

*Biblical Interpretation—
New Testament Epistles*

Christ's Community Study Center

Donald F. McNeill

Biblical Interpretationô New Testament Epistles

I. Three types of meaning indicators¹

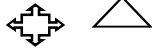
A. Persons, things, events, and attributes (characteristics which describe these things)

1. Personsô God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, Paul, Timothy, Epaphras, the Colossians, brother, apostle, servant, saints, enemies, etc.

(1) **1** Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ



(2) by the will of God,



(3) and Timothy our brother,



ôPaulö and ôapostleö have the same symbol because they are the same person. ôTimothyö and ôbrotherö is the same person. ôourö refers to Paul and the Colossians. ôJesus Christö and ôGodö are both God but are distinct persons of the God-head, thus they receive different symbols.

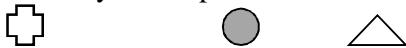
2. Thingsô will, thanks, prayers, heaven, word, truth, faith, fruit, world, manner, knowledge, might, power, inheritance, darkness, body, church, deeds, forgiveness, thrones, authorities, redemption, wisdom, understanding, religion, decrees, principles, growth, worship, substance, festival, etc.

(4) **2** To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ



(5) *who are* at Colossae:

(6) Grace to you and peace from God our Father.



(7) **3** We give thanks to God,



(8) the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

(9) praying always for you,

(10) ⁽⁴⁾ since we heard

(11) of your faith in Christ Jesus



(12) and the love which you have for all the saints;



which refers to the word **love**

(13) ⁽⁵⁾ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven,



(14) of which you previously heard



which refers to **hope**

¹ The following section is an adaptation of Bennie Wolvaardt's, *How to Interpret the Bible—A Do-It-Yourself Manual. Part Three: The Steps of Exegesis* (pp. 75-125) and *Appendix A: The Different Types of Relationships*, pp.315-321).

(15) in the word of truth, the gospel ⁶ which has come to you,

(16) just as in all the world also

(17) it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing,

(18) even as *it has been doing* in you also

(19) since the day you heard *of it*

(20) and understood the grace of God in truth;

(21) ⁷ just as you learned *it* from Epaphras,

(22) our beloved fellow bond-servant,

(23) who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf,

(24) ⁸ and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

ōthe word of truthō is the
ōgospelō. ōwhichō also refers
to the gospel.

3. Eventsō these can be in the form of **verbs** (reconciled, present, filled, walk, proclaimed, rescued, transferred, bestowed, manifested, bearing fruit, increasing, praying, heard, submit, died, supplied and held together, taking his stand, delighting, having triumphed, having forgiven, raised, having been buried, have been made complete, being built up, established, instructed, rejoicing, hidden, may be encouraged, striving, etc.)

Now let's look at the same passage, also giving symbols to the **events**. We will use arrows.

(7) **3** We give thanks to God,

(8) the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

(9) praying always for you,

(10) ⁽⁴⁾ since we heard

(11) of your faith in Christ Jesus

(12) and the love which you have for all the saints;









(13) ⁽⁵⁾ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven,



(14) of which you previously heard

(15) in the word of truth, the gospel ⁶ which has come to you,

ōgive thanksō, ōprayingō, ōheardō are events in the form of verbs. All of these events have ōweō (namely, Paul and Timothy) as the subject. They are marked with a forward arrow → for present tense or a backward arrow ← for past tense. The arrow points in the direction of the time of the action. The present tense refers to continuous action.







The event (or verb) ōlaid upō has ōhopeō for its subject. However, the verb is passive. ōHopeō does not ōlay upō itself. God is the implied actor who lays up this hope. Backward arrow means past tense. The action has been completed already. ← · · · ·

- (16) just as in all the world also
- (17) it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, 
- 
- (18) even as *it has been doing* in you also 
- (19) since the day you heard of it 
- (20) and understood the grace of God in truth; 
- (21) ⁷ just as you learned *it* from Epaphras, 
- (22) our beloved fellow bond-servant,
- (23) who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, 
- (24) ⁸ and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit. 

The event verbs, *ōhas comeö*, *ōis ...bearing fruit and increasingö* and *ōhas been doingö* (implied in the text) have *ōthe word of truthö* or *ōthe gospelö* as their subject. *Has been doing* is equal to *ōconstantly bearing fruit and increasingö*, therefore, there is an equal symbol between them. The verb is in *italics* since it has been supplied by translators. 


ōheardö, *ōunderstoodö* and *ōlearnedö* are past tense; therefore, a backward arrow points in the direction of action which has previously taken place.

4. Attributes, characteristics, descriptions *ō* describe persons or things (e.g. blameless, beloved, holy, faithful, strengthened, visible, invisible, riches, glory, full, persuasive, good, firmly, empty, elementary, complete, made without hands, alive, hostile, inflated, self-made, etc.)













- (4) 2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ 
- (12) and the love which you have for all the saints; 
- (16) just as in all the world also 
- (22) our beloved fellow bond-servant,  
- (23) who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, 

The attribute, *ōfaithfulö*, has the same **shape** as *ōfaithö* (Line 11) since it has a related meaning. The same goes for *ōbelovedö* since it is related in meaning to *ōloveö*. I have shaded these words to distinguish between a thing (love, faith) and an attribute describing a thing (beloved, faithful).

All of the persons, things, events (verbs), or attributes are linked together by the author to develop his theme. They are the “indicators” of meaning— or meaning indicators.

Let *ø* now mark all the indicators we have learned thus far.

Colossians 1: 1-20

- (1) 1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ   
- (2) by the will of God,  
- (3) and Timothy our brother,   
- (4) 2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ    

(5) *who are* at Colossae:



(6) Grace to you and peace from God our Father.



(7) **3** We give thanks to God,



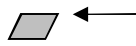
(8) the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,



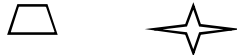
(9) praying always for you,



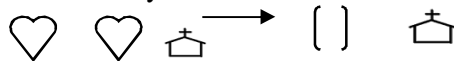
(10) ⁽⁴⁾ since we heard



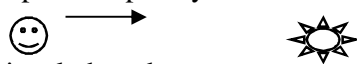
(11) of your faith in Christ Jesus



(12) and the love which you have for all the saints;



(13) ⁽⁵⁾ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven,



(14) of which you previously heard



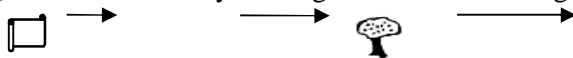
(15) in the word of truth, the gospel ⁶ which has come to you,



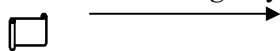
(16) just as in all the world also



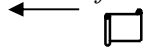
(17) it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing,



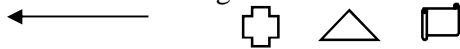
(18) even as *it has been doing* in you also



(19) since the day you heard *of it*



(20) and understood the grace of God in truth;



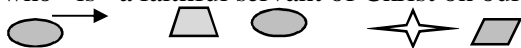
(21) ⁷ just as you learned *it* from Epaphras,



(22) our beloved fellow bond-servant,



(23) who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf,



(24) ⁸ and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.



(25) ⁹ For this reason also,

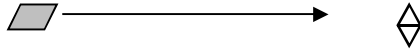


The ðreasonö Paul prays is because of the Colossiansø love and faith. See v. 4

(26) since the day we heard of it,

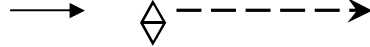


(27) we have not ceased to pray for you



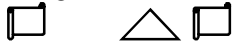
The diamond with a horizontal line is a symbol for the pronoun, ðyouö. ◊

(28) and to ask that you may be filled



Will walk, to please, bearing, increasing, are all verbs which are potential, not actual. That is, Paul is exhorting them to walk in such a manner from this point and into the future that they will be pleasing to the Lord, bearing fruit and increasing. They are doing this now, but He wants them to continue this activity into the future. Therefore I have used the future verb symbol. —————▶

(29) with the knowledge of His will



(30) in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,



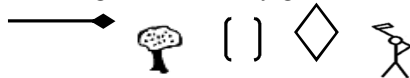
(31) ¹⁰ so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord,



(32) to please *Him* in all respects,



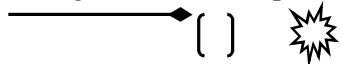
(33) bearing fruit in every good work



(34) and increasing in the knowledge of God;



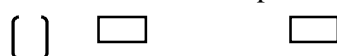
(35) ¹¹ strengthened with all power,



(36) according to His glorious might,



(37) for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience;



(38) joyously ¹² giving thanks to the Father,

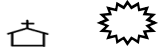


(39) who has qualified us to share in the inheritance



ðHas qualifiedö is past tense, indicating that Christ has already accomplished the action of the verb. We do not qualify ourselves or make ourselves acceptable to God. Christ does that for us.

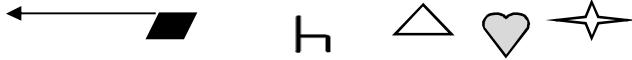
(40) of the saints in Light.



(41) ¹³ For He rescued us from the domain of darkness,



(42) and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,



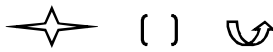
(43) ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.



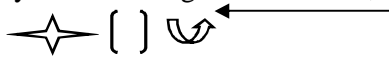
(44) ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God,



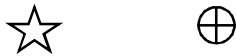
(45) the firstborn of all creation.



(46) ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created,



(47) *both* in the heavens and on earth,



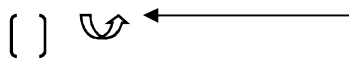
(48) visible and invisible,



(49) whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities^o



(50) all things have been created



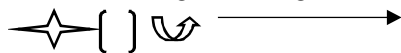
(51) through Him and for Him.



(52) ¹⁷ He is before all things,



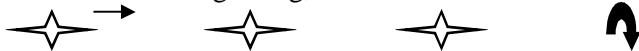
(53) and in Him all things hold together.



(54) ¹⁸ He is also head of the body, the church;



(55) and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,



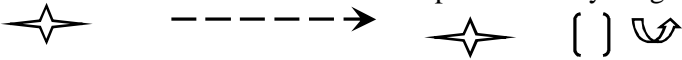

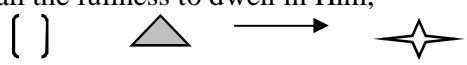
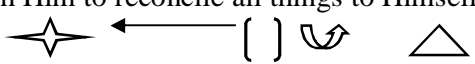
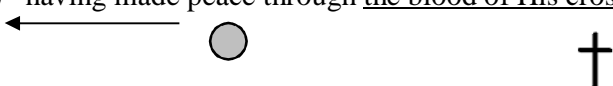
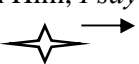
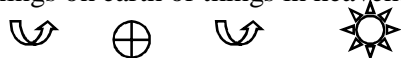
(56) so that



Sins is represented by the darkened tablets of the law which we have broken. The blank tablets indicate that our sins have been washed clean by the blood of Christ. **Redemption** and **forgiveness** are synonymous terms.

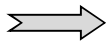
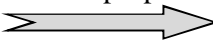

Notice that *ōby Himō*, that is, Christ, all things were created. Christ was active with the Father in creating the world (cf. Heb. 1: 2).

All created things are held together in Christ, who is also God. The created order is a personal creation, not impersonal. God is in control of this creation through the medium of Christ's divine-human rule and authority. Satan, does not control the world; Christ does.

- (57) He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

- (58) ¹⁹ For it was the *Father's* good pleasure

- (59) for all the fullness to dwell in Him,

- (60) ²⁰ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself,

- (61) having made peace through the blood of His cross;

- (62) through Him, *I say*,

- (63) whether things on earth or things in heaven.


B. Stylistic features²

This is the second type of *meaning indicator*. Stylistic features are repetitions in *form or meaning*. The two kinds of stylistic features regularly found in the NT are *1. parallelism* and *2. chiasm*. Parallels and chiasms can be identified by paying attention to the repetition of nouns, verbs, phrases, and concepts. Note the repetitions of Colossians 1: 28-29: **every man**, verbs (**admonishing, teaching, may present, so that, for this purpose, wisdom, complete in Christ**).

- | | | | |
|------|--|-----|-----|
| (92) | ²⁸ We <i>proclaim</i> Him, | [a] | |
| (93) | admonishing every man | [b] | |
| (94) | and teaching every man | [b] | |
| | with all wisdom , | | [c] |
| (95) | so that | | [d] |
| |  | | |
| (96) | we may present every man | [b] | |
| | complete in Christ. | | [c] |
| (97) | ²⁹ For this purpose also | | [d] |
| |  | | |
| (98) | I <i>labor</i> , | [a] | |
| | striving | | [b] |
| |  according to His power, | | |
| | (99) which mightily works within me. | | [c] |

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Consider the simple *parallelism* of 1 Cor. 1: 22-23.³

² Wolvaardt, p. 104

³ Wolvaardt, *Equipping to Serve, Module One*, p. 4: 8

Jews demand miraculous signs **a**
 and Greeks look for wisdom **b**
 but we preach Christ crucified:
 a stumbling block to Jews **a**
 and foolishness to Greeks **b**

A **chiasm**, on the other hand, occurs when at least two meaning indicators are repeated in **inverted sequence** leading to the following pattern: **a b b a**. Consider the following chiasm in Col. 3: 11.⁴

(1) Here there is no ó Greek	a	} chiasm	Notice that L (line) 1 and 4 refer to the Greeks who are <i>uncircumcised</i> while L 2 and 3 refer to the Jews who are <i>circumcised</i>
(2) - or Jew	b		
(3) - circumcised	b		
(4) - or uncircumcised	a		

Or consider Col. 3: 9-11 which contains both **parallelism** and **chiasm**.

(1) ⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you	a	} This parallelism is antithetic (contrasting) . <i>Old self</i> contrasts with <i>new self</i> and <i>evil practices</i> contrasts with <i>true knowledge</i>
(2) laid aside the <i>old self</i>	b	
(3) with its <i>evil practices</i> ,	a	
(4) ¹⁰ and have put on the <i>new self</i>	b	
(5) who is being renewed to a <i>true knowledge</i>		

(6) according to the image of the One who created him ô	c	} cultural differences (chiasm)
(7) ¹¹ a <i>renewal</i> in which there is no <i>distinction between</i>		
(8) Greek	d	
(9) and Jew,	e	
(10) circumcised	e	
(11) and uncircumcised,	d	

(12) barbarian, f	} Cultural differences
Scythian, g	
(14) slave h	} Social differences
and freeman i	

(15) but **Christ is all, and in all.** **c**

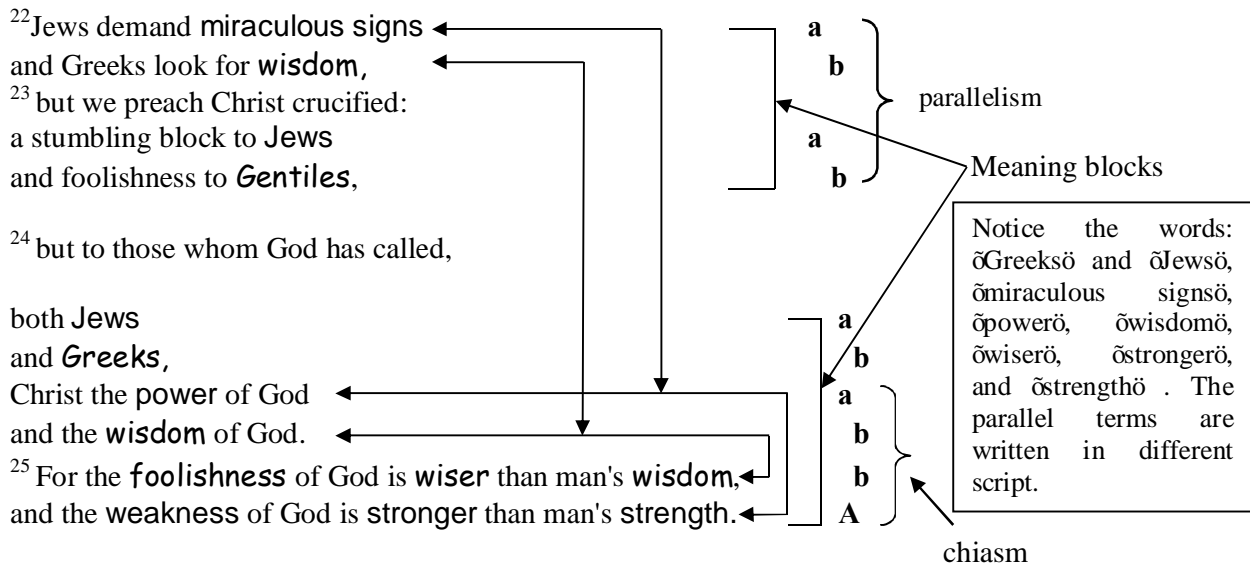
The Christian is the *new self* who is a new creation in Christ Jesus. At the first creation, the Triune God created man and woman. At the second creation, the Triune God created the *renewed* man, regenerated by the Spirit to *true knowledge*, that is, to the truth man rejected at the fall.

In the text above, vv. 9 and 10 are *parallel* to one another, both of them using the *metaphor* (figure of speech) of taking something off and putting something onô *laying aside* the clothing of the *old self* (old man) and *putting on* the clothing of the *new self* (new man). Furthermore, the term *evil practices* is parallel to *true knowledge*. The *one who created* is **Christ**, thus, Lines 6 and 15 are designated with a ðcö. The *him* in v. 6 is the *new self* whom Christ has created through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. *Barbarian* and *Scythian* are parallel cultural terms. *Slave* and *freeman* are parallel social terms.⁵

⁴ Wolvaardt, p. 104

⁵ William Hendriksen, *Colossians*

Wolvaardt gives another example of a **parallelism** and a **chiasm** from 1 Cor. 1: 24-25 (NIV) taken as a whole unit.



Purpose of parallels and chiasms: The parallelism and chiasm of this passage (stylistic features) can illuminate the meaning of the passage. Believing Jews found in Christ the miraculous power of God which had been demonstrated in the exodus. Jesus' miracles proved that He was the God of the OT. Believing Greeks found in Christ the wisdom of God. The Greeks were always looking for *ōwisdomō*, namely, a unifying philosophical system which explained everything else. Christ is this unifying principle upon whom everything else can be understood.

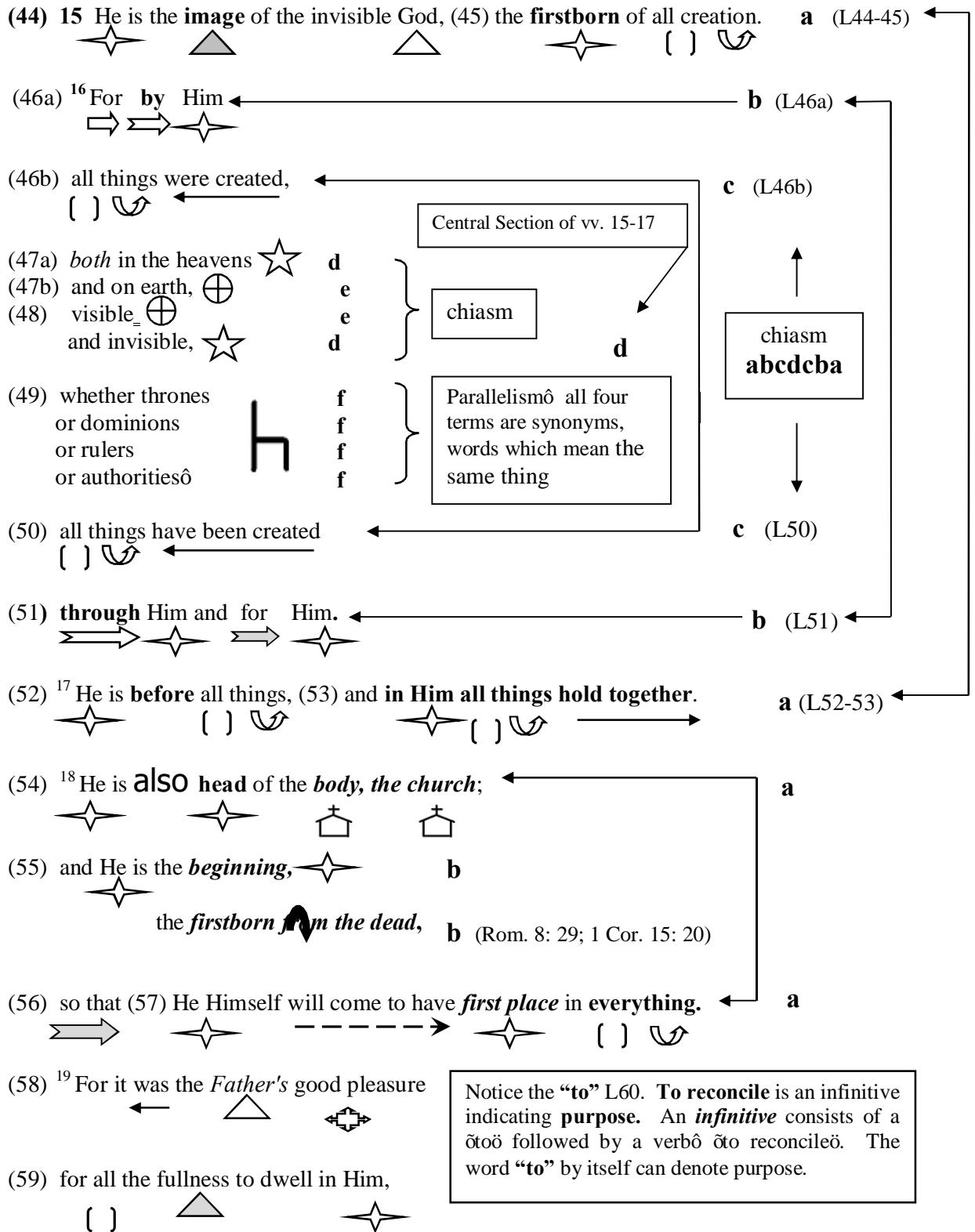
Notice the *stylistic features* of **Colossians 1: 15-20** on the following page. In Lines 44-53, we see that Christ is preeminent (first) in the *original creation*. In Lines 54-63, we see that Christ is also preeminent (first) in the *new, spiritual creation*, the church. In L44, Christ is the *firstborn* of all creation. This does not mean that Christ was created by the Father. He is the firstborn in the sense that He is the *heir* to all creation even as the firstborn son in ancient Israel was the heir to the father's inheritance. That Christ cannot be a created being is evident from L50-52. All things have been created *through or by means of* Christ and *for His purpose*. Furthermore, He was *before* all things and in Him *all things hold together*. What does this mean? The author of Hebrews explains this statement more clearly.

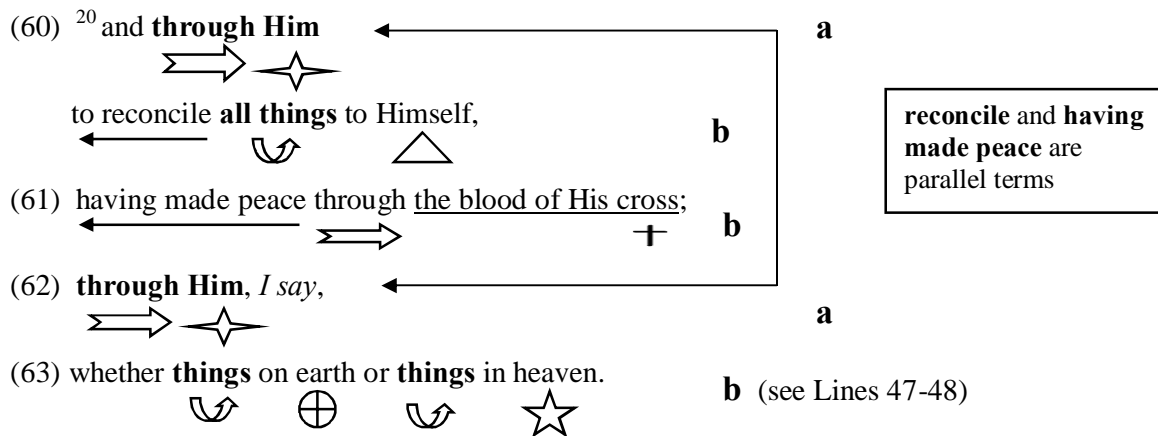
God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, *through whom also He made the world*.³ And He is the radiance of His glory and the *exact representation of His nature*, and *upholds all things by the word of His power*. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (Hebrews 1:1-3 NASB).

Below is a structural interpretation of Colossians 1: 15-20. Don't let all the arrows confuse or intimidate you. Structural analysis is really not that complicated; otherwise I couldn't do it. God meant for ordinary people like you and me to understand the Bible, including its structure.

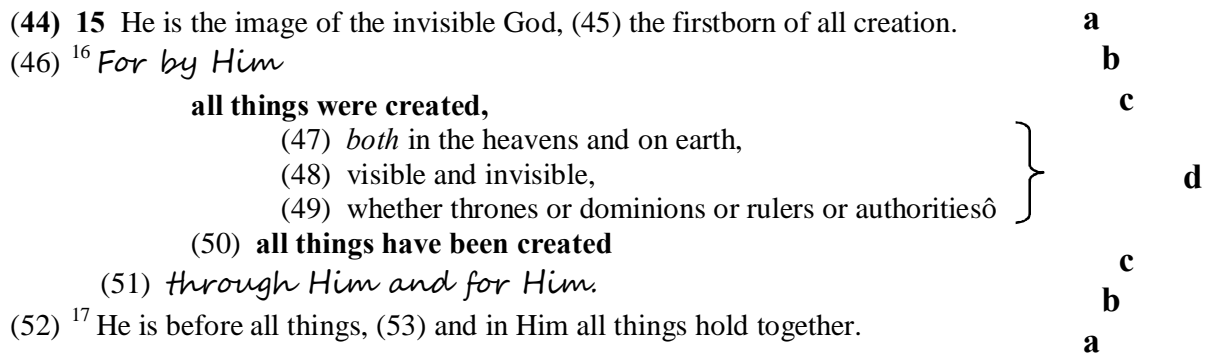
The central section, **d**, draws attention to Paul's anti-Gnosticism, against the idea that matter is evil. Material things are created by God who holds them all together in a wonderful unity of purpose. Christ, who is God incarnate in human flesh, is the goal of true humanity. Believers are being

perfected in the image of Christ who is the reigning monarch of the universe. We are vice-regents reigning under Christ who will one day inherit the earth and fulfill God's initial purpose for creation.





By examining the structure of this passage, we can determine **Paul’s focus**. The central part of verses 15-18 occurs in Lines 44-53, the *ōdō* section of the **chiasm**. The central part of the chiasm will often serve as the emphasis of the passage. Note the alternate diagram below.



Purpose of the structure: So what is Paul’s point here? Clearly he is intent on showing the Colossians that God the Father, through Christ, God the Son, created the material world, the heavenly bodies and the earth as well as the things upon the earthō things visible and invisible (Heb. 1: 2-3; Jn. 1: 3). Notice that the center of the chiasm is Lines 47-49, the **emphasis** of vv. 15-17. Even evil **thrones** and **dominions** were created by God. They were not created evil, for God is not the author of evil. But they became evil in order to fulfill God’s secret purpose (Prov. 16: 4). If, then, God through Christ created the material world, the material world is good, not bad. The **Gnostic heresy** taught that the material world was **inherently** bad and that one must free himself from the material world to become pure spirit.

Furthermore, God through Christ **sustains** the material world. Christians must not look with disfavor upon material things as if they were evil in themselvesō in other words, evil **by definition**. Evil by definition means that something is inherently evil. For example, pornography is evil by definition because it involves the immoral exposure of the human body and sexual acts to people who have no right to see them. Nudity and sexuality, on the other hand, are not evil by definition. A husband and wife have a biblical right to see, feel, and enjoy each other’s bodies. In fact, they have the biblical **duty** to do so (1 Cor. 7: 6).⁶ To use another example, murder is evil by definition because it involves the **unlawful** killing of another human being. Execution, on the other hand, is not evil by definition because the Bible allows lawful capital punishment (Gen. 9: 6). Therefore, capital punishment is

⁶ The *ōconcessionō* or *ōpermissionō* Paul mentions in v. 6 refers to the temporary interruption of sexual relations for the purpose of prayer, not the command to have sexual relationships. Withdrawal from sexual relations was a matter of personal choice, but the command to provide sexual relations to husbands or wives was a command. (See Gordon Fee, *1 Corinthians*).

lawful killing, not murder. Material things are not evil by definition, but they may be used in evil ways. Everything God made is good if it is used according to His moral will.

In vv. 15-17, Paul is preparing his readers for the practical exhortations which follow (Col. 2: 21-23).

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ²¹ "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" ²² (which all *refer to* things destined to perish with use) ^o in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? ²³ These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence. (Colossians 2:20-23 NASB)

Paul attacks the same kind of asceticism⁷ and Gnosticism in his first letter to Timothy, in which he calls mandatory abstinence from marriage *o*the doctrines of demons^o. In this example, we are using the *analogy of faith*, also known as the *analogy of Scripture* from which we may formulate a systematic theology of ethics.

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, ² by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, ³ *men* who forbid marriage *and advocate* abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; ⁵ for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. (1 Timothy 4:1-5 NASB)

Paul himself sacrificed marriage for the sake of the gospel. He made himself a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 19: 12).⁸ But Paul never taught that abstinence from marriage was required for everyone or that abstinence was even the best option, despite some misinterpretations of 1 Corinthians 7. Singleness and abstinence is permitted for those who believe that they can best serve the kingdom of God in the unmarried state. Everyone else should be married if given the opportunity in order to fulfill the original creation mandate to multiply and fill the earth ^o a creation ordinance which has never been rescinded.

