

# Table of Contents

<b>The Presuppositions</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Section 1: Principles for Interpreting Scripture</b>	<b>2</b>
Two wrong ways	2
The right way	3
Twelve principles of interpretation	4
Tips for studying biblical narrative	10
The parallel structure of Hebrew poetry	13
<b>Section 2: Study Methods – Learning to Read Carefully</b>	<b>16</b>
Introduction: Why study grammar and syntax?	16
Section one: Words	18
Section two: How words function in a sentence	19
Section three: How groups of words function in a sentence or a paragraph	21
Prepositional phrases	23
Types of clauses	24
Participle phrases	27
Clause exercises	28
<b>Section 3: Making Sense of It</b>	<b>31</b>
Block diagramming	32
Interpretational outline	36
Plural noun summary statement	38
Diagramming and outlining narrative	40
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>44</b>
Two directed studies	44
Five stages of sermon preparation	51
Practice diagrams	54



# The Presuppositions

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*This notebook assumes the following truths about the Bible:*

- The Bible is God's written revelation to man, and thus the sixty-six books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit constitute the plenary (inspired equally in all parts) Word of God (1 Corinthians 2:7-14; 2 Peter 1:20-21).
- The Word of God is an objective, propositional revelation (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 2:13), verbally inspired in every word (2 Timothy 3:16), absolutely inerrant in the original documents, infallible, and God-breathed. We teach the literal, grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture which affirms the belief that the opening chapters of Genesis present creation in six literal days (Genesis 1:31; Exodus 31:17).
- The Bible constitutes the only infallible rule of faith and practice (Matthew 5:18; 24:35; John 10:35; 16:12-13; 17:17; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20-21).
- God spoke in His written Word by a process of dual authorship. The Holy Spirit so superintended the human authors that, through their individual personalities and different styles of writing, they composed and recorded God's Word to man (2 Peter 1:20-21) without error in the whole or in the part (Matthew 5:18; 2 Timothy 3:16).
- While there may be several applications of any given passage of Scripture, there is but one true interpretation. The meaning of Scripture is to be found as one diligently applies the literal grammatical-historical method of interpretation under the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit (John 7:17; 16:12-15; 1 Corinthians 2:7-15; 1 John 2:20). It is the responsibility of believers to ascertain carefully the true intent and meaning of Scripture, recognising that proper application is binding on all generations. Yet the truth of Scripture stands in judgement of men; never do men stand in judgement of it.

*Oh how I love Thy law!*  
Psalm 119:97

## Section 1: Principles for Interpreting Scripture

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### Two Wrong Ways

Through the centuries of Christianity Bible students have practiced many wrong methods of interpreting the Scripture. Here are two common ones you'll want to avoid.

**1) The allegorical method:** An allegory is a story in which the people and events of the story have hidden or symbolic meanings. Those who interpret the Bible allegorically by-pass the clear, historical meaning of the text, and make imaginative associations between their Christian experience and persons or events in the text.

For example, one church father interpreted the parable of the good Samaritan by making the following associations: The traveler who was attacked represents a person seeking salvation. The robbers represent Satan. Naturally, the good Samaritan is Christ. The oil and wine the Samaritan administered to the injured man's wounds picture the Holy Spirit and forgiveness. The donkey is the gospel because it was the vehicle that carried the injured man to the inn (the church), where the man recovered.

Although Jesus taught the parable to answer a specific question ("Whom must I love as my neighbor?"), that is ignored. That church father "found" a deeper, mystical, not-readily-apparent meaning for the passage by means of imaginative association.

*Evaluation of the allegorical method:*

- The allegorical method obscures the true meaning of God's word by ignoring what the writer actually said.
- Since the plain sense of the text is ignored, there is no means of checking whether an allegorical interpretation is true or not.
- An allegorical interpretation tells you more about the interpreter's imagination than it does about God's word.

**2) The "What it means to me" (or Neo-orthodox) method:** This method comes in two packages: one scholarly, one popular. Let's start with the scholarly. The Neo-orthodox or reader-response method of interpreting Scripture is based on a particular view of the Bible. Modern theologians don't believe the Bible is infallible or inerrant; they don't believe the Bible in itself *is* God's word. It is merely a record of how men in ages past experienced God. Therefore, it is *suggestive*, but not *authoritative* in our day: your experience of God might be different than Moses' or Paul's or Peter's.

For the Neo-orthodox theologian the Bible isn't God's word. It *becomes* the word of God when you have a significant experience while reading it. Truth is not the concern; that is different for every person. The issue is how the words strike you as

you read them. What the original author wrote is merely a tool that assists you in shaping your own concept of God and how to please Him. This view of God's word is very popular in today's post-modern, everyone-is-right, no-one-is-wrong academic atmosphere. The reader's response determines the meaning, not the words themselves.

This method of interpretation is also wide spread on the popular level, reflected in the motto, "What this verse means to me is..." God's intent is not the concern. The historical, theological context is irrelevant. Only how it immediately and intuitively strikes the reader matters. In such circles, diligent study is frowned on, even vilified. The reader's intuitive, unstudied response determines the meaning, not the words themselves.

*Evaluation of the Neo-orthodox / What it means to me method:*

- It's based on an errant view of the Bible's inerrancy and infallibility.
- The Bible is divine truth, not suggestive, non-authoritative, human experiences.
- These methods fail to recognise that the intent of the original author is what determines the meaning of a document—the memo means what the boss who wrote it says it means. What the Bible meant to the human authors (as God's Spirit moved them to write) is what the Bible means. We don't impose our meaning on what God said; we work to discover the meaning He initially and eternally intended.

We can find that meaning by reading the Bible according to the normal rules of written communication. What are those rules? How do they apply to the Bible? What is the right way to interpret the Bible?

**The Right Way: Carefully and Normally**

The right way to interpret the Bible is to read it as carefully and normally as possible. In fact, 1 Timothy 2:15 commands that we be careful readers of God's word: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." While not forgetting its unique characteristics—it is the God-breathed word—we must let the Scripture mean what it means based on what the words say. Interpretation is not a magical or mysterious process; it is reading carefully and normally, not looking for fanciful, allegorical, personal meanings.

Of course, since the Bible is God's book, to understand it we must seek God's wisdom: "Open my eyes that I might behold wonderful things from Your law" (Psalm 119:18). Having sought the necessary grace to handle the divine message, as a carpenter who measures twice and cuts once, we must accurately cut straight the words and sentences of Scripture. The twelve principles on the following pages are the basic guidelines for reading God's word carefully and normally.

## TWELVE PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

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### 1) The Clarity of Scripture

The Bible can be understood because God meant it to be understood.

I am the Lord, and there is none else. I have not spoken in secret, in some dark land...I, the Lord, speak righteousness declaring things that are upright. Isaiah 45:18-19

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, *but the things revealed belong to us* and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law. Deut 29:29, emphasis added (cf. 2 Tim 3:16-17)

Not everything in the Bible is easy to understand (2 Peter 3:15-16). However, as Deuteronomy 29:29 indicates, God revealed His word to be understood and lived: the revealed things—the words of the law—are ours (cf. Deut 6:1, 6-7; Matt 7:24-27; James 1:22-25). That means we study God's word *expecting* to discover a coherent message. When we do come across theologically obscure passages, we must give precedence to the clear sections of Scripture that address that issue.

### 2) The Accommodation of Revelation

God revealed His truth in terms that human beings can understand. For example, the Scripture was written in well-known human languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. When it speaks of infinite or divine concepts, it does so in terms we can relate to. For example, 2 Chronicles 16:9 says God's *eyes* move throughout the earth. That doesn't necessarily mean that God the Father, a spirit being, has physical eyes. He doesn't. But God knew that eyesight is the most perceptive of the human senses; therefore, He described His infinite perceiving abilities that way. Accommodation means God stoops to our level, describing Himself in ways we can understand.

### 3) One Meaning of a Text

Although a text may have many different applications, it has only one meaning—the meaning of the original human author, moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21).

Consider, for example, the command, "Do not steal." For the ten year old, that might apply to shoplifting a candy bar. For an adult it might apply to doing non-work related activities while his employer is paying him to work. Those are two different *applications*. However, there is only one meaning to that text: Don't take something that is not yours or not yours to use in that way.

### 4) Harmony of Scripture

Even though written over a period of 1500 years by more than thirty human authors, the Bible agrees with itself, amazingly so—or not so amazingly when you consider

its one divine author, God. Because the Scripture was spoken by the God who knows everything and never lies, the Bible does not contradict itself. There is a danger lurking in this principle. We must avoid the practice of determining what we believe based on *one* text and then forcing every other passage to "harmonise" with that view. That leads to bad, even dishonest theology.

### **5) Normal Interpretation**

This means we read the Bible following the reading practices we would consider normal for any other important document. When the office manager sends the maintenance man a memo instructing him to change the flickering florescent globe in the hallway, the maintenance man doesn't read a mystical, secret meaning about spiritual light into it. He reads the memo normally and fetches a new globe and a step ladder. That's normal interpretation, and we need to read our Bibles that way, too.

Normal reading means statements are assumed to be literal unless it is evident the author was using a figure of speech. For example, when Jesus said, "I am the door," we do not conclude that Jesus is made of wood and has hinges. We naturally understand that our Lord was using imagery. Our minds examine the literal meaning, find it unlikely, and accept it as figure of speech.

We should note that even when interpreting figures of speech it is good policy to begin with the literal. What is a door? What purpose does a door serve? Having asked that, then we ask: What was Jesus trying to communicate by comparing Himself to a door? The literal function of a door suggests the meaning of the figure: Jesus is the gateway to eternal life.

### **6) Context**

One of the most important summary statements ever made regarding Bible interpretation is, *context determines meaning*. This means that a text of Scripture is given its true meaning only when it is considered in relationship to the words around it.

For example, Philippians 2:3 says, "Do nothing." Is that justification for laziness? No. The rest of the verse says, "Do nothing *from selfishness or empty conceit*." When the words surrounding, "Do nothing," are considered, it is clear Paul was not condoning laziness. Here's another example: Philippians 4:6 says, "Be anxious." Is that justification for worry? No. The rest of the verse says, "Be anxious *for nothing*."

By quoting only a portion of a text, we can completely up-end the obvious meaning of the text. Not considering the context would have led us to *disobey* God if we had applied our "interpretation."

Consider another example: Read Isaiah 1:10. To whom was God speaking? Based on that verse alone, you would conclude God was addressing Sodom and Gomorrah.

Now read the context. Verse 1 says Isaiah prophesied during the reigns of four kings—Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah—who lived 1400 years *after* the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Verse 3 says Isaiah was proclaiming God's word to Israel. Verse 8 uses the terminology "daughter of Zion," an OT phrase referring to Jerusalem. And finally, verse 9 uses the phrases "*like* Sodom" and "*like* Gomorrah." Isaiah was making a comparison between Jerusalem of his day and Sodom and Gomorrah, two cities destroyed over a thousand years before.

