγελίζεται παρ᾽ ὃ παρελάβετε CE]
  if anyone you is proclaiming a gospel contrary to what you have received

ἀνάθεμα ἔστω
accursed   let him be

Paul wastes no time in getting to his main point in Galatians, describing it in vv. 6-8. He utilizes a complex point-counterpoint set (cf. Chapter 4) to state the key idea that rather than deserting the gospel, they should be holding fast to what Paul has imparted to them. Verse 9 is essentially a repetition of the content of v. 8, and is introduced by a meta-comment. Rather than a simple 'I say to you…' or 'I want you to know…', the meta-comment of v. 9 is much more impassioned. I take it to be akin to saying in English, 'I am going to speak slowly and use small words…' It is a meta-comment before something that should be plainly obvious. "What I said before, *even now again* I say…" communicates largely the same thing. The main verb following the meta-comment is an imperative, and has the opposite effect of that seen in Rom 12:1. Rather than mitigating the exhortation, the meta-comment + imperative has the effect of making the exhortation more potent.

The meta-comment lets the reader know that Paul is almost condescendingly repeating what should have been understood without saying. This view fits with his statements in v. 8 that no matter who might try and persuade them otherwise, they should not forsake the

gospel that they were delivered. Notice that the entire meta-comment could be removed without affecting the propositional content of v. 9 (i.e. "If anyone should preach to you a gospel…") Paul suspends what he is saying and comments on what he is going to say. Just comparing v. 8 to v. 9 makes it clear that he is repeating what he has already told them. There is no need to overtly state it unless there is some meaning behind the choice.

Example 4   Galatians 1:11

So far we have looked at meta-comments used with exhortations, both to strengthen them and to mitigate them. They can also be used to attract attention to a new topic at a boundary in the discourse, as illustrated in Galatians 1:11. The meta-comment enables Paul to highlight the introduction of his topic (the gospel that has been proclaimed by me) and make a comment about it (it is not according to man).

SENTENCE   ¹¹‹ Γνωρίζω γὰρ ὑμῖν › ‹ ἀδελφοί › ‹→ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον
I make known   for   to you,   brothers   the   gospel

τὸ εὐαγγελισθὲν ὑπ᾽ ἐμοῦ →›
that has been proclaimed   by   me

SUB-POINT   ὅτι ‹⊙ οὐκ ἔστιν κατὰ ἄνθρωπον ⊙›
that   not   it is   according   to man

He could have communicated the same content without the meta-comment, but it would not have had the same effect of attracting attention to the new topic. In other words, stating "The gospel that I proclaimed is not according to man" conveys the same idea, but without the attaching the same import to it. The meta-comment is redundant; the Galatians knew that Paul was the one who had proclaimed the gospel. Making a redundant comment in this context has the effect of suspending the flow of the discourse and highlighting what comes ahead. If the information were not redundant, it would not have had this effect.

Forward-pointing devices like meta-comments are often found at discourse boundaries in order to make sure the reader properly tracks with where the writer is going (as illustrated in Romans 12:1 above). The same content could have been communicated without the device, but the reader might have missed the transition. They function something like speed bumps to 'slow' the reader and attract his attention. Use of these devices at junctures and transitions illustrates the care that the biblical writers took to ensure their intended message would be clearly tracked and understood.

Example 5   James 1:16-17

This next example from James provides a clear example of where a meta-comment stops the discourse and makes a comment that clearly attracts extra attention to what follows.[26]

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[26] Ropes comments that μὴ πλανᾶσθε is "used to introduce a pointed utterance…as in 1 Cor. 6:9, 15:33, Gal. 6:7." James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James* (New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1916) 158. Moo comments that James "does not want his readers to make any mistake about what he is about to say about God as the source of all good gifts." Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (The Pillar New Testament commentary, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 76.