In L54-63, Paul turns his attention to the pre-eminence of Christ in the new, spiritual creation, the church.

- | | |
|--|----------|
| (54) ¹⁸ He is also <i>head</i> of the body, the church; | a |
| (55) and He is the <u>beginning</u> , | b |
| the <u>firstborn</u> from the dead, | b |
| (56) so that (57) He Himself will come to have <i>first place</i> in everything. | a |
| (58) ¹⁹ For it was the <i>Father's</i> good pleasure (59) for all the fullness to dwell in Him, | |
| (60) ²⁰ and <i>through Him</i> | a |
| to <u>reconcile</u> all things to Himself, | b |
| (61) <u>having made peace</u> through the blood of His cross; | b |
| (62) <i>through Him, I say,</i> | a |
| (63) whether things on earth or things in heaven. | b |

⁷ Asceticism teaches that one can reach a higher spiritual state through self-denial ^o e.g. abstinence from sex, marriage, alcohol, or certain kinds of food. The Bible teaches no such thing. Everything God has made should be enjoyed within the boundaries He has given. Sex and marriage should be enjoyed within the boundaries of marriage. Alcohol and food should be enjoyed within the boundaries of moderation in eating and drinking ^o no drunkenness and no gluttony.

⁸ Jesus was speaking figuratively, not literally, as Origen believed, who castrated himself. Poor interpretation of Scripture can lead to disastrous consequences.

Line 63 assumes the verb *ōreconcileō*, therefore it is also labeled with a “**b**”. Take note of the word, **things** in order to see the parallels. The point of L60-63 is that God through Christ has *ōmade peaceō* or *ōreconciledō* the whole **created world to** Himself and **with** Himself. This includes not just people, but **all things** (v. 20). The creation as we know it has been subjected to the futility of pain, suffering, and death.

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope²¹ that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.²² For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. (Romans 8:20-22 NASB)

Yet, Paul says, the creation will one day be restored **from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the children of God**. One might ask: How can we say that God is reconciling the world, given the cruelty, injustice, immorality and death that remain in the world as we know it? But we must consider the **now** and the **not yet** of the kingdom of God. Through Christ's atonement, the **definitive work** of reconciliation has already taken place (the **now**), but the **consummation or completion** of this reconciliation (the **not yet**) remains to be fully realized and applied. This is why Christians are still here on earth, to continue applying the full reconciliation which Christ has accomplished on the cross, to participate with Christ as His ambassadors reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5: 20).

Moreover, Christians are involved in many fields of thought: science and technology, relief work, farming, etc. These different areas must be brought *ōcaptiveō* to the obedience of Christ so that each field may be used to promote the kingdom of God. For example, modern medicine is the gift of God to correct or *ōreconcileō* the forces of disease occasioned by the fall. Famine, also the result of the fall, is corrected by giving food to the hungry and by training farmers to maximize their yield of crops, thus helping feed more people and eliminate hunger through increased production. These are only two forms of reconciling the world to Christ during the *ōnot yetō* of God's kingdom. In the *ōnowō* of the consummated kingdom of God, there will be no disease and no famine in a sinless world, but there will still be production and learning how to subdue the earth for God's glory. There is no sacred/secular dichotomy (division) between spirit and matter. God owns both our spirits and our bodies, as well as everything which pertains to physical existence. The verse does not, however, teach a **universalistic gospel** which claims that in the end everyone will be saved (cf. Mk. 9: 43-44; 14: 21; Jn. 3: 16 with Lk. 13: 3; Matt. 11: 22).

The Importance of Structure: The goal of writing out the structure of a text is not to produce a masterpiece. The **Alternative Diagram** I have produced below could easily be debated and critiqued by others who see the structure quite differently. The goal is to understand the text as well as possible so it can be taught as plainly as possible. The reason I have labeled the words and phrases as I did is due to the repetition of words or concepts. I have grouped these repetitive words and phrases as follows: Note the font styles on the **Alternative Diagram**.

[a] Words or phrases pertaining to Christ as preeminent or Christ as the very essence of God the Father.

He is the *image* of the invisible God,

He is before **all things**,

He is also *head*

He is the *beginning*,

He Himself will come to have first place

[b] Words or phrases pertaining to Christ being **first**.

the firstborn of all creation.

the firstborn from the dead,

He Himself will come to have first place

[c] Prepositional phrases^o beginning with **for, by, through, in**^o pertaining to Christ as the mediator of both the first creation and the second creation, that is, the one who creates and reconciles all things.

For by Him

through Him and for Him.

and in Him

in Him,²⁰ and through Him

through Him, I say,

[d] Phrases pertaining to **all things**, that is, all created things

all things were created.

all things have been created

all things hold together.

in everything.

to reconcile all things to Himself,

whether [*to reconcile—implied*] **things on earth** or **things in heaven.**

[e] [f] [g] Examples of all created things which are either visible or invisible to the human eye.



both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities

Thrones, dominions, etc. can refer to both earthly or heavenly entities. Jesus called Satan **the ruler of this world** (Jn. 12: 31), and Paul explains that evil **angels, principalities, and powers** will not be able to separate us from the love of God. Moreover, Paul warned us to arm ourselves against invisible powers and rulers which seek to harm us.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. (Ephesians 6:12 NASB)

However, Satan uses earthly powers^o men like Nero, Augustus Caesar, Idi Amin, et al, to wage war against the church (Rev. 12: 17); thus, there is unity in Scripture between evil worldly powers and evil heavenly powers. Notwithstanding their evil nature, all powers are originally the creatures of the Triune God^o Father, Son, and Holy Spirit^o which He uses to bring world history to its consummation in the all-encompassing kingdom of God on earth.

Alternative Diagram

- (44) 15 He is the *image* of the invisible God, [a]
- (45) the firstborn of all creation. [b]
- (46) ¹⁶ For by Him [c]
all things were created. [d]
- (47) both in the heavens f
- (48) and on earth, g
- visible g
- and invisible, f [e]
- (49) whether thrones h
- or dominions h
- or rulers h
- or authorities^o h
- (50) **all things have been created** [d]
- (51) through Him and for Him. [c]
- (52) ¹⁷ He is before **all things,** [a]
- (53) and in Him [c]
all things hold together. [d]
- (54) ¹⁸ He is **also** head of the body, the church; **and** [a]
- (55) He is the *beginning*, [a]
- the firstborn from the dead, [b]
- (56) so that

- (57) He Himself will come to have [a]
first place [b]
in everything. [d]
- (58) ¹⁹ For it was the *Father's* good pleasure

- (59) for all **the fullness** to dwell [a]
- (60) in Him, ²⁰ and through Him [c]
to reconcile all things to Himself, [d]
- (61) having made peace through the blood of His cross; [d]
- (62) through Him, I say, [c]
- (63) whether [to reconcile—implied] **things on earth**
or **things in heaven.** [d]

C. Relationships Between the Different Syntactic Units⁹

Syntactic units are those words which belong together grammatically. They include sentences, clauses, or phrases. In determining syntactic relationships, we must learn to notice conjunctions like *and, but, although, if, when, because, etc.* which indicate the nature of the relationship.

Syntactical relationships can be broken down into **three** main categories: **(a)** relationships focusing on time **(b)** relationships of causality **(c)** descriptive relationships. More detail of these relationships are found in Appendix A of *How to Interpret the Bible*.

1. Relationships that focus on time¹⁰

In this category, elements are related to one another within a **framework of time**. The **specific** time (e.g. tomorrow, yesterday, or this morning) is **not** the issue, but only the **general framework of time** in which something is occurring (e.g. *once, when, always, while, after, etc.*)

a. Occurring at the same time (simultaneously) as another activity—e.g. *while, when, always, now, constantly, once, etc.*¹¹

¹⁵For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which *exists* among you and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease *giving thanks* for you, **while making mention of you** in my prayers; (Ephesians 1:15-16 NASB)

(Explanation: *Giving thanks* takes place **at the same time** as *making mention of the Ephesians* in his prayers.)

¹⁰So then, **while** we *have opportunity*, let us *do good* to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. (Galatians 6:10 NASB)

(Explanation: *Do good* takes place at **the same time** as *have opportunity*.)

⁶For **while** we *were still helpless*, at the right time Christ *died* for the ungodly. (Romans 5:6 NASB)

(Explanation: We as a human race *were still helpless* at the **same time** that Christ *died*.)

²You know that **when you were pagans**, you *were led astray* to the mute idols, however you were led. (1 Corinthians 12:2 NASB)

(**At the same time** they *were pagans*, they were *led astray* by idols.)

⁹ Wolvaardt, HTIB, p.105

¹⁰ Wolvaardt, pp. 315-316

¹¹ Wolvaardt, p. 318

⁵In the same way then, there *has also come to be at the present time a remnant* according to God's gracious choice. (Romans 11:5 NASB)

(A *remnant of believing Jews exists* at the **same time** Paul is writing his letter to the Romans.)

Colossians 4: 2-3a NASB

(272) **2 Devote yourselves to prayer,**
 (273) *keeping alert* in it with an attitude of thanksgiving;
 (274) ³*praying at the same time* for us as well,

Devote yourselves to prayer (for anything) and *keeping alert* should take place **at the same time** as *praying* specifically for God to open up opportunities for Paul and others to preach the gospel and for clarity of explanation.

Colossians 2: 15 NASB

(154) ¹⁵ When He *had disarmed* the rulers and authorities,
 (155) He *made a public display* of them,
 (156) *having triumphed* over them through Him.

Disarmed, made a public display, and *having triumphed* took place at the same time. All the arrows are pointing backwards to show past action, something God has already done.

b. Occurring sequentially, or one after another—e.g. after, before...now, formerly...now; once...when, etc.¹²

⁵But I *will come* to you **after** I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia.
 (1 Corinthians 16:5 NASB)

(The event of *coming* will take place **after** the event of *going through Macedonia*.)

⁹As we *have said before*, so I *say again now*, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (Galatians 1:9 NASB)

(Paul has said **before** that anyone preaching a false gospel is accursed. He says this same thing **now**. The **before** symbol points backwards to a previous time while the **now** symbol points upwards indicating the present time. The direction of the arrow is determined by the verb that the indicator modifies. *Have said* is modified by **before** and *say again* is modified by **now**.)

³For we also **once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.**

⁴ But **when** the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, ⁵ 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, (Titus 3:3-5 NASB)

¹² Wolvaardt, p. 318

(**Once** refers to a time in the past **before** we were saved. **When** refers to a **time after this** when we were saved through the renewing of the Holy Spirit. Here the words are used together **sequentially** in the sentence to indicate two different periods of time, **one occurring after the other**. **Once** in the past we were unsaved and foolish, but later **when** Christ *appeared* to us through the work of the Spirit, we were saved. However, both the verbs **were** and **appeared** are past tense verbs referring to something which has already happened, thus the backward arrow. Notice that the past tense verbs and their temporal modifiers (**once**, **when**) demonstrate that salvation includes a change of behavior. We were once foolish and disobedient as a general way of life. But now we are saved from this kind of behavior.)

Colossians 1: 21-22 NASB

- (64) 21 And although you *were* formerly *alienated*
 (65) *and hostile in mind, engaged* in evil deeds,
 (66) ²² yet He *has* now *reconciled* you
 (67) in His fleshly body through death,

Were alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds occurred before the verb, has reconciled.

2. Relationships that focus on causality¹³

a. **Reason**ô the cause of some event or thing (**for this reason, therefore, because, for** (by itself), **so then**). These are some of the most important syntactic relationships in the Bible, particularly in the NT epistles.

Colossians 1: 4-9

- (10) ⁽⁴⁾ since we heard
 (11) of your **faith** in Christ Jesus
 (12) and the **love** which you have for all the saints;
 (13) ⁽⁵⁾ because of **the hope** laid up for you in heaven,

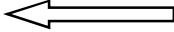
The **reason** for their *faith* in Christ and their *love* for the saints is the *hope laid up* for them in heaven. The arrow points forward to the reason for *faith* and *love*ô namely, *hope*.

- (14) of which you previously heard
 (15) in the word of truth, the gospel ⁶ which has come to you,
 (16) just as in all the world also
 (17) **it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing**,
 (18) even as *it has been doing in you also*
 (19) since the day you heard *of it*
 (20) and understood the grace of God in truth;
 (21) ⁷ just as you learned *it* from Epaphras,
 (22) our beloved fellow bond-servant,
 (23) who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf,
 (24) ⁸ and he also informed us of your **love** in the Spirit.

The **reason** for Paul's and Timothy's enthusiastic prayers is found in Col. 1: 4-8ô the Colossians' **faith** and their **love** for the brethren (L 10-28). In this case, the arrow **points backward** to the previous verses which describe the Colossians' response to the gospel.

¹³ Wolvaardt, pl 318

(25) **9 For this reason** also,

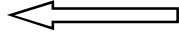


(26) since the day we heard *of it*,
 (27) we have not ceased to pray for you
 (28) and to ask that you may be filled
 (29) with the knowledge of His **will**
 (30) in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

The word *it* (implied) refers to **faith** and **love**—the response of the Colossian Christians to the gospel they received from Epaphras. The faith and love of the Colossians was the reason for Paul's continued prayer for their continuing progress. The **will** that Paul is speaking of is the preceptive or moral will of God. Only the prophets were given insight into God's decreed or secret will.

Other examples:

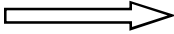
⁹**For this reason** also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which



is above every name, (Philippians 2:9 NASB)

(The **reason** God highly exalted Christ is found in the immediate **context** of Phil. 2: 5-8—the self-sacrifice of Christ in His humiliation and crucifixion. The backward arrow points to this reason which is found in the previous verses.)

⁵**For this reason** I left you in Crete, **that you would set in order what remains and appoint**



elders in every city as I directed you, (Titus 1:5 NASB)

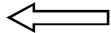
(Paul left Titus in Crete so that he could set the church in order and appoint elders in every city. In this particular case, the **arrow points forward** to the reason found in the **subsequent (following) clause**—to appoint elders in every city, etc.)

¹**Therefore** I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. (Romans 12:1 NASB)

(This "therefore" may refer back to everything Paul has said earlier in Romans 10-11, all of which forms the basis for the instructions given in chapters 12-16.)

Colossians 2:6 NASB

(118) **6 Therefore**

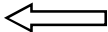


(119) as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord,
 (120) *so* walk in Him,

Therefore refers to something said previously, but it may be difficult sometimes to determine exactly what the referent (thing referred to) is.

Colossians 3: 5-6 NASB

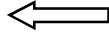
(198) **5 Therefore**



(199) consider the members of your earthly body as dead
 (200) to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed,
 (201) which amounts to idolatry.

Because of something Paul had said earlier (vv. 1-2), the Colossians must consider themselves dead to sinful behavior.

(202) ⁶ For it is because of *these things*



(203) that the *wrath of God* will come

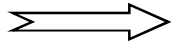


(204) upon the sons of disobedience,

The *wrath of God* will come **because** of *these things* mentioned earlier in L 200-201 (see above). Theologically, if Christ has atoned for the sins of every individual, then why will the wrath of God come upon those whose sins have been atoned for and forgiven? This brings up the question of particular, versus universal, atonement.

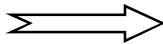
b. Means something is accomplished by or through a certain instrument (**through, by means of, by**)¹⁴

¹⁸For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham **by means of a promise**. (Galatians 3:18 NASB)



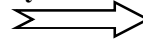
(Abraham received the inheritance not by working for it but **by means of** the promise God made to him in Gen. 12.)

⁴For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude;⁵ for it is sanctified **by means of the word of God and prayer**. (1 Timothy 4:4-5 NASB)



(Everything God has made is set apart for good use by means of an understanding of the Word of God and by means of prayer for wisdom in using it.)

⁹Likewise, *I want* women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments,¹⁰ but rather **by means of good works**, as is proper



for women making a claim to godliness. (1 Timothy 2:9-10 NASB)

(Christian women should adorn themselves by means of good works, not by being preoccupied with external beauty. This does not imply, however, that women should never look in the mirror or put on jewelry or makeup. It only means that women should be more concerned about inward character than outward beauty.)

Colossians 1: 16 NASB

(44) **15** He is the image of the invisible God,

(45) the firstborn of all creation.

(46) ¹⁶ For **by Him** all things were created,



(47) *both* in the heavens and on earth,

(48) visible and invisible,

(49) whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities

(50) all things have been created

(51) **through Him** and for Him.



By means of (or through) Christ, all things were created. Notice that in all the verses provided in Section (2), the instruments or means (underlined words) are given *after* the words *through, by means of, or by*. Thus, the arrows are pointing forward to the instrument of the event.

¹⁴ Wolvaardt, p. 318

c. Purpose—something happens to accomplish a goal (**so that, in order to, that**)¹⁵

⁶knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, **in order that** our body of sin might be done away with, **so that** we would no longer be slaves to sin (Romans 6:6 NASB)

(The old self was crucified with Christ for the **purpose** of setting us free from a life of sin. Once more, we should understand that salvation includes salvation from the dominating power of sin. If sin is still the dominating power in our lives, then we are not saved.)

Colossians 1: 21-22 NASB

(64) **21** And although you were formerly alienated
(65) and hostile in mind, *engaged* in evil deeds,
(66) ²² yet He has now reconciled you
(67) in His fleshly body through death,
(68) **in order to** present you before Him

(69) holy and blameless and beyond reproach

In order to is similar but not exactly the same as **by means of**, thus the same shape but a different color. The arrow points toward the purpose which is underlined. The same reasoning for **so that**.

Colossians 3: 21 NASB

(251) ²¹ Fathers, do not exasperate your children,
(252) **so that** they will not lose heart.

Christ reconciled us to God through His death for the **purpose** of presenting us to Himself holy and blameless. Thus, the purpose of Christ's death is our **sanctification**. Christ did not merely die to **take us to heaven** but to **make us fit for heaven**.

Colossians 1: 25

(80) ²⁵ Of *this church* I was made a minister
(81) according to the stewardship from God
(82) bestowed on me for your benefit,
(83) **so that** (84) I might fully carry out the *preaching of the word of God*.

Colossians 4: 2-4 NASB

(272) **2** Devote yourselves to prayer,
(273) keeping alert in it with *an attitude of thanksgiving*;
(274) ³ praying at the same time for us as well,
(275) **that** God will open up to us a door for the word.

(276) **so that** we may speak forth the mystery of Christ.

(277) for which I have also been imprisoned;

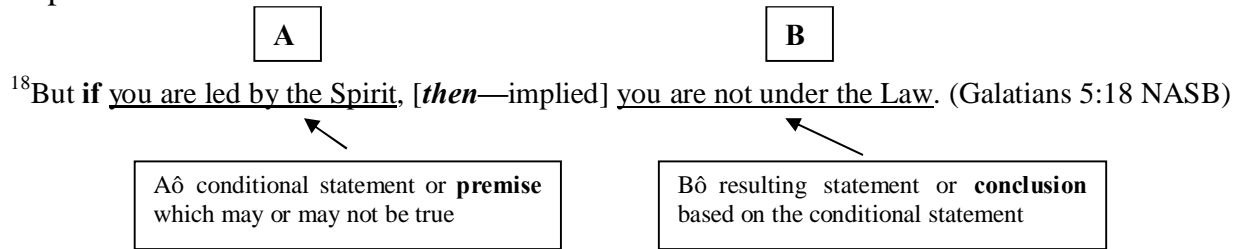
(278) ⁴ **that** I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.

Notice how many times Paul uses purpose statements in three verses (vv. 2-4)

d. Condition—something will occur, or should occur, in the future if certain conditions are met or fulfilled. Or, something should not occur if a condition is not met. Or, a conclusion is true if the premise (conditional statement) is true or a conclusion is not

¹⁵ Wolvaardt, p. 318

true if the premise (conditional statement) is not true. These are called if...then statements. More often than not, the *ōthenō* is not expressly stated in the sentence but is implied.¹⁶



(The **condition** of being not under the law is to be in the present state of being led by the Spirit. On the contrary, if you are **not** led by the Spirit, you **are** under the Law. From the Scriptures we know that every true believer is, indeed, led by the Spirit, *ōFor all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.ō* (Romans 8:14 NASB) Are you a son of God? Then you are also **led by the Spirit** and are **not under the Law**. But what does it mean to be led by the Spirit? Does this mean that we have verbal instructions given to us minute by minute guiding us in every decision in life? No. Paul explains what this means in the verse preceding Romans 8: 14.

So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh¹³ for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if **by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**¹⁴ For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (Romans 8:12-14 NASB)

In other words, being led by the Spirit is manifested (demonstrated) by a person's putting to death the sinful deeds of the body. If we are resisting sin, it proves that we are being led by the Spirit. Yet many preachers claim to be led by the Spirit through prophecy while they are living sinful lives.)

Colossians 2: 20-22 NASB

(174) **20** If you have died with Christ

Conditional statement or premise which may or may not be true

(175) to the elementary principles of the world, [thenō implied]

- (176) why, as if you were living in the world,
- (177) do you submit yourself to decrees, such as,
- (178) ²¹ "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"
- (179) ²² (which all *refer to* things destined to perish with use)^ō
- (180) in accordance
- (181) with the commandments and teachings of men?

Resulting statement or conclusion based on the conditional statement.

If the **premise** *ō* that you have died with Christ *ō* is true, then why do you follow man-made rules which don't apply to Christians? *ō* a result which should **not** follow from the premise. Paul is speaking about Christian liberty. We should not forbid what God allows. This is adding to God's words.

⁵(but **if** a man does not know how to manage his own household,

[thenō implied] how will he take care of the church of God?), (1 Timothy 3:5 NASB)

¹⁶ Wolvaardt, p. 319

(The implication is that a man will not know how to shepherd the church as an elder if he is incapable of shepherding his own wife and children. The condition (premise) for being able to care for the church is the ability to care for one's own family. If the former responsibility is **not** fulfilled, then the latter **cannot** be fulfilled.)

²³Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, [then implied] will they not say that you are mad? (1 Corinthians 14:23 NASB)

(If everyone is speaking in tongues without any interpretation the **conditional part** of the sentence then [the result] unbelievers and those not gifted in tongues will think everyone is insane.)

⁸For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, [then—implied] who will prepare himself for battle? (1 Corinthians 14:8 NASB)

(If the bugle sound is indistinct or unclear, **then** no one will prepare for battle.)

²⁸but if there is no interpreter, [then implied] he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. (1 Corinthians 14:28 NASB)

(Thus, if there is no interpreter present the conditional statement then the person gifted with tongues should keep quiet, speaking only to himself and God.)

⁴But what is the divine response to him? "I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL." ⁵In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to *God's* gracious choice. But if it is by grace, [then implied] it is no

longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. (Romans 11:4-6 NASB)

(During Elijah's ministry, God graciously kept for Himself 7,000 of His people who would not bow to Baal. In the same way, a remnant of Jews existed in Paul's day who were saved according to God's gracious choice in election. If God chose them according to His gracious choice as He did in Elijah's day [I have kept] then the choice is not based on personal works or merit. If the choice is based on works, it cannot be based on grace otherwise, the word, ðgraceð, has no meaning. Stated another way, if the condition of salvation by grace is in place, the result of salvation by works is eliminated.)

¹⁸For if the inheritance is based on law, [then implied] it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise. (Galatians 3:18 NASB)

(If the **condition** is true that the inheritance is based on law, then the **result** of this condition is that the inheritance is not based on the promise [grace]. However (öbutö), Paul argues that this conditional statement is not true. In actual fact, God gave the inheritance to Abraham by means of a promise. The conclusion [therefore not stated expressly but implied] is that since Abraham in actual fact received the inheritance by a promise, **then** the inheritance must be on the basis of promise, not law-keeping.)

Colossians 3:1 NASB

(188) 1 Therefore

(189) if you have been raised up with Christ.(190) [**then** implied] keep seeking the things above,

(191) where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Paul is not questioning the Colossians about their salvation. He is merely implying that **if** the condition of salvation (L 189) has been fulfilled in Christ^o and it has been^o **then** it is *imperative* that they keep seeking heavenly priorities. Notice the different head on the arrow for an imperative (command) verb.

¹For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not

drift away *from it*. ²For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every

transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, [**then** implied] ³how will we escape

if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, (Hebrews 2:1-3 NASB)

(This is a complicated passage, but the main point is that even violation of the Mosaic Covenant administered through the mediation of angels [cf. Gal. 3: 19; Acts 7: 53] received a just punishment (the **premise** of the argument). If people were punished^o even sometimes with the death penalty for violation of the Mosaic Covenant (inaugurated through angels), then [implied] how much more will they be punished for violation of the New Covenant (which was inaugurated through Christ Himself)? This is what is called **an argument from the lesser to the greater**. Violation of the New Covenant through unbelief and unrepentance is greater than a violation of the Mosaic Covenant. One can be forgiven for disobeying the Mosaic Law, but he cannot be forgiven for not believing in Christ. Although violators of the Law of Moses were punished in various ways, they could be forgiven. But how can a person be forgiven for rejecting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? There is no forgiveness for this sin since Christ is the only provision for man^o sin.

This **premise** (condition) of Hebrews 2: 2 is true and has been verified in the history of Israel. The true premise forms the basis for the **conclusion** (result) that the author^o readers would also not escape punishment if they did not respond in faith to the New Covenant inaugurated by Christ.)

e. Contra-expectation—something happens contrary to expectation (althoughⁱ yet; althoughⁱ but; even though; though. The *öyetö* or *öbutö* is sometimes implied).¹⁷

(64) 21 And although you were formerly alienated(65) and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds,(66) ²² yet He has now reconciled you

(67) in His fleshly body through death,

It was contrary to anyone^o expectation that God would reconcile those who were His enemies, whose minds were hostile to Him, and who were engaged in evil deeds. However, this is exactly what happened in spite of the situation which existed.

¹⁷ Wolvaardt, p. 319

⁸**Although He was a Son**, [*yetô* implied] He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. (Hebrews 5:8 NASB)

(We would not have expected the Son of God to learn obedience **through suffering**. After all, He was perfect in every way. Yet, Christ in His humanity learned obedience in the same way we do, through the experience of suffering. The difference is that He never failed in His obedience.)

Although he was grieved, [*yetô* implied] the king commanded *it* to be given because of his oaths, and because of his dinner guests. (Matthew 14:9 NASB)

(Although we might have expected Herod not to behead John the Baptist for fear of the multitudes [cf. Matt. 14: 5], he did it anyway to save face before his guests.)

¹¹Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and **although there were so many**, [*yetô* implied] the net was not torn. (John 21:11 NASB)

(With this many fish, they would have expected the net to tear; but contrary to their expectations, the net did not tear.)

³for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, ⁴**although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh**. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: ⁵circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. ⁷**But** whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. (Philippians 3:3-7 NASB)

(Paul was a law-keeping Pharisee who might have been expected to put confidence in his Jewish pedigree (biological background) and his performance. But contrary to expectations, because of the surpassing greatness of Christ and the gospel, he considered all his efforts to earn salvation from the law as loss so that he could gain Christ through faith.)

¹Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave **although he is owner of everything**, ²**but** he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father.

³So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. ⁴But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, ⁵so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. ⁶Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. (Galatians 4:3-7 NASB)

(One would expect the heir of the inheritance to have more privileges in the family than a household slave; but in Roman culture, the child who had not grown to maturity was treated similarly to a slave. Using this as an analogy, Paul says that Christ's redemption has changed our status from one of slaves to that of full-grown sons with the full privileges of membership in the family of God—a status he calls "adoption.")

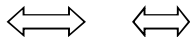
³²and **although** they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice
 ➤
 such things are worthy of death, [yet implied] they not only do the same, but also
 ➤
 give hearty approval to those who practice them. (Romans 1:32 NASB)

(Considering the penalty of death to those who break God's law, we might expect people to fear breaking the law. Instead, they not only break God's law, they heartily approve of anyone who lives sinfully.)

f. Alternation—Either one event occurs or another event occurs, but not both. In other words, if one thing happens, the other will not happen because of a causal connection between the two events.¹⁸

¹⁰For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, **either**. (2 Thessalonians 3:10 NASB)

(One **or** the other event will take place but **not both**. If **not working** occurs, then **eating** will not occur. In the church of Thessalonica, **not working** and **eating** could not occur at the same time. Notice that **either this or that** will occur, but not **both**.)



²¹for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, **either**. (Romans 11:21 NASB)



(God did not spare the Jewish people's natural branches when they failed to respond in faith to His covenant promises. He will also not spare Gentiles who profess faith in Christ if they prove later by their unbelief that they are not true Christians. God will not pardon **disbelieving Gentiles** if He has judged **disbelieving Jews**. Not sparing unbelieving Jews and sparing unbelieving Gentiles will not occur together. God does not show favoritism to Jews or Gentiles. Anyone who does not respond in faith will be judged. **Either** implies a condition which goes in both directions, thus the arrow which points both ways. Paul is warning the Romans about empty professions of faith. One may profess faith in Christ but live lawlessly like an unbeliever. If he does this, Paul gives him no assurance of salvation. The Jews also **professed** faith in God, but they habitually broke His law and worshipped idols. So, Paul says to the Gentiles. You will be cut off just like the Israelites if you persist in behavior which gives evidence of unbelief.)