Context is important. If you had picked out only v. 10, you would have concluded Isaiah chapter one is about Sodom and Gomorrah. Your interpretation would have been embarrassingly inaccurate. Reading the context gives you the true picture. Context determines meaning.

Here are some questions you can ask to grasp the context of a particular passage:

- Who is writing or speaking?
- To whom is he writing or speaking?
- Is there a specific situation addressed in the text that shapes the interpretation?

Let's apply those questions to Jeremiah 29:11—a favorite "sound bite" verse for Christian posters and calendars.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans for welfare and not for calamity..."

This verse is often quoted as if it were a general promise to all believers. However, even a cursory examination of Jeremiah 29 shows that this was part of a letter sent by Jeremiah to the Jews exiled in Babylon. Reading further, you find that this promise was part of God's plan to restore the nation of Israel in the future.

The ones to whom Jeremiah was writing and the specific situation—exile and promised restoration—limits the meaning of this verse. It is definitely *not* a sweeping promise that believers will have an easy and calamity-free passage through life (Jeremiah himself was hated, harried, thrown in prison, kidnapped, and martyred for his faithful preaching—it certainly didn't apply to him!). Context determines meaning.

## **7) Progressive Revelation**

God revealed His truth over an extended period of time. In other words, revelation became more detailed as time went on. It *progressed*.

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son.  
Heb 1:1-2



The fact that God's revelation has grown more detailed over time means we must avoid the trap of reading *later* revelation back into *earlier* revelation.

For example, in Genesis 12:3 God said He would bless all the families of the earth through Abraham. In Galatians 3, God revealed that part of that blessing is salvation by grace through faith in Abraham's seed, Jesus Christ. It might be a mistake to assume that Abraham understood *all* of that when God gave him the promise in Genesis 12. Only as revelation progressed did God unveil the specifics of His plan.

When studying OT passages, we must take care not to read into them more than the author could have known. Once we have established the author's meaning in his historical context, it is appropriate to fill that out with later revelation. However, those two steps must be kept separate.

### **8) Interpretation vs. Application**

There is a difference. *Interpretation* finds the meaning the original author intended in his historical situation. The *application* is the various ways that one meaning can be lived out today.

For example, Jesus said, "Love one another." A wife might say, "That means I need to love my husband better." However, is that really the *meaning*? If it is, her husband is going to have some trouble fulfilling that command—he doesn't have a husband. And, if that is the *meaning*, that wife might get upset when other women in the church try to love her husband better.

You can see the point. The *meaning* of John 15:12 is a command for the disciples to exhibit a self-sacrificial concern for others. You might be able to stretch that to apply to how a wife is to relate to her husband. However, that application is definitely not the *meaning* of the passage.

Interpretation and application must always be kept separate. Here is one way to do that. Let's assume you are studying Romans 12:1-2. Re-write in your own words those two verses. Start every sentence with the words "Paul said..." Make sure you write *only* what Paul actually said *to the Romans* in that verse. That is the interpretation. From that interpretation, you can develop appropriate applications for your present situation.

*Example: Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world.*

Wrong approach: "To me that means we shouldn't watch television. In fact, this verse means all television is evil. If you own a television you're not a Christian. That's what Paul said to the Romans, you know."

Right approach: *Interpretation:* Paul said the Roman believers should not follow the same patterns of thinking and living unbelievers do. *Application:* Something that influences me to think like an unbeliever is watching television. To keep from being

conformed to worldly thinking I should be more discerning about what I watch on television or even avoid watching television all together.

Interpretation—what Paul said—is distinct from how you are to act based on what he said. One interpretation can lead to many legitimate applications; just make sure you actually find the one meaning of the text before you start multiplying applications.

### **9) Grammar and Syntax**

A verse does not say more or less than what the rules of language make it say. It might be qualified by the context, but the real meaning of the text is found in what the passage says according to the normal usage of language.

### **10) Historical Appropriateness**

One of the great dangers a Bible student faces is reading a modern view of a word or concept into a biblical one. For example, one well-known Christian psychologist defines one of Paul's words for the mind in Romans in terms of the Freudian unconscious mind. However, the unconscious mind—the id, super-ego, and so on—are the manufacture of modern psychology. It is historically inappropriate to read those modern, secular concepts back into Paul's statements. This is called totality transfer: totally transferring a twenty-first century meaning into a first century word. The Freudian concept of human beings simply didn't exist in Paul's day. Always make sure your interpretation is appropriate to the historical situation of the text.

### **11) Word Study**

To understand a passage of Scripture, key words within that passage must be defined accurately (as illustrated just above). To do this, it is helpful to consider the other uses of that word in the Scripture—first by the same author and then by others. If there are multiple meanings, the immediate context determines which meaning the author intended in your passage. If you are working in the NT, the OT background of the word must always be considered.

You can accomplish much in word study with just an exhaustive English concordance and some persistence. As you look at every use of a word, you'll naturally see its range of meanings, its nuances in different contexts.

However, today there are also many excellent, usable lexicons, theological word books, and commentaries that provide scholarly explanations of biblical words for the average Bible student. Get them and use them.

### **12) Checking Principle**

It's good for a student to check his understanding of a passage against the interpretations of Bible scholars from the ages of Christianity. It is impossible for us to know all the geographic, historical, and interpretational issues in a passage—

information Bible scholars spend a lifetime accumulating. Bible dictionaries, commentaries, and other Bible study tools can shorten that process from a lifetime to five minutes.

Notice that this principle is *last* on the list. There is a reason for that. As a rule it's best to do your own study on a passage, and then compare it with someone else's. Sometimes you'll need to use Bible dictionaries and commentaries early in the process to get a handle on a certain word or theological concept. That's advisable. However, avoid the trap of opening a commentary and reading it as if it were the Bible.

Work on a passage all you can, looking up specific words or concepts you don't understand. Once you've done all you can to process a text, then use good commentaries to fill in the gaps or correct errors. Rather than read the results of someone else's analysis, analyse the passage yourself. You'll understand the message of the text and apply it better if you do.

Use the checking principle. It will save your interpretational life. But don't become so commentary dependent that you never develop your own ability to interpret the Scripture. You can do more than you think!

The twelve principles we've just covered apply to the study of all the Scripture. There are, however, some specific principles that will help you when studying OT poetry like the Psalms and Proverbs, and biblical narrative (the "story" sections of Scripture like Genesis, 1 Samuel, and Acts). The following six pages detail those principles.

## FIVE TIPS FOR INTERPRETING BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

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- 1) Read the whole account through a number of times to get a good grasp of the story.**
- 2) Look for the overall theological message of the story.** What was the author's purpose for writing? Rarely (if ever) was it merely to provide a record of historical events.

*Six ways to find the author's overall theological message:*

1. Check to see if the message is clearly stated in the introduction or conclusion of the narrative.

*Example:* John 20:30-31

2. Consider what historical information the author chose to include and exclude. His choice to include some details and exclude others tells you the theological message he was trying to communicate.

*Example:* Why did the Gospel writers include so little about Jesus' childhood and youth and so much about the final week of His life, especially the crucifixion? Answer: one is a curiosity; the other is the heart of the Christian message. What the gospel writers excluded and what they included point you to the overall message of the Gospels: Jesus Christ and Him crucified for sinners.

*Example:* Why did Jonah include that funny little section about the gourd and the worm in chapter four? Jonah's compassion on the plant is contrasted with God's compassion on sinners, highlighting Jonah's message: God's compassion.

3. Why did the author put the material in the order he did? Biblical narrative is not always strictly chronological.
4. Look for repeated words or concepts that suggest the theme of the narrative.

*Example:* Read the following verses in the book of Acts and see if their oft-repeated message suggests anything about the double theme of the book of Acts. Acts 2:47; 4:33; 5:14, 42; 6:7; 8:4; 11:19-21; 12:24; 28:30-31. The faithful preaching of the gospel by the early church and the resulting increase in converts is the message of Acts.

5. Take note of key connecting, "editorial," comments included by the author as he ties together parts of the story.

*Example:* The verses from Acts just listed are a great example of this. Luke connected his snap-shots of events in the early church with editorial comments about their faithful preaching and the increase in converts.

*Example:* Matthew 4:23 and 9:35. Matthew 9:35 repeats Matthew 4:23 almost exactly. Matthew used this repetition to mark the beginning and end of a section of his gospel, and at the same time told you why that section was included. Chapters 5-9 are about Jesus' teaching and evangelism (of which the Sermon on the Mount is a fine example) and about Jesus' Messianic healing ministry (highlighted in the miracles of chapters 8-9). Matthew 4:23 and 9:35 prove that teaching and healing were an important part of Matthew's overall theological message about Jesus.

6. Take note of rhetorical questions in the text that highlight the author's message. A rhetorical question is a question not answered because the answer is so obvious.

*Example:* Jonah 4:11. God's question needs no answer. Compassion on the 120,000 residents of Nineveh is in keeping with His gracious character. That compassion on undeserving Gentile sinners is the message of the book. The rhetorical question of 4:11 seals it.

*Example:* Luke 24:25-27. Jesus' unanswered question highlights the meaning of Luke's crucifixion account. The Christ had to suffer to fulfil prophecy, to accomplish the forgiveness of sins, and to be exalted by God.

### **3) God is always the main character of biblical narrative.**

Example: Jonah isn't about a naughty prophet and a hungry whale. It's about God and His compassion on sinners.

*Example:* Daniel 4 is not about Nebuchadnezzar and his bizarre dream. It's about God who can humble the proud (Dan 4:34-37).

### **4) Choose the verses that you will study and teach based on the natural divisions of the text.**

- Look for editorial beginning and ending comments:  
“and it came about...” “after these things...” “Now...”  
“after many days...” “when Jesus had finished these words...”

## 5) Method of teaching:

### *Traps to avoid:*

- Do not *merely* focus on a good or bad behaviour in the narrative. Fit that incident into the larger theological message.
- The ethical—"Do this; Don't do that"—principles you draw from biblical history must be clearly taught in a teaching section of Scripture. The behaviour you picked to imitate may not have been included in the story because it was good! For example, King David had multiple wives, committed adultery, and murdered to cover his sin. Even though he was a man after God's own heart, you might not want to imitate those things. Why not? The teaching sections of Scripture tell us they are God-rejected behaviour.
- Exercise caution when developing doctrine out of a narrative section. Didactic or teaching sections always take precedence. Too often narrative is twisted to "prove" something it was never intended to teach.

*Example:* The fact that the husband and wife team, Aquila and Priscilla, instructed Apollos more fully in the way (Acts 18), can't be used to overturn Paul's instruction that women should not teach men in the church (1 Timothy 2:11-12). First, we weren't there: we don't know how much or how little teaching Priscilla actually did. Second, even if Priscilla did instruct Apollos, Luke didn't tell us whether it was *right* for her to do so. Third, the setting was a private conversation, not a home Bible study, Sunday school class, a sermon, or some other church event. Let the teaching sections determine your doctrine, and let the narrative sections support it.