SENTENCE ¹⁶‹🖳 Μὴ πλανᾶσθε 🖳› ‹📢 ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί 📢› ⁽ᵀᴾ πᾶσα
[do] not be deceived   brothers my   dear   every

δόσις ἀγαθὴ καὶ πᾶν δώρημα τέλειον ᵀᴾ⁾ **ἄνωθέν** ἐστιν
gift good and every gift perfect   from above is

Debelius notes that the same formula is used to introduce another significant maxim in 1 Cor 15:33: "‹🖳 Do not be deceived: 🖳› "Bad company ruins good morals" (ESV)²⁷ The principle that 'every good gift comes down from above' provides a corollary to what was claimed in vv. 13-15 that God does not tempt nor is he tempted. Verse 16 provides an important corrective to close out the section; introducing it with a meta-comment ensures that the reader does not miss its importance. Verse 16 does not introduce a new unit, but attracts attention to the principle that closes out the unit of vv. 13-18.

So far the examples considered have all come from the epistolary literature. Nearly half of the meta-comments in the NT are found in the gospels and Acts;²⁸ only one of them is found outside of reported speeches.

Example 6   Mark 13:14

In the midst of Jesus' description of the temple's future destruction, there is a meta-comment inserted that addresses the *reader* rather than the *hearer*. Interestingly there are no textual variant listing the exclusion of the meta-comment in NA²⁷.

SENTENCE ¹⁴⁽ᴸᴰ Ὅταν δὲ ἴδητε τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως ἑστηκότα
when but you see the abomination of desolation standing

ὅπου οὐ δεῖ ᴸᴰ⁾ ‹🖳 ὁ ἀναγινώσκων νοείτω 🖳› ⁽ᵀᴹ τότε ᵀᴹ⁾
where not [be] should the one who reads understand, then

⁽ᵀᴾ οἱ ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ ᵀᴾ⁾ φευγέτωσαν εἰς τὰ ὄρη
those in — Judea must flee to the mountains

The pragmatic effect is a dramatic pause and address to the reader regarding the apocalyptic events that are being described. It is placed just before the instructions regarding how to respond when the anti-Christ desecrates the holy of holies. Note also that the temporal frame (cf. Section 10.2) itself is interrupted: 'when this event happens…*then* flee to the mountains'.

Example 7   Mark 13:37

Jesus concludes the teaching in Mark 13 with one main exhortation in v. 37 to be alert, which is introduced with a meta-comment.²⁹ In v. 33 he gives two commands, 'watch out' and 'be alert' followed by the parable of the master who goes away on a journey.

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²⁷ Martin Dibelius and Heinrich Greeven, *James: A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (Hermeneia--a critical and historical commentary on the Bible. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 100.

²⁸ There are 174 meta-comments in the epistles and Revelation versus 165 in the gospels and Acts, based on the *LDGNT*.

²⁹Edwards states "'Watch!' " is the final and most important word of the Olivet discourse. The point of Mark 13 is not so much to inform as to admonish; not to provide knowledge of

³³ Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. **³⁴** It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. **³⁵** Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning— **³⁶** lest he come suddenly and find you asleep (ESV).

SENTENCE ³⁷‹🖥 [TP] ὃ δὲ ὑμῖν λέγω TP] πᾶσιν λέγω 🖥› γρηγορεῖτε
　　　　　　　what and to you I say　to everyone I say　　be on the alert

The exhortation to be alert summarizes how Jesus wants people to respond to the coming doom. He has already stated this in v. 33, and then illustrated it in a parable. He could have just as easily skipped the repetition of γρηγορεῖτε in v. 37, or repeated it by itself: 'Be alert!' The prominence-marking device creates a break in the flow of the discourse just before something significant. The comment also redirects what Jesus is saying to others besides the disciples, rather than simply stating the exhortation. It is doubtful that the hearers were wondering to whom this would have applied, especially since no one had been excluded previously in the discourse. The plural command anticipates broad application.

Commentators agree that the conclusion of v. 37 is very emphatic, but they do not mention the role that the choice to include the meta-comment plays in leading them to this conclusion. Simple repetition of the imperative alone would not have achieved this effect.