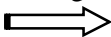
¹⁶Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone *as* slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, **either** of sin resulting in death, **or** of obedience resulting in righteousness? (Romans 6:16 NASB)



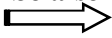
¹⁸ Walvaardt, p. 320

(The two situations presented are *mutually exclusive*—both cannot be true. **Either** a person presents himself (sells himself) as a slave of sin, **or** he presents himself as a slave of obedience. But he cannot present himself as a slave both to sin and obedience **at the same time**. Likewise, one condition results in death and the other in righteousness, but death and righteousness cannot exist at the same time. From the perspective of Roman culture (historical context), a *bond-slave* could not serve two masters. He was fully owned by *one master only* who would not share him with another master. Thus, Paul is saying—by way of analogy—that one cannot be a slave of one master (sin) while at the same time being the slave of another master (righteousness). Further qualification is necessary. Paul is not speaking of besetting sins with which all Christians struggle. He is speaking about habitual slavery to sin as the dominating description of one's life.

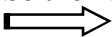
g. Conclusion—there is a causal relationship between one thing or event which leads to a conclusion. The first thing or event (the premise of the argument) is known to be true which serves as the basis for the conclusion which follows from the premise.¹⁹

The phrases, “**so also**”, “**so then**” or “**even so**” will be used in forming conclusions, but this is not an exhaustive list of conclusion indicators. Note the new symbol: 

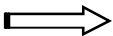
¹Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything,² but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father.

³**So also** we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the  world. (Galatians 4:1-3 NASB)

(In v. 3, Paul is leading us to a **conclusion** based upon the analogy of vv. 1-2. In the same way that a child does not differ from a slave before the precise time set by the father, the believer does not receive the full allotment of his privileges as an adopted son until the time set by God the Father.)

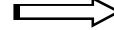
¹⁸**So then** as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, **even so** through  one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. (Romans 5:18 NASB)

(Paul draws the **conclusion** of justification through one man, Christ, from the premise of condemnation through one man, Adam. This is because both Adam and Christ were federal heads representing more than one man. Adam represented the whole human race while Christ was the second Adam representing elect sinners for whom He died—His sheep (Jn. 10: 11, 26).

⁹For this is the word of promise: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON."¹⁰ And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac;¹¹ for though *the twins* were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to *His* choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls,¹² it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER."¹³ Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."¹⁴ What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!¹⁵ For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION."¹⁶ **So then** it *does not depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on 

¹⁹ Wolvaardt, p. 320

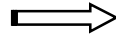
God who has mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH." ¹⁸ **So then** He has mercy



on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. (Romans 9:9-18 NASB)

(Based on the way God dealt with Jacob and Esau, as well as with Pharaoh, Paul draws the **conclusion ("so then")** that the basis for election has nothing to do with the person or what the person will do, but solely on the basis of God's sovereign choice and desire to save some and not others.)

¹⁰If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. ¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, [*then—implied*] He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. ¹² **So then**, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the



flesh, to live according to the flesh (Romans 8:10-12 NASB)

(These three verses consist of the combination of a conditional *if* then statement followed by a conclusion, *so then* in v. 12. Based upon the fact that the Holy Spirit dwells in the believer and gives him spiritual life, the believer does not have to surrender himself to the cravings of the flesh. He has the ability to say *no* to the flesh. He can never claim that the devil exercises an irresistible force upon him, making him do something against his will. No, the Christian is not **under obligation**. Paul is using the analogy of slavery to make his point. A slave is **obligated** to obey his master. Before we came to Christ, the flesh was our master, and by nature, we could do nothing but obey this master. The flesh had control over us. But not any more. We are now freed from the flesh as the dominating influence over our lives. Our new master is Christ operating in us through the Holy Spirit.)

Other **"so then" conclusions** are found in the following texts (NASB): Rom. 7:3, 12, 25; Rom. 8:12; Rom. 14:12, 19; 1 Co. 3:7, 21; 1 Co. 7:38; 1 Co. 11:33; 1 Co. 14:22; Gal. 3:5, 9; Gal. 4:31; Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:19; Eph. 5:17; Phil. 2:12; 1 Thess. 5:6; 2 Thess. 2:15

Other **"so also" conclusions** are found in the following texts (NASB): 1 Co. 9:14; 1 Co. 11:12; 1 Co. 12:12; 1 Co. 14:9, 12; 1 Co. 15:22, 42, 45, 48; 2 Co. 1:5, 7; 2 Co. 10:7; Gal. 4:3; Eph. 5:24; Col. 3:13; Heb. 5:5; Jas. 2:26; Jas. 3:5

3. Relationships that focus on explanation—the explanatory "for"

The word **for** can point to a reason (see *Relationships of Causality*). However, **for** can indicate a further **explanation** of a previous statement. Note the following examples of the *explanatory for* below. (Note that the symbol below is different from the symbol for **although...yet** which has a tail and is slightly tinted.



⁵So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. ¹⁶ **For** I am not



ashamed of the gospel, **for** it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to



the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ **For** in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith



to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." ¹⁸ **For** the

wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident within them; **for** God made it evident to them. ²⁰ **For** since the creation of the world

His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. ²¹ **For** even though

they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (Romans 1:15-21 NASB)

In this passage of Scripture, every “**for**” in bold letters is the Greek word *gar*. Expositors often call this word the ðexplanatory *gar*ð since it commonly *explains* a previous statement or gives the *reason* for a previous statement. Nevertheless, we must distinguish the *explanatory* “**for**” from the *reason* indicator, “**for**” or “**for this reason**”. In v. 15, Paul is *not* saying, ð**For this reason** I am not ashamed of the gospel. This would result in a very clumsy interpretation: The reason Paul is not ashamed of the gospel is that he is eager to preach the gospel. This would not make much sense. Rather, in v. 16 he gives us further *explanation* of why he is eager to preach the gospel: He is eager to preach the gospel *because* he is not ashamed of the gospel.

In v. 16b, Paul *explains* the previous statement in v. 16a. Why is Paul is not ashamed of the gospel? **Because** (a substitution for the word, ðforð) the gospel is ðthe power of God for salvation to everyone who believesð. Why should Paul be ashamed of something so powerful? Notice that there is a close parallel between syntactical relationships of *explanation* and syntactical relationships of *reason*. Reasons are commonly included in the explanations. The *reason* Paul is not ashamed of the gospel is that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. However, we cannot turn the statement around: The gospel is the power of God for salvation *because* Paul is not ashamed of it. Obviously, the gospel *is* the power of God for salvation regardless of Paul’s opinion of it. Its power does not depend on Paul. Rather, Paul’s eagerness and lack of shame depends on the power of the gospel.

In v. 17, Paul *explains* his previous statement in v. 16b. Why is the gospel the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes? The answer comes in v. 17ð because the gospel is all about the righteousness of God, a righteousness which could be received only on the basis of faith in *what God has done for man, not what man has done for God*.

But what does Paul mean by ðfrom faith to faithð? Scholars have given many explanations of this prepositional phrase. Careful examination of the context will provide a clue to the meaning. Paul quotes from the prophecy of Habakkuk (**Hab. 2: 4**). When did Habakkuk live? He lived under the administration of the Old Covenant, the Mosaic Law; yet, he clung to the promise of grace made explicit in the Abrahamic Covenant: ðThen he [*Abraham*] believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness (**Genesis 15:6** NASB). Therefore, ðfrom faith to faithð may mean that the righteousness of God *through faith* has been demonstrated throughout the history of God’s covenant people—“**from**” members of the Old Covenant who were justified by faith (like Habakkuk) “**to**” members of the New Covenant who were justified by faith (like Paul). Paul further demonstrates this principle in **Romans 4** by using Abraham as the supreme example of those who are justified by faith apart from the works of the Law. Although the Law was given as a disciplinarian to lead us to grace, the principle of salvation by grace alone was always operative throughout the history of redemption. The Mosaic Covenant never invalidated the promise made to Abraham on the basis of faith alone (see Gal. 3: 17-29).

In v. 18, Paul uses another **for** to introduce another *explanation*. While the **righteousness** of God is revealed in the gospel by the examples of everyone who has believed the promises of God by faith, the **wrath** of God is revealed by the examples of those who have suppressed the truth about God. Unrighteous men, no matter who they are or when they lived upon the earth, have no excuse for their unbelief and unrighteousness. Why? **Because** all men have the witness of God within them (by virtue of their being made in the image of God^o not directly stated in the text). In the clause, **for** God made it evident to them^o, Paul provides further explanation of why **that** which is known about God is evident within them^o. It is evident **because** **God** made it evident to them^o. Thus, God implanted in every man^o by virtue of his nature as the image of God^o an intuitive (without the need for rational proof) knowledge of God.

In v. 20, Paul continues the explanation begun in v. 19b. **How** did God make Himself known to men? The *explanation* given in v. 20 shows how. God's **invisible attributes** and **divine nature** (including His love, holiness, wrath, omniscience, etc.) and **His eternal power** (omnipotence in creation and providence) have been adequately demonstrated in everything God has made^o that is, in the visible creation. Thus, the **invisible** God has made Himself **visible** in creation in such a powerful, unmistakable way, that all men are without excuse for failing to acknowledge Him as God, for failing to worship Him, and for failing to keep His moral laws which are demonstrated in creation itself. This proves that even the moral law of God was **evident** to men before the Mosaic Law was promulgated at Mount Sinai (given officially in written form^o the reason Cain was afraid of wondering around after murdering Abel; see also **Rom. 2: 14-15; 5: 13-14**). Notice that Paul does **not** say that men merely **knew** that some kind of god **existed**. He says specifically that men knew the **true** God through His divine nature and attributes because these were **clearly seen** and **understood** through what God had created.

In v. 21, Paul further **explains** why men do not have an excuse for their ungodliness and unrighteousness. He begins with yet another explanatory **for**. I will substitute the word, **because** in my paraphrase. **They** are without excuse because although they knew God's invisible attributes, omnipotence, and holiness, they still did not give God the honor He deserved as God, nor did they give thanks to God for being the kind of God He is and for making them in His image. Instead, they began worshipping a god in many ways similar to themselves, a god of their own creation. As a consequence, even the understanding of God they possessed became darkened^o.

Romans 8 is another passage with an extensive use of the *explanatory for*.

¹Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²**For** the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. ³**For** what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴**so that** the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵**For** those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶**For** the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, ⁷because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; **for** it does not subject itself to the law of God, **for** it is not even able *to do so*, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:1-8 NASB)

Let us break this passage down the following way:

1. Those in Christ are **not condemned**. The question is: What is the nature of this condemnation? Is Paul speaking of being condemned to hell or something else?

2. **First explanatory “for”** (v. 2)ô The dominating power of the Holy Spirit (**the law of the Spirit of life**) sets the Christian free from **the law of sin and death** (the dominating power of sin and death). This law has been mentioned in Rom. 7: 23 as the power of sin in the believer still threatening to control him. Contrary to the traditional interpretation, I do not believe Paul is speaking of the penalty of sin which is condemnation and judgment in hell. While it is true that the believer will not be condemned and judged in hell, this is not the burden of the present text. It would be foreign to the **context** of chapter 8 which deals with sanctification. Thus, **condemnation** in Romans 8: 1, in the immediate context of Romans 7, must have reference to sanctification, not justification.²⁰ Paul has already dealt with justification in Romans 3ô 5, and he is not returning to this subject here. The **therefore** of Romans 8:1 does not reach back to Romans 5.

3. **Second explanatory “for”** (v. 3)ô What is it that the Law could not do? It is true that the Law could not justify us because we could not keep it. But this is not what Paul is talking about here (in my opinion). The Law of God could not **set us free** morally from **the law of sin and death** reigning in us. In Romans 7: 24, Paul asks the question, **Who will set me free from the body of this death?** He answers this question generally in 7: 25. Christ sets us free. He now becomes more specific with His answer in Romans 8: 2. The operation of the Holy Spirit has set us free from **a life condemned to be dominated by sin**ô the topic Paul began in Romans 6: 1. The principle of sin and death dominating the unbeliever has been broken by the operation of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, justification, and sanctification. Therefore, from the context of Romans 8: 1 (which is Romans 7), I reason that Paul must be speaking of the condemnation of sin's **power**, not the condemnation of sin's **penalty**.

The Law could not sanctify us and make us holy. It could tell us what holiness requires, but it could not break the power of sin. This was no fault of the law, but the fault of sin living in us. The law was **weak**, but not weak of itself, but weak because of our sin rendering us incapable of keeping it. But what the Law could not do, God did by **sending His own Son**. Through Christ, God **condemned sin in the flesh**. That is, Christ defeated sin while living in a fleshly body. He is the archetype (the beginning) of all those who are controlled by the Spirit (Rom. 8: 11-14).

It is also true that God condemned the sins of all believers in the death of Christ, but I do not believe this is the burden of Paul's argument here. The point he is making is that sin is condemned **as a controlling power** in the flesh because of Christ's victory over sin in His earthly life. Since Christ never yielded to sin, then those who are united to Him by the Spirit will no longer yield to the controlling power of sin. The **analogy of Scripture** supports this view.

No one who abides in Him **sins**; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. (1 John 3:6 NASB)

No one who is born of God **practices sin**, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. (1 John 3:9 NASB)

We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. (1 John 5:18 NASB)

²⁰ See John Murray, *Romans*, and H.A. W. Meyer, *Romans*

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. (1 John 1:8-10 NASB)

In the first three Johanine passages above, it is clear that John is not speaking of sinless perfection; otherwise, he would be contradicting what he said earlier in the last quotation.

There are other exegetical reasons supporting this interpretation: the purpose clause of v. 4, **so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit**. In the NT, walking is a metaphor or figure of speech for living and practicing the Christian faith. Thus, sin is condemned as a reigning power **so that** we may practice the Christian faith. To paraphrase v. 1, “The Christian is not **condemned** to a life of being controlled by his flesh.” This does not imply the possibility of sinless perfection. Christians still sin, and Paul admits this in Romans 7. Yet, the very struggle that Paul is experiencing in Romans 7 proves that this is the testimony of a Christian, not an unbeliever. The unbeliever is at peace with his sin, and he is not concerned that he is displeasing to God. He is not in anguish over his sin as Paul is in Romans 7. Yet, we should not believe that Paul in Romans 7 is admitting consistent defeat in his walk with Christ— in other words, that he is losing more than he is winning. He is not giving us a statistical analysis of how many times he wins versus how many times he loses in his battle against sin. Paul strived toward perfection; therefore, any and every defeat was deeply felt and mourned by Paul.²¹

3. Third explanatory “for” (v. 5) — This verse offers a further explanation of the requirement of the law being fulfilled in the believer. The unbeliever’s mind is governed by the flesh, but the believer’s mind is governed by the Spirit. Although he sins, the believer’s world-view, one might say, is a world-view influenced by the Spirit. Therefore, the believer is not **condemned** to a life governed by the flesh because the Holy Spirit helps him practice the Christian life.

4. Fourth explanatory “for” (v. 6) — If there is **no condemnation** for the believer whose mind is set on the Spirit and ruled by the Spirit, then those who are ruled by the flesh **are**, indeed, under condemnation. In the Spirit is **life and peace**, but in the flesh there is death **because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God** (v. 7). This is further evidence that Romans 7: 14-25 is the description of Paul, the believer. In that passage, Paul delights in the law of God (v. 22) and wishes to be set free from every sin (vv. 23-24). Being **of the flesh** (7: 14) is not the same thing as being **in the flesh** (7: 5; 8: 9).

5. Fifth explanatory “for” (v. 7a) — The first part of this verse explains the reason why the unbeliever is hostile toward God. The unbeliever does not subject himself to God’s law. This necessarily puts him in a hostile relationship to a holy God who demands submission to His law.

6. Sixth explanatory “for” (v. 7b) — The second part of this verse explains why a believer does not subject himself to God’s law. He cannot do so. The unbeliever is incapable of subjecting himself to God’s law in the absolute sense. He may do the right thing but for the wrong reason and the wrong motive, rendering his action fundamentally displeasing to God. In v. 8, Paul goes on to say that the unbeliever cannot please God — that is, please God in the absolute sense. He cannot fulfill all three conditions of a righteous act: the correct standard (the law of God), the correct motive (the love of God and man), and the correct goal (the glory of God). Remember that the greatest commandment is to **love God** with all your heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22: 37). Without loving God, we are incapable of pleasing God. Moreover, we cannot please God if we are not seeking the kingdom of God as our foremost purpose in life.

²¹ See Murray on Romans 7

II. The Meaning of Words and Phrases

We determine the meaning of a word in a passage of Scripture from the context. How does the author *use* the word? I have suggested a possible strategy for developing the meaning of words and phrases below.²²

A. Use As Many Good English Translations of the Text as You Have Available.

Using multiple translations (NIV, ESB, NASB, KJV, and ASV) can be very helpful in determining the meaning of words and phrases. The translators of any recognized version of the Bible are Greek and Hebrew scholars who have spent many long days, months, and years arriving at the most helpful translation of the Greek and Hebrew Bible according to a particular set of goals. Moreover, they have done this after a many previous years of personal mastery of the Greek and Hebrew languages. The goal of the NASB is to provide a translation as close to the *literal* Greek and Hebrew as possible. The goal of the NIV is to provide an English version which reads more smoothly than the NASB or King James.

We should start the process by taking a passage of Scripture from two translations (or three) and placing them one after the other or side by side. I have done this with Colossians 2. The text with the line numbers is the NASB, 1995, and the one without the line numbers is the NIV, 1984.

Colossians 2

(100) ¹ For I want you to know
 (101) how great a struggle I have on your behalf
 (102) and for those who are at Laodicea,
 (103) and for all those **who have not personally seen my face,**

NASB

¹I want you to know
 how much I am struggling for you
 and for those at Laodicea,
 and for all **who have not met me personally.**

NIV

Who have not met me personally sounds more like what an English speaker would say. If I have not met someone, I do not say, **I have not personally seen his face.** Thus, the NIV has translated the phrase into a more natural English equivalent for easier reading and understanding.

(104) ² **that** their hearts may be encouraged,
 ⇨
 (105) having been knit together in love,
 ⇨
² **My purpose** is that they may be encouraged in heart
 ⇨
 and united in love,

NASB

NIV

We can see that the translators of the NIV have identified the purpose statement for us by translating **that** with **My purpose**, words which are not in the original Greek but which are clearly *intended* by the author. Also, **united in love** is more understandable to the modern English reader than **knit together in love**.

²² (See also Wolvaardt, *HTIB*, chapter 12, and *Equipping to Serve*, "Explain words and phrases", p. 4:3.).

(112) ⁴I say this so that no one will delude you
 (113) with **persuasive** argument.

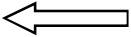
NASB

⁴I tell you this so that no one may deceive you
 by **fine-sounding** arguments.

NIV

Once again, the NIV captures the intended meaning. Paul was not implying that the arguments of the false teachers were truly **persuasive**, cogent, or logically conclusive, but that to some people they appeared to be so. Such arguments **sounded just fine** until someone like Paul came along to examine them carefully. Implication: Don't be taken in by arguments which may sound intelligent but are nothing but *ōhot airō*. Think!!!

(118) **6 Therefore**



(119) as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord,
 (120) **so walk** in Him,
 (121) ⁷having been firmly rooted
 (122) **and now** being built up in Him
 (123) and established in your faith,
 (124) just as you were instructed,
 (125) **and** overflowing with gratitude.

NASB

Notice the two different ways of translating this important **reason indicator**.

The NIV has captured the continuing action of a present tense verb—literally the text reads, **continue walking around**. But what does that mean? It means, **continue living the Christian life**. The NIV translates the Greek verb, *peripateo* as **live** while the NASB routinely translates it **walk**. But the connotation (suggested meaning) of **walk** is that the Christian takes his faith *wherever he goes* while he is **walking around**. In other words, Christian character is something we take with us into the market place, into the job, to the ball field, into the bedroom, etc.

⁶**So then,**
 just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord,
continue to live in him,
⁷rooted and built up in him,
 strengthened in the faith
 as you were taught,
 and overflowing with thankfulness.

NIV

Having been...rooted (L121) is a perfect participle. The perfect tense has the connotation (suggested meaning) of an activity in the past with present results. Thus, the Colossians were already rooted in Christ in the past with the present result of being **built up** and **established** in their faith

The NASB routinely translates present participles in this way—**having been...** which gives you an indication of the **perfect tense**. The action of the verb is in the past but the results of the verb continue into the present.

(126) **8** See to it that no one takes you captive
 (127) through philosophy and empty deception,
 (128) according to the tradition of men,
 (129) according to the elementary principles of the world,
 (130) rather than according to Christ.

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive
 through hollow and deceptive philosophy,
 which depends on human tradition
 and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

NIV

The NASB uses three parallel phrases, **according to the tradition of men** and **according to the elementary principles of men, rather than according to Christ**. This literal construction sets up the parallel and contrast more clearly than the NIV.

- (131) ⁹ For in Him
 (132) all the fullness of Deity **dwells** in bodily form,
 (133) ¹⁰ and in Him
 (134) you have been made complete, NASB
 (135) and He is the head over all rule and authority;

In the Greek, the word **dwells** is *katoikeo* which means to **inhabit**. The word **house** in the Greek is *oikos*, thus you can see the connection. The fullness of God has taken up residence in Christ. In the same way, the Holy Spirit **dwells** in every believer or, to put it another way, has taken up residence in the believer (1 Cor. 3: 16; *oikeo*).

- ⁹ For in Christ
 all the fullness of the Deity **lives** in bodily form,
¹⁰ and you have been given fullness
 in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.

NIV

- (136) ¹¹ and in Him you were also circumcised
 (137) with a circumcision made without hands,
 (138) in the removal of the body of the flesh
 (139) by the circumcision of Christ;
 (140) ¹² having been buried with Him in baptism,
 (141) in which you were also raised up with Him
 (142) through faith in the working of God,
 (143) who raised Him from the dead.

NASB

The body of the flesh is a very curious phrase to the modern ear. **Sinful nature (NIV)** is much easier to understand.

- ¹¹ In him you were also circumcised,
 in the putting off of the sinful nature, NIV
 not with a circumcision done by the hands of men
 but with the circumcision done by Christ,
¹² having been buried with him in baptism
 and raised with him through your faith
 in the power of God,
 who raised him from the dead.

Yet, **the body of the flesh** (NASB) helps us to understand the meaning of circumcision in the OT. The removal of the foreskin of **flesh** from the male sex organ represented the removal of the sinful flesh or **sinful nature**. But while OT circumcision was limited to a small piece of flesh, the circumcision of Christ is more radical, consisting of the whole person. The whole person, the old self (3: 9), is crucified with Christ, dead, and buried. Thus, the analogy between circumcision in the OT the removal of **flesh** is more strikingly captured by **the removal of the body of the flesh** which indicates the complete removal of the old man. His sinful nature is removed not only in part, but in the whole.

- (144) ¹³ When you were dead NASB
 (145) in your transgressions
 (146) and the uncircumcision of your flesh,
 (147) He **made you alive together with Him**,

The verb of L147 is literally **made alive together**. It is a compound verb with the preposition **with** included in the verb. The NIV **with Christ** is a good translation, especially since it identifies the **him** which is a pronoun in the Greek. However, the NASB is also a good translation which translates the original force of the verb. The idea is that God made us alive **together with Christ**. Thus, being **together with Christ** in His resurrection is emphasized in the Greek and is captured by the NASB, not the NIV.

- ¹³ When you were dead in your sins
 and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature,
 God **made you alive with Christ**.
 He forgave us all our sins, NIV

(154) ¹⁵ When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities,
 (155) He made a **public display** of them,
 (156) having triumphed over them through Him.

NASB

¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities,
 he made a **public spectacle** of them,
 triumphing over them by the cross.

NIV

(164) ¹⁸ Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize
 (165) by delighting in self-abasement
 (166) and the worship of the angels,

NASB

¹⁸ Do not let anyone who delights in false humility
 and the worship of angels

NIV

Here, **public spectacle** is a better translation because it better captures the intent for the modern reader. **Public spectacle** has a negative connotation (suggested meaning). The idea is that God stripped the cosmic, heavenly powers of their weapons and is now exhibiting them to the world in their conquered condition. The military term used (**triumphed**) indicates that Christ is now driving His conquered enemies through the streets in royal procession bound in chains (see 2 Cor. 2: 14).

False humility is a much more understandable translation than **self-abasement**.

(174) **20** If you have died with Christ
 (175) to the elementary principles of the world,
 (176) why, as if you were living in the world,
 (177) do you submit yourself to decrees, such as,
 (178) ²¹ "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"

NASB

²⁰ Since you died with Christ
 to the basic principles of this world,
 why, as though you still belonged to it,
 do you submit to its rules:

NIV

²¹ "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"

Again, a more understandable translation by the NIV. The Christian is still **living in this world**, but not in the sense of **belonging to it**. In Jn. 15: 19, Jesus tells His disciples that they are not **of the world**. In the same sense, we are not of the world. We do not belong to it. (cf. Col. 1: 13).

What are these **elementary principles**? The Greek word is *stoicheion*, also used in Hebrews 5: 12.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the **elementary principles** of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. (Hebrews 5:12 NASB)

Thus, the expression **elementary principles** is a value-neutral term. Whether the principles are good or bad is determined by the context of the passage. In Hebrews 5: 12, they refer to fundamental Biblical truth **of the oracles of God** which the Hebrew Christians were in danger of abandoning. They once more needed to be taught this fundamental truth rather than progressing to more advanced teaching. In Colossians, the term has a negative connotation because these elementary principles are **of the world**. That is, they are fundamental ideas or philosophical ideas which are derived from worldly thinking. The context of the Colossians passage indicates that these were principles which governed one's spiritual and ethical life—rules about eating, drinking, and perhaps, sex. They were a list of *do's* and *don'ts* which, if kept, would make a person spiritual and right with God. Thus, they were viewed as a means of saving oneself. Note how Paul uses the same word, *stoicheion*, in Galatians.

So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the **elemental things** of the world. (Galatians 4:3 NASB)

But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless **elemental things**, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? (Galatians 4:9 NASB)

In Galatians 4, *stoicheia* (plural of *stoicheion*), is used in reference to the ritual observance of days, months, seasons, and years. Thus, the "elemental things" are the ritual and ceremonial observances of the Mosaic Law in which the Jewish nation had trusted for salvation. This is why Paul refers to the OT ceremonial requirements as elemental principles **of the world** even though God had given these requirements in the Law. Ridderbos explains.

Presumably, these principles or axioms comprise what men thought they possessed in the way of potentials for redemption outside of Christ. And since the apostle speaks of being *held in bondage under these rudiments*, we shall probably have to think of the prescriptions and ordinances to which religious man outside of Christ surrendered himself, and by means of which he tried to achieve redemption. Before the coming of Christ the whole world was slavishly subjected to these *rudiments* or *elements*, also those who by means of the works of the law tried to earn their justification before God. For, even though the law itself was of divine origin, the use that men made of it was wrong. Those who lived under the law in this unwarranted way lived in the same condition of bondage as that under which the Gentiles, for all their exertion, also pined.

Verse 10 tells us in what this service of the rudiments consists, namely, in the observation of all kinds of ceremonial regulations, most specifically the one stipulating holy seasons. Inasmuch as Paul's argument is entirely directed against Judaism, the *days* presumably refer to sabbath-days, the *months* to the days of the new moon, the *seasons* to the Jewish feasts, and the *years* to the Sabbath and jubilee years. Whether the *years* were still being celebrated by the Jews in Palestine is highly uncertain. The intent of the apostle is to say that they had taken over the whole system. The summing up of them all, the cumulative heaping up, is intended to express what is quantitatively legalistic in their course of conduct. And all this they were now busy painstakingly reintroducing.²³

To summarize, the Jews used the law as a means of salvation, and this use of the law was "wrong and of the world." The ceremonial requirements, far from teaching men that they were capable of saving themselves, should have led men to recognize that they could not keep the law perfectly, and therefore needed a perfect sacrifice to atone for their many transgressions.

Stoicheia, in the context of Galatians 4 (see v. 10), does not refer specifically to the **moral principles** of the Mosaic Law. The moral requirements of the law are clearly set forth as continuing requirements in the New Covenant (Rom. 8: 4); and, as such, they could not be called "weak and worthless" (Gal. 4: 9). We could never refer to the laws against idolatry, taking God's name in vain, murder, adultery, etc. as "weak and worthless" except as the sole means of procuring our salvation. The law gives us no power for either justification or sanctification. But while it is true that the Old Covenant is terminated with the coming of Christ, it does not follow that every principle of that covenant is also terminated. The moral principles of God's government of man's righteousness were in existence long before the Law of Moses, dating back to Adam and Eve. Cain killed his brother Abel and was fearful of being executed by other men as a consequence (Gen. 4: 15).

Once useful in the plan of salvation, the ritual observances which prefigure Christ (the Aaronic priesthood, food restrictions, yearly festivals, etc.) are **now** weak and worthless because they are only

²³ Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, pp. 154, 161-162, emphasis his).

shadows of the real person whom they prefiguredô Christ himself (Col. 2: 16-17). They were good and necessary for the period of the church's minority or *childhood* (Gal. 4: 3) depicted by the nation of Israel before Christ, but now that Christ has replaced them, we need them no longer.

Why are man's efforts to save himself called **elementary principles of the world**? By his very nature, man is a legalist who insists on making up the conditions of his own salvation. He instinctively believes that he can do something significant to save himself. On the õflip side of the coinö, he is an antinomian. By devising his own way of salvation, he is constantly breaking the law of God. In the Gnostic heresy, some believed that salvation was attained through extreme asceticismô depriving the body of food, drink, sex, etc. Even married people were advised to abstain from sexual relations. By so doing, the person could eventually free himself from the limitations of the material body. Paul says any such means of salvation is elementary foolishness.

B. Compare the Meaning of Words and Phrases with How the Same Author Uses These Words and Phrases in Different Books.

It is always helpful to know the author of the book you are studying since he is likely to use words and phrases in one book the same way he uses them in other books. However, there are exceptions, and we cannot make a blanket rule which applies to every case. In every situation the context must govern our understanding. I have taken another letter of Paul, *Ephesians*, and compared it with *Colossians*. Both of these letters were written while Paul was in his first Roman imprisonment.