*Example:* The Openness of God movement teaches that God doesn't know or control the future. They teach this based on Old Testament narrative passages that speak of God "changing" His mind when someone repented. However, the teaching sections of Scripture clearly teach that God both knows and controls the future—His very God-ness hinges on it (Is 44:7-8; 46:8-9). Other satisfactory explanations can be given to the "God changed His mind" passages. Narrative is inspired and authoritative, but don't use its lack of detail or explanations to overturn doctrines established in the teaching sections of Scripture.

### *Things to do:*

- Re-tell the story, explaining all significant cultural, historical, or theological points.

- As you re-tell the story, give your listeners a sense of what it was like to be there. Biblical narrative isn't fiction. Bible characters were real people; these things really happened to them. Don't, however, use your imagination to manufacture details or incidents the text doesn't speak of.

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## THE PARALLEL STRUCTURE OF HEBREW POETRY

**Parallelism:** Probably the most identifiable feature of English poetry is rhyme: *From the start, you captured my heart.* Old Testament poetry rarely uses rhyme. Instead, the most identifiable feature of Hebrew poetry is parallelism. Parallelism is a correspondence or relationship between two lines of poetry—not audio parallelism, but conceptual.

### **Types of Parallelism**

There are four basic kinds of parallelism used in Hebrew poetry. To interpret the Psalms, Proverbs, much of the Prophets, and the other poetical sections of the Old Testament it is helpful to know the different kinds.

1. **Synonymous**      The second line expands the thought of the first.

*Example:*      Why are the nations in an uproar  
and the peoples devising a vain thing?

Three historical views of synonymous parallelism:

1.      A ≠ B:      A completely separate interpretation is sought for each line.
2.      A = B:      “The practice of saying the same thing twice in different words.” (C. S. Lewis)

Both views are partially correct. A more accurate way to describe synthetic parallelism is...

3.      A, and what's more, B:

The second line carries forward the thought found in the first. Thus, you could say that the two lines are *more* than equal, but *less* than different. In the following examples notice how the second line advances or expands the thought of the first line.

*Examples:*

But his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
[and what's more]

in His law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:2)

The second line gives specific expression to the delight of the first line: delight leads to meditation.

Hear, my son, your father's instruction  
[and what's more]  
do not forsake your mother's teaching. (Prov 1:8)

The second line expands the principle to include mothers.

2. **Antithetical** Expresses the same thought from two opposite perspectives, not two contrary thoughts as it might first appear.

*Example:* For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,  
But the way of the wicked will perish. (Psalm 1:6)

A prudent man sees evil and hides himself,  
The naive proceed and pay the penalty. (Prov 27:12)

3. **Emblematic** The words *like* or *as* are used to compare two radically different things for the purpose of illuminating a theological concept.

*Example:* As the deer pants for the water brooks,  
So my soul pants for You, O God. (Ps 42:1)

4. **Chiastic** The thought pattern of the lines are inverted and repeated (A-B, B-A). A chiasmus is similar to playing a scale on the piano—eight notes up, the same eight notes back down in reverse order. Notice how the six lines of Isaiah 53:3 fall into three groups.

*Example:*

A He was despised  
B and forsaken of men,  
C a man of sorrows  
C and acquainted with grief;  
B and like one from whom men hide  
their face He was despised  
A and we did not esteem Him.



This chiastic structure is also common in the New Testament.  
Consider this example from Philippians 3:10-11.

*Example:*    A ...that I may know Him and the power of His  
                  *resurrection*

                  B and the fellowship of His *sufferings*,  
                  B being conformed to His *death*;

                  A in order that I may attain to the *resurrection*

from

the dead.

## Section 2: Study Methods – Learning to Read Carefully

---

*Language is the sheath of the sword of the Spirit.*

Martin Luther

### **Introduction: Why study grammar and syntax?**

God has revealed Himself using language. The heavens declare His glory, but words are more detailed. Having been taught to read, most of us instinctively apply enough of the rules of language to wade through the biblical text without drowning. However, because of our foggy knowledge of grammar, sometimes we misinterpret or miss altogether what God said. We aren't drowning, but we might be floundering.

To interpret the Bible rightly we must have a basic working knowledge of grammar and syntax—how language works. A soldier can fire a rifle if he knows where the safety catch and the trigger are. But he shoots accurately only if he knows the bullet he fires will drop a certain number of centimetres after it travels 200 metres. For the marksman, knowing his weapon is the difference between a bull's-eye and just clipping the edge of the target.

In the same way, your knowledge of how language works will affect the accuracy of your Bible interpretation. If you know how language works, your interpretations will hit the bull's-eye of truth. If you don't, they will often miss the mark.

Is it important that we be so careful when interpreting Scripture? Yes. Every word of the Bible is inspired by God (2 Tim 3:16), and that determines how we study it. Casual, off-hand, arbitrary interpretations are disrespectful to God. If God breathed every word of it, then accuracy in interpreting those words and their God-given relationships is important. Inspiration determines our method of interpretation.

A note of encouragement: All this talk about grammar and syntax sounds daunting. There's no need to have heart palpitations. You use grammar and syntax every single time you read or speak (you're so practised, you do it without thinking.) That intuitive application of the rules of language is adequate for reading the newspaper or carrying on a conversation with a friend: rigorous analysis isn't necessary. Reading God's word, however, requires the diligent efforts of a skilled workman (1 Timothy 2:15).

### **The basic components of language:**

- 1) words**
- 2) relationships between words (grammar)**
- 3) relationships between groups of words (syntax)**

Language has three basic components. The first is **words**. Words and the range of meaning they carry are the most fundamental component of language. However, just as critical are **the relationships between words** or grammar. Let me explain by example.

Let's use the word *ball* and the word *red*. By themselves those two words produce certain images in your mind. However, when we put them together and talk about a *red ball*, the image in your mind's eye suddenly changes. When you considered the words separately, perhaps you pictured a white soccer ball and a sheet of red paper. However, when we put the two words in relationship to each other (a *red ball*), you had to change the picture—perhaps to a cricket ball. The words didn't change, just the relationship between them.

Therefore, both the meaning of a word *and* its relationship to the words around it are critical to understanding written communication.

We have many lexicons and theological dictionaries to help us with the meaning of biblical words. Far more difficult is the task of analysing the relationships between those words. Very few study aids are designed to help the student master this. That's unfortunate, because it is those *red ball* relationships that bring clarity to the Scripture.

Just as important is the third component of language: **relationships between groups of words** or syntax. Once we pass the age of two, most of us speak more than one word at a time. We speak more than two or three words at a time. In fact, we speak (and write) long, tangled sentences, multiple sentence paragraphs, and—some of us—sixty minute sermons. Just like us, the Bible authors wrote in complex sentences and groups of sentences. Unless we understand how those *groups* of words work together, God's word will remain a mystery.

A note on Bible translations: It is the translators' job to reflect accurately the grammar of the original languages in a modern translation. Some do that better than others. To study the Bible the way we are suggesting you need a version that stays as close as possible to the grammar and syntax of the original. The English versions which most diligently carry over the grammatical structures of the original are the New American Standard, the English Standard Version, the King James, and the New King James.

## Section one: Words

Words are the bricks that make up the building of language. They are the building blocks of daily speech. To understand the Bible, we must understand the various kinds of bricks it uses.

**Noun:** A noun represents a person, place, thing, or abstract idea.

examples: John, Africa, ball, justice

**Pronoun:** A pronoun is used in the place of a noun.

examples: he, she, they, it, you

**Verb:** A verb represents an *action* or *state of existence*.

*Action* verbs: run, jump, write

*Stative* verbs: is, was, am, etc. Stative verbs describe a state of existence: *Jesus is God*. They function something like an equal sign: *Jesus = God*.

**Adjective:** An adjective *describes* a noun.

examples: the *red* ball, a *dull* lecture

**Adverb:** An adverb describes a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. It tells how, when, why, where, to what extent.

examples: run *quickly*, a *terribly* dull lecture, run *very* quickly

**Prepositions:** A preposition shows a relationship between the words before and after it.

examples: the king *of* France - the *of* points out a relationship between *king* and *France*.

Billy collapsed *into* the chair. - *Into* describes the relationship between Billy's collapse and the chair.

**Participles:** A participle is a verbal adjective or adverb. They are called *verbals* because they have action implicit in them. Participles end in *ing*, *ed*, or *en*. Note: when combined with a helping verb they function as a verb.

examples: He sat down by the *running* stream. (adj.)  
He slipped, *dropping* his books on the pavement. (adv.)  
I *am asking* you to sit down. (Note the helping verb *am*.)

**Gerunds:** Gerunds are verbal nouns. They look like participles, but act as nouns.

examples: I love *singing*. - *Singing* is not describing anything, so it isn't a participle. It is noun summarising the action of singing.

**Infinitives:** An infinitive is a verb with the word *to* in front of it. It is a very flexible part of speech. It can function as a noun, an adjective, an adverb, or a verb in a purpose clause.

examples: *To live* is Christ, *to die* is gain. Both *to live* and *to die* are infinitives acting as nouns. Here they make the verbs *live* and *die* into concepts.

Jesus came into the world *to save* sinners. - *To save* is an infinitive acting as an adverb telling the purpose of Jesus' coming. When used this way, infinitives express purpose.

## **Section two: How Words Function in a Sentence**

Bricks provide the basic material for construction. However, depending on how you combine those bricks, you can make a floor, a wall, or an arch. In the same way, words are the basic components of language. However, by combining them in different ways you can say totally different things. *Billy hit the ball*, doesn't mean the same thing as, *The ball hit Billy*.

How words are used in relationship to each other in a sentence determines the meaning of a sentence. Consider our example.

Billy hit the ball.

Both *Billy* and *ball* are nouns. One is a person; the other is a thing. However, do they serve the same function in this sentence? No, they don't. One is *doing* the action of the verb. The other is *receiving* the action of the verb. This may not seem like such a profound observation. However, when you tangle with one of Paul's eternal, run-on sentences, it is the difference between comprehension and mystification. The following are some important ways words or groups of words can function in a sentence.

### **The Parts of a Sentence**

**Verb:** A verb express action or a state of being. The verb is the heart and soul of a sentence.

- Billy *hit* the ball.
- Billy *is* tall
- Billy *was hit* by the ball.

You can see from the examples that a verb can be *active*, *stative*, or *passive*.

- Active:* The subject does the action: *Billy hit the ball.*  
*Stative:* The subject is in the state of existence expressed by the rest of the sentence: *Billy is tall.*  
*Passive:* The subject is the recipient of the action of the verb: *Billy was hit by the ball.*

**Subject:** The part of the sentence about which something is said.

examples:

- *Billy ran home.* *Billy* did the action of running.
- *To sing was my dream.* The concept of singing is the subject of the stative verb, *was*. (Notice the infinitive *to sing* is used as a noun).
- *Paul was imprisoned in Philippi.* *Paul* is the subject, but the action of the passive verb was done to him.
- [*You*] *Stand by the door.* In commands, the subject is often implied rather than stated.