Example 8　Luke 4:24-25

Luke 4 recounts where Jesus identifies himself as the one fulfilling what Isaiah foretold in chapter 61. He made this claim in the synagogue of his home town of Nazareth. However, the people responded by questioning his claim, leading Jesus to make the statement of v. 24, and the references to the Old Testament stories about Elijah.

SENTENCE ‹! Ἀμὴν !› ‹🖥 λέγω ὑμῖν 🖥› ὅτι [TP] οὐδεὶς προφήτης TP]
　　　　　　　truly　　　　I say to you　that　　no　　prophet

δεκτός ἐστιν ἐν τῇ πατρίδι αὐτοῦ
acceptable　is　in　—　hometown　his

SENTENCE ²⁵‹🖥 ἐπ᾽ ἀληθείας δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν 🖥› πολλαὶ χῆραι ἦσαν
　　　　　　in　　truth　but I say to you　　many　widows there were

ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἠλίου ἐν τῷ Ἰσραήλ
in　the　days　of Elijah in　—　Israel

SUB-POINT ὅτε ἐκλείσθη ὁ οὐρανὸς ἐπὶ ἔτη τρία καὶ μῆνας ἕξ
　　　　when　was shut the　sky　for years three and months six

SUB-POINT ὡς ἐγένετο λιμὸς μέγας ἐπὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν
　　　　while took place famine a great over　all　the land

SENTENCE ²⁶καὶ ‹✕ πρὸς οὐδεμίαν αὐτῶν ἐπέμφθη Ἠλίας ✕›
　　　　　　and　　to　none　of them　was sent　Elijah

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arcane matters but to instill obedience in believers." James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (The Pillar New Testament commentary, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 409.

SUB-POINT   εἰ μὴ ‹✔ εἰς Σάρεπτα τῆς Σιδωνίας πρὸς γυναῖκα
    but only   to   Zarephath   of   Sidon   to   a woman

χήραν ✔›
a widow

The combined use of the attention-getter ἀμὴν and the meta-comment have the effect of attracting extra attention to the proposition that is introduced in the subordinate clause. It is not an exhortation or prohibition, but a principle that explains the people's difficulty in accepting his testimony. He follows this proverbial statement about the lot of a prophet by relating it to stories about Elijah. Here too he uses a meta-comment to attract extra attention to the statement that follows. The phrase ἐπ' ἀληθείας most likely serves a comparable attention-getting role as ἀμὴν,[30] evincing an effort to mark the significance of vv. 25 ff. as much as the proverb of v. 24.

Example 9   Matthew 15:10-11

In Matthew 15, Jesus responds to a question from the Pharisees and scribes regarding why his disciples do not wash their hands when they eat bread. Jesus addresses the broader problems associated with the Pharisaic laws in vv. 3-9 before returning to the specific issue of washing in v. 10. His response is in the form of a principle, and is introduced with a meta-comment.

SENTENCE   ‹🖥 Ἀκούετε καὶ συνίετε 🖥› ‹✗ οὐ τὸ εἰσερχόμενον
        hear   and   understand   not —   what goes

εἰς τὸ στόμα κοινοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ✗›
into the   mouth   [that] defiles a   person

SENTENCE   [11]ἀλλὰ ‹✔ [LD] τὸ ἐκπορευόμενον ἐκ τοῦ στόματος [LD]
        but   —   what comes out   of   the   mouth

τοῦτο κοινοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ✔›
this   defiles   a   person

There is no semantic need for including the commands to hear and understand. Think of it as comparable to some saying in English, "listen up!" or "pay attention!" The meta-comment ensures that the importance of the principle that follows is not missed. Jesus uses a point-counterpoint set to reinforce the principle, stating it both positively and negatively for clarity and rhetorical impact (cf. Chapter 4).

Example 10   Matthew 11:15

One final group of examples is taken from Matthew, where "to him who has ears, let him hear" is used to punctuate the end of a discourse.