Ephesians

1⁷ In Him we have **redemption** through His blood, **the forgiveness of our trespasses**,
 10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the *summing up of all things* in Christ, **things in the heavens and things on the earth**.

15 **For this reason** I too, **having heard of the faith** in the Lord Jesus which *exists* among you and your **love for all the saints**,

I ¹⁶ do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention *of you* in my prayers; ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a **spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him**.

¹⁸ *I pray that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, „what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

¹⁹ and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might ²⁰ which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, ²¹ far above **all rule and authority and power and dominion**, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

Colossians

1¹⁴ in whom we have **redemption, the forgiveness of sins**.
²⁰ and through Him to *reconcile all things* to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I say*, whether **things on earth or things in heaven**.

³ We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,
⁴ **since we heard of your faith** in Christ Jesus and **the love which you have for all the saints**; ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven,

9 For this reason also, since the day we heard *of it*, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the **knowledge of His will** in all **spiritual wisdom and understanding**, joyously ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

¹⁶ whether **thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities**ô all things have been created through Him and for Him.

Ephesians

2¹ And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.³ **Among them we too all formerly lived in** the lusts of our flesh, **indulging** the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,⁵ **even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ** (by grace you have been saved),

¹¹ Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," *which is performed in the flesh by human hands*

¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,¹⁵ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances*, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace,

³ that by revelation there was made known to me the **mystery**, as I wrote before in brief.⁴ By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into **the mystery of Christ**,⁵ *which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit,*

⁶ *to be specific*, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellowmembers of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

³⁸ To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,⁹ and to bring to light what is the administration of **the mystery** which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;

Colossians

1²¹ And although you were formerly **alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds,**²² yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach

2¹³ When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,¹⁴ having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

2¹¹ 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;**

1²⁵ so that I might fully carry out the *preaching of the word of God,*²⁶ *that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints,*²⁷ to whom God willed to make known what is **the riches of the glory of this** mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

2² that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and *attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself,*³ *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

Ephesians

4¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the **head**, *even* Christ, ¹⁶ **from whom the whole body**, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the **growth** of the body for the building up of itself in love.

4²² that, in reference to your former manner of life, **you lay aside the old self**, which is *being corrupted* in accordance with the lusts of deceit, ²³ and that you *be renewed* in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and **put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.**

5 ³ **But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints;** ⁴ and *there must be no* filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. ⁵ For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

5²² Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body. ²⁴ But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, ²⁶ so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. ²⁸ So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; ²⁹ for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church, ³⁰ because we are members of His body.

6¹ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

Colossians

2¹⁹ and not holding fast to the **head, from whom the entire body**, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a **growth** which is from God.

3⁸ But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, *and* abusive speech from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you **laid aside the old self** with its *evil* practices, ¹⁰ and **have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—**

3⁵ Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to **immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.** ⁶ For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience.

3¹⁸ Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.

²⁰ Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.

⁴Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

⁵Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; ⁶not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. ⁷With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men,

⁸knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.

⁹And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

²¹Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.

²² Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who *merely* please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men,

²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

⁴¹ Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.

One can see that any serious study of Colossians must also include the study of Ephesians and vice versa (the other way around). The interpreter can use the words and phrases of one book to understand the meaning of words and phrases in the other book with the warning that the immediate context must be the deciding factor, as our study of *stoicheion* (above) illustrated.

C. Compare Words and Phrases in Books by Different Authors.

Not only can we compare words and phrases in books by the same author, it is also helpful to compare the works of other authors. Consider the word, *ōshadowō* found in both *Colossians* and *Hebrews*.

¹⁶Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day ¹⁷ things which are a *mere shadow of what is to come*; but the **substance belongs to Christ**. (Colossians 2:16-17 NASB)

⁴Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; ⁵ who serve a **copy and shadow of the heavenly things**, just as Moses was warned *by God* when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "SEE," He says, "THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN." (Hebrews 8:4-5 NASB)

For the Law, since it has *only* a **shadow of the good things to come** and not **the very form of things**, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. (Hebrews 10:1 NASB)

From the preceding texts, we may conclude that the **shadow** (Col. 2: 17) refers to the things ordained in the Mosaic administration^ō ceremonial regulations concerning food and drink, festival days, new moons, or Sabbath days. **What is to come** (Col. 2: 17) refers to the **heavenly things** (Heb. 8: 5) or **the good things to come** (Heb. 10: 1). The **heavenly things** are the same as **the very form of things** or

the substance which belongs to Christ. All the copies in the OT pointed to Christ who fulfilled these copies. But now that the substance has come, the Colossians should not focus their attention upon the copies or shadows, but upon Christ Himself.

For another example, consider the use of the verb **sin** in Romans 6 and 1 John 3. What are Paul and John saying about the relationship of the believer to sin? Are they teaching sinless perfection?

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?² May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?³ Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.⁵ For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection,⁶ knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;⁷ for he who has died is freed from sin. (Romans 6:1-7 NASB)

Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.⁵ You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.⁶ No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.⁷ Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous;⁸ the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.⁹ No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. (1 John 3:4-9 NASB)

D. Use the Analogy of Faith to Determine the Meaning of Words and Phrases

What is **the body of the flesh** in Colossians 2: 11? The NIV renders the verse in the following way:

In him you were also circumcised, in **the putting off of the sinful nature**, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, (Colossians 2:11 NIV).

Therefore, in the opinion of the NIV translators, **the removal of the body of the flesh** is equivalent to (the same thing as) **the putting off of the sinful nature**. This **putting off** can be accomplished only by **the circumcision of Christ**. But this begs another question: What is **the circumcision of Christ**? For that matter, what is **circumcision**, and what did it represent to those who practiced it?

The question concerning the meaning of circumcision must be answered according to the **analogy of Scripture** or the **analogy of faith**.²⁴

The analogy of the faith implies that the broader context of any passage of Scripture is the whole Bible. The word *context* in the English language literally means *woven together*. Therefore, we believe that the Bible has been woven together in such a way that every text of Scripture relates in some way to every other text of Scripture with no internal contradictions or incoherency. Therefore, what we learn about circumcision in the OT has a very important bearing for every mention of circumcision in the NT.

In the Old Covenant, all male Israelites (even slaves and servants) were required to be circumcised.

²⁴ The **analogy of faith** is another expression for **Step 4** in the **Steps of Exegesis: Relate message to broader biblical and theological framework** (Wolvaardt, *HTIB*, p. 79). For a more detailed explanation of the analogy of faith, see my *Hermeneutics—Principles of Biblical Interpretation, “The Analogy of Faith”*, pp. 3-11. The analogy of faith basically means that Scripture interprets Scripture.

And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a *servant* who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants. (Genesis 17:12 NASB)

Anyone refusing circumcision would be **cut off** or excluded from the nation of Israel.

But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be **cut off** from his people; he has broken My covenant. (Genesis 17:14 NASB)

In circumcision, the flesh covering the male sex organ (the **foreskin**) was **cut off** or removed. Therefore, either the **foreskin** would be removed or the **person himself** would be removed. This was not simply an external sign that the nation (represented by the male population) belonged to God. Some Sudanese have the marking of their tribe cut into their foreheads, identifying them as belonging to a certain tribe in Sudan. I am not aware of what this marking means, but it likely symbolizes certain obligations and responsibilities to the tribe. Likewise, circumcision in the OT was far more than an external badge of membership hidden under one's clothing. Rather, **it symbolized the covenant obligations** of the nation and what **kind** of nation Israel was **supposed** to be—namely, a holy nation. The removal of the flesh from the male sex organ symbolized the removal of the **sinful flesh** or the **sinful nature**—the obligation to keep God's law. How do we know this? From the OT we learn that the Israelites were commanded to circumcise or remove the foreskins of their **hearts**.

So **circumcise your heart**, and stiffen your neck no longer. (Deuteronomy 10:16 NASB)

Circumcise yourselves to the LORD And **remove the foreskins of your heart**, Men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Or else My wrath will go forth like fire And burn with none to quench it, Because of the **evil of your deeds**." (Jeremiah 4:4 NASB)

But although they were **responsible** to circumcise their hearts, they were **unable** to do so. Although Israelites could circumcise the male sex organ, they could not circumcise the heart which represented **the whole person or inner being**. Only God could do this. Thus, they were promised that one day this inward, heart circumcision would be accomplished by **divine initiative, not by human effort**.

Moreover **the LORD your God** will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live. (Deuteronomy 30:6 NASB)

From the NT we learn that **true** circumcision was not the **outward** circumcision of literal flesh but circumcision of the heart by the Spirit.

²⁸For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. ²⁹But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, **by the Spirit**, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. (Romans 2:28-29 NASB)

The **circumcision of the heart by the Spirit** is the kind of circumcision Paul is talking about in Colossians 2: 11, the circumcision made **without hands**—that is, without **human** hands using a sharp knife. Moreover, if a person is not circumcised in heart, he will be **cut off** from the Lord's people on the Day of Judgment just as uncircumcised Israelites were physically cut off from the nation of Israel (Gen. 17: 14).

By using the analogy of faith—Scripture interprets Scripture—we now see that the circumcision of the OT symbolized **regeneration**—the renewal of the heart by the Holy Spirit (Tit. 3: 5). As the circumcision of the OT symbolized the cutting off of the sinful flesh, water baptism in the NT symbolizes the renewal and cleansing of the whole person. We are, as it were, raised from the dead

and made alive—cleansed by the **washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit** (Tit. 3: 5; synonymous parallelism). Therefore, we cannot attribute (give as a quality) saving benefits to water baptism any more than the Israelites could attribute saving benefits to circumcision. Just as true circumcision in the OT was circumcision of the heart, true baptism is baptism by the Holy Spirit. The ritual itself will not save us; only God can save us through the supernatural act of the Holy Spirit.

In **Colossians 2: 12-13**, Paul assumes more than mere *water* baptism but rather *spiritual* baptism which is accompanied by **faith**. Nevertheless, he uses the external sign as the analogy of what happens to the true believer.

¹²having 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. ¹³ When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, (Colossians 2:12-13 NASB)

As Christ was crucified and buried, so the believer is also crucified and buried with Christ; and as Christ is raised from the dead, the believer is raised from the dead with Christ. From the construction of v. 13, to be **dead in your transgressions** is equivalent to being uncircumcised, an **uncircumcision** that cannot refer to the state of being physically uncircumcised. Rather, it refers to the uncircumcision of the human heart (see OT references above).

Therefore we can see that it really takes the whole Bible to interpret *one part or one word* of the Bible. The meaning of words and phrases will become more evident to us as we familiarize ourselves with the whole Bible.

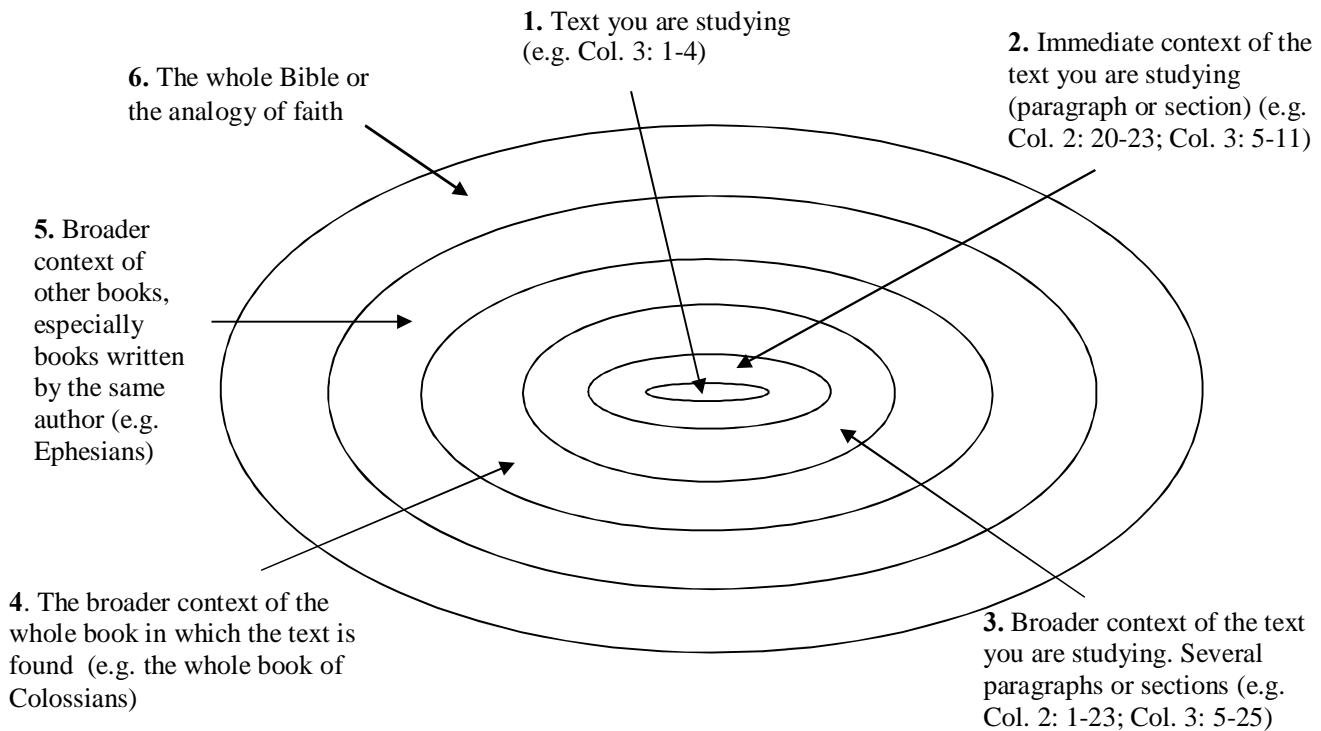
III. Literary Context

If we are taking only a section of *Colossians* as our preaching, teaching, or devotional text, we must determine where the selected text fits into the whole book. In other words, why is *this* text in *this* particular location in the book and *nowhere* else.²⁵ I would like to suggest that the student form the habit of teaching, preaching, or having devotional readings from whole books of the Bible rather than selected texts. The only way to determine why a selected text is in a certain portion of the book is to be thoroughly acquainted with the whole book; therefore, why not preach, teach, or study the whole book rather than a few selected passages from the book? Determining the reason for its specific position in the book will require careful exegesis.

Studying the literary context is analogous to throwing a stone into a lake of still water while watching the ripples radiate outward from the point of impact. The point of the stone's impact is the text you are studying, while the ripples represent the immediate and broader context of the text in question. The closer the circle is to the center (your text), the more it influences your passage.²⁶

²⁵ Daniel Doriani, *Getting the Message—A Plan for Interpreting and Applying the Bible*, pp. 35-36

²⁶ Doriani, p. 33



A. Six Principles Governing the Study of the Literary Context ²⁷

1. Interpret Single Verses in Light of Their Immediate Context.

For example, who does **Him** refer to in L46? According to the immediate context, **him** refers to the **Son** in L42 (Col. 1: 13-16).

- (41) ¹³ For He rescued us from the domain of darkness,
 (42) and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,
 (43) ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
(44) 15 He is the image of the invisible God,
 (45) the firstborn of all creation.
 (46) ¹⁶ For by **Him** all things were created,
 (47) *both* in the heavens and on earth,

But who is **He** in L41? To determine this, we must back up another verse 12 where we find that **the Father** is the *antecedent*—the word occurring before the pronoun; the word to which the pronoun refers.

- (38) joyously ¹² giving thanks to **the Father**,
 (39) who has qualified us to share in the inheritance
 (40) of the saints in Light.
 (41) ¹³ For **He** rescued us from the domain of darkness,


2. Interpret Paragraphs and Episodes in Light of the Paragraphs or Events around Them



a. Consider Colossians 2: 16-17 (L157-163). How do we interpret these two verses? First, we know that **therefore** is a *reason indicator* pointing to something said previously. Therefore, we will go

²⁷ Doriani, pp. 34-39

back to the *previous* paragraph (Col. 2: 8-15) to see if we can discover some clues. Before we do this, however, we must examine the text in question.

(157) **16** Therefore Referring to something he said previously which we have not fully determined

(158) no one is to act as **YOUR** judge 

(159) in regard to food or drink  

(160) or in respect to a festival or a new moon

(161) or a Sabbath day—

(162) ¹⁷ things which are a mere shadow of what is to come;

(163) but the **substance** belongs to Christ.


Someone is judging the Colossians. How are they judging them?

They are judging them about what they eat and drink and about the keeping of certain days and festivals.

According to the immediate context, the **things** mentioned in L159-161 are a **mere shadow**. A shadow of what?

A **shadow** is only a mere outline of something that has more **substance**. If I see my wife's shadow, I don't hug the shadow; I hug my wife who made the shadow. Specifically, I hug my wife's body. In the Greek, the word *soma* (body) occurs in L163 and is translated **substance**. Thus, the laws concerning food, drink, festivals, or a Sabbath day were shadows of a more **substantial** body, the body of Christ, or **Christ Himself**.

b. Now let's consider Colossians 2: 8-15 (L126-156) which occurs *before* the text under examination.


(126) **8** See to it that no one takes you captive 


(127) through philosophy and empty deception, Taken captive **through** or by means of *philosophy and empty deception*


(128) according to the tradition of men, Elementary principles is also used in L175. See Gal. 4: 3,9

(129) according to the elementary principles of the world, Note the repetition of **according to**. *Philosophy and empty deception, the tradition of men, and the elementary principles of the world* are contrasted to Christ.

(130) **rather than** according to **Christ**.

(131) ⁹ For **in Him** 

(132) all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 

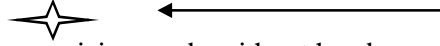
(133) ¹⁰ **AND in Him** 

(134) **you have been made complete**, Notice that in Christ the Colossians were **complete**. The false teachers, on the other hand, were insisting that they had to **add** something to Christ's rules and regulations about food, ceremonial laws, worshipping angels, seeing visions, severe treatment of the body, etc. Thus, Paul says that none of this is necessary because Christ completes them.

(135) **AND He** is the head over all rule and authority;



(136) ¹¹ **AND in Him** you were **ALSO** circumcised



(137) with a circumcision made without hands,



(138) in the removal of the body of the flesh



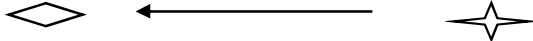
(139) by the circumcision of Christ;



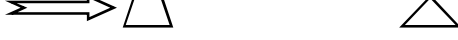
(140) ¹² **having been buried with Him** in baptism,



(141) in which you were also raised up with Him



(142) through faith in the working of **God**,



(143) who raised **Him** from the dead.



(144) ¹³ When you were dead



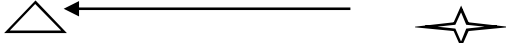
(145) in your transgressions



(146) and the uncircumcision of your flesh,



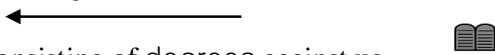
(147) **He** made you alive together **with Him**,



(148) having forgiven us all our transgressions,



(149) ¹⁴ having canceled out the certificate of debt



(150) consisting of decrees against us,

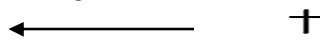


(151) which was hostile to us;

(152) **AND He** has taken it out of the way,



(153) having nailed it to the cross.



made without hands is an analogy for *without human effort*. The Israelite could be circumcised in the flesh by human hands, but only God could circumcise his heart **without human hands**.

Since the false teachers laid such emphasis on Jewish ceremonialism, it is also likely that they required **circumcision** as well, as did the false teachers in Galatia (see Gal. 5: 1-11). Here Paul says that the Colossians were already **circumcised** through faith in Christ. Only Christ can remove the sinful flesh (sinful disposition) *not* man-made religion (cf. L187). Thus, the circumcision of Christ is a *spiritual* circumcision.

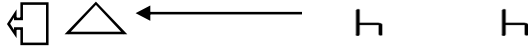
Notice the repetition of **AND IN Him** and **WITH Him** as well as **AND He**. The entire passage is saturated with Christ and later with God the Father. Therefore, Christ is all we need.

Through faith (L142) is instrumental. That is, through the instrument of faith, we are raised up with Christ. Our faith does not save us, but we lay hold of Christ by means of faith.

All our transgressions are forgiven. We don't need to obey a list of man-made rules to achieve what Christ has already achieved.

What is this certificate of debt or decrees against us? The law of God stands against us as a certificate declaring our indebtedness to God. We **owe** God our obedience, but we have not obeyed. Christ takes our debt and nails it to His cross (cf. Eph. 2: 14-15; Mk. 15: 26). See further exegesis of this text below.

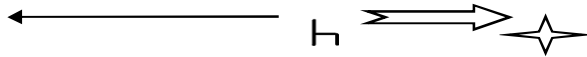
(154) ¹⁵ When **He** had disarmed the rulers and authorities,



(155) **He** made a public display of them,



(156) having triumphed over them **THROUGH Him.**



Notice all the verbs whose action is in the past: **made alive, having forgiven, having cancelled, has taken, having nailed, had disarmed, made a public display, having triumphed.** Christ has already accomplished redemption.

We have not even scratched the surface of this paragraph, but at least you can see how Colossians 2: 8-15 helps us understand what Paul says immediately afterwards in Colossians 2: 16-17 and further (vv. 18-23). The false teachers were trying to convince the Colossians that *something more* was needed for salvation and sanctification. Christ was *not enough*. But in the preceding paragraph, Colossians 2: 8-15, it is crystal clear that Christ is the **author and perfecter** of our faith (Heb. 12: 2). We are **complete** in Him, needing nothing more. The repetition of **in Him, with Him, and through Him** should be noted. To be right with God, there is nothing left for us to do except to believe by faith in what Christ has done for us. This is the burden of Paul's message.

Alternative Diagram for Colossians 2: 13-14

(144)	¹³ When you were dead	[a]	
(145)	in your <u>transgressions</u>		[b]
(146)	and the <u>uncircumcision of your flesh</u> ,		[b]
(147)	He made you alive together with Him,	[a]	
(148)	having forgiven us		[c]
	all our <u>transgressions</u> ,		[b]
(149)	¹⁴ having canceled out		[c]
	the <u>certificate of debt</u>		[b]
(150)	consisting of decrees against us,		[d]
(151)	which was hostile to us;		[d]
(152)	and He has taken it out of the way ,		[c]
(153)	having nailed it to the cross.		[c]

3. Try to Determine Why Your Text Belongs Precisely Where It Is and Nowhere Else.

a. Consider Colossians 2: 1-5, focusing on L106-117.

- (100) ¹ For I want you to know
 (101) how great a struggle I have on your behalf
 (102) and for those who are at Laodicea,
 (103) and for all those who have not personally seen my face,
 (104) ² that their hearts may be encouraged,
 (105) having been knit together in love,
 (106) **and attaining to all the wealth that comes**
 (107) **from the full assurance of understanding,**
 (108) **resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery,**
 (109) **that is, Christ Himself,**
 (110) ³ **in whom are hidden all the treasures**
 (111) **of wisdom and knowledge.**
 (112) ⁴ **I say this so that no one will delude you**

(113) with persuasive argument.

- (114) ⁵For even though I am absent in body,
 (115) nevertheless I am with you in spirit,
 (116) rejoicing to see your good discipline
 (117) and the stability of your faith in Christ.

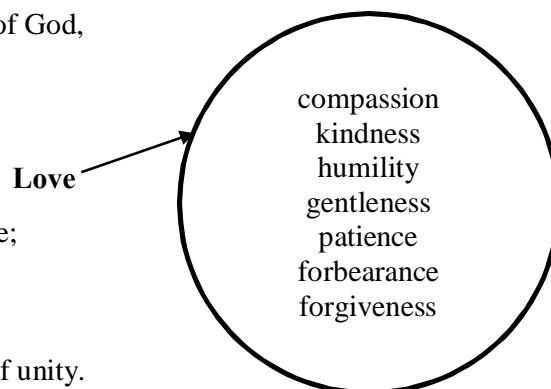
Since we have studied Colossians 2: 8-23, it should be clear *why* Paul makes this statement (highlighted in bold letters) here. He is just about to explain the difference between **true wisdom and knowledge** found only in Christ and the *so-called wisdom and "secret" knowledge* of man-made religion promoted by the false teachers. The false teaching in Colossae a mixture of Jewish legalism, the worship of angels, and Gnostic asceticism, etc. was **persuading** some of the Colossian Christians to go astray from the simplicity of their faith in Christ. Notice v. 4, ōI say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argumentō (Colossians 2:4 NASB) \Rightarrow

What was the **persuasive argument**? From the literary context, we really don't know until we come to Colossians 2: 8-23 which describes several aspects of the **elementary principles** including dietary restrictions, the legalistic keeping of certain ceremonial days and festivals, worship of angels, visions, etc. which the false teachers were using to **persuade** the Colossians to join their religious club. Therefore, Colossians 2: 1-5 occurs just where it does and nowhere else to **introduce** what Paul has to say about the Gnostic heresy, a legalistic means of salvation.

b. We have already dealt with Colossians 2: 8-15 in detail. After this section, Paul then says, **Therefore** in v. 16. Considering what Christ had accomplished without any help from the Colossian Christians, it was **therefore** foolish to submit themselves to man-made rules designed to save themselves. Thus, Colossians 2: 16-17 belongs exactly where it is as the **conclusion** to Colossians 2: 8-15.

3. From Colossians 3: 12-14, why does Paul place the attribute of **love** after the other attributes of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and forgiveness? Notice that love is last on the list, but should it be first?

- (224) **12** So, as those who have been chosen of God,
 (225) holy and beloved,
 (226) put on a heart of compassion, kindness,
 (227) humility, gentleness and patience;
 (228) ¹³bearing with one another,
 (229) and forgiving each other,
 (230) whoever has a complaint against anyone;
 (231) just as the Lord forgave you,
 (232) so also should you.
 (233) ¹⁴**Beyond all these things**
 (234) *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity.



In the list of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5: 22-23), love comes first (see also 1 Cor. 13 and Rom. 13: 8). Here Paul is saying that love is the **unifying principle** for all the other attributes mentioned in vv. 12-14. To put it another way, love is the **glue** which binds all the other graces together. Without love, we can go through the outward motions of compassion, kindness, patience, forgiveness, etc; but without genuine love they will be hypocritical.

4. Look for Thematic Statements that Introduce or Interpret an Entire Section.

A **thematic statement** is a statement which summarizes or describes a larger section.

a. Colossians 2:6-7 NASB

Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk in Him, ⁷ having been firmly rooted *and now* being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, *and* overflowing with gratitude.ö

I am suggesting the above verses as a **thematic statement** for Chapter 2. Why? Because in the remainder of chapter 2, Paul explains what it means to **walk** in Christ and to be **established in your faith**. To walk in Christ means that they must not be taken **captive** to false philosophies according to the **traditions of men** and not **according to Christ**. To walk in Christ also requires that they understand that they are **complete** (L34) in Christ alone and do not need to obey any man-made rules and regulations (L157-187) to make themselves complete. **The body of the flesh** (L138) has been removed by Christ in spiritual **circumcision** (L136-139). No man-made religion will be effective against **fleshly indulgence** (L187).

b. Colossians 3: 1-4 serves as a thematic statement for Colossians 3: 5- 4: 1

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³ For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

⁴ When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4 NASB)

Immediately after this thematic statement and through 4: 1, Paul gives practical instructions and commands for living the Christian life. The only way to live it is to keep our minds focused on Christ and the future grace in store for us at the consummation of His kingdom.

5. Look for Repeated Words or Phrases²⁸

We have demonstrated this principle in our analysis of Colossians 2: 8-15 and 2: 9-23. The repetition of pronouns referring to Christ or God the Father is pervasive throughout the passage (**in Him, with Him, He, who**—pronouns referring either to Christ or God the Father. Notice also the repetition of **all things** and **heaven and earth** in Colossians 1: 15-20 indicating that God has reconciled the whole created universe to Himself through Christ.

6. Locate your text in the purpose of its section and the whole book.

a. Consider Paul's exhortations to wives, husbands, fathers, children, and slaves in Colossians 3: 18-25. Why does Paul insert these exhortations here rather than at the first of the book?

¹⁸**Wives**, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹**Husbands**, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. ²⁰**Children**, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. ²¹**Fathers**, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart. ²²**Slaves**, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who *merely* please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord

²⁸ Doriani, pp. 34-39

Christ whom you serve.²⁵ For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. (Colossians 3:18-25 NASB)

Without the context, these commands seem like a random list of do's and don'ts. But look back at the immediate context of Colossians 3: 12-17.

¹²So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³ bearing **with one another**, and forgiving **each other**, whoever has a complaint **against anyone**; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. ¹⁴ Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. ¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (Colossians 3:12-17 NASB)

Therefore, the commands for husbands, wives, et al, must be interpreted within the context of Colossians 3: 12-17. What does a wife's submission to her husband consist of? It consists of the qualities mentioned in vv. 12-17: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and thanksgiving. What does the husband's love for his wife consist of? The same qualities. Children's obedience to parents? Same qualities. And so on. Thus, we see that the instructions to individual members of the family and to slaves is located exactly where it needs to be: following the more general character qualities which should be true of all Christians. Paul simply proceeds from the **general** to the **specific**. There are general principles of behavior which apply to **everyone** (vv. 12-17), but the application of these general principles are specific for **each individual**. In other words, the humility of a father toward his child will not be applied in the same way as the humility of the child toward his father. The father is the head of the family while the child must be in subordination to the father. Yet, both father and child are exhorted to be humble. In the same sense, a master may not think that he must be humble toward his slave, but Paul says otherwise. Humility would require that the master refrain from unjust accusations and threats (Eph. 6: 9).

b. Consider the following text from Colossians 2: 13-14. Why does Paul say this **here** in this particular section rather than elsewhere? We have looked at this text previously, but it requires more explanation.