**Direct object:** The direct object is the part of the sentence that receives the action of an active verb.

- *Billy hit the ball.* *The ball* is receiving the action of the active verb, *hit*.
- *I believe that Jesus is God.* What is receiving the action of belief?

Here a group of words, *that Jesus is God*, is functioning as the direct object. The whole group of words is acting like one noun. Though it seems more complex, *I believe that Jesus is God*, is no different than saying, *I believe the truth*.

**Predicate nominative (noun) or predicate adjective:** The part of the sentence which is being equated with the subject when a stative verb is used.

- *Billy is my friend.* *Friend* is a noun which equals *Billy*.
- *Billy is tall.* *Tall* is an adjective describing Billy's state of existence.

**Modifiers:** Modifiers are a word or a group of words which describe, limit, or qualify another word. Modifiers include *adjectives* and *adverbs*, and groups of words acting like them.

- Billy caught the *red* ball.
- Billy caught the ball *that ricocheted off the head of the opposing side's most prolific goal-scorer*.

What modifies the word *ball* in those two examples? In the first it is the word *red*. In the second, it is the group of words, *that ricocheted off the head....* Although

there are thirteen words following *ball* in the second example, they all function together as one word describing which ball Billy caught.

**Apposition:** An apposition is the renaming of a noun. You've found an apposition when two names for the same person or thing are placed next to each other.

- *Paul, an apostle* of Christ Jesus...
- In Him, you also, after listening to the *message of truth*, the *gospel of your salvation*...
- To *me*, the *very least of all saints*, this grace was given.

Notice in the next example that not only nouns can serve as appositions, but also noun clauses.

- Although they know the *ordinance* of God, *that those who practice such things are worthy of death*, they not only do the same, but...

**Direct address:** When a person is spoken to directly by name, his name or title is called a vocative or direct address. It has no direct grammatical association with the rest of the sentence.

- Consider it all joy, *my brethren*, when you encounter various trials...

### **Section three: How Groups of Words Function in a Sentence or a Paragraph**

When we write, we group words together in four different ways: phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs. Let's consider each in turn.

#### **PHRASES**

A *phrase* is a group of words that function together as a unit, but *does not* contain a verb. Examples: participles, prepositions, infinitives.

**participle phrase:** We give thanks to God always for all of you, *making mention of you in our prayers*.

**prepositional phrase:** Timothy, guard what has been entrusted *to you*.

**infinitive phrase:** Instruct those who are rich in this present world not *to be conceited* or *to fix* their hope on the uncertainty of riches.

#### **CLAUSES**





- |                |                        |
|----------------|------------------------|
| 2. Eph 5:25-33 | a husband's leadership |
| 3. Eph 6:1-3   | a child's submission   |
| 4. Eph 6:4     | a father's leadership  |
| 5. Eph 6:5-8   | a slave's submission   |
| 6. Eph 6:9     | a master's leadership  |

A paragraph's theme will usually be found in the opening sentence or two. All the other sentences work as a team to develop that key idea.

Understanding relationships between sentences in a paragraph is as critical as understanding the relationships between clauses and phrases within one sentence.

Example: The Lord is my shepherd, [as a result] I shall not want.

### **Zooming in: Prepositions, Clauses, and Participles**

To complete this section, let's consider more closely three groups of words: prepositions, clauses, and participles. These three are extremely common in the Scripture; therefore, it is important to understand them.

#### **Prepositional Phrases**

Prepositional phrases can function in two different ways in a sentence, as an adjective or an adverb. Adjectival prepositional phrases describe *nouns*. Adverbial prepositional phrases describe *verbs*.

Examples:

- But the wisdom *from above* is first pure.

The prepositional phrase *from above* describes the noun *wisdom*. It points out just which wisdom the author is referring to, the from-above wisdom. Since it describes a noun, it is adjectival.

- God is opposed *to the proud*, but gives grace *to the humble*.

Both of the prepositional phrases in this example are used adverbially. The first tells to whom God is *opposed*. The second explains to whom God *gives* grace.

→ Adverbial prepositional phrases often answer the questions *who*, *where*, *when*, *how*, *to what degree*, *to whom*, *to what extent*, and so on.

Let's look at some examples:

He predestined us

to adoption	adv. the goal of the predestining
as sons	adv. the extent the predestining
through Jesus Christ	adv. how we were predestined
to Himself	adv. to whom we were
predestined	
according to the kind intention	adv. to what degree
of His will	adj. describing which kind
intention	
to the praise	adv. why He predestined us
of the glory	adj. describing which praise
of His grace	adj. describing which glory

## Clauses

On the next two pages are a list of the most important kinds of subordinate clauses. Outside of the Bible, these are the most important two pages in your library. No kidding. To be a good interpreter, you must master them. Some of the key connector words that mark subordinate clauses are given in bold. They won't always be used, but usually they will.

### Types of Clauses

**Relative:** Functions as an adjective describing a noun.

**(who, which, whom, that, by which, in which, for which)**

- The God *who made the world and all things in it...* does not dwell in temples [*which are*] made with hands.
- He has fixed a day *in which he will judge the world.*

**Temporal:** Describes *when* the action of the controlling (usually main) clause is taking place.

**(when, while, after, then, since, before, as, etc.)**

- *When they heard of the resurrection of the dead,* some began to sneer.
- His spirit was provoked within him *as he was observing the city full of idols.*

**Purpose:** Describes the goal of the action of the controlling clause.

**(in order that, so that, that)**

- Christ Jesus...gave Himself for us, *that He might redeem us...*
- For this reason I left you in Crete, *that you might set in order what remains...*

**Result:** Describes the result of the action in the controlling clause.  
(**therefore, as a result, so, thus**)

- God has not given us a spirit of timidity... *therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.*
- ...and all these things shall be added to you. *Therefore, do not be anxious for tomorrow...*

**Causal:** Expresses the reason for the action of the controlling clause.  
(**because, for<sup>1</sup>, since**)

- He felt compassion for them, *because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd.*
- Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; *for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life...*

**Contrast:** Contrasts a clause with what was just said.  
(**but, yet, nevertheless**)

- Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, *but* only such a word as is good for edification...
- Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth... *but* lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...

**Conditional:** Establishes a condition that must be true before the controlling clause

will come to pass. (**if, unless**)

- But I will come to you soon, *if the Lord wills.*
- ...*if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming*, he would have been on the alert ...

**Comparison:** Introduces an analogy to explain or emphasise the action of the controlling clause. (**as, like, even as, just as**)

- Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, *just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

**Concessive:** Concedes something to be true: in spite of *this* fact, *this* other thing is true. (**although, though, even though**)

- In this you greatly rejoice, *even though now for a little while...you have been distressed by various trials...*

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<sup>1</sup> The conjunction "for" is often causal. However, it can also introduce an *explanation* of the preceding thought.

- *Although He existed in the form of God, [Jesus] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped...*

**Sequential:** Used often in narrative, it expresses simple progression.  
(**then, now**)

- *Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.*

**Noun:** A group of words that function as a noun (most often as a direct object or an apposition). (**that, what**)

- For this you know with certainty, *that no immoral or impure person ... has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*
- But realize this, *that in the last days difficult times will come.*

**Very important note!** Usually the text you study will be more than one sentence in length. If that's the case, you must analyse the series of main clauses you are studying, looking for the same relationships listed above. Don't forget your key words. They point out the relationships *between* sentences just as well as they do relationships *within* a sentence.

## Participle Phrases

Participle phrases work the same way clauses do. You'll see from the examples that their function is often implied by the context, rather than stated directly.

**Purpose:** Expresses the purpose of the controlling verb.

- Let us see if Elijah comes [*for the purpose of*] saving him.

**Temporal:** Establishes the time of the main verb.

- Seeing [*when they saw*] the star, they rejoiced.

**Causal:** Reveals the reason for the action of the main verb.

- They received Him, seeing [*because they saw*] all that He did.

**Conditional:** Used as the *if* portion of an *if-then* statement.

- How shall we escape, neglecting [*if we neglect*] so great a salvation.

**Concessive:** Concedes something to be true in (i.e., you can insert the words, *in spite of*).

- ...and he went out, not knowing [*even though he did not know; in spite of not knowing*] where he was going.

**Instrumental:** Indicates the means by which the controlling verb is accomplished.

- Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [*by*] fixing our eyes on Jesus...

**Circumstantial:** Expresses circumstances concurrent with the controlling verb.

- They went forth, [*at the same time*] preaching everywhere.

You now have in your tool kit the tools necessary to read God's word *carefully*. If you apply the principles we've covered, you will read and understand the Bible at a level you never have before. I can't wait to get started! Turn the page and we'll begin to apply what we've learned.

## Clause Exercises

**Instructions:** Read each verse, giving special attention to the subordinate clauses in *italics*. Using pages 24-25 as a guide, write in the blanks provided the name of each kind of clause. The answer key is on page 29.

### Sample:

Those <sup>1</sup>*who wait for the Lord* will gain new strength.

Looking at pages 24-25, you'll see that the word *who* marks a relative clause. In this case, *who* and the words following it tell which *those* will be given new strength. Therefore, your answer will be,

1. relative clause

### Exercises:

No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, <sup>1</sup>*so that he may please the one* <sup>2</sup>*who enlisted him as a soldier*.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>3</sup>*If we confess our sins*, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

3. \_\_\_\_\_

But avoid worldly and empty chatter, <sup>4</sup>*for it will lead to further ungodliness*.

4. \_\_\_\_\_

He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, <sup>5</sup>*so that he will have something to share with one who has need*.

5. \_\_\_\_\_

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God *as a workman* <sup>6</sup>*who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth*.

6. \_\_\_\_\_

And <sup>7</sup>*although they know the ordinance of God*, <sup>8</sup>*that those who practice such things are worthy of death*, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those <sup>9</sup>*who practice them*.

7. \_\_\_\_\_ 8. \_\_\_\_\_

9. \_\_\_\_\_

Also <sup>10</sup>*if anyone competes as an athlete*, he does not win the prize <sup>11</sup>*unless he competes according to the rules*.

10. \_\_\_\_\_ 11. \_\_\_\_\_

But thanks be to God <sup>12</sup>that <sup>13</sup>though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching <sup>14</sup>to which you were committed.

12. \_\_\_\_\_ 13. \_\_\_\_\_  
14. \_\_\_\_\_

Retain the standard of sound words <sup>15</sup>which you have heard from me, in the faith and love <sup>16</sup>which are in Christ Jesus.

15. \_\_\_\_\_ 16. \_\_\_\_\_

"<sup>17</sup>Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, <sup>18</sup>yet <sup>19</sup>because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection."

17. \_\_\_\_\_ 18. \_\_\_\_\_  
19. \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>20</sup>Now <sup>21</sup>after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem.

20. \_\_\_\_\_ 21. \_\_\_\_\_

For this you know with certainty, <sup>22</sup>that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, <sup>23</sup>who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

22. \_\_\_\_\_ 23. \_\_\_\_\_

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; <sup>24</sup>so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

24. \_\_\_\_\_

"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD,

"<sup>25</sup>Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; <sup>26</sup>though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.