SENTENCE   [14]καὶ [CE] εἰ θέλετε δέξασθαι [CE] [TP] αὐτός [TP] ἐστιν Ἡλίας
        and   if you are willing to accept [it]   he   is   Elijah

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[30] Marshall states, "ἐπ' ἀληθείας (20:21; 22:59; Acts 4:27; 10:34; Mk. 12:14, 32) may here be a substitute for an original ἀμήν, laying stress on the following saying. (If so, this would confirm the genuineness of the saying, but also suggest that originally it did not follow v. 24)." I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (The New International Greek Testament Commentary, Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 189.

‹👤 ὁ μέλλων ἔρχεσθαι 👤›
the   one going   to come

SENTENCE   ¹⁵‹🖥 ⁽ᵀᴾ⁾ ὁ ἔχων ὦτα ᵀᴾ⁾ ἀκουέτω 🖥›
the one who has ears   let him hear

SENTENCE   ¹⁶Τίνι δὲ ὁμοιώσω τὴν γενεὰν ταύτην
to what but shall I compare   —   generation   this

Note that asyndeton is used to connect v. 15 to what precedes, indicating that there is no clear guidance as to whether this relates to what precedes or whether it begins a new, unrelated section. However, the use of δὲ in v. 16 provides some guidance, indicating that what follows is a new development built upon the preceding discourse. Since it cannot just be building upon the content of v. 15, it must be building upon the preceding pericope.[31] This implies that the meta-comment relates to what precedes, likely signaling the conclusion of the section and adding some solemnity to the final proposition, i.e. the statement in v. 14 that John the Baptist is the Elijah that was expected to come.

Example 11   Matthew 13:9

This same idiom is used twice more as a meta-comment in Matthew 13 to punctuate the close of a section. In the next example, it concludes the parable of the sower, marking the transition to the disciples' asking why Jesus teaches in parables.

SENTENCE   ⁸‹✓ ⁽ᵀᴾ⁾ ἄλλα ᵀᴾ⁾ δὲ ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν τὴν καλὴν ✓›
other [seed] but   fell   on   the   soil —   good

SENTENCE   καὶ ἐδίδου καρπόν
and   produced   grain

SUB-POINT   ‹✕ ὃ μὲν ἑκατόν ✕›
one — a hundred

SUB-POINT   ‹✓ ὃ δὲ ἑξήκοντα
one and   sixty

SUB-POINT   ὃ δὲ τριάκοντα ✓›
one and   thirty

SENTENCE   ⁹‹🖥 ⁽ᵀᴾ⁾ ὁ ἔχων ὦτα ᵀᴾ⁾ ἀκουέτω 🖥›
the one who has ears   let him hear

A bit later in the same chapter, the meta-comment marks the conclusion of the explanation of the parable of the tares, creating a clear division between this parable and the parable of the hidden treasure that immediately follows.

Example 12   Matthew 13:43

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[31] Hagner comments, "The closing exhortation points to the unusual and difficult character of the preceding section. The formula, or one very similar to it, is often used in contexts where difficult content is present (e.g., 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; Luke 8:8; 14:35; cf. Rev 2:7, 11, 17, etc.)" Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (Word Biblical Commentary vol.33A, Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 308. Davies and Allison similarly comment, "It typically functions as a hermeneutical warning and/or to mark the conclusion of a paragraph or other literary unit." W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 259.

SENTENCE	⁴²καὶ βαλοῦσιν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὴν κάμινον τοῦ πυρός
	and throw them into the furnace — fiery
SENTENCE	‹◻ [SP] ἐκεῖ [SP] ◻› ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς
	there will be — weeping and — gnashing
	τῶν ὀδόντων
	of teeth
SENTENCE	⁴³Τότε [TP] οἱ δίκαιοι [TP] ἐκλάμψουσιν ὡς ὁ ἥλιος
	then the righteous will shine like the sun
	ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτῶν
	in the kingdom of Father their
SENTENCE	‹▯ [TP] ὁ ἔχων ὦτα [TP] ἀκουέτω ▯›
	the one who has ears let him hear

Just as in the other two examples above, it punctuates the concluding proposition of the preceding discourse.

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