(144) ¹³ When you were *dead*

(145) in your transgressions

(146) and the uncircumcision of your flesh,

(147) **He** made you *alive together* **WITH Him**,

(148) having forgiven us all our transgressions,

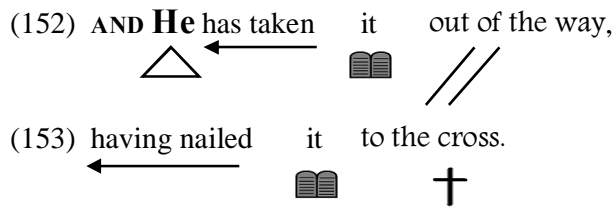
(149) ¹⁴ having canceled out the certificate of debt

(150) consisting of decrees against us,

(151) which was hostile to us;

¹³ When you were **dead** a
 in your transgressions b
 and the uncircumcision of your flesh, b
 He made you **alive together** with Him, a

having forgiven us all our transgressions, c
having canceled out the certificate of debt c
 consisting of decrees **against us**, d
 which was **hostile to us**; d
 and He has taken it out of the way, c
having nailed it to the cross. c



Chiasm—“c” consists of the past tense verbs of L148-149 and L152-153 (**having forgiven, having canceled out, has taken, having nailed**) coupled with **transgressions, certificate of debt, it, and which** pronouns referring to the certificate of debt. The “d” part is the effect of this certificate. It was **against us or hostile to us**.

Whatever the **certificate of debt** was, it was **against us** and **hostile to us**. However, this certificate can **no longer** be against us because God the Father (cf. v. 2) **has taken it out of the way** and **nailed it to the cross** of Christ. This **certificate**, therefore, no longer has any relevance for the Christian as far as judgment and condemnation are concerned. Whatever it is, it is not **hostile** to us as believers. But what is it?

It is helpful at this point to refer back to our diagram on p. 35, the **ripple principle** of studying the broader context of a passage **5**. Broader context of other books, especially books written by the same author. Or, you could say we are applying the **analogy of faith**. In the epistle to the **Ephesians**, Paul says,

For He Himself is our peace, who made **both groups into one** and broke down the **barrier of the dividing wall**, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances*, so that in Himself He might make the two into **one new man**, *thus* establishing peace, (Ephesians 2:14-15 NASB)

Both groups and **the two** refer to Jews and Gentiles who are reconciled to God and to one another in the gospel. The **Law of commandments contained in ordinances** seems to be an obvious reference to the **ceremonial laws** concerning foods, festivals, ritual purity, and circumcision—a **dividing wall** between Jews and Gentiles. This **barrier** is now broken down, thus enabling both Jew and Gentile to make up **one new man** in Christ. Gentiles no longer have to obey Jewish ceremonial laws, including circumcision, to be part of the covenant people. Many commentators interpret the passage in this manner (William Hendriksen and Calvin, to name only two). The **Law of commandments contained in ordinances** are the **ceremonial laws** of Moses pertaining to food, circumcision, etc. which distinguished between Jew and Gentile.

If this interpretation is applied to **transgressions, certificate of debt, and decrees** in Colossians 2, it would certainly fit the **immediate context** of 2: 16-23. In these verses, Paul tells the Colossians not to allow anyone to be their **judge** concerning foods, festivals, Sabbath days, or ritual customs pertaining to clean and unclean (**don't handle...don't touch**). If such laws have been **taken away** and **nailed to the cross**, then they can no longer be used as records of our indebtedness—**a certificate of debt** or judgments against our behavior.

Paul, therefore, forbids the Colossians to yield to such outmoded, obsolete requirements which have been done away in Christ. Hendriksen and Calvin also interpret Colossians 2: 13-14 in the same way as Ephesians 2: 15, as a reference to **ceremonial laws**.

But I see problems with this interpretation. According to the structure of the passage (see above), **having canceled out the certificate of debt** (L149) is equivalent to (the same as) **having forgiven all our transgressions** (L148). Many questions arise:

- Is Paul referring only to transgressions of the **ceremonial law**?

- Are only these types of transgressions **forgiven** (L148)?
- Are they the only transgressions **nailed to the cross** of Christ (L153)?
- Furthermore, were the Colossians spiritually **dead** (L144) because they had broken ceremonial laws?

It is, therefore, doubtful to me that Paul (in Colossians) is limiting the meaning of **certificate of debt** and **decrees against us** to ceremonial laws. I believe that he is speaking more generally of the *law of God* as it was revealed to both Jews and Gentiles in different ways. To the Jews the law was *formally codified* in the Law of Moses that included ceremonial institutions pointing to the sacrifice of Christ. To the Gentiles, the law of God was not given in a formal document, but was revealed to the conscience (Rom. 1: 18-32 demonstrating the use of the analogy of faith). Reading the OT prophets (again, the analogy of faith), we see clearly that God did not send the nation into exile because they failed to bring their *ritual sacrifices*. Rather, they were exiled because of *moral corruption* and their failure to take care of the orphan, the widow, and the poor (cf. Isaiah 1:13-20; Jeremiah 7:21-23).

Looking at these OT texts, we get the distinct impression that God was far more concerned about the keeping of His moral law than He was with ceremonial institutions (although He was concerned with both. Remember poor Uzzah; 2 Sam. 6: 6-7). The reason for this is that the ceremonial requirements were given for the purpose of ensuring obedience to the moral code, not the other way around. In other words, the moral code did not have the purpose of ensuring obedience to ceremonial rituals. That this is so is evident in Isaiah's criticism of the apostate nation in Isaiah 1. God no longer recognized the validity of their rituals because they had broken His moral law. It is also evident in the fact that Christians are no longer required to keep certain ceremonial regulations about food, drink, clothing, farming, etc. which are included in the case laws. Yet, our obedience to moral commands is still required.

I am not alone in this interpretation. Some NT scholars have come to the same conclusion.²⁹ Commenting on Ephesians 2: 14-15, Charles Hodge makes the following observation:

The law, however, is viewed in a **twofold** aspect in this connection. First, it was that **original covenant of works**, demanding perfect obedience, whose conditions must be satisfied in order to the reconciliation of men with God. Christ by being made under the law, Gal. 4: 4, and fulfilling all righteousness, has redeemed those who were under the law. **He delivered them from the obligation of fulfilling its demands as the condition of their justification before God.** In this sense they are not under the law. Compare Rom. 6: 14; 7: 4, 6; Gal. 5:18; Col. 2: 14. But **secondly**, as Christ abolished the law as a **covenant of works** by fulfilling its conditions, so he abolished the **Mosaic law** by fulfilling all its types and shadows. He was the end of the law in **both these aspects**, and therefore, it ceased to bind the people of God in **either** of these forms. Of this doctrine the whole of the New Testament is full. The epistles especially are in large measure devoted to proving that believers are not under the law in **either** of these senses, but under grace. Thus it is that Christ is our peace. **The abolition of the law as a covenant of works reconciles us to God; the abolition of the Mosaic law** [the ceremonial element of the Mosaic Law] **removes the wall between the Jews and Gentiles.** This is what is here taught. By abolishing the law of commandments, i.e. the law in both its forms [moral and ceremonial], the apostle says, Christ has, first, of the twain [two] made one new man, v. 15; and secondly, he has reconciled both unto God in one body by the cross, v. 16.

The abolishing, therefore, of which the apostle speaks, **does not consist in setting the law aside**, or suspending it by a sovereign, executive act. It is a causing it to cease; or rendering it **no longer binding by satisfying its demands**, so that we are **judicially** free from it; free not by the act of a sovereign but by the sentence of a judge; not by mere pardon, but by justification. The idea probably is that the law in **all its**

²⁹ At this point, I am invoking Step 5 of Exegesis: "Read interpretations of others; e.g. commentaries"; see Wolvaardt, *HTIB*, p. 79).

compass, and in all its forms, so far as it was a **covenant** prescribing the conditions of salvation, is **abolished**. The law of which the apostle here speaks is **not exclusively the Mosaic law** [i.e. the ceremonial law]. It is the law which **binds the heathen and which is written on their hearts**. It is the law from which the death of Christ redeems men. But redemption is **not mere deliverance from Judaism** [ceremonies and rituals] and therefore the law from which we are freed by the death of Christ is **not merely the law of Moses** [i.e. ceremonial law]. Deliverance from the Mosaic institutions could not have the effects ascribed to the freedom from the law of which Paul speaks. It could not secure reconciliation to God, justification, and holiness, all of which, according to the apostle, flow from the redemption effected by Christ. The antithetical [opposing] ideas always presented in Paul's writings, on this subject, are the law and grace, the law and the gospel, the system which says: "Do and live," and the system which says: "Believe and live;" as, however, the form in which the law was ever present to the minds of the early Christians was that contained in the Mosaic institutions; as all, who in that day were legalists, were Judaizers, and **as the Mosaic economy was included in the law which Christ abolished**, in many cases (as in the passage before us), special reference is had to the law **in that particular form**. But in teaching that men cannot be saved by obedience to the law of Moses, Paul taught that we cannot be saved by obedience to the law **in any form**. Or rather, by teaching that salvation is not of works of any kind, but of grace and through faith, he teaches it is not by the specific, ceremonial works enjoined in the law of Moses.³⁰

Nothing in the statement above should be interpreted to mean that the moral law of God is no longer binding on the believer. Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments," and His commandments included a detailed exposition of the OT law in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matt. 5: 17-20). But what Hodge *does* mean is that the Christian is no longer under the law *as a covenant document* demanding perfect performance. This is what Paul means when he says, "For sin shall not be master over you, for you are **not under law but under grace**" (Romans 6:14 NASB). The law as a covenant document demanding performance has been superseded (replaced) by a new and better covenant in which the obligations have already been accomplished through the active and passive obedience of Christ (cf. *Hebrews*). This does not imply that we are now lawless; rather, through the atoning work of Christ the Holy Spirit is given to us as a guarantee of continuing faith which leads to an obedient life.

Commenting on Colossians 2:13-14, F.F. Bruce says,

Paul insisted that Jews, who had received the divine law by revelation, and pagans, who had not received it, not in the same form, at least, were alike morally bankrupt before God and equally in need of his pardoning grace. Jews had disobeyed his will in the form in which they knew it (**the law**); pagans had disobeyed it in the form in which they knew it (**the inner voice of conscience**)....The sins which have now been forgiven represented, so to speak, **a mountain of bankruptcy** which those who had incurred it were bound to acknowledge but could never have any hope of discharging. They had violated the ordinances of the law, and nothing that they might do could afford redress. But Christ wiped the slate clean and gave them a fresh start. He took that signed acknowledgement of indebtedness which stood as a perpetual witness against them and cancelled it by his death. It might even be said that he took the **document, ordinances and all, and nailed it to his cross** as an act of triumphant defiance in the face of those blackmailing powers that were holding it over men and women in order to command their allegiance.

There is perhaps an allusion here to the fact that our Lord's own accusation was fixed to his cross. Jesus nails the accusation against his people to the cross, just as his own accusation had been nailed there.³¹

When we consider the barrier between Jew and Gentile, far more was involved than the Jewish ritual requirements of sacrifice and circumcision. The Jews hated the Gentiles (calling them "dogs"), and the Gentiles hated the Jews. It is quite possible that some of this hatred was rooted in the ceremonial requirements distinguishing Jews from Gentiles. These laws should have humbled the Jews, but had,

³⁰ Charles Hodge, *Ephesians*, pp. 130-131, 134-135 (emphasis and words in brackets mine).

³¹ F.F. Bruce, *Colossians*, pp. 109-110; emphasis mine

instead, made them proud and arrogant (the "frozen chosen" syndrome). Jewish-Gentile relations were not improved by the fact that Jews would not even come under the roof of an uncircumcised Gentile (Acts 10: 28 not found in OT law) or that Gentiles could be put to death for entering into the Jewish courts of the temple.³²

Nevertheless, racial hatred was the outgrowth of the more radical hatred of man for man; and more fundamentally, man's hatred for God. Far more would be required to reconcile Jews and Gentiles than the mere removal of ritual requirements. You cannot make friends out of bitter enemies that easily! Too much water had gone under the bridge (too much bad history) for attitudes to change overnight. A radical change of heart would have to take place, a change of heart which could only be affected through the removal of enmity between God and man. And this could only happen if the debt of man's sin was nailed to the cross of Christ. By removing the **certificate of debt** which kept man at a distance, God reconciled **men to Himself**. But when this happened, He also reconciled **men to other men**. Men hate other men primarily because they hate God first, but when the love of God fills their hearts, they are rendered capable of loving other men as themselves.

We must now return to the interpretive principle: **Locate Your Text in the Purpose of Its Section and the Whole Book.**

We may have trouble seeing how Colossians 2: 13-14 relates to the exhortations in 2: 16-23. The connection, I believe, is this: Addition by subtraction. Christ **unites** men together by **removing** rules, regulations, and their violations and by substituting His righteousness in their place. The apostate teachers, on the other hand, **divide** men by **adding** new rules, regulations and violations. They become judges (L158) who add multiple regulations concerning what others can eat and drink, what clothes to wear (other than considerations of decency), rules concerning the observance of the Sabbath day, etc. Such added restrictions were sure to bring unnecessary controversy and a "clubbish" mentality to the church—*ous* versus *them*.

To be sure, some of these regulations, not all, had been given to the Israelites in the Mosaic economy but only to prevent the nation from being absorbed into Canaanite idolatry. But now that Christ has come with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, such regulations were passé (out of date and no longer relevant) and would have the effect of moving the church backwards rather than forwards—backwards into the outmoded Mosaic system characterized by early childhood. Paul had seen this before. When confronting the Galatian heresy earlier, he had to deal with the same kind of Jewish legalism within the church (cf. Gal. 4).

⁹But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless **elemental things**, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? ¹⁰**You observe days and months and seasons and years.** ¹¹I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain. (Galatians 4:9-11 NASB)

Here they are again, those **elementary principles** Paul talks about in Colossians 2: 8, 20 which have no value against fleshly indulgence (v. 23). Once we begin focusing on such elementary principles fit only for the immaturity of children, we will begin swallowing all sorts of camels while straining gnats (Matt. 23: 24). Or, to use another Biblical analogy, we will be taking the splinter out of our brother's eye while missing the log in our own.

³² F.F. Bruce, *Acts*, pp. 433-434

Basically what Paul is talking about is the imposition of man-made rules which limit legitimate Christian freedom. Whenever man-made rules are instituted, there are always those who are the rule-makers who wish to subject everyone else to their rules. Rather than esteeming the contributions of other believers (L171-172), such a person exalts himself by **delighting in self-abasement...inflated without cause by his fleshly mind** (L165, 168).

Many reformed scholars have not included the weekly Sabbath as falling under Paul's examination in Colossians 2, but we may ask: By what exegetical necessity is it *excluded*? F.F. Bruce maintains that the *onus probandi* (the burden of proof) falls upon those who wish to exclude the weekly Sabbath from Paul's statement.³³ This does not imply that we are no longer obligated to attend weekly worship (cf. Heb. 10: 24-25), nor that we are no longer obligated to keep God's moral law. What it does mean is that no one can make up a list of Sabbath rules for us which cannot be substantiated (proved) from Scripture.

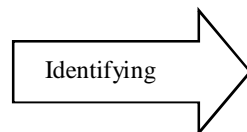
IV. Meaning Structure³⁴

A. Meaning Blocks

After we determine the meaning of words and phrases we must determine the meaning structure. **Meaning blocks** are "the main elements that function together to give the meaning of a *paragraph*." They form a network of relationships with each other so that "the meaning of a paragraph is more than just the sum total of the individual blocks of meaning." We should look for related ideas that form a **basic unit of thought**. These units (or **meaning blocks**), in turn, make up a larger unit of thought called a **paragraph**.³⁵

Wolvaardt gives three purposes for **marking significant meaning indicators**:³⁶

- (1) to identify the related meanings
- (2) to discover stylistic features
- (3) to establish the main syntactic relationships.



Meaning blocks

Colossians 1: 3-8 is a paragraph consisting of five meaning blocks.³⁷ The verses below are NASB). Notice that some Bible translations highlight the beginning of paragraphs in bold numbers (the bold "3" below).

³³ F.F. Bruce, *Colossians*, p. 115, footnote

³⁴ Wolvaardt, *How to Interpret the Bible*, p. 113

³⁵ Doriani identifies a paragraph, not a meaning block, as the basic unit of discourse analysis (*Getting the Message*, p. 82).

³⁶ Wolvaardt, pp. 113-114

³⁷ See p. 116 of Wolvaardt, *HTIB*, who uses the NIV.

(7) **3** We give thanks to God,
 (8) the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 (9) praying always for you,
 (10) ⁽⁴⁾ **since we heard**
 (11) **of your faith in Christ Jesus**
 (12) **and the love which you have for all the saints;**
 (13) ⁽⁵⁾ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven,
 (14) of which you previously heard
 (15) in the word of truth, the gospel ⁶ **which has come to you,**
 (16) just as in all the world also
 (17) it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing,
 (18) even as *it has been doing* in you also
 (19) **since the day you heard of it**
 (20) **and understood the grace of God in truth;**
 (21) ⁷ **just as you learned it** from Epaphras,
 (22) our beloved fellow bond-servant,
 (23) who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf,
 (24) ⁸ **and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.**

A

B

C

B

A

Meaning blocks which make up a paragraph. Notice that they are in the form of a chiasm. I have used capital letters to indicate meaning blocks rather than lines or words.

The interpreter should seek to summarize each meaning block in his own words. The purpose of doing this is to determine the *main idea* of the meaning block and the paragraph.

Examine the possible meaning blocks below from Colossians 2: 1-23. The highlighted words are clues to determining the meaning blocks. (Letters **do not** denote stylistic features.)

(100) ¹ *For I want you to know*
 (101) how great a struggle I have on your behalf
 (102) and for those who are at Laodicea,
 (103) and for all those who have not personally seen my face,

A

The basic idea in this meaning block is that Paul is struggling on behalf of others and wants them to know his concern for them. **For I want you to know** is a transitional statement marking the meaning block.

(104) ² *that* their hearts may be encouraged,
 (105) having been knit together in love,
 (106) and *attaining* to all the wealth that comes
 (107) from the full assurance of understanding,
 (108) *resulting* in a true knowledge of God's mystery,
 (109) *that is*, Christ *Himself*,
 (110) ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures
 (111) of wisdom and knowledge.

B

In this meaning block, Paul reveals the purpose of his struggle **that** they may be encouraged by a full understanding of who Christ is and what He has done. All knowledge and wisdom is in Christ. (Similar idea to L106-108.) **That** marks a purpose statement. It is an abbreviation for **in order that**.

(112) ⁴ *I say this so that* no one will delude you
 (113) with persuasive argument.
 (114) ⁵ For even though I am absent in body,
 (115) nevertheless I am with you in spirit,
 (116) rejoicing to see your good discipline
 (117) and the stability of your faith in Christ.

C

This is an introductory statement for the rest of the chapter and it has a similar idea to L100-103 expressing Paul's concern. Paul does not want the Colossians to be deceived. Although physically absent, he is present with them in spirit. **I say this so that** is also a transitional statement which serves to mark another meaning block.

(118) 6 *Therefore*

- (119) as you **have received** Christ Jesus the Lord,
 (120) *so walk* in Him,
 (121) ⁷ **having been firmly rooted**
 (122) *and now being built up* in Him **D**
 (123) **and established** in your faith,
 (124) just as you **were instructed**,
 (125) *and overflowing* with gratitude.

Although this is a complete paragraph, I see it as only one meaning block. The main idea is that the Colossians must continue living out the same faith they had received through the apostolic tradition **just as you were instructed**.

Therefore is a reason indicator marking another meaning block.

- (126) 8 *See to it* that no one takes you captive **E**
 (127) through philosophy and empty deception,
 (128) according to the tradition of men,
 (129) according to the elementary principles of the world,
 (130) rather than according to Christ.

If they are living out their faith in Christ, they should not stray away from Christ by following the traditions of men contrary to the apostolic traditions.

See to it is an imperative marking off another meaning block.

- (131) ⁹ *For in Him*
 (132) all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, **F**

Christ is God in human flesh. **For** is a reason indicator giving the reason for not accepting any other way of salvation mentioned in L126-130.

- (133) ¹⁰ *and in Him*
 (134) you have been made complete, **G**

You are complete in Christ. **And** indicates *addition*. Note the additions in L131-136.

- (135) *and He* is the head over all rule and authority; **H**

Christ is head over angelic powers

- (136) ¹¹ *and in Him* you were also *circumcised*
 (137) with a circumcision made without hands, **I**
 (138) in the removal of the body of the flesh
 (139) by the circumcision of Christ;

Christ has done away with your sinful nature through His death. The **and in Him** and **circumcision** mark another clue for a meaning block.

- (140) ¹² having been *buried with Him in baptism*,
 (141) in which you were also *raised up with Him*
 (142) through faith in the working of God,
 (143) who raised Him from the dead. **J**

Through faith you have died with Christ and have been resurrected with Him represented in your baptism.

Buried...in baptism, raised and with Him are more clues for a different meaning block.

- (144) ¹³ *When* you were *dead*
 (145) in your transgressions **K**
 (146) and the uncircumcision of your flesh,
 (147) He *made you alive* together **with Him**,

When you were spiritually dead, God made you spiritually alive together with Christ.

When is another clue to a meaning block along with the words **dead** and **made alive** which are new ideas in Paul's argument.

- (148) *having forgiven* us all our transgressions,
 (149) ¹⁴ *having canceled out the certificate of debt*
 (150) consisting of decrees against us,
 (151) which was hostile to us; **L**
 (152) and He has taken it out of the way,
 (153) having nailed it to the cross.

God has forgiven all our sins. He has taken the law as a document declaring our guilt and debt and nailed it to the cross of Christ. The law condemning us has been taken out of the way.

Having forgiven is a new concept or idea forming another clue to a different meaning block.

- (154) ¹⁵ *When* He had disarmed
the *rulers and authorities*,
(155) He made a public display of them,
(156) having triumphed over them through Him.

M

Through Christ God has rendered powerless all the angelic forces hostile to His people.

When is another clue word for a different meaning block along with the new idea of disarming rulers.

- (157) **16** *Therefore*
(158) *no one is to act* as your judge
(159) in regard to food or drink
(160) or in respect to a festival or a new moon
(161) or a Sabbath day
(162) ¹⁷ things which are a *mere shadow*
of what is to come;

N

Because of what God has done through Christ, do not allow anyone to judge you concerning ceremonies, food laws, or special *ō*holyō days. Such things are mere shadows or copies of what would come later in the person of Christ.

Therefore and the imperative verb are clues.

- (163) *But* the substance belongs to Christ.

Food laws, ceremonies, and special days only pointed to Christ, but Christ is the completion or fulfillment of such things.
But is a subtraction word.

- (164) ¹⁸ *Let no one keep defrauding* you of your prize
(165) by delighting in self-abasement
(166) and the worship of the angels,
(167) taking his stand on *visions* he has seen,
(168) inflated without cause by his fleshly mind,

O

Let no one take away your freedom in Christ with false humility, *ō*superō spirituality, and visions he has seen. Such a person is not focusing on Christ but only on himself.

The imperative verb, **let no on keep defrauding**, marks the the meaning block.

- (169) ¹⁹ *and not holding fast to the head*,
(170) from whom the entire body,
(171) being supplied and held together
(172) by the joints and ligaments,
(173) grows with a growth which is from God.

P

As head, Christ controls the rest of the body, the church, whose members are bound together and grow together like a human body, a growth which comes from God. L169 is a new idea or concept in contrast with L164-168, marking a new block.

- (174) **20** *If you have died with Christ*
(175) to the elementary principles of the world,
(176) why, as if you were living in the world,
(177) do you submit yourself to decrees, such as,
(178) ²¹ "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"
(179) ²² (which all *refer to* things destined to perish with use)
(180) in accordance
(181) with the commandments and teachings of men?

Q

Your death with Christ means that you no longer belong to the world. Submission to man-made rules and regulations for earning salvation is unnecessary.

If...then statement marks a new meaning block.

B. Analyzing Paragraphs³⁸

Below, I have dealt with the passage in the form of *paragraphs*, not meaning blocks. Doriani says, “To capture the message of the Bible, we need to study paragraphs more than single words or even sentences. That is, discourse analysis works on paragraphs, whole chapters, and even larger segments of books, as well as sentences.” He also says, “For the beginner, discourse analysis is most fruitful in the study of paragraphs” but goes on to say, “Still, there are times when authors, like travelers preparing for a long trip, pack meaning in tightly enough to reward more intensive study.” Thus, the intensive study may take the form of *marking meaning indicators and distinguishing meaning blocks*, smaller segments of paragraphs. Some of the Apostle Paul’s paragraphs are very long and complicated. It is best to break them down into smaller units or meaning blocks. Here, I have taken all the information we have gathered from marking indicators, noting connecting words, verbs, and parallel thoughts, and summarized the message of each paragraph in Colossians 2.

Step 3.5—Conclude and summarize the message to the original receiver.

- (100) ¹ For I want you to know
 (101) how great a struggle I have on your behalf
 (102) and for those who are at Laodicea,
 (103) and for all those who have not
 personally seen my face,
 (104) ² that their hearts may be encouraged,
 (105) having been knit together in love,
 (106) and *attaining* to all the wealth that comes
 (107) from the full assurance of understanding,
 (108) *resulting* in a true knowledge of God's mystery,
 (109) *that is*, Christ *Himself*,
 (110) ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures
 (111) of wisdom and knowledge.
 (112) ⁴ I say this so that no one will delude you
 (113) with persuasive argument.
 (114) ⁵ For even though I am absent in body,
 (115) nevertheless I am with you in spirit,
 (116) rejoicing to see your good discipline
 (117) and the stability of your faith in Christ.

Paul wants the Colossians to know that he is very concerned about them as well as other believers in Laodicea, including those he has never met. In light of the discouraging message of the false teachers who were adding conditions to the gospel, he wants them to be **encouraged** with the truth that Christ has done everything necessary to **make their salvation certain**. Nothing is lacking, for all the knowledge and wisdom of God is found in Christ. There is no secret knowledge which needs to be discovered that has not already been revealed in the gospel, and no one should convince them otherwise. Even though Paul is not present with them, this does not mean that he is not thinking about them and praying for them. He is with them in spirit and rejoices to hear about their firmness of faith and the Christian discipline which characterizes the church at Colossae.

- (118) **6** Therefore
 (119) as you have received
 Christ Jesus the Lord,
 (120) *so* walk in Him,
 (121) ⁷ having been firmly rooted
 (122) *and now* being built up in Him
 (123) and established in your faith,
 (124) just as you were instructed,
 (125) *and* overflowing with gratitude.

Paul reminds them of how they had believed in Christ in the past—convinced that He was all-sufficient for their salvation. They had been firmly grounded in the apostolic traditions learned from Epaphras and should continue allowing these traditions to guide them in their practical daily living and Christian growth. Furthermore, they should continue being grateful for the truth they had received.

³⁸ Doriani, *Getting the Message*, pp. 82-84

- (126) **8** See to it that no one takes you captive
 (127) through philosophy and empty deception,
 (128) according to the tradition of men,
 (129) according to the elementary
 principles of the world,
 (130) rather than according to Christ.
 (131) ⁹ For in Him
 (132) all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,
 (133) ¹⁰ and in Him
 (134) you have been made complete,
 (135) and He is the head over all rule and authority;
 (136) ¹¹ and in Him you were also circumcised
 (137) with a circumcision made without hands,
 (138) in the removal of the body of the flesh
 (139) by the circumcision of Christ;
 (140) ¹² having been buried with Him in baptism,
 (141) in which you were also raised up with Him
 (142) through faith in the working of God,
 (143) who raised Him from the dead.

No one should be allowed to carry them away in a tradition contrary to the apostolic tradition they had received. Any other tradition is the **tradition of men** characterized by **elementary** requirements by which men are deceived into believing that they can earn their salvation through works and rule-keeping. On the contrary, they have been made complete in Christ who is the being of God Himself. He rules over the angelic world; therefore, they don't need to worship angels. By His divine power and without any help from humans they have been made into new people (regeneration), the spiritual reality symbolized in circumcision. Therefore, they do not need Jewish circumcision which is now only an outdated ritual replaced by baptism. They have died with Him and have been raised with Him through the instrument of their faith produced by God's power. Their identification with Christ in His crucifixion and resurrection has been symbolized in their water baptism.

- (144) ¹³ When you were dead
 (145) in your transgressions
 (146) and the uncircumcision of your flesh,
 (147) He made you alive together with Him,
 (148) having forgiven us all our transgressions,
 (149) ¹⁴ having canceled out the certificate of debt
 (150) consisting of decrees against us,
 (151) which was hostile to us;
 (152) and He has taken it out of the way,
 (153) having nailed it to the cross.
 (154) ¹⁵ When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities,
 (155) He made a public display of them,
 (156) having triumphed over them through Him.

At one time, the Colossians were spiritually dead. They were dead not only in their way of life (transgressions) but also by nature or disposition the **uncircumcision of your flesh**. But God made them spiritually alive through Christ and forgave them their sins cancelling all sinful **debts** against His moral law revealed to them in their conscience.

This debt, consisting of obligations to keep His law (**decrees**), has been removed by **nauling it to the cross** of Christ. This means that Christ has paid the debt which they owed to God. At the same time Christ removed their debt through His death, He also rendered all hostile demonic forces incapable of separating them from the love of Christ (cf. Rom. 8: 38-39 the analogy of faith). Having bound the demonic forces in chains, He drove them through the streets before His victorious chariot in royal procession (2 Cor. 2: 14).