25. \_\_\_\_\_ 26. \_\_\_\_\_

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, <sup>27</sup>so that it will give grace to those who hear.

27. \_\_\_\_\_

We know that we have passed out of death into life, <sup>28</sup>because we love the brethren.

28. \_\_\_\_\_

Whoever confesses <sup>29</sup>that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

29. \_\_\_\_\_

The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, <sup>30</sup>for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.

30. \_\_\_\_\_

For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, <sup>31</sup>*so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory.*

31. \_\_\_\_\_

But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, <sup>32</sup>*as is proper among saints.*

32. \_\_\_\_\_

For <sup>33</sup>*since the creation of the world* His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through <sup>34</sup>*what has been made*, <sup>35</sup>*so that they are without excuse.*

33. \_\_\_\_\_

34. \_\_\_\_\_

35. \_\_\_\_\_

### Answer Key

1. purpose—telling why a soldier doesn't entangle himself
2. relative—describing *one*
3. conditional—confessing is the condition for forgiveness
4. causal—explaining why to avoid such *chatter*
5. purpose—explaining the goal of the ex-thief's labour
6. relative—describes which workman, the unashamed one
7. concessive—in spite of their knowledge, they still sin
8. noun—apposition renaming or telling what the ordinance of God is
9. relative—telling which *those*
10. conditional—competing is the condition required for being eligible to win the prize
11. conditional—competing according to the rules is the condition required to win the prize
12. noun—gives the content of the thanksgiving
13. concessive—in spite of their previous slavery to sin, they obeyed
14. relative—describes which teaching: the one they were committed to
15. relative—describes which words to retain: those heard from Paul
16. relative—describing which faith and love, the ones found in Christ Jesus
17. concessive—in spite of his lack of God-fearing, the judge will give protection
18. contrast—contrasts the judge's lack of fear with his intent to provide protection
19. causal—explains why the judge will give the unexpected protection
20. sequential—advances the story
21. temporal—tells when the magi came
22. noun—apposition of *this*, giving the content of the knowing
23. relative—describes the coveter as an idol worshiper, bowing before that which he covets
24. result—complete equipping of God's man is the result of the inspiration and profitableness of Scripture
25. concessive—in spite of their scarlet sin, the whiteness of the main clause will result
26. concessive—in spite of redness of their sin, woolly whiteness will be given
27. purpose—the reason for speaking the edifying word
28. causal—explains why we are certain we are spiritually alive
29. noun—direct object of the verb, *confesses*
30. causal—tells why Onesiphorus was a worthy candidate for mercy
31. purpose—tells why Paul endured so many sufferings: the salvation of God's elect
32. comparison—equates the verbal restraint of the main clause with "saintly" behaviour
33. temporal—telling from what time God's attributes, power, and nature have been seen
34. noun—object of the preposition, *through*; the same as saying "through creation"
35. result—God's self-revelation makes sinners' guilt indefensible



## Section 3: Making Sense of It

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We have all heard great preachers. We love their detail, their explanation of the passage. They take the text apart and put it back together in an understandable, interesting, and impactful way. They don't preach *around* God's word or just *about* God's word. They preach *God's word*: they explain the text itself.

How do they do it? What is their secret? Some of it is just extraordinary spiritual giftedness. God gives that in different measures, so we can't imitate that. However, we can imitate their method of analysing and summarising the text.

### **Some wrong approaches:**

Some of the wrong methods not-so-great preachers use to study God's word:

- *The CNN method*: You prepare for your sermon by analysing television news programs or newspaper editorials rather than the Scripture.
- *The shoplifting method*: Grab a favourite word from the text and run.
- *The eisegesis method*: Read your meaning into the text rather than drawing God's meaning out of the text.
- *The "Help me, Jesus!" method*. It's Saturday night and you didn't make time to study this week.

### **The right approach:**

The method we will employ has three steps. It's a great method to use if you're going to teach God's word. However, it's just as effective and useful for Bible students who want to learn God's word but have no desire to teach.

- 1. A block diagram**
- 2. An interpretational outline**
- 3. A plural noun summary statement**

## Block Diagramming

A block diagram is a way to represent relationships between words, groups of words, and sentences. It is a picture of the grammar and syntax of the passage. It's a flow-chart of the passage. It involves arranging the words of a Bible text on a page using spacing and indentation to represent the work they are doing.

### ***The method:***

- 1) To create a block diagram, you begin by writing the main verb and its subject on the left hand margin.
- 2) Underneath that and to the right, you write the words that modify or describe that main thought. Subordinate relationships are indicated by indentation. Line up modifiers directly underneath the word they describe.

It sounds complicated, but like tying your shoe, block diagramming is much easier to learn when you see it in action. So, let's discover the process of block diagramming step-by-step.

### ➔ **Step one: Find the main verb and its subject.**

Find the part of the sentence that stands by itself as a complete thought.

### **Examples:**

**Genesis 1:1** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

What is the main verb or main clause of this sentence? What stands by itself as a complete thought? Cut away all the "unnecessary" words in the sentence until all that is left is the core, that which stands by itself as a complete thought.

*God created.* That's the core of the sentence. The rest of the words simply explain *when* God created and *what* He created. God's creating act, however, is the central thought.

To block diagram Genesis 1:1, you would start with this on the left-hand column:

God created

### **Galatians 6:1**

Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to yourselves, lest you too be tempted.

What is the main verb of this sentence? What words stand by themselves as a complete thought? To find the main clause of Galatians 6:1, focus on the verbs, the heart of a sentence. There are five different verb-like words in this sentence: *is*

*caught, are, restore, looking, be tempted.* Read each of them and see which one stands by itself as a complete thought.

Hopefully you came up with this: *you...restore.* That command *is* the sentence. It is the thought that stands complete in-and-of itself.

What does discovering that do for you? By identifying the main clause, you know that *restoration* is the theme of this verse. You might want to teach about temptation, or being spiritual, or gentleness. Those are all great topics. However, if you want to teach what Paul taught when he wrote this verse, then your theme has to be the *restoration* of a sinner. That is rightly dividing the word of truth.

To block diagram Galatians 6:1 you start with your main clause on the left-hand column:

you restore such a one

---

Continuing the process of block diagramming, we come to **step two**.

Step one: Find the main verb and its subject.

→ **Step two: Underneath and to the right, write the groups of words that modify that main clause or other subordinate thoughts.** Line up modifiers and clauses directly underneath the word they describe.

Lets apply this step to our examples.

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**Genesis 1:1** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

→ **Step one: Find the main verb and its subject.**

God created

→ **Step two: Underneath and to the right, write the groups of words that modify that main clause or other subordinate thoughts.**

God created    the heavens<sup>2</sup>  
                    and  
                    the earth

in the beginning

---

<sup>2</sup> I usually prefer to put the direct object of the verb on the same line as the verb to show the complete thought of the main clause.

*Heavens* and *earth* are the direct objects of the verb, *created*. *In the beginning* is an adverbial preposition describing when God created. Therefore, it goes underneath the verb and is indented to show subordination.

---

Galatians 6:1

➔ Step one: Find the main verb and its subject.

you restore such a one

➔ Step two: Underneath and to the right, write the groups of words that modify that main clause or other subordinate thoughts.

brethren<sup>3</sup>

you                                restore such a one  
     who are spiritual

  even if a man is caught in any trespass

  in a spirit of gentleness

  looking to yourselves  
   lest you too be tempted

You can see that each group of words has been arranged to indicate what they modify. *Who are spiritual* describes *you*. Therefore, it is placed underneath it and indented slightly. *Even if...*, *in a spirit...*, *looking...*, all modify the action of restoring. Therefore, they are placed under *restore*. To get your mental ear used to hearing this it is helpful to repeat the main clause before each subordinate clause.

You restore such a one...even if a man is caught in any trespass

You restore such a one...in a spirit of gentleness

You restore such a one...looking to yourselves lest you also be tempted

---

**?      What if I am studying a passage that has several main clauses?  
 How is that block diagrammed ?**

Most of the time the text you are studying will be more than one sentence long. If that is the case, you have **two options** in the block diagram.

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<sup>3</sup> Direct addresses don't fit in the flow of a sentence. Generally they are placed above the main clause.

**Option #1. The sentences are all of equal importance to the thought of the paragraph.** In that case, each sentence in your block diagram begins on the left hand column as a distinct thought.

Example: 1 Thess 5:16-18

Rejoice  
always

Pray  
without ceasing

Give thanks  
in everything

**Option #2. Although all of the sentences in the paragraph are complete thoughts, in the flow of the text, some are subordinate to others.**

Example: Psalm 23:1

The Lord is my shepherd

[as a result]  
I shall not want

The logical connection between the two sentences is indicated by the phrase in brackets. The main thought is the Lord's shepherding. Not lacking is the result of that shepherding. These relationships between sentences in a paragraph are as critical as those within a sentence<sup>4</sup>.

### Summary of block diagramming

A block diagram is a wonderful tool for studying a passage. It pictures what is happening in a sentence or a paragraph. It helps you identify the focus of the author. It shows you what is central and what is subordinate. It traces the line of the author's argument. All those things are critical to carefully reading the Bible.

Let me give you a few more examples of block diagramming.

2 Timothy 1:14

[You] guard the treasure  
which has been entrusted [relative clause]  
to you [adv. prep: to whom]

---

<sup>4</sup> Often the author will mark the logical connections between sentences with connector words. See the clause pages for such words: *therefore*, *since*, *but*, etc. However, poetry often does not directly state these connections, as in Ps 23:1.

through the Holy Spirit	[ <i>adv. prep: how</i> ]
who dwells in us	[ <i>relative clause</i> ]

1 Timothy 3:14

I am writing	these things	
to you		[ <i>adv. prep: to whom</i> ]
hoping to come		[ <i>participle w/ inf.</i> ]
to you		[ <i>adv. prep: to whom</i> ]
before long		[ <i>adv. prep: when</i> ]

1 Tim 6:3-4

he is conceited	[ <i>2 main verbs</i> ]
and	
understands nothing	

if	[ <i>3 conditional</i>
<i>clauses</i> ]	
anyone advocates a different doctrine	
and	
does not agree	
with sound words←→those	[ <i>apposition</i> ]
of our Lord Jesus Christ	
and	
[ <i>does not agree</i> ]	
with the doctrine	[ <i>adv. prep</i> ]
conforming to godliness	[ <i>adj. part.</i> ]

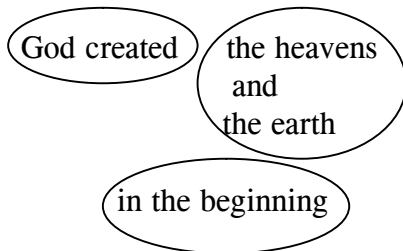
A picture of your passage is very helpful, but you need a way to report what the picture or diagram shows you. This is especially true if you are a preacher: you can't preach a block diagram. You must also *report* what you have found in a clear, accurate, and memorable manner. How can this be accomplished?

**Interpretational Outline**

- 1. a block diagram
- 2. an interpretational outline
- 3. a plural noun summary statement

→ **Definition:** An interpretational outline is *a series of statements that describe the content and flow of a passage.*

An interpretational outline describes each piece of the text in your block diagram. Let's use **Genesis 1:1** as an example.



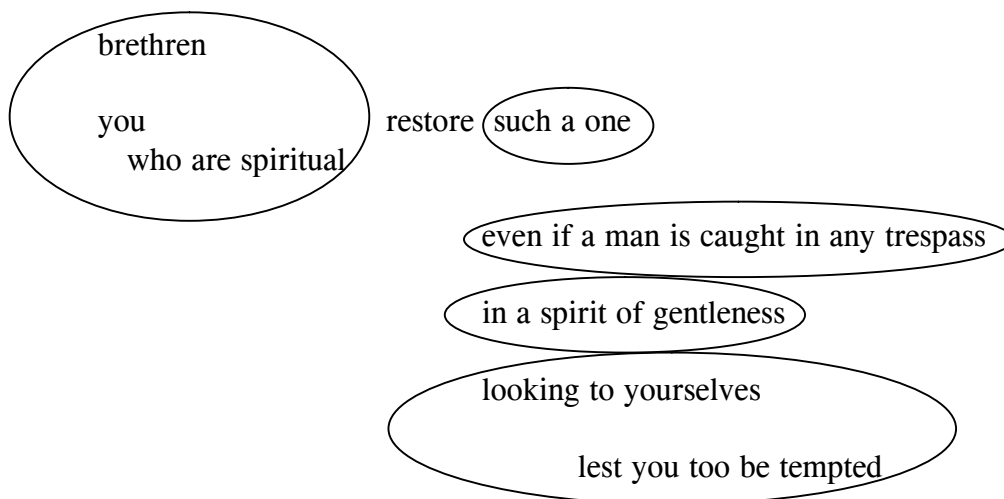
The block diagram reveals the basic parts of this verse: a Creator who creates a creation at a certain time. Let's shape that into an outline.

1. the Creator - God
2. the creation - heavens, earth
3. the chronology - in the beginning

Notice how everything revolves around the main verb, *created*: the One who created, the things that were created, the time of the creating. An interpretational outline is a simple summary of the content of a passage.

We can do the same thing with the other passage, Galatians 6:1.

**Galatians 6:1.**



The main verb establishes the theme of the sentence: *restoration*. You could outline the key thoughts of this passage this way:

- the committee of restoration      - *you who are spiritual*
- the culprit of restoration        - *such a one, i.e. the caught man*
- the condition of restoration      - *even if a man is caught...*
- the compassion of restoration    - *in a spirit of gentleness*
- the caution of restoration        - *looking to yourselves...*

That, of course, is only your basic outline. Under each of those main points there would be sub-points. For example, under the *committee of restoration*, you would

have their *qualification*: spiritual maturity. (For more examples of block diagramming and outlining, see *Practice Diagrams*, p.48ff.)

### **Plural Noun Summary**

- 1. a block diagram**
- 2. an interpretational outline**
- **3. a plural noun summary statement**

There is one more helpful step in the process of analysing a passage. This is especially important for teachers. We need a statement that summarises the whole passage in one neat, understandable sentence. If you can't do this, you don't understand the passage. If you don't, the people you're teaching won't understand it either.

There are different ways of summarising a passage. The one we will use is called a **plural noun summary**. Here is an **example** of a plural noun summary:

The purpose of this chapter is to give you *three tools* to illustrate and report the content of a passage of Scripture: a block diagram, interpretational outline, and plural noun summary.

A plural noun summary is a one sentence re-statement of the content of your outline of the passage. In a long passage, there may be many points and sub-points. You want to teach all that detail. However, the people listening will not grasp the significance of those individual points unless you capsulise them. A plural noun summary does that. It is a microcosm of your sermon. It's your sermon in pill form.

Let's go back to Genesis 1:1.

1. the Creator - God
2. the creation - heavens, earth
3. the chronology - in the beginning

There are obviously going to be *three somethings* to summarise here (that's why we call it a *plural* noun summary). Try to think of a word (a noun) that encompasses all three of those points.

Here is one way you could do it: *Three facts* about creation you need to know to understand how the universe came into being. Those three facts are *Who* made it, *what* was made, and *when* it was made. If you wanted to be a bit more controversial, you could summarise Genesis 1:1 as *three facts* that blow up the Big Bang theory.

This summary statement accomplishes two vital goals. It organises *your* thoughts so you can teach the passage with the impact of a rifle bullet rather than a pillow. It



gives your teaching direction and purpose. Most importantly, you can be confident that you are saying exactly what the text of Scripture says.

Besides being a guide for you, your plural noun summary is a life-line for your *listeners*. It tells them in a simple, understandable way what you will be teaching them. They know where each point is going and how the passage fits together.

### **The three components of a plural noun summary**

A plural noun summary should contain the following three components:

1. A plural noun summarising the main points of your outline.
2. A reflection of the main point of the passage.
3. An application that stimulates interest.

Notice how this is illustrated by the **Genesis 1:1** example:

*Three facts*<sup>1</sup> / about creation<sup>2</sup> / you need to know to understand how the universe came into being<sup>3</sup>.

---

We can do the same thing with **Galatians 6:1**.

1. the committee of restoration
2. the culprit of restoration
3. the condition of restoration
4. the compassion of restoration
5. the caution of restoration

*Five factors*<sup>1</sup> to consider when a brother or sister in Christ<sup>3</sup> needs to be guided back to the straight path of righteousness.<sup>2</sup>

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### **Summary**

If you carry out the three steps of diagramming, outlining, and summarising in a plural noun statement, you can be confident that you have done your best to *cut straight* the word of God. You have read it carefully, normally, and accurately—as God's word deserves. If you are a teacher, you know you have done your best to preach *the Word*. And never forget the final step of studying God's Word: "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves" (James 1:22).

## Diagramming and Outlining Narrative

Narrative often includes dialogue or explanations that need to be broken down to be understood. Therefore, if you're studying a short narrative section (Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, for example), you can diagram it just as you would a teaching section like Genesis 1:1 or Galatians 6:1.

### Example: Matthew 26:39

My Father [*direct address*]

let this cup pass  
from Me

if it is possible [*conditional clause*]

yet [*contrast*]  
not as I will,  
but [*contrast*]  
as You will

If you're doing a large section—all of 1 Samuel 17, for example—you probably don't need to block diagram the description of Goliath's armour in vv. 5-7. But you should diagram the important theological statements by David (vv. 34-37, 45-47) and the summary comments by the biblical historian (v. 50, "there was no sword in David's hand"). Understanding them is essential to understanding the story.

### Example: 1 Samuel 17:46-47 (David to Goliath)

The Lord will deliver you up  
this day  
into my hands...

that [*purpose*]  
all the earth may know there is a God in Israel

and  
that [*purpose*]  
all this assembly may know that      the Lord does not deliver by  
sword or by spear  
[*noun clause, direct obj. of may know*]

for  
the battle is the Lord's  
and  
He will give you into our hands

David's two purpose clauses give you the theology of the David and Goliath account: God's power is greater than Goliath's. Narrative can, and should be block diagrammed.

### **How do you outline narrative?**

Narrative can be outlined the same way you outline smaller, teaching texts. Consider our definition of an interpretational outline:

→ **Definition:** An interpretational outline is *a series of statements that describe the content and flow of a passage.*

With narrative, the blocks of text you describe might be five sentences long, rather than five words long, but you're still describing the content and flow of the passage. The easiest way to do this is by describing the following three things:

- the participants
- the events
- the theological comments

Example: Acts 11:19-30; 13:1-3. **Plural noun summary:** Four reasons the church of Antioch is the best church in the Bible, the church we want to imitate.

#### 1) Their evangelism

20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. 22 The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch...

#### 2) Their training

25 And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; 26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

#### 3) Their serving

27 Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius. 29 And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. 30 And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.

#### 4) Their missions

13:1 Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Some narrative passages resist an easy plural noun summary. In those cases, just an outline re-describing the persons, events, and theological statements will be adequate.

Example: 1 Samuel 17. The David and Goliath account—a story about God's power, not David's!

- 1-3 the arena of God's power (the geographic setting )
- 4-11 the adversary of God's power (Goliath)
- 12-22 the implement of God's power (David)
- 23-30 the impudence of God's power (David's fearless attitude)
- 31-39 the desperation of ignoring God's power (Saul's willingness to use David)
- 40-47 the discussion of God's power (Goliath and David's dialog)
- 48-50 the demonstration of God's power (David's unexpected victory or, more accurately, God's utterly predictable victory)

Example: Matthew 26:57-68. Six components of Jesus' trial before the Jewish religious leaders.

- 57 the defendant (Jesus)
- 58 the spectator (Peter)
- 59 the jury (the Council or Sanhedrin)
- 59-62 the witnesses (the religious leaders' false witnesses)
- 63 the charge (the Christ, the Son of God)
- 64 the guilty plea (Jesus' confirmation that He is the Christ/Son of God)
- 65-68 the sentence (execution)

Other, better outlines could be created, but these examples show you how summarising the participants, events, and theological statements of a story can provide a simple outline for a narrative passage.

### **Summary**

If you carry out the three steps of diagramming, outlining, and summarising in a plural noun statement, you can be confident that you have done your best to *cut straight* the word of God. You have read it carefully, normally, and accurately—as God's word deserves. If you are a teacher, you know you have done your best to preach *the Word*. Never forget the final step of studying God's word: "Prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves" (James 1:22).

## Practice

At this point you've learned the theory. Now comes the fun—practising what you've learned. The appendices of this notebook were included to give you an opportunity to apply these Bible study methods—with some coaching to help you get it right.

The first section is called *Directed Studies*. It will lead you through two passages step-by-step: block diagramming, outlining, and creating a plural noun summary statement. The second section contains a number of Bible texts from the New American Standard Bible. You can use them as texts to practice on, employing a separate sheet of paper or computer. The third section provides diagrams, outlines, and plural noun summaries of those passages so you can compare them to your own work.

Excellent resources for further study:

*Toward an Exegetical Theology*. Walter Kaiser, Baker Book House, 1981.

*Rediscovering Expository Preaching*. John MacArthur and the faculty of The Master's Seminary, Word Publishing, 1992.

## Directed Studies: 1 John 3:5 & 1 Timothy 1:15-16

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1 John 3:5 *You know that He appeared in order to take away sins.*

→ **Step One: identify the main verb and its subject.**

To find the main thought of this sentence we must identify the main verb. There are three verb-like words in this sentence. What are they?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Which do you think is the main verb? Read the various parts of the sentence out loud, identifying the one that stands by itself as a complete thought. The three options are as follows:

1. *you know*. That stands by itself as a complete thought. Your first option is the main verb. However, let's consider why the other two aren't.