- (157) **16** Therefore
 (158) no one is to act as your judge
 (159) in regard to food or drink
 (160) or in respect to a festival or a new moon
 (161) or a Sabbath day
 (162) ¹⁷ things which are a *mere* shadow
 of what is to come;
 (163) but the substance belongs to Christ.

Because Christ has accomplished everything necessary for their salvation, the Colossians must not allow themselves to be regulated by rules and regulations which only **fore-shadowed** the person and work of Christ. All of these things are only pictures of Christ but not the person Himself.

- (164) ¹⁸ Let no one keep defrauding you
of your prize
(165) by delighting in self-abasement
(166) and the worship of the angels,
(167) taking his stand on *visions* he has seen,
(168) inflated without cause by his fleshly mind,
(169) ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the head,
(170) from whom the entire body,
(171) being supplied and held together
(172) by the joints and ligaments,
(173) grows with a growth which is from God.

Furthermore, they should not be led astray by asceticism, false humility, and the worship of angels as mediators between God and man. People who do so believe that man is too sinful to approach God and needs angelic mediators (Hendriksen, pp. 125-126).

But if we have Christ, no other mediator is needed. He is the true prize who brings liberty and salvation from sin. (Or, Paul could be saying that our salvation and liberty is the prize.) The Colossians also must not be carried away by people who *claim* to have special insight through what they have seen (**visions**).

Note: the words **not seen** occur in the KJV and NKJV (**2: 18**), but this is not based on the best manuscript evidence. Paul is not admitting that these teachers actually enjoyed visions, but that even if they did, the visions were unnecessary since Christ has come. By claiming visions, the false teachers have become puffed up with pride— a contradiction to their *pretended* humility. Rather the Colossians must hold fast to Christ as the head of the body, the church. Just as the head controls the functions of the body, Christ causes the growth of the church which consists of every member— joints and ligaments— helping every other member (cf. Eph. 4: 15-16; explained with more detail in 1 Cor. 12). (Here Paul uses a figure of speech, a *synecdoche* or part for the whole. **Joints and ligaments** represent **all the members of the body** which are fitted together into a meaningful whole. The church is not a pile of parts lying all over the place with no meaningful connection with one another. Furthermore, they cannot function independently of one another but depend on one another for their proper functioning.

- (174) **20** If you have died with Christ
(175) to the elementary principles of the world,
(176) why, as if you were living in the world,
(177) do you submit yourself to decrees, such as,
(178) ²¹ "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"
(179) ²² (which all *refer to* things destined
to perish with use)—
(180) in accordance
(181) with the commandments and teachings of men?
(182) ²³ These are matters which have, to be sure,
(183) the appearance of wisdom
(184) in self-made religion
(185) and self-abasement
(186) and severe treatment of the body,
(187) *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence.

If the Colossians have died with Christ to any human means of earning salvation, why do they place themselves under man-made regulations? All such regulations appear very pious and religious, but they do not help anyone avoid sinful practices. **As if you were living in the world** is confusing. Are not the Colossians still living in the world? The NIV rendering is helpful— *as though you still belonged to it*. Although still living in the world, Christians no longer **belong** to this world with its regulations governing one's relationship to God. They belong to Christ and live spiritually with Him in a different realm.

C. Developing a Sermon or Bible Study from Colossians 2: 1-23

Obviously, it would be easier to develop a sermon from Colossians 3 than from Colossians 2. Colossians 3 contains many practical exhortations which are so important for Christian living. But without the Christology of Chapter 2, the exhortations of Chapter 3 are impossible. Why? Practical holiness stands or falls upon solid theology, including the doctrine of Christ. The Colossian heretics

insisted on holiness based on external rules and rituals—the same mistake made by the Pharisees who opposed Christ. As long as people **did** the right things, they would be complete and holy. Paul insists, however, that holiness must be grounded in right thinking about the person and work of Christ. People are helpless to change their sinful nature through activity. Christ must do that for them through spiritual circumcision (regeneration). From that point they must continue trusting in His power to remake them into His image consisting of true knowledge (L108)—knowledge of who Christ is and knowledge of His preceptive (moral) will.

To develop a sermon or Bible study, we must first understand the **main idea** of the text. Below, I have proposed the main idea of Colossians 2 as well as the main points of the sermon. I have not written out an entire sermon or given a detailed outline, but only a few points to let you know where I would go with it. This is not **the** ideal outline. The chapter could be outlined a dozen different ways and ten thousand different sermons preached from it. You see something different every time you look at a passage.

Main idea: Unless we understand who Christ is and what He has done for us, we cannot effectively live a holy life.

This main idea leads to the **question**: Why? *Why can't I live a holy life without understanding the doctrine of Christ?* The divisions of the sermon may now come from the three or four *answers* we give to this question.

I. Because only in Christ is the fullness of the wisdom and knowledge of God (Col. 2: 1-5).

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face,² that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and *attaining* to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, *resulting* in a true knowledge of God's mystery, *that is*, Christ *Himself*,³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.⁴ I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument.⁵ For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ. (Colossians 2:1-5 NASB)

Paul knew about the false teachers who were trying to persuade the Colossians that they alone possessed the true secret—the “mystery”—of the Christian life. Paul alludes to this false teaching in vv. 2-3 calling Christ Himself the mystery, **in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge**. It is because the Colossians did not understand the *sufficiency* of Christ that they could be persuaded that *something else* was necessary to make them complete. This *something else* was the asceticism and rule-keeping of the Colossian heresy. Therefore, Paul begins at the beginning, a *deficient understanding of Christ*, which is at the root of many modern heresies (e.g. Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, etc.).

Paul makes this specific statement in vv. 2-3 to introduce the remainder of the chapter. “I say **this so that** no one will delude you with persuasive argument.” The persuasive argument consists of the additional *something else* that the Colossians **must do to be full and complete Christians**.

But how would Paul's statement apply to a modern congregation in Africa? In any sermon, we must take our audience forward from the original communication situation to the present day. Colossians was written about AD 60, but what did the Colossians have in common to our present situation in Africa in 2015? The question we must ask is: Is there false teaching in Africa which encourages people to look for something in addition to Christ as a means of salvation or as a means to a super-

spiritual Christian experience? Another question is: Is this additional something keeping people from realizing the truth that both justification and holiness are found in Christ alone?

Once we ask this question, we can think of several strands of false teaching which are getting in the way of the truth—the prosperity gospel of health and wealth, rules and regulations about drinking (‘‘You cannot drink alcohol and be born-again’’), regulations about one’s private devotional life (how long should we pray, read the Bible, how many times must we share our faith each month, etc.). People can think of endless rules and regulations which are designed to govern the ‘‘truly spiritual’’ Christian life. Believers who are not performing up to these standards are regarded by the ‘‘elite’’ Christians as substandard—and possibly not saved at all. Speaking in tongues may be added to the list of things we must do to have a genuine Christian experience, and many true believers have doubted their salvation because they have never experienced this gift. Why? Because they have been told by other believers that unless they speak in tongues, they have no evidence of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, the first thing we must do is to understand the bridge between the world of Paul in the first century and our world today in Uganda. Since the Bible is the word of God and is always relevant to the human situation, we will always find some similarities.

Thus, my first point is: The doctrine of Christ is important because only in Christ do we find the true knowledge and wisdom of God. Therefore, if we miss Christ, we have missed everything necessary for justification and sanctification. Furthermore, in Christ there is *nothing lacking* of the true knowledge and wisdom of God. He is the fullness of God (cf. 1: 15-20). He is fulfillment of all the covenants of the OT ensuring salvation for God’s people. He is the fullness of all the promises made in the OT. We can never go *beyond* the person and work of Christ in our understanding of the Christian faith. We can only go *deeper* into the person and work of Christ. The more we understand Him, the more we will grow in our faith and the more holy we will become. But once we believe that there is more to living the Christian life than we can observe in Christ—in His incarnate ministry on earth, and in the apostolic tradition of Christ in the epistles—we have quenched the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8: 9)—and we are left helplessly dependent upon human effort alone.

II. Because the Christian faith must be lived in the same way it was received—by faith alone in Christ alone (Col. 2: 6-7).

Therefore as you have **received** Christ Jesus the Lord, *so walk* in Him,⁷ having been firmly rooted *and now* being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, *and overflowing* with gratitude. (Colossians 2:6-7 NASB)

In these verses, Paul brings the Colossians back to the *initial point of conversion*. He reminds them that they experienced a change of heart on the basis of faith in Christ alone and not on the basis of any additional rules and regulations given to them. By referring to another book written by Paul (remember the analogy of faith), we learn that he does the same thing with the Galatians who were being persuaded by Judaizers that circumcision was essential to salvation.

¹You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?²This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you **receive** the Spirit by the **works of the Law**, or by **hearing with faith**?³ Are you so foolish? Having **begun** by the Spirit, are you now being **perfected** by the flesh?⁴Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?⁵ So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? (Galatians 3:1-5 NASB)

This is essentially the same argument Paul is now making in Colossians. They had received Christ by faith without additional requirements. Beyond any doubt, they had also received the Holy Spirit at the

same time without performing any additional requirements. The presence of the Holy Spirit was evidence that they had truly received Christ. The phrase, **just as you were instructed** indicates that they had been taught according to the apostolic tradition—a tradition which said that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone.

Furthermore, it is clear from the exhortation in **2:6, walk**, that by receiving Christ through faith, they were now able to **live out the Christian life** by that same faith. Receiving Christ by faith without works implies the ability to live by a faith **that works**—that is, a faith that produces good works. Living the Christian life is dependent upon **faith**, not **raw, independent effort** which always falls short. It is a supernatural life led and empowered by the Spirit; and left to our own efforts, we cannot produce the obedience God requires.

Paul assumes, of course, that the Colossians had genuinely received Christ. He is assured of this by the fact that he had **heard** about their **love for one another** from the report of Ephaphras (**1: 4-7**; context). The modern preacher, on the other hand, may not be as convinced of the salvation of his hearers as Paul was the Colossians. In that case, he must emphasize the fact that Paul was convinced of their faith by their **good deeds toward others**, not by religious rituals. The most convincing sign of true faith is **the fruit of love** for one's fellow man, particularly his fellow brother in Christ. If the pastor sees this kind of love being given to fellow believers, he should also make note of it when preaching this sermon. Using the analogy of faith, note the following:

Let us not lose heart in **doing good**, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.¹⁰ So then, while we have opportunity, **let us do good** to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. (Galatians 6:9-10 NASB)

and let us consider how **to stimulate one another to love and good deeds**, (Hebrews 10:24 NASB)

Keep your **behavior** excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may **because of your good deeds**, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:12 NASB)

They profess to know God, but **by their deeds** they deny *Him*, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed. (Titus 1:16 NASB)

in all things show yourself **to be an example of good deeds**, *with* purity in doctrine, dignified, (Titus 2:7 NASB)

Our people **must also learn to engage in good deeds** to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful. (Titus 3:14 NASB)

This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God **will be careful to engage in good deeds**. These things are good and profitable for men. (Titus 3:8 NASB)

We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention *of you* in our prayers;³ constantly bearing in mind **your work of faith and labor of love** and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father,⁴ knowing, brethren beloved by God, *His* choice of you;⁵ for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.⁶ You also **became imitators of us and of the Lord**, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,⁷ so that you **became an example** to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.⁸ For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.⁹ For they themselves report about us what kind of

a reception we had with you, and how you **turned to God from idols** to serve a living and true God, (1 Thessalonians 1: 2-9 NASB)

Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show **by his good behavior his deeds** in the gentleness of wisdom. (James 3:13 NAU)

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: **to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.** (James 1:27 NIV)

III. Because all other religious traditions—the traditions of men—falsely assume man’s ability to save himself (Col. 2: 8-15).

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.⁹ For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,¹⁰ and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;¹¹ 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;¹² 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.¹³ When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,¹⁴ **having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.**¹⁵ When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. (Colossians 2:8-15 NASB)

No matter what other religious tradition we are talking about, they are all based on salvation by works. This is true even of Judaism whose adherents should have recognized salvation by faith in a sacrificial substitute through the Levitical system, but turned the sacrificial system into salvation by works. Islam is also salvation by works, as is Buddhism and Hinduism. The reason that all other religious systems are based on works is the assumption that man is *capable* of performing good works. They fail to recognize that man is dead in sin and incapable of such meritorious works. What is actually needed is not man’s improvement, but a radical remaking of man, a rebirth through regeneration by the **circumcision of Christ**. It is clear from v. 13 that the **uncircumcision of your flesh** was the state of being spiritually **dead**. God had to make us alive with Christ through spiritual circumcision by which He removed **the body of the flesh**, also called the **old man** or the **old self**. In essence, we had to die and be made into a completely new person through rebirth. This was an operation which we could not do for ourselves, even as the Hebrew could not circumcise his heart (or as the 8 day old Hebrew baby boy could not circumcise the flesh from his male sex organ). We were all helpless to make ourselves into new people. God alone must do this for us.

Many people today do not seem to understand the obvious fact that if salvation was achievable through human merit, it was therefore *not necessary* for Christ to die. God Himself offered salvation to anyone who would keep His law, “Do this and you will live.” (Lev. 18: 5), a promise of life repeated by the Lord Jesus in His earthly ministry (Lk. 10: 28; Matt. 19: 17). **But the promise of life through a system of merits was never given with any expectations of anyone being successful.** (The only exception was Jesus Christ who kept the Law perfectly, and by His merits He earned the reward of salvation for those who trust in Him.) Even the good law-keeper, Paul, when he finally understood the radical internal demands of the law, finally had to admit, “For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God” (Galatians 2:19 NASB). Through the radical demands of the law which said, “Do not covet,” he came to understand that the whole law must be kept internally as well as externally. He then knew that he, too, was a helpless law-breaker worthy of death (Rom. 7: 9-10).

Unless we understand man's inability to save himself, we also cannot understand why Christ's atoning work was necessary. Since man could not keep the law, God had to move the law **out of the way, nailing it to a cross**. This was a strange turn of events. The law of God stood as a legal document declaring our indebtedness to God. But instead of removing sinful man out of the way by condemning all humanity to hell, God removed His own legal code out of the way. He had to do so; otherwise, the law would have continued to be a barrier between God and man. But how did God remove it? Not by ignoring the Law or by ignoring man's sin, but by demanding the full requirements of the law to be fulfilled in the crucifixion of Christ by nailing it to the cross of Christ. By fully keeping the law, Christ fulfilled all of its active requirements. He **did** everything the law required Him to do. But by dying on the cross, Christ also fulfilled the law's passive requirements—death to the sinner who fails to keep the law. Through His passive obedience unto death, Christ fulfilled the law's demand for punishment. Having punished the sins of His people through Christ, the law as a legal document of indebtedness has been made null and void. The paid debt does not have to be paid again. Through perfect obedience, Christ has earned the salvation promised in the law and vicariously transferred His earned obedience to our account.

IV. Because all human religious traditions substitute ritual for righteousness (Col. 2: 16-23).

Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—¹⁷ things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.¹⁸ Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on *visions* he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind,¹⁹ and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.²⁰ If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as,²¹ "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"²² (which all *refer to* things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?²³ These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence. (Colossians 2:16-23 NASB)

Muslims believe they can be right with God by praying toward the Mecca five times a day, but many of them treat their wives like second class slaves. Under Muslim law they can beat them, even kill them if necessary. Their religious ritual is of no value against the **fleshly indulgence** of thinking women exist only to satisfy male desires. Many Roman Catholics go to mass thinking that something magical will happen when they partake of the elements of bread and wine. They go to confession thinking the priest can absolve them of their sins (pronounce them free from guilt). Many professing Christians from all denominations think church attendance is the means of receiving God's blessings, but their faith seems to have little to do with their daily affairs in business and the marketplace, honesty toward others, the way they spend money, etc. Man-made religion is always a means of manipulating God to get what we want rather than submitting the whole life to God's will. He becomes a man-made God who can be appeased or bought-off with token sacrifices. Isaiah's warning 2,750 years ago is as relevant today as the day he spoke it,

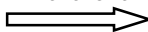
¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah!
¹¹ "The multitude of your sacrifices— what are they to me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.¹² When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts?¹³ Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations— I cannot bear your evil assemblies.¹⁴ Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.¹⁵ When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood;¹⁶ wash and make yourselves clean. **Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing**


wrong,¹⁷ learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. (Isaiah 1:10-17 NIV)

From this example, you can see that one sermon can be preached from an entire chapter consisting of five paragraphs and many more meaning blocks. This does not mean you cannot preach on single verses or single meaning blocks; however, the full thrust of Paul’s message is more readily captured when the a broader text is used. On the other hand, many sermons can be preached from this same outline by breaking the main headings into smaller sermons. In fact, as your ability to interpret Scripture grows, you will want to preach several sermons from each of these sections or from different sections, depending on how you interpret the text.

V. The Exegesis of Colossians 3: 1-11


A. Meaning Indicators and Structure for Colossians 3: 1-4

(188) 1 Therefore


(189) if you have been raised up with Christ,


(190) [*then—implied*] KEEP SEEKING the things above, [a]


(191) where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. [b]

(192) ² SET YOUR MIND ON the things above, [a]


(193) not on the things that are on earth. [b]

Therefore points forwards to L189. But it also has reference to L147 ὁHe made you alive together with Himō. In light of our resurrection with Christ, we must do somethingō **keep seeking the things above**.

Notice the ὁiff thenō statement of v. 1. This is a **conditional statement** (see I. C. 2. d. of your outline)

The parallelism **abab** is based on the two imperative verbs **keep seeking** and **set your mind on** as well as the sphere **things above, the right hand of God, not...on earth**. L191 and L193 are parallel to one another in terms of locationō **the right hand of God** and **not...on earth**. The NIV reads, **set your hearts on things above**. This captures the thought, but misses the connection with Matt. 6: 33 which uses the same present active imperative verb, **seek**.

Therefore			
if you have been raised up with Christ,	A		
keep seeking		B	
<u>the things above</u> ,			C
where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.	A		
² Set your mind on		B	
<u>the things above</u> ,			C
not on the things that are on earth.			D

The imperative verbs, **keep seeking, set your mind on** are based on the indicative verbs, **have been raised and have died**.

The indicatives state a fact upon which the imperatives follow. Based on the **fact** that the Colossians **have died and have been raised**, they **must** and can keep their minds preoccupied with Christ and His kingdom. The imperatives are also **present tense** indicating on-going activity and keep on seeking and keep on setting your mind on.

Notice from the text that Christians **have been raised up with Christ** (A). And since Christ is **seated at the right hand of God** (A), then it follows that there is a sense in which we are spiritually present with Christ at God’s right hand in the heavenly places. This fact is supported by the **analogy of faith** when Paul says in Ephesians 2: 6, and raised us up with Him, and **seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.** Christians are therefore living in the world but are not **of the world** (Jn. 15: 19; 17: 14; 17: 16).

³ For YOU have died [a]
 and YOUR LIFE [b]
 is hidden [c]
 with Christ in God. [d]

For you have died is a reason clause presenting the reason for putting our minds on Christ and his kingdom rather than the world. But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Galatians 6:14 NASB)

⁴ When CHRIST, [a]
 who is OUR LIFE, [b]
 is revealed, [c]
 then YOU ALSO [a]
 will be revealed [c]
 with Him in glory. [d]

your life and our life are parallel. **Hidden and revealed** are parallel. **With Christ in God and with Him in glory** are parallel. **Christ** is also parallel to **you also** since there is an identification made here between the death of Christ and the death of the believer and also the revealing of Christ and the revealing of the believer.

This text indicates the NT doctrine of our **identification** with Christ in His death, resurrection, and glorification. This is why I have marked the YOU and **CHRIST** the same **Christ, who is our life**. (Note the **you also**). Since we have died to our old self, the **only life** we now possess is the life of Christ in us.

I have been crucified with Christ and **I no longer live**, but **Christ lives in me**. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2: 20 NIV).

As Christ **died for us vicariously** (as a substitute), we thus **live for Him vicariously**. That is, our lives are an extension of the life of Christ, a continuation of His incarnate (in the flesh) ministry on earth (cf. Col. 1: 24; Rom. 12: 1). Moreover, the only life we now possess is a purchased life.

For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body (1 Corinthians 6:20 NASB). Therefore, it is an error to think of **all** slavery as sinful. Our slavery to Christ is not sinful. We are purchased by His blood and belong to Him in totality, body and soul. If we think of ourselves as private persons who may do whatever we want with our lives, then we will inevitably live selfishly as the slaves of sin, self, and Satan. Slavery to something or someone is inevitable. The real question is:

Whose slave are we? Our unique identity as persons is not destroyed through our identification with Christ; rather, our unique identity is **fulfilled** as the person we were created to be in Christ Jesus.

YOU have died because **CHRIST** has died; you died with Christ. In the same sense **YOUR LIFE** is **hidden with Christ** in His death and burial. Paul is speaking by way of analogy. The body is buried in the earth and **hidden** from sight. **OUR LIFE** is hidden with Christ because Christ can no longer be seen visibly in this world. In the same way, the **real life** of the believer is hidden to the world because the world cannot see the believer **as he is in Christ**. We are still frail and weak and subject to persecution, disease, injury, and death, but when the glory of Christ is fully revealed at the second coming, our glory will also be revealed with Him. The person you truly areô the immortal human being with body and soulô will only be revealed when Christ is revealed in glory.

Notice the parallel prepositional phrases: **with Christ in God...with Him in glory**. **When...then** are indicators of time pointing forward to a future revelation of Christ at the general resurrection of the dead (1 Thess. 4). At the **same** time Christ is **revealed** in His glory, we also **will be revealed** with Him in our glorified condition, including our glorified bodies. This is not a conditional statement, but a statement of certaintyô a òwhení thenö statement. The Apostle John says,

Beloved, now we are children of God, and **it has not appeared as yet what we will be**. We know that **when He appears**, we will be **like Him**, because we will see Him **just as He is** (1 John 3:2 NASB).

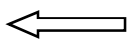
The analogy of Scripture can help you add more detail and illustrations to your expository preaching. As other texts of Scripture from the same other and from different authors are used to support your preaching texts, God's people are built up in their faith and in the knowledge of the Bible.

B. Summary of Col. 3: 1-4

Since the Christian has been resurrected with Christ, his primary focus should be on Christ and the many ways Christ makes a difference in every area of life. Seeking Christ gives us a divine perspective on living in this world. As the glory of Christ is now hidden, so our gloryô what we will be at the resurrectionô is also hidden. But as the glory of Christ is revealed at His second coming, our glory with Him will likewise be revealed. Consequently, we should not worry about our present condition in this world, for we will share in the exaltation of Christ at His return.


C. Meaning Indicators and Structure for Colossians 3: 5-11

(198) 5 Therefore (199) **CONSIDER** the members of your earthly body as dead.

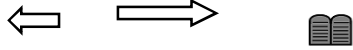


A third reason indicator, **therefore**, referring back to the indicative verb of Col. 3: 3, **you have died**. Once more, the imperative **consider** is based upon the indicative **you have died**. Since we have died with Christ, then we must consider ourselves as dead with Christ and risen to a new life in Christô a risen life which is dead to immorality, impurity, etc.

(200) **to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed,**

(201) which amounts to **idolatry.** 

(202) ⁶For it is because of **these things**



For is explanatory. The Colossians must put to death (NIV) evil behavior **because** it is evil behavior which summons God's judgment. The **for** refers back to **put to death** and is the explanation for the exhortation, **put to death**. **Because** refers to the reason God's wrath is coming **these things** or evil behavior. It is difficult to determine here whether **idolatry** refers only to **greed** or whether it refers to all **these things** which are mentioned on Line 200. I am inclined to think that all sin is idolatry, putting something else in God's place.

(203) that the wrath of God will come



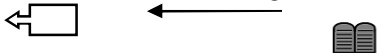
(204) upon the sons of disobedience,

(205) ⁷ and in **them YOU ALSO** once walked,



Paul does not distinguish between those who profess Christ and those who don't, but between those who live in **disobedience** and those who live in **obedience** (cf. Matt. 7: 21) Moreover, what does v. 6 imply about the atoning work of Christ? If God punished the sins of every human being in the death of Christ, why is He still angry with sinners? Who are these **sons of disobedience**?

(206) when **YOU** were living in **them.**



Backward arrows signifying the action of the verbs in the past, not the present. (See explanation below.)

Once...when—time indicators. The Colossians **once walked** in disobedience **when** they were living in **these things**. But this is no longer true of the Colossian Christians or of any genuine believer. Although it is still necessary to **put them all aside (these things of L200-201) remaining** sin is not the same as **reigning** sin. **Committing** sin is not the same as **walking** in sin as a way of life. Falling into a pig pen is not the same thing as living in a pig pen.

There is a total difference between surviving sin and reigning sin, the regenerate in conflict with sin and the unregenerate complacent to sin. *It is one thing for sin to live in us; it is another for us to live in sin. It is one thing for the enemy to occupy the capital: it is another for his defeated hosts to harass the garrisons [outposts] of the kingdom.* It is of paramount concern for the Christian and for the interests of his sanctification that he should know that sin does not have the dominion over him, that the forces of redeeming, regenerative, and sanctifying grace have been brought to bear upon him in that which is central in his moral and spiritual being, that he is the habitation of God through the Spirit, and that Christ has been formed in him the hope of glory. This is equivalent to saying that he must reckon himself to be dead indeed unto sin but alive unto God through Jesus Christ his Lord. *It is the faith of this fact* [the indicative] *that provides the basis for, and the incentive to the fulfillment of, the exhortation* [the imperative], "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body to the end that ye should obey its lusts. Neither present ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead and your members as instruments of righteousness to God" (Rom. 6: 12, 13). *In this matter the indicative lies at the basis of the imperative and our faith of fact is indispensable to the discharge of duty.* The faith that sin will not have the dominion is the dynamic in bondservice to righteousness and to God so that we may have the fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life (Rom. 6: 17, 22). It is the concern of sanctification that sin be more and more mortified and holiness ingenerated and cultivated.³⁹

³⁹John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 145-146; bold and underlined emphasis and words in brackets mine.

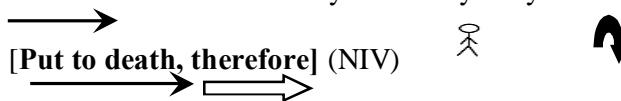
The above quotation demonstrates two things: (1) the importance of *the analogy of Scripture* in the quotation of Rom. 6: 12, 13, 17, and 22, a passage which cannot be ignored in the study of sanctification and Col. 3; and (2) the importance of consulting commentaries and theological works *whenever possible*. This is *historical theology*, passed down to the church from century to century through gifted scholars like John Murray. Its importance cannot be underestimated. Do not be so naïve (foolishly simplistic) to think that you should reinvent all the church's theology from the beginning. There is no human being or group of humans alive on planet earth today who are capable of doing this. From the very beginning of the church, the development of its theology and doctrine has been the combined effort of the Christian community studying the Bible together. Some mistakes have been made since the development of our understanding of Scripture is not an inspired event. Nevertheless, neither will your effort be inspired. Be willing to receive God's gift to the church through hundreds of years of Spirit-taught Christians and scholars. Double-check your own interpretation of Scripture with commentaries and books on theology whenever they are available to you but without becoming completely dependent upon them.

D. Stylistic features of Colossians 3: 5-11

In the analysis below and in the alternative diagram on the following page, **A** represents present commands to believers that are appropriate to their new natures. **B** represents either the evil characteristics of the old self or the good characteristics of the new self. **C** represents past activity of laying aside the old man and putting on the new man. **D** represents the present ongoing activity of being renewed to the image of Christ.

(198) 5 Therefore

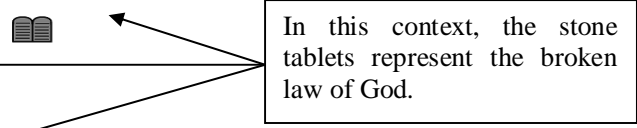
(199) **consider** the members of your earthly body as dead



A Present command: **Consider...as dead or Put to death.**

(200) to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed,

(201) which amounts to idolatry.