2. *that He appeared...* That's not a complete thought by itself. However, it has a subject and a verb, so it must be a subordinate clause. Look at your list of subordinate clauses on the clause pages and determine what kind of clause it is.

It is a \_\_\_\_\_ clause, functioning as the direct object of the verb *know*.

If you were diligent you found on the clause pages the heading, *noun clause*. The verb *appeared...* can't be the main verb because it is part of a subordinate noun clause.

3. *in order to take away sins*. This can't stand alone as a complete thought either. Check the clause sheets to determine what kind of clause is marked by the words *in order to* or *in order that*.

→ **Step two: Underneath and to the right, write the groups of words which modify that main clause or other subordinate thoughts.**

You know      that He appeared      [noun clause: dir. obj. of *know*]

*in order to take away sins* ???

Now you have a decision to make. The clause, *in order to take away sins*, could describe *you know* or the subordinate clause *He appeared*. Which is the controlling verb? How do you decide? Read both options and see which makes more sense:



## 1 Timothy 1:15-16

It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

Now that we've had some practice, let's try a more difficult passage—one that has two sentences in it.

→ **Step One: identify the main verb and its subject.**

Let's break the passage down piece-by-piece. Start with the first sentence. What is the main verb? List the verb-like words.

1. \_\_\_\_\_                      2. \_\_\_\_\_                      3. \_\_\_\_\_  
4. \_\_\_\_\_                      5. \_\_\_\_\_

Which one of those groups of words is able to stand by itself as a complete thought? Read them out loud if you need to.

Hopefully you've made the right choice. Let's go through the options.

1. *It is a trustworthy statement...* Sounds like a complete thought, doesn't it. It is. That's your main verb. This is a stative verb: whatever the word *it* refers to exists in a state of being trustworthy. Warning: don't begin to think the main verb will always be at the beginning of a sentence because our examples are like that. Sometimes that won't be the case.
2. *deserving full acceptance...* Is that a complete thought? No. You are left wondering *what* is deserving of full acceptance.
3. *that Christ came into the world...* This should be familiar after your battle with 1 John 3:5. It doesn't stand by itself as a complete thought and begins with *that*. If you need to check the clause pages to remember what kind of clause this is, please do so.
4. *to save sinners...* That's not a complete thought. It's an infinitive expressing purpose.
5. *among whom I am foremost of all...* Complete thought? No. Check the clause pages to see what kind of clauses start with *whom*.

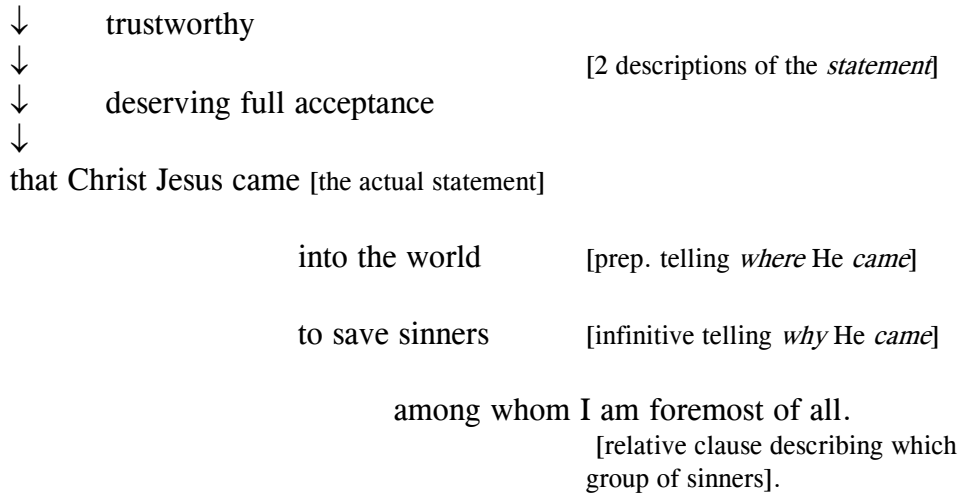
So, the main clause is, *It is a trustworthy statement.*



→ **Step two: Underneath and to the right, write the groups of words which modify that main clause or other subordinate thoughts.**

Let's start with the main verb on the left-hand margin and then line up everything under it.

It is a statement



We are half way. There was a second sentence in our text as well.

And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

By now, you know the procedure.

→ **Step One: identify the main verb and its subject.**

List the verb-like words.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_

Let's work through the options.

1. *I found mercy...* This is the main clause. But let's consider the other options for the sake of practice.

2. *in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience ...* Complete thought? No, the *in order that* makes it dependent on something else to be complete.

3. *who would believe in Him for eternal life...* Complete thought? Nope. It is begging for a noun to describe.

Paul's main thought in this sentence is, *I found mercy.*

→ **Step two: Underneath and to the right, write the groups of words which modify that main clause or other subordinate thoughts.**

And yet [connection with previous sentence]

I found mercy,

for this reason:



[the *in order that...* clause is an apposition of *this reason*. It is both a noun clause and a purpose clause]

in order that Jesus Christ might demonstrate	His perfect patience
	[dir. object]
in me	[adv. prep. where]
as the foremost	[adj. prep.]
as an example	[prep.- why Christ demonstrated His patience]
for those	[prep. describing those]
	who would believe in Him
	for eternal life. [relative cl.]

Now that we have figured out the two sentences separately, we must consider the relationship *between* them.

It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

Paul used the second sentence to prove the truthfulness of his assertion in the first sentence that Christ came to save sinners. If Christ saved Paul, the very worst, then saving sinners was certainly the purpose of His coming to earth. Having discovered the connection between the two sentences, here is a full block diagram:

It is a statement

↓ trustworthy  
↓  
↓ deserving full acceptance  
↓  
that  
Christ Jesus came

into the world

to save sinners

among whom I am foremost of all.

And yet [*as a result of this foremostness*]

I found mercy

for this reason:

↓  
in order that Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect  
patience

in me as the foremost

as an example for those

who would believe in Him for  
eternal life.

How can we outline that? What are the main thoughts? Inevitably they are found in the main verbs—the trustworthy statement and the mercy Paul found.

The first main point is Christ came to save sinners: that is the trustworthy statement. Therefore, you know the content of the trustworthy statement. You also know the character of that statement: it is trustworthy. We have something going here, don't we: the content and the character. Let's try to make it work.

The **character** of the statement

trustworthy  
acceptable

The **content** of the statement:

the hero of the expedition - He came  
the location of the expedition - into the world  
the purpose of the expedition - to save  
the objects of the expedition - sinners

The **confirmation** of the statement

the person of the confirmation - Paul  
the blessing of the confirmation - mercy  
the purpose of the confirmation - demonstration of patience  
the beneficiaries of the confirmation - those who would believe

We took the text apart in the block diagram, analysed the pieces, and then put them back together in this outline. Every significant portion of the text was understood and re-described. That is critical for studying the Bible and in preparing expository sermons.

Now, if we can just summarise it all in one statement, we'll be finished. We obviously have three *somethings* in this outline. Take a shot at summarising them in one sentence.

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Here's one way you could do it:

*Three components* of the most important statement a sinner will ever hear: its character, its content, and its confirmation.

# Five Stages of Sermon Preparation

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Here's a glimpse of how I approach preparing my sermons. You might find these steps useful in your own preparation, whether it is for preaching, a Bible study, or just study for personal understanding.

## **1. Preparation Stage**

**Forsake all hidden or unrepentant sin.** You can't preach if you're wicked.

**Love Christ.** We are not professional sermon makers. We are adoring servants of a risen, glorious Lord.

**Pray for wisdom.** *The well is deep, and our brains are shallow.* Richard Baxter.

**Choose the passage.** This is easy if you preach consecutive exposition; hard if you preach topically.

## **2. Study Stage**

**Translate from the Greek or Hebrew** (if you have the training to do so).

**Block diagram** the passage.

**Consider the historical context:** author, audience, historical events or practices that influence the text.

**Look up difficult or theologically important words** for accurate definitions.

**Look for repeated words or themes.** E.g. Matt 24:4-5, 11, 24, spiritual deception.

**Search for cross references** (CR) by key words, themes, related texts. or parallel texts.

Example: Eph 5:22-33: CR: Col 3, Gen 1-2, Ps 128, 1 Peter 3:1-7, etc.

Example: Eph 1:3-4: CR: Romans 9, 2 Thess 2:13ff, 2 Tim 1:9, James 1:18.

Example: parallel passages: Matt 24, Mark 13, Luke 21: Olivet Discourse.

**Check good commentaries** (which help me do all of the above more effectively).

### **3. Thinking Stage**

**Determine the main point of the passage.** Nothing is more important than this.

**Determine the main application(s)** I want to impress upon my hearers based on the main point of the passage. Usually I get this by meditating on how the main point of the passage applies to me as a Christian and/or a preacher. He who preaches best to others has first preached to himself.

**Brainstorm for illustrations:** supplied by the text itself (ex. James 1:15 birth illustration), from biblical history, church history, secular history, your personal history, the world generally (consider the birds/flowers), quotations from books, etc.

**Develop lists** that expand, prove, or apply the main point:  
10 ways God is glorious, 8 evidences of a self-righteous heart, 7 reasons we need a Saviour. *Tell them what the text says. But you better also tell them more than they could have discovered by simply reading the text themselves.* Richard Mayhue on expository preaching.

**Consider possible introductions and conclusions** that lead directly into or from the main point and application.

### **4. Outline Stage**

**Build a sermon outline** based on my block diagram (i.e., the main points and sub-points come directly from the block diagram of the text).

**Fill in that outline with useful information from the other steps:** cross references, theological definitions, historical background, illustrations, quotations, etc. I could preach from this outline, but I preach much better if I go one step further.

### **5. Writing Stage**

**Write the sermon.**

I preach much more effectively if I write my sermons out in full. This is a matter of personal preference, but for me, good preaching starts with good writing. I print my manuscript in a large font and leave blank lines between sentences so I can maintain regular eye

contact *and* find my place in my notes again quickly without awkward pauses.

**Edit the sermon.** I make corrections, striving for...

clear, strong, short sentences

no unnecessary repetition

clear connections between points

new ways of saying old truths

correct grammar and accurate theology

stimulating, descriptive language

## Practice Diagrams

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Below I have included the New American Standard version of ten Bible texts. Practice your block diagramming, outlining, and plural noun summaries on these texts, and then check yourself against the examples on the following pages. Make sure you give each one your best effort before you peek at the answer!

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1 Peter 1:14-16

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

1 Peter 5:6-7

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.

1 Peter 2:1-3

Therefore putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander,  
like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Colossians 2:8-12

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,  
and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority,  
and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;  
having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Ephesians 4:1-3

Therefore, I the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.



Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Philippians 2:14-16

Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd,  
I shall not want  
He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
He leads me beside quiet waters.  
He restores my soul;  
He guides me in the paths of righteousness  
For His name's sake.  
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I fear no evil; for Thou art with me;  
Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.  
Thou dost prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
Thou hast anointed my head with oil;  
My cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life,  
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Titus 3:4-7

But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life.