(202) ⁶For it is because of these things

(203) that the wrath of God will come

B Evil characteristics of the old man from L200 to L202

(204) upon the sons of disobedience,

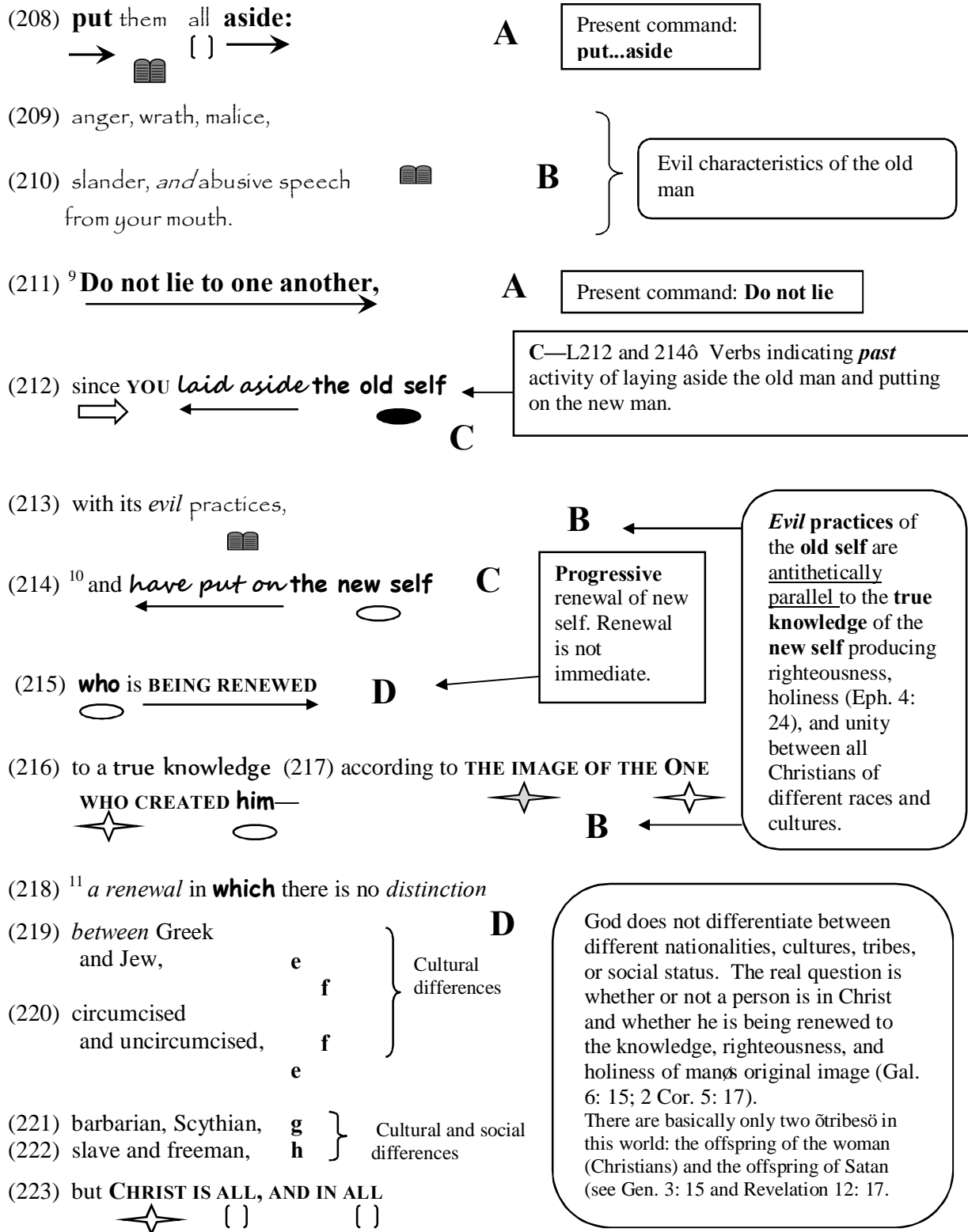
L204 not included in some early manuscripts, but see Eph. 5: 6.

(205) ⁷and in them **YOU ALSO** once *walked*,

(206) when **YOU** *were living* in them.

C L205-206 Verbs indicating the *past* activity of living as the old man

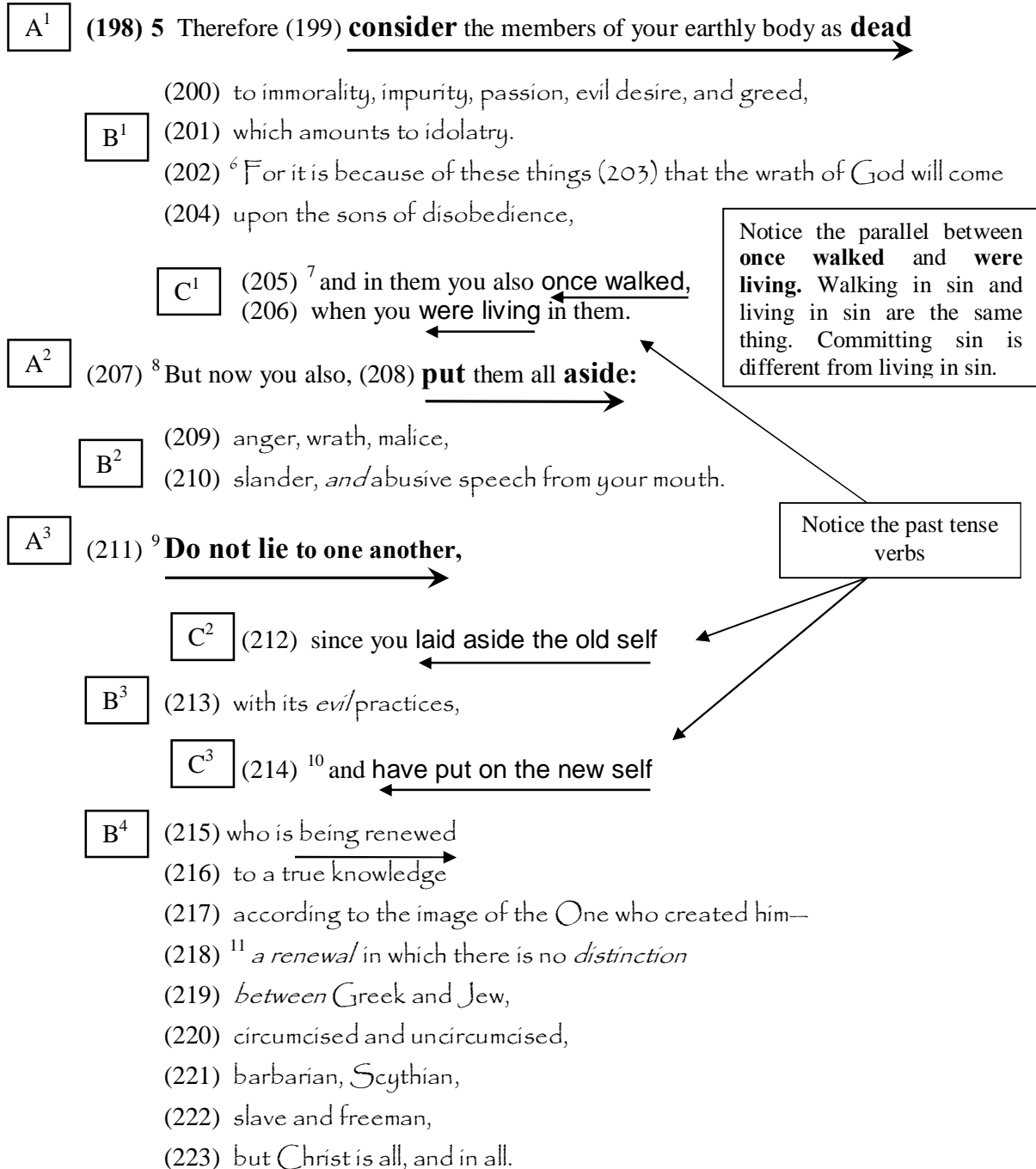
(207) ⁸**BUT now YOU ALSO**,



There many possible ways of looking at this passage? There are no infallible ways of diagramming the structure of a text. The main purpose of attempting to do so is to understand the text by noting the parallels. Notice that the **tenses of the verbs** (events) used in the text have influenced the way I

interpreted the structure. On the other hand, had I focused on the **nouns** (things), I may have come up with a different structure. I would invite the student to experiment with different structures as long as he has valid reasons for them. It should also go without saying that if we were working with the Greek text, our structure may look different, but the NASB translation has attempted to translate the Greek text as closely as possible.

E. An Alternative Way of Looking at the Structure and Stylistic Features of Colossians 3: 5-11



F. Comparing Colossians 3: 9 with Ephesians 4: 22

There is a slight difference between Colossians 3: 9 and Ephesians 4: 22 which appears contradictory. To get the context, I have reproduced Eph. 4: 17-24.

Ephesians 4: 17-24 (NASB)

¹⁷ So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, ¹⁸ being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; ¹⁹ and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. ²⁰ But you did not learn Christ in this way, ²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, ²² **that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,** ²³ and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and **put on the new self,** which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth (NASB)

Colossians 3: 9

⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you **laid aside** the old self with its *evil* practices,

The question is this: Why would Paul *command* the Ephesians to **lay aside** the old self

(imperative verb) when he has told the Colossians that they have *already laid aside* (indicative verb) the old self? John Murray has given extensive consideration to this question.

It would seem as if Paul is there exhorting believers to put off according to the former manner of life the old man and to put on the new man. *And it is true that considerations of grammar would not necessarily be violated if this interpretation were adopted.* But exegetical considerations and the analogy of Paul's teaching elsewhere [e.g. Rom. 6: 6] point to the entirely different conclusion, namely, that when Paul speaks of putting off the old man and putting on the new man he is thinking in terms of *result rather than in terms of exhortation.* The passage should therefore be rendered as follows: -But ye have not so learned Christ, if so be ye have heard him and have been taught by him as the truth is in Jesus, so **that ye have put off**, according to the former manner of life, the old man who is corrupted according to the lusts of deceit, and are being renewed in the spirit of your mind, and have put on the new man who after God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth (Ephesians 4: 20-24). *It is apparent that this rendering...carries with it no implication to the effect that the believer is regarded as both old man and new man,* that he is exhorted to put off the former and put on the latter, and that progressive renewal consists in this process of divestiture and investiture.⁴⁰

The verb form of Ephesians 4: 22 is not in the form of an imperative but an infinitive (ὄτο lay aside). Murray interprets it as an infinitive of *result*, not of command. The NIV and ESV, I believe, give a better translation than the NASB,

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, **to put off your old self**, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires (Ephesians 4:22 NIV)

to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires (Ephesians 4:22 ESV)

⁴⁰ Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, pp. 215-216; words in brackets and emphasis mine

Although the infinitive can be translated as an imperative in the NT, Murray believes that Ephesians 4: 22, 24 is not one of those occurrences. Murray notes that Ephesians 4: 22, 24 is not listed as an example of an *imperatival infinitive* by any of the Greek authorities.⁴¹ But in Murray's opinion, as noted above, the exegetical considerations should force us to the conclusion that in *neither* passage is Paul *commanding* believers to lay aside the old man. Why? Because the old man is already dead.

Paul is not exhorting believers to put off the old man and to put on the new. He is urging them to desist from certain sins, sins which are indeed characteristic of the old man, and the reason he adduces for such abstinence is that they have put off the old man and have put on the new man. Since this is the case, *Paul is saying in effect, do not practice those sins which are after the pattern of the old man but behave as new men, as indeed you are.* Besides, *the figure* [figure of speech] which Paul is using namely, that of having put off and of having put on, does not agree with the idea of being both an old man and a new man at the same time. For in that event the figure would require that we are clothed with both at the same time. *The notion that putting off the old man is a process would involve this incoherent [confusing] figure of speech.* There need be no question but that Paul here regards believers as those who have put off the old man and have put on the new and therefore, in terms of his figure, as those who are clothed with the new man and not with the old.⁴²

The characterization of the old man in Ephesians 4: 17-22 should cause due hesitation in applying this description to the true believer. The **old self is being corrupted by its deceitful desires** (NIV). Further, the *pattern* of the old self is in the **former manner of life** which is characterized by the futility of mind, darkness of understanding, separation from God, ignorance, hardness of heart, abandonment to sensuality, and indulgence in every kind of impurity. Murray asks, "Can we possibly think of a believer as answering to this description? To that characterization he must answer if he is still an old man as well as a new man." The contrast which Paul sets up, however, indicates that the believer answers to a different description altogether, for he says, "You, however, did not come to know Christ that way" (Ephesians 4:20 NIV).⁴³ We have already noted in Colossians 3: 7 that the Colossians **once walked** in evil practices when they **were living in them** with the clear implication that they **no longer lived in them**.

It is no more feasible [possible] to call the believer a new man and an old man, than it is to call him a *regenerate man and an unregenerate*. And neither is it warranted to speak of the believer as having in him the old man and the new man. This kind of terminology is without warrant and it is but another method of doing prejudice to the doctrine which Paul was so jealous to establish when he said, "our old man has been crucified"⁴⁴

It may also be confusing that Paul says in Ephesians 4: 22, **that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit.** Why would he use a present tense verb, **being corrupted**? But Paul is not referring to the old self of the *Christian who is no longer the old self. He is referring to the old self which still characterizes unbelievers.* It is true that the old self continues to get worse and worse. It continues to be corrupted because it cannot be reformed or improved. Rather, it must be killed. For *unbelievers*, the continuing corruption of the old man is a terrible reality. They are not getting better; they are getting worse—further and further entrenched in their denial of Christ and the claims of God upon their lives. Although they may show signs of outward improvement, the inward

⁴¹ Citing A.T. Robertson (*A Grammar of the Greek New Testament*) and E. Dewitt Burton (*Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*), among several others,

⁴² Murray, p. 214; underlined emphasis his, bold emphasis and words in brackets mine

⁴³ Cf. Murray, p. 216

⁴⁴ Murray, p. 218, emphasis and word in brackets mine

man becomes more determined in his rebellion against God. The only way a man gets better is through grace, not self-effort. We should also notice that the old self corresponds to the Christian's **former manner of life**, not his **present** manner of life patterned after the new man—the image of Christ characterized by knowledge, righteousness and holiness.

Since we have died with Christ, we have laid aside the old self—like laying aside an old, worn-out garment—which is corrupt and sinful. This means that we consciously lay aside (on a daily basis) any **behavior** which is characterized by the old man that we **once** were, but **are no longer**. Thus, what we laid aside **in principle** at our conversion, we lay aside **in practice** daily. But further, the practical putting aside of evil behavior is dependent upon the **once-for-all act** of laying aside the old man—the accomplishment of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and conversion.

At the same time we **laid aside** the old man, we **put on** the new man—like a new garment. As Murray says, this **metaphor** is incoherent (confusing) if the Christian is both old man and new man at the same time. This would be like wearing two different garments at the same time. Further, who can imagine that once having taken off an old, worn-out garment which no longer fits, and having put on a new one, we would put the old one back on again, particularly if our disposition toward sin and righteousness had been radically changed? The metaphor indicates that once having laid the old garment (old man) aside and having put on the new one, we will **never** wear the old one again. Both Murray and Leon Morris agree that the verb used of the old self in Romans 6: 6 (**was crucified**) indicates a definitive putting to death of the old man. Morris says, "The verb conveys the thought that the old man was thoroughly destroyed."⁴⁵

⁵ For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, ⁶**knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him**, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; ⁷ for he who has died is freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. ¹⁰For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹Even so **consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus**. ¹² Therefore do not let sin **reign** in your **mortal body** so that you obey its lusts, ¹³ and do not go on **presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness**; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your **members as instruments of righteousness to God**. ¹⁴ For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace (Rom. 6: 1-14).

G. The New Man

Who is this new man? In Colossians, Paul tells us that the new man is **being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him** while in Ephesians he says, **and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth**. Comparing the two texts, it would seem, then, that the new man (1) has been created; that is, the Christian is a new creature in Christ (since the old creature is now dead), a fact that agrees with 2 Corinthians 5: 17; and (2) that this image is not yet complete but is being progressively conformed to the image of Christ and God, an image that consists of true knowledge that produces holiness and righteousness. Therefore, the **true knowledge** is not intellectual knowledge only, but a **knowledge producing holiness**. This, in turn, is consistent with Romans 8: 29,

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become conformed* to the **image of His Son**, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren (Romans 8:29 NASB).

⁴⁵ Morris, *Romans*, p. 251

H. A Short Commentary on Colossians 3: 5-11

Although we once lived in the sins of immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, we are now **dead** to these things as a way of life. They no longer have mastery or control over our lives. Our death to sin as a dominating way of life is fully supported by the analogy of Scripture found in Romans.

¹What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?² May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?³ Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.⁵ For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, **knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;**⁷ **for he who has died is freed from sin.**⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him (Rom. 6: 1-9 NASB)

Freed from sin does not mean sinless perfection. It means freedom from the dominion of sin. The analogy is this: dead men don't sin. In Colossians 3: 6, Paul says that God is coming in judgment upon such sins. **Immorality** and **impurity** refer to sexual immorality, and **passion** refers to sexual passion. In another Pauline epistle we read,

³For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality;⁴ that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,⁵ not in **lustful passion**, like the Gentiles who do not know God; (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 NASB)

Paul uses many vice lists (lists of sins) throughout his epistles, and sexual immorality is always included (cf. Rom. 1: 26-32; 1 Cor. 5: 9-11; 6: 9-10; Gal. 5: 19-21; Eph. 5: 3-6; 1 Thes. 4: 3-7; 1 Tim. 1: 9-10; 2 Tim. 3: 2-5; Tit. 3: 3). **Greed** or **covetousness** is also commonly included. It is possible that the **idolatry** mentioned is in apposition (not opposition) to greed alone and not to the other sins. In other words, **greed** amounts to idolatry. All sin, of course, is idolatry; but Paul may be singling out greed as especially expressive of loving and worshiping something else more than God. Pastors in the US don't talk much about greed. I wonder why? Could it be, as one theologian has said, that greed has become the institutionalized sin of the church for over a half century, one of those respectable sins which no one gets upset about? Yet, Paul may be isolating it from the rest of the vice list as the sin which especially epitomizes (represents) idolatry, and he makes freedom from the love of money as a requirement for elders (1 Tim. 3: 3).

Both the sins of the **body** and the sins of the **mind** are included in Paul's vice lists of L200-201 and L209-210. **Passion, evil desire, and greed** are sins of the mind and heart while **immorality** and **impurity** are sins which we normally think of as finding expression in the body. Sin is not only that which is **external** to the body, but **internal**. On the other hand, internal sin generally finds external expression **in the body**; therefore, Paul exhorts the Colossians to "consider the **members** of your **earthly body** as dead" to these things" all of them. Just as uncontrolled passion and evil desire give rise to sexual immorality and impurity, greed gives rise to apathy (unconcern) toward those in need and extravagant lifestyles centered on material things rather than the kingdom of God. Paul's exhortation in Romans 6 demonstrates how the sinner **presents** the members of his body to sinful practice.

¹⁰For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹Even so **consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.** ¹²Therefore do not let sin **reign**

in your **mortal body** so that you obey its lusts,¹³ and do not go on **presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness**; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your **members as instruments of righteousness to God**.¹⁴ For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace (Rom. 6: 10-14).

Therefore, the physical body is seen as something which can either be **presented** as an instrument *facilitating* (being used for) *sin* or an instrument *facilitating* (being used for) *righteousness*. For example, the arms may either wield a club to beat someone to death, or they may use a hoe to grow food for one's family or a needy widow. The mouth may be used to slander or lie, or it may be used to encourage or sing praises to God. The feet may run swiftly to steal, or they may run to save someone injured in a car accident.

Another metaphor Paul uses is that the body is either presented as a **slave to sin** or a **slave to righteousness**, but the body is not a slave to *both* sin *and* righteousness at the same time. The two different conditions of slavery are mutually exclusive of one another. In Romans 6, Paul expressly states that the old self, or the old man, **was crucified**; therefore, the Christian can no longer be the old man who is a slave to sin. Further, a close look at the context reveals that the crucifixion of the old man is *patterned* after the crucifixion of Christ who has been crucified *once* and is never to be crucified again.

The believer is not regarded as dying and rising with Christ again and again. [Notice Col. 3: 3, "For you have died, not "For you are dying."] Undoubtedly there is process and progression in the believer's life and this may properly be understood as *progressive realization* [understanding] of the implications and claims of having died and risen with Christ. But the *dying and rising* with Christ are not viewed as process but as *definitive and decisive event* and can no more be construed [understood] as continuous process than can the death and resurrection of Christ himself. We are *not commanded to become dead to sin and alive to God*; these are presupposed [assumed]. And it is not by reckoning these to be facts that they become facts [that is, it does not become fact by thinking to yourself, "I am dead to sin"]. The force of the imperative is that we are to reckon with and appreciate the facts which already obtain *by virtue of union with Christ*. The expression "dead unto sin" implies an abiding state of condition resultant upon [resulting from] the once-for-all decisive event of having died to sin *by union with Christ in the efficacy of his death*. And the complementation of "dead unto sin" and "alive unto God," as parallel to Christ's death to sin and life to God (vs. 10), implies that the life to God is of *abiding continuance just as being dead to sin is*. The security and permanence of this life to God are insured by the fact that it is "in Christ Jesus" the life is maintained. It is not to be supposed [in v. 12] that sin is conceived of as reigning in the believer and that now he is exhorted to terminate that reign of sin. *This would run counter to all that has been set forth in the preceding verses* regarding the status of the believer as dead to sin and alive to God. And, furthermore, we have in this passage the assurance that sin will not have dominion because the believer is not under law but under grace (vs. 14). The force of the imperative [command] can be understood only in the light of the relation of the indicative [fact] to the imperative. *Sin does not have the dominion—this is the indicative [fact]*. This indicative is not only expressly asserted in verse 14, it is implicit in all that the apostle has argued in the verses that precede verse 12. *Let not sin reign—this is the imperative [command]. And it flows from the indicative*. It is only *because* sin does not reign that it can be said, "Therefore let not sin reign." In other words, *the presupposition* [assumption] *of the exhortation* is not that sin reigns but the *opposite*, that it does not reign, and *it is for that reason that the exhortation can have validity and appeal*. To say to the slave who has not been emancipated [freed], "Do not behave as a slave" is to mock his enslavement. But to say the same to the slave who has been set free is the *necessary appeal to put into effect the privileges and rights of his liberation*. So in this case the sequence is: sin does not have the dominion; therefore, do not allow it to reign. Deliverance from the dominion of sin is both the *basis of and the incentive to the fulfillment of the exhortation*, "Let not sin reign"⁴⁶

⁴⁶ John Murray, *Romans*, selections from pp. 224-227; words in brackets and emphasis mine.

Thus, the believer's crucifixion is likened to Christ's crucifixion, a once and for all event. This does not eliminate the necessity of *progressive sanctification* or progressively putting sin to death (Rom. 8) but the definitive break with sin in the death of the old man is the *ground upon which progressive sanctification is made possible*, for he who has died is freed from sin (Rom. 6:7 NASB), that is, freed from sin as a dominating power demanding compliance and obedience. Our emancipation from slavery to sin is also the *indicative* (a statement of fact) which serves as the *incentive* (motive) to the *fulfillment* of the *imperative* (let not sin reign).⁴⁷ In other words, since we know that we are, in fact, free from sin as a way of life, we have the incentive and encouragement to press on toward perfection in practice.

If a runner believes he has the potential to run 100 meters in less than ten seconds, he will have the incentive (motive) to train many months to achieve this goal. If, indeed, God has given him the genetic potential, then the proper training will enable him to reach this goal. But there are others of us, like me, who have no incentive to run 100 meters in under ten seconds simply because no amount of training will enable us to do this. We just don't have the potential period. On the other hand, I know that God has given me everything necessary to live a holy life (2 Pet. 1: 3) giving me the incentive to train toward perfection.

For the reasons mentioned above, I believe that the NASB rendering of Colossians 3: 5 is a good one, *consider* the members of your earthly body as dead. We consider (or reckon) ourselves dead to sin and alive to righteousness because we *are* dead to sin and alive to righteousness. Further, as Murray has proposed, progressive *sanctification* is the *progressive realization* (awareness) of a *real, spiritual* death in Christ's death and a *real, spiritual* resurrection to life in Christ's resurrection. Sin's power over us has been broken; therefore, we no longer have to obey its urgent demands but may yield ourselves to the demands of holiness. While the *remnants* of the old man's thinking and his behavior remain in us, he no longer exists as a dominating reality.

To use another analogy, if an old man has died and has been buried, then most of his possessions and dirty laundry have been cleared out of the house after burial. However, there still remain remnants of the old man's life a pair of ragged shoes and one sock with a hole in it, a frayed, dirty shirt, a torn pair of trousers, etc. Although he is gone from the house, and although most of his old belongings have been cleared out, a few items remain. Over the next few weeks, the remainder of the old man's clothing will be removed. Likewise, the believer will remove the remaining items of the old man he was once and the old life he once lived. But it will take a lot longer than a few weeks! This process will occur for the rest of his life, for there are many remaining sins of the old man which are left behind. At death, Christ will complete the process by purging whatever remains. At that point, what the believer is now in *position* and standing with Christ, he will also be in *condition* experientially and practically.

In the commentary above, I have demonstrated the importance of (1) the analogy of faith (comparing scripture with scripture), (2) comparing the meaning of words and phrases with how the same author uses these words and phrases in different books, and (3) consulting commentaries when available.⁴⁸

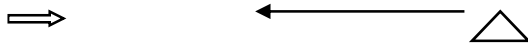
VI. Examination of Colossians 3: 12-17

A. Meaning Indicators and Stylistic Features

⁴⁷ Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, p. 220

⁴⁸ Wolvaardt, HTIB, p. 79, "The steps of exegesis. 5. Read interpretations of others"

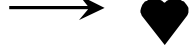
(224) 12 So, *as those who have been chosen of God,*



(225) *holy and beloved,*



(226) **put on** a heart



A

Soô reason indicator. Since you *are* a new man in Christ, then *act* like a new man. Having told the Colossians to **put off**, Paul now tells them to **put on**. Negation (ōdonōt do thisō) is not enough in the Christian life. There must be a positive endowment of good behavior (ōdo thisō).

of compassion, kindness,

(227) humility, gentleness and patience;

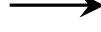
B

The human heart cannot remain a vacuum emptied of everything. Inevitably, it will be filled with something. **Put on** is antithetically parallel to **put aside**; thus the "ōA".

(228) ¹³ **bearing with** *one another,*



(229) **and forgiving** *each other,*



C

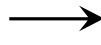
Inward qualities. *Good* characteristics antithetically parallel to the *evil* characteristics of L200-201 and L209-210; thus, the B.

(230) **whoever has a complaint against** *anyone,*

(231) *just as the Lord forgave you,*



(232) **so also should you.**



Outward actions (C) producing *unity* in the church rather than *strife and disunity*. Participles (**bearing, forgiving**) indicating *present* activity are antithetically parallel to the *past activity* of L205-206; 212 and 214). **So also should you** has an implied present tense verb **so also should you forgive**. Note also the **one another** and **each other**. **Forgiving each other** is both outward and inward; but if not expressed outwardly, it is not inwardly real.

The inward qualities of the heart (B) (L226-227). All of these qualities stand or fall together. **Compassion** is the capacity to be emotionally and even physically affected by someone else's sorrow, calamity, or weakness (literally, *ōto be moved in the inward parts*; cf. Lk. 15: 20; Matt. 9: 36; Matt. 20: 34, *ōMoved with compassion*, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him. *ō Being moved with compassion* is something like having a heavy, sorrowful feeling in the pit of your stomach. Another rendering is **pity**; ESV). True **compassion**, in turn, leads to **kindness** (like the Good Samaritan). You cannot **show** compassion without **doing** something. **Humility, gentleness, and patience** go together because only a humble person is capable of recognizing his own weakness, especially his sin. This enables him to be gentle and patient with fellow sinners. How short we all fall in this respect, for it is much easier to condemn the faults of others than to be patient with them!

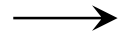
All the characteristics of L226-227 flow naturally from L224-225. The Colossians **have been chosen of God** and are **holy and beloved**. Therefore, they have a *reason* to exhibit these qualities to others. God has been compassionate, kind, gentle, and patient with *them*. God has also been humble. There has been no greater manifestation of humility than the humility of Christ's incarnation and crucifixion.

He was not constrained (controlled) by any necessity outside of His and the Father's love for us to suffer the indignity of poverty, fatigue, persecution, slander, torture, and death. Because of what He did *without constraint*, we do because we *are constrained* by the love of Christ.

For the love of Christ **controls** us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died;¹⁵ and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf (2 Corinthians 5:14-15 NASB)

(233) ¹⁴ Beyond all **THESE THINGS**

(234) **put on**



love,



which is the perfect bond of unity.



Present command. **Put on** is not in the Greek text but is implied. The words are inserted in all the major translations. **These things** refer to L226-232.

B The most fundamental **characteristic** of the new

C Inward love produces outward **unity**. Unity is not a "thing" but an activity in the body of Christ in contrast with the characteristics of the old man—greed, wrath, malice, etc.—which produce the activity of **disunity** and strife.

(235) ¹⁵ **LET...**

RULE

A

the peace of Christ ... in your hearts,



B



Present command. "Put on peace" by **letting it rule** in your hearts. Paul is no longer using the metaphor, but the idea of putting on new clothing is still evident.

Peace is another **characteristic** of the new man contrary to the old man.

(236) to which indeed you were called in one body;



C

cf. L224—**have been chosen**

We are called to peace with one another—a present, observable, corporate **activity**—not simply a state of mind. **In one body** corresponds to **unity, one another, and each other**.

(237) **and BE**



A

"Put on thankfulness" by being **thankful**.

thankful.



B

The **character** of the new man contrasted with immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (L200)

(238) ¹⁶ **LET...**

DWELL

A

"Put the word of God in your heart."

the word of Christ

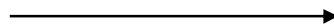


richly within you,



Word-saturated minds and hearts in contrast to hearts filled with **anger, wrath, malice, evil desire, uncontrolled passion, etc.**

(239) with all wisdom **B**
 teaching and admonishing one another



a

C

b

The present *activity* of hearts and minds which are saturated with the word of God (**teaching and admonishing one another** and **singing** corporate worship characterized by **thankfulness**). Notice the repetition of thankfulness (L237, 241)

More parallels. Note the preposition **with** and the participles **teaching and admonishing and singing**. The **psalms and hymns and spiritual songs** are parallel with **wisdom**.

(240) with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,

a

(241) singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

b



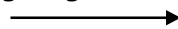
(242) ¹⁷ **WHATEVER YOU DO IN WORD OR DEED,**

(243) DO ALL in the name of the Lord Jesus, **A**



Concluding statement for 3: 12-17 and *introduction* for 3: 18-4:1

(244) giving thanks through Him to God the Father.