	As obedient children	<i>comparison clause</i>
<i>secret 1</i>	do not be conformed	<i>main verb</i>
	to the former lusts	<i>adverbial prep</i>
	which were yours in your ignorance	<i>relative clause</i>
<i>secret 2</i>	but be holy yourselves also	<i>contrast main verb</i>
	like the Holy One	<i>adv. prep. (in which way)</i>
	who called you	<i>relative clause</i>
	in all your behavior	<i>adv. prep. (to what extent)</i>
	because it is written	<i>causal clause</i>
	↓	
	→ You shall be holy	<i>OT quotation</i>
	for I am holy	<i>causal clause</i>

---

Two secrets to personal holiness:

1. Non-conformity ( to your unsaved lifestyle)

- childlike avoidance (as obedient children)
- informed avoidance (no longer walking in ignorance)

2. Conformity (to God's character)

- the *obligation* of the conformity (the command)
- the *imitation* of the conformity (like the Holy One)
- the *extent* of the conformity (in *all* your behaviour)
- the *authority* of the conformity (the OT command)

v. 5 ...God is opposed to the proud and gives grace to the humble

1.	Therefore	<i>result</i>
	[you] humble yourselves	<i>main verb</i>
2.	under the mighty hand of God	<i>adv. prep. (where)</i> <i>adj. prep. (which hand)</i>
3.	that He may exalt you at the proper time	<i>purpose clause</i> <i>adv. prep. (when)</i>
4.	casting all your anxiety upon Him because He cares for you	<i>participle ("by..." instrumental)</i> <i>casual clause</i>

---

Four fundamental principles of personal humility:

1. the prompting of humility (God's opposition/grace in v. 5)
2. the place of humility (under the mighty hand of God)
3. the purpose of humility (that He may exalt you)
4. the peace of humility (the casting of anxiety on God)

1 Peter 2:1-3

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Therefore

- |    |                      |  |  |
|----|----------------------|--|--|
| 1. | [you] long for       | the pure milk of the word  | <i>main verb/direct ob<br/>temporal particle<br/>("after")</i> |
| 2. | putting aside        | all malice<br>and<br>all deceit<br>and<br>hypocrisy<br>and<br>envy<br>and<br>all slander |  |
| 3. | like newborn babies  |  | <i>adv. prep (how)</i>   |
| 4. | so that you may grow | by it<br>in respect to salvation   | <i>purpose cl.<br/>adv. prep. (how)<br/>adv. prep. (how)</i>   |
| 5. |                      | if you have tasted the kindness<br>of the Lord   | <i>conditional<br/>adj. prep.</i>                              |

---

5 descriptions of the one lust every believer should have.

1. a truth lust (of the word)
2. a purified lust (putting aside)
3. a passionate lust (like newborn babes)
4. a growth-oriented lust (so that you may grow)
5. salvation-driven lust (in respect to salvation)

## 2 Timothy 3:16-17

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1.	All Scripture is inspired by God	<i>main verb (stative) with two predicate adjectives telling what Scripture is</i>
2.	and profitable	
	for teaching	<i>adv. prep. (what)</i>
	for reproof	<i>adv. prep. (what)</i>
	for correction	<i>adv. prep. (what)</i>
	for training in righteousness	<i>adv. prep. (what) adj. prep. (what kind of training)</i>
	so that the man of God may be adequate	<i>result cl.</i>
	equipped for every good work	<i>participle</i>

---

Two characteristics of God's word which determine its authority and effectiveness in our lives.

1. The source of Scripture
  - its person (by God)
  - its procedure (inspired)
2. The usefulness of Scripture (*profitable*)
  - for doctrine
  - for conviction
  - for re-direction
  - for education
  - for equipping
    - the beneficiary of the equipping (the man of God)
    - the breadth of the equipping (for every good work)

[You] see to it

- (A) that no one takes you captive  
through philosophy (1)  
and  
empty deception (2)  
  
according to the tradition of men (3)  
  
according to the elementary principles of  
the world (4)  
  
rather than  
according to Christ. (5)

- (B) For  
  
in Him all the fullness of deity dwells (1)  
in bodily form  
and  
  
in Him you have been made complete (2)  
  
and  
He is the head over all rule and authority (3)  
  
and  
in Him you were also circumcised (4)  
  
with a circumcision  
[which was] made without hands  
  
in the removal of the body of the flesh  
  
by the circumcision of Christ  
  
having been buried with Him in baptism  
  
in which you were also raised up  
with Him  
through faith  
in the working of God,  
who raised Him from the dead.

---

The two opposing sides of the doctrinal war in the Colossian church that tell us what to teach and what not to teach in the church.

- A. The error being taught
- |                     |                                  |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. human wisdom     | 2. deceptively attractive wisdom |
| 3. man's traditions | 4. worldly wisdom                |

5. not-from-Christ or about-Christ wisdom

B. The truth to replace it

1. the deity of Christ

3. the authority of Christ  
Christ

2. the complete work of Christ

4. the internal circumcision of

Ephesians 4:1-3

---

Therefore

I	←→	the prisoner of the Lord	<i>apposition</i>
		<i>of</i>	
implore you			<i>main verb</i>
		to walk	<i>infinitive</i>
		in a manner worthy	<i>adv. prep. (how)</i>
		of the calling	
		with which you have been called	<i>relative cl.</i>
1.		with all humility	<i>adv. prep. (how)</i>
		and	
2.		[with all] gentleness	<i>adv. prep. (how)</i>
3.		with patience	<i>adv. prep. (how)</i>
4.		showing forbearance	<i>adv. participle</i>
		to one another	
		in love	
5.		being diligent to preserve the unity	<i>adv. participle</i>
		of the Spirit	<i>adj. prep.</i>
		in the bond of peace	<i>adv. prep.</i>

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Five footsteps on the path of Christ-likeness.

Introduction:            theological context - chps. 1-3 (*Therefore*)  
                                  personal context - Paul's imprisonment

Five Footsteps

- |                           |                     |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. lowly mindedness       | 4. loving tolerance |
| 2. strength under control | 5. peaceful unity   |
| 3. slowness to anger      |                     |



Hebrews 12:1-2

---

1. Therefore *result (connection with chp. 11)*  
 since we have so great a cloud *casual clause*  
 of witnesses $\longleftrightarrow$ [the ones] surrounding us
2. let us also lay aside every encumbrance *1<sup>st</sup> main verb*  
 and *2 direct objects*  
 the sin  
 which so easily entangles us
- and
3. let us run the race *2<sup>nd</sup> main verb*  
 that is set before us *relative clause*
- with endurance *adv. prep. (how)*
- fixing our eyes on Jesus  $\longleftrightarrow$  the author  $\longleftrightarrow$  and *instrumental participle*  
 perfecter of faith *(by)*
- who endured the cross *relative clause*  
 for the joy set before Him *causal clause*  
 despising the shame *adv. participle*
- and  
 [who] has sat down *relative clause*  
 at the right hand of the throne of God.

---

Three tactics for winning the race of the Christian life:

1. Imitate the great (the cloud of witnesses in chp. 11)
2. Lighten the load (lay aside encumbrances and sin)
3. Run the race (let us run the race)
  - enduringly
  - with a Christ focus:
    - His example
    - His victory

- |    |  |  |
|----|--|--|
| 1. | [You] do all things<br>without grumbling                             | <i>main clause</i><br><i>adv. prep. (how)</i>    |
| 2. | or<br>disputing  |  |
| 3. | so that you yourselves will prove to be blameless<br>and<br>innocent | <i>purpose clause</i>                            |
|    | children of God  |  |
|    | above reproach   |  |
|    | in the midst of a crooked<br>and<br>perverse generation              | <i>adv. prep. (where)</i>                        |
|    | among whom you appear  | <i>relative clause</i>                           |
|    | as lights in the world   | <i>comparison</i>                                |
| 4. | holding fast the word of life  | <i>adv. participle</i>                           |
|    | so that I will have reason to glory<br>in the day of Christ          | <i>result clause</i><br><i>adv. prep. (when)</i> |
|    | because I did not run in vain<br>nor<br>toil in vain.                | <i>casual clause</i>                             |

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Four instructions for working out your salvation (v. 12-13)

1. be a content person (without grumbling)
2. be a gentle person (without disputing)
3. have a godly purpose in an ungodly world (blameless, innocent, children of God, above reproach, in the midst of this crooked generation)
4. have a gripping passion (holding fast the word of life)

Psalm 23

1. The Lord is my shepherd *main clause*
- [as a result]*  
 I shall not want  
     *[because]* He makes me lie down  
   in green pastures  
     *[because]* He leads me beside quiet waters.  
     *[because]* He restores my soul;  
     *[because]* He guides me in the paths  
   of righteousness  
   for His name's sake *casual*
- [as a result]*  
 I fear no evil
- even though I walk through the valley *concessive clause*  
   of the shadow of death
- for You art with me *causal*
- [because]*  
 they comfort me  $\longleftrightarrow$  Your rod  
   and  
   Your staff
2. Thou dost prepare a table *main clause*
- before me *adv. prep. (where)*  
 in the presence of my enemies *adv. prep. (where)*
- Thou hast anointed my head with oil
- My cup overflows
- [as a result]*  
 Goodness and lovingkindness will follow me *result 1*  
   surely  
   all the days  
   of my life
- and
- I will dwell *result 2*  
     in the house  
         of the Lord  
     forever

---

Two illustrations of God's providential care:

1. The first illustration of God's providential care: Shepherd  
 Two blessings 1) no lack

- four reasons he has no lack
  - 2) no fear, even of death
    - two reasons he is not afraid
2. The second illustration of God's providential care: Banquet Host
- Three blessings 1) victory (in the presence of my enemies)
- 2) joy
  - 3) abundance

Final result: goodness, unfailing love, the personal presence of God.

Titus 3:4-7

	But		<i>contrast from previous verse main clause</i>
1.	He saved us		
2.	when appeared the	kindness of God ←→ our Savior and His love for mankind	<i>temporal clause apposition  adj. prep.</i>
3.	not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness		<i>negative relative clause</i>
	but according to His mercy		<i>contrast adv. prep.(how)</i>
	by the washing of regeneration and [by] renewing by the Holy Spirit whom He poured out upon us		<i>adv. prep.(how)  adv. prep.(how)</i>
	richly		<i>adverb</i>
	through Jesus Christ ←→ our Savior		<i>adv. prep.(how) apposition</i>
4.	so that we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life		<i>purpose clause adv. prep. adj. prep.</i>
	being [ <i>having been</i> ] justified by His grace		<i>adv. participle</i>

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Four explanations of God's salvation:

1. The *who* of salvation (God)
2. The *when* of salvation (when God's kindness and love appeared)
3. The *how* of salvation
  - its non-contributors (our deeds)
  - its motivation (His mercy)
  - its method (washing and regeneration)
4. The *why* of salvation (to be made inheritors of eternal life)