This is only one way of looking at the passage which is divided into “**A**” *present commands*, “**B**” *character (old and new)* and “**C**” *activity (past and present)*. Notice that the *present* activity of vv. 12-17 is always contrasted with the *past* activity of **were living** and **once walked**. Once a person is converted to Christ, there is no going back to the old life of sin. There will be lapses in our behavior (as with King David), but there will be no return to the kingdom of darkness where we once habitually resided. We now have a new address, and there is no returning to the old address.

B. Schematic view of Colossians 3: 5-11

Summary

(198) **5** Therefore

(199) **consider** the members of your earthly body **as dead**

A¹ Consider yourselves dead...
(present command)

(200) to immorality, impurity, passion,
evil desire, and greed,

(201) which amounts to idolatry.

(202) ⁶For it is because of these things

(203) that the wrath of God will come

(204) upon the sons of disobedience,

B¹ ...to the **character** of the old man
who deserves God's wrath...

(205) ⁷and in them you also **once walked**,

(206) when you **were living** in them.

C¹ ...in which you once lived, but no longer
live **(past activity)** of the Colossians)

(207) ⁸But now you also,

(208) **put them all aside:**

A² Put aside...**(present command)**

(209) anger, wrath, malice,

(210) slander, *and* abusive speech from your mouth.

B² ...the **character** of the old man...

(211) ⁹Do not lie to one another,

(212) since you **laid aside** the old self

(213) with its *evil* practices,

A³ Do not lie to one
another...**(present
command)**

C² ...since you put off the old man...**(past activity)**

(214) ¹⁰and **have put on** the new self

B³ ...with his **evil character**...

C³ ...and have put on the new man...**(past
activity)**

(215) who is being **renewed**

(216) to a true knowledge

(217) according to the image of the **One who created him**ô

B⁴ ...who is being renewed to a true knowledge of
God—knowledge which reflects the image of
Christ. **(present character)** of the new man)

(218) ¹¹a **renewal in which** there is no *distinction*

(219) *between* Greek e
and Jew, f

(220) circumcised f
and uncircumcised, e

(221) barbarian, Scythian, g

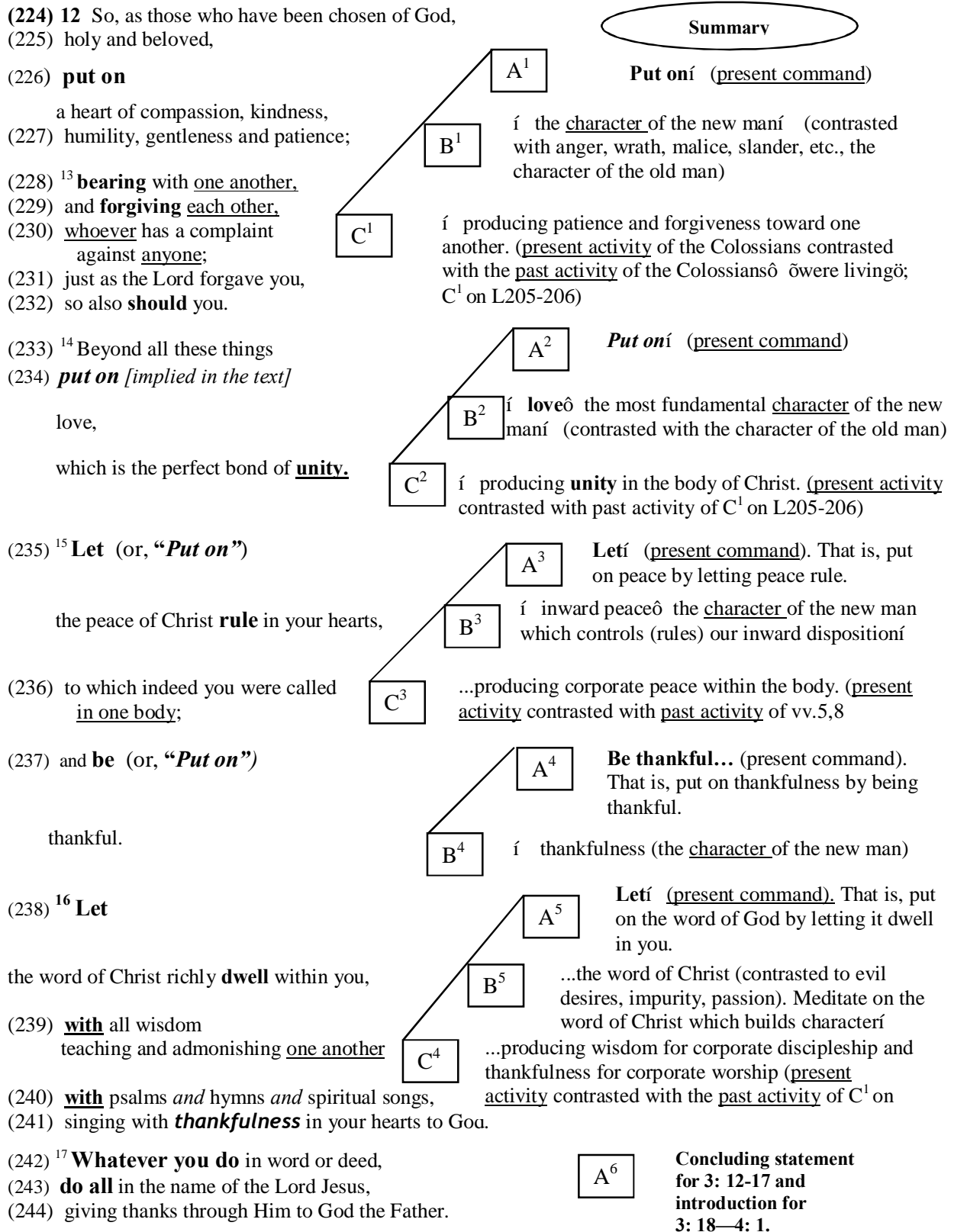
(222) slave and freeman, h

B⁵ ...a renewal in which there are no
distinctions of worth between people
because all of life is summed up in
our union with Christ. **(present
character)** of new man)

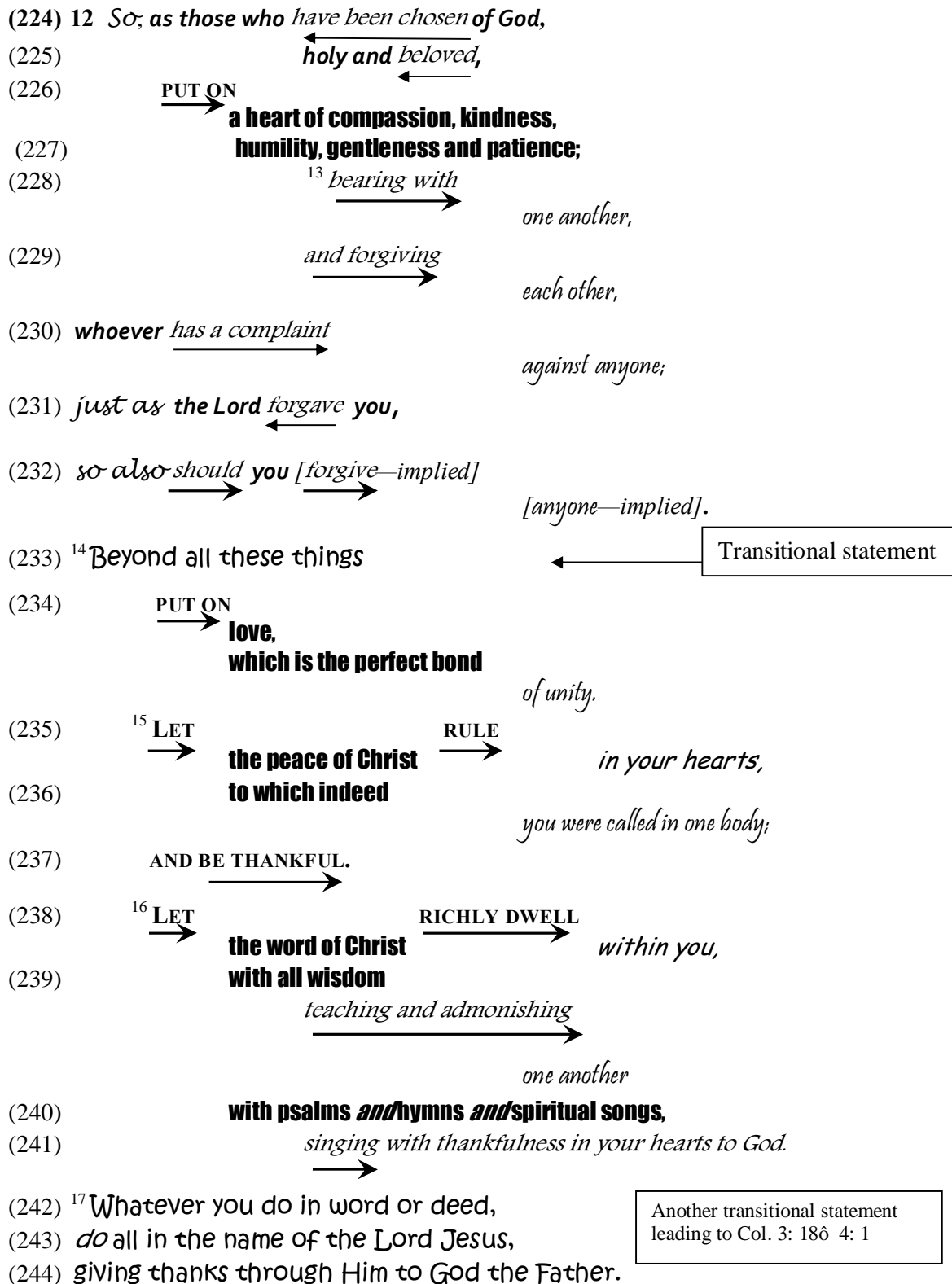
(223) but **Christ is all, and in all.**

The “A” synonymous parallels refer to the *present commands or imperatives*. The “B” parallels may be either synonymous or antithetic (contrasting) parallels. Either the *good characteristics* of the new man or the *bad characteristics* of the old man are in view, but since they represent *character*, they are represented by the same letter. The “C” parallels represent *past activity* either in living as the old man or living as the new man or in putting off the old man or putting on the new man. The verbs are in the *past* indicating that the action is accomplished.

C. Schematic view of Colossians 3: 12-17 (compared with 3: 5-11 above)



Alternative Diagram of Colossians 3: 12-17 using the indentation method.



D. Suggested Meaning Blocks of Colossians 3: 1-17

Summary

(188) ¹ *Therefore*

- (189) *if* you have been raised up with Christ, A
- (190) *keep seeking* the things above,
- (191) where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

If you have participated with Christ in His resurrection^o and you have^o then your priorities in life should be the priorities of Christ, who is now exalted at the right hand of God the Father.

- (192) ² *Set your mind on* the things above, B
- (193) not on the things that are on earth.

Focus on God's kingdom and how everything has its meaning in relationship to this kingdom.

- (194) ³ *For* you have died C
- (195) and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
- (196) ⁴ When Christ, who is our life, is revealed,
- (197) then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

In Christ you have died to the world and the priorities of the world (Gal. 6: 14). Just as the exalted Christ is now **hidden**, so also the **life** of the believer is **hidden**. At the return of Christ in glory, believers will also be revealed to the world in their exalted condition.

(198) ⁵ *Therefore*

- (199) consider the members of your earthly body as dead
- (200) to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed,
- (201) which amounts to idolatry. D

Consider yourselves dead to any evil character which is the same thing as worshipping idols. "The human heart is an idol factory." (John Calvin)

- (202) ⁶ *For* it is because of these things
- (203) that the wrath of God will come
- (204) upon the sons of disobedience, E
- (205) ⁷ and in them you also once walked,
- (206) when you were living in them.

Because of these evil things, God's wrath is coming in judgment upon those who live in disobedience. In the past, you lived the same way.

- (207) ⁸ *But now you also,* F
- (208) *put them all aside:*
- (209) anger, wrath, malice,
- (210) slander, *and* abusive speech from your mouth.

Get rid of the **remaining** sins (traces) of the old man.

- (211) ⁹ *Do not lie* to one another, G
- (212) since you laid aside the old self
- (213) with its *evil* practices,
- (214) ¹⁰ and have put on the new self
- (215) who is being renewed
- (216) to a true knowledge
- (217) according to the image of the One who created him^o

Do not lie because (**since**) you have laid the old man aside like a worn-out garment and have put on the new man whose thinking and behavior is being made new according to the image of Christ.

(218) ¹¹ *a renewal in which* there is no *distinction*

- (219) *between* Greek and Jew,
 (220) circumcised and uncircumcised,
 (221) barbarian, Scythian,
 (222) slave and freeman,
 (223) but Christ is all, and in all.

H

In this renewed image, there are no distinctions of worth between different cultures, races, or social classes. The only thing that matters is whether a person knows Christ.

(224) ¹² *So, as those who have been chosen of God,*

- (225) *holy and beloved,*
 (226) *put on a heart* of compassion, kindness,
 (227) humility, gentleness and patience;
 (228) ¹³ bearing with one another,
 (229) and forgiving each other,
 (230) whoever has a complaint against anyone;
 (231) just as the Lord forgave you,
 (232) so also should you.

I

As you are putting off the evil remnants of the old man, you should be putting on all the good characteristics of the new man, characteristics which enhance the corporate life of the body of Christ. These characteristics produce patience and forgiveness, thus imitating the forgiveness of the Lord Jesus who also forgave us.

(233) ¹⁴ *Beyond all these things*

- (234) *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

J

Love is the grace which binds all the other graces together (F.F. Bruce, *Colossians*, p. 156.) Love is the glue that holds believers together in unity (Gal. 5: 22)

(235) ¹⁵ *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,*

- (236) to which indeed you were called in one body;
 (237) and be thankful.

K

Rather than letting anger, malice, greed, etc. rule your life, let the peace of Christ govern your hearts producing peace throughout the community of believers. (Gal. 5: 22).

(238) ¹⁶ *Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you,*

- (239) with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another
 (240) with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
 (241) singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

L

Study the word of God in private and public worship. This produces the wisdom essential for making disciples and which produces the gratitude essential for worship that is pleasing to God.

(242) ¹⁷ *Whatever you do in word or deed,*

- (243) *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus,
 (244) giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

M

Everything you do must be done with the goal of honoring Christ, whose name is either honored or dishonored by the way believers treat one another. Further, everything must be done with an attitude of thanksgiving to God the Father for what He has done for us through Jesus Christ.

E. Clues to finding blocks of meaning

In the examples above, I have highlighted the words and phrases which provide clues to blocks of meaning.

1. Reason indicatorsô therefore, for, so
2. Transitional or introductory phrasesô now you also, beyond all these things
3. Imperatives or commandsô keep seeking, set your mind on, consider, put them all aside, do not lie, put on, let
4. Summary statementsô whatever you do in word or deed
5. Further explanationsô *a renewal* in which
6. If/then statementsô if you have been raised up with Christ, [*then*] keep seeking the things above
7. Terms of endearmentô as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved

We must keep in mind that dividing the text into blocks of meaning is *not an exact science*. There is much room for differences of opinion. Paragraph divisions, however, are more exact and much easier to determine, and translators have actually done most of the work for us. Most of the time, Greek scholars will be generally correct in their division of paragraphs, but not infallible. Likewise, chapter and verse divisions in the Bible were made hundreds of years ago by non-inspired translators and are often mistaken.

F. Summary of Colossians 3: 12-17

Now that the Colossians have laid aside the old man (who was crucified) with his evil character, they must continually put on the character of the new man who was raised with Christ. The new man is who they *really are*. This new character is in total contrast to the old man they once wereô a man characterized by anger and malice, immorality and impurity, and abusive use of his tongue. Rather, they must put on compassion and kindness for one another, patience and forbearance, forgiveness, love, peace, and thankfulnessô character which produces unity, effective discipleship, and thankful worship pleasing to God. Such character is **put on** through the private and public teaching of the word of Christ. Only to the extent that their thinking is saturated with the word can they respond to one another with the fruit of the Spirit. Everything they do should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus which means that everything should be done with the goal of making the exalted Christ known to a world of rebellious sinners. This is best achieved only if believers are treating one another with love, compassion, and forgiveness. Love, not doctrinal distinctives (Presbyterian, Baptist, Lutheran, Anglican, Roman Catholic, or Pentecostal) is the glue that holds believers together. As long as the *basic essentials* of the Christian faith are believed, there is ground for unity without divisions over the non-essentials. (Justification by faith alone in Christ alone, sola Scripture, the deity of Christ, etc. would be some of those basic essentials). The corporate community (community) of the church is our most effective evangelism. The lack of it is the worst evidence of our hypocrisy. Nothing should be done which would slander the name of Christ or take His name in vain before the watching world.

VII. Examination of Colossians 3: 17—4:1

A. Meaning Indicators for Colossians 3:17

Colossians 3: 17 is the *conclusion* of Colossians 3: 1-17 and the *introduction* to Colossians 3: 17ô 4:

1. Note also the repetition, **whatever you do**, found in L259.

- (242) ¹⁷ **WHATEVER YOU DO IN WORD OR DEED,**
 (243) **DO ALL** *in the name of the Lord Jesus,*
 (244) **giving thanks** through Him to God the Father.
-

**General directives
or commands
governing all
behavior**

B. Summary of Colossians 3: 17

Submission to Christ governs our obedience to all other human authorities. Doing everything **in the name of the Lord Jesus** is the governing thought of Colossians 3: 18 & 4: 1. Doing something **in the name of** someone else meant that the action was connected with the person in whose name you were acting & presumably with his authorization and approval (cf. Deut. 18: 20; Ps. 118: 26). **Giving thanks** may be the second governing thought in the passage which is mentioned three times in **Colossians 3** alone. Everything we do in word and deed should be done in such a way that the name of Christ is honored and magnified. Submission to Christ and thanksgiving for what God has done for us in Christ is the **controlling principle** of the Christian life. Thus far, Paul has given general principles governing our relationships with others. He will now give specific directives to husbands, wives, masters, slaves, and children.

C. Meaning Indicators of Colossians 3: 18-21

- (245) ¹⁸ Wives **be subject** to your husbands,
 (246) *as is fitting in the Lord.*
 (247) ¹⁹ Husbands, **love** your wives
 (248) **AND** do not be embittered against them.
 (249) ²⁰ Children, **be obedient** to your parents **IN ALL THINGS,**
 (250) **FOR** *this is well-pleasing to the Lord.*
 (251) ²¹ Fathers, **do not exasperate** your children,
 (252) **SO THAT** they will not lose heart.
-

**Specific directives or
commands governing
relationships in the
family.**

D. Summary of Colossians 3: 18-21

Wives should be subject to (obey) their husbands in every way *that does not conflict* with their obedience to Christ (**as is fitting in the Lord**). The phrase, **as is fitting in the Lord**, qualifies and limits her obedience. The Christian wife cannot submit to anything which contradicts or compromises the lordship of Christ over her life. She is not her husband's slave. She is the slave of Christ. A bondsman cannot be subservient to two different masters. Thus, the Christian husband must recognize his wife's complete allegiance to her heavenly master, Jesus Christ.

Husbands should love their wives (**just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her** cf. Eph. 5: 25), and not become bitter (or harsh) against them when they fail to measure up to all their expectations of what they think wives should be. Furthermore, the husband's headship over his wife cannot violate Christ's lordship over *his or her* life. He cannot beat or abuse his wife, nor can he abdicate (give up) his responsibility to be the head of the home by assigning headship to his wife. God assigned the headship of the home to him, not her.⁴⁹

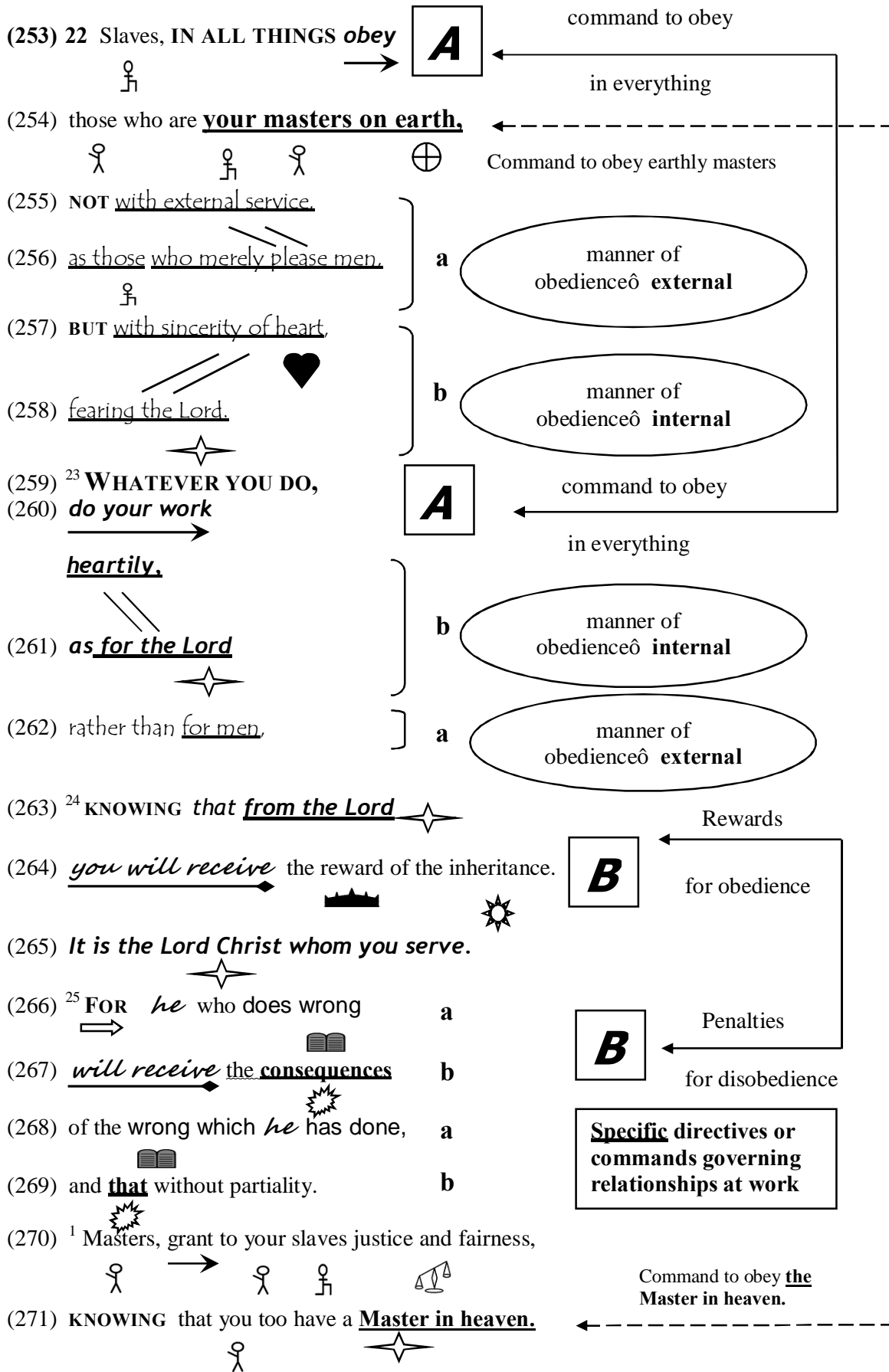
For this is well pleasing to the Lord applies to children's obedience to parents, but the clause also qualifies and limits their obedience. Children should be obedient to their parents in every way that does not contradict their prior submission to Christ as Lord (**Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right**) (Eph 6:1 NASB). Contradiction to Christ's lordship cannot be **well pleasing**. In the same way that husbands should not require perfection from their wives, fathers should not exasperate or provoke their children with unrealistic demands and expectations. Furthermore, the lordship of Christ limits the father's authority over their children. They can discipline their children, but they are not allowed to abuse them. Paul would have no sympathy with the *cultural norm* of male oppression. Such teaching was unheard of in Roman society in which men had almost life and death power over wives and children who had few, if any, legal rights. Therefore, the Christian ethic concerning family life was *counter-cultural*. The Christian faith always challenges the norms (values and ethical systems) of any culture which are not in accord with Scripture. The Christian faith and ethic are not "western". Christianity is not the "white man's religion" imposed on African culture. It is trans-cultural and supernaturally transcendent over all cultures.

On the other hand, fathers are not allowed to let children become independent of their authority or autonomous (self-ruling). Paul would also have no sympathy with the anarchy occurring in western homes and increasingly in African society.

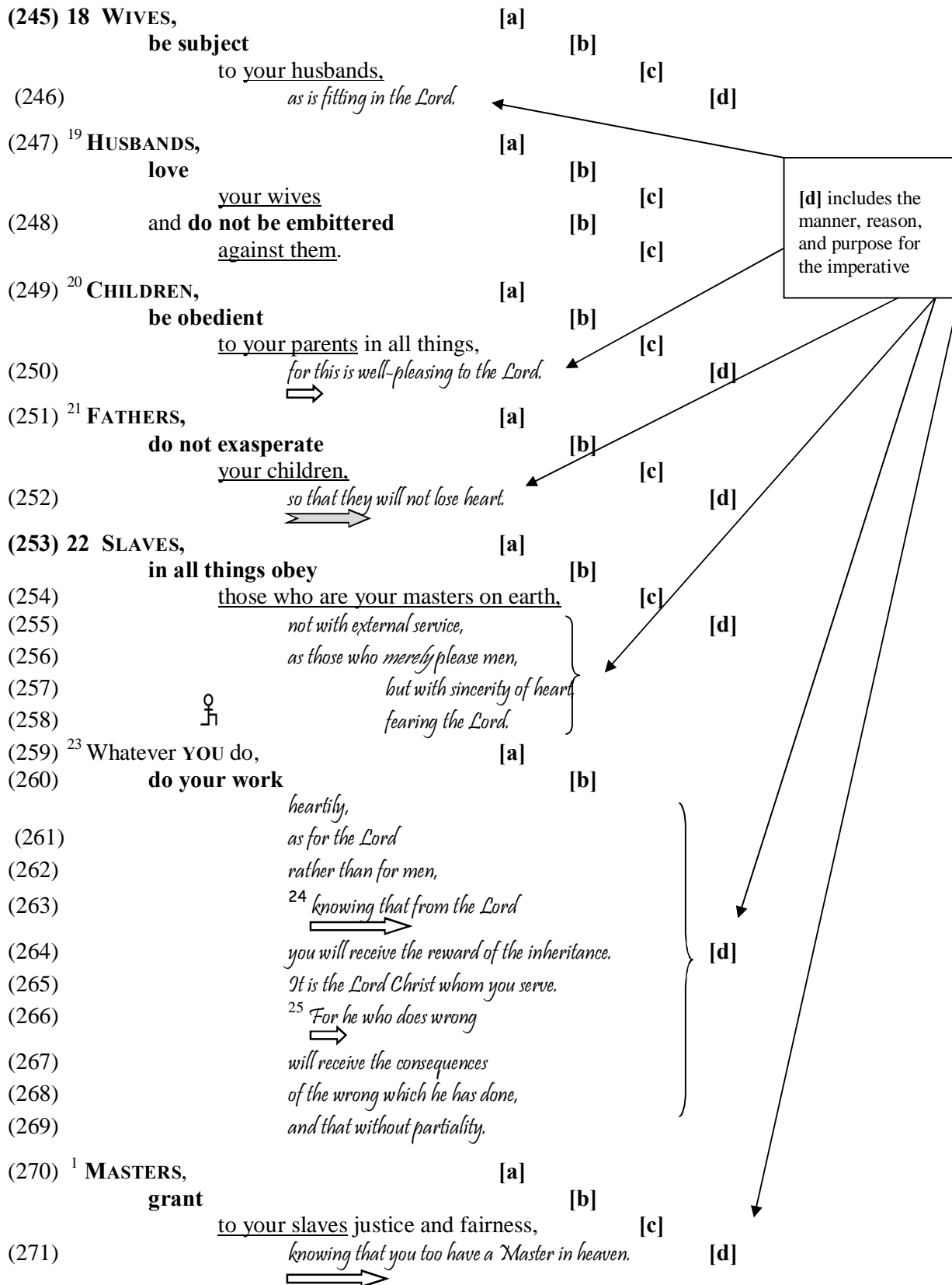
You will notice in the diagram below that Colossians 4: 1 should be included in chapter 3. One of the first considerations when dealing with the *immediate context* is to ignore the chapter divisions of the passage. This will be difficult since we are somewhat programmed to believe that these divisions are inspired by God. They are not. Chapter and verse divisions were added many years after the writing of the Scriptures and are in no sense inspired. They were added so that people worshipping together could find an announced passage easily. Just imagine trying to direct a congregation to a particular verse of Scripture in any book of the Bible, particularly a large one, without chapter and verse divisions. Sometimes these divisions can be very helpful in sorting out the segments in an author's thought. However, as often as not, chapter divisions prevent us from understanding the author's complete thought. The paragraph divisions of modern translations are more helpful since they are the product of careful Hebrew and Greek exegesis. But even they can be incorrect.

E. Meaning Indicators and Stylistic Features of Colossians 3: 22—4: 1

⁴⁹ For the same reason, women should not be elders of churches. See McNeill, *1 Timothy* (especially commentary on 1 Timothy 2 and 3).



F. Alternative Diagram for Colossians 3: 18-21 using the indentation method.



F. Summary of Colossians 3: 22—4: 1

In the same way that the behavior, authority, and submission of husbands, fathers, wives, and children are *qualified and limited* by the lordship of Christ, the behavior, authority and submission of masters and slaves is qualified and limited by this same lordship. Slaves cannot submit to commands which contradict their allegiance to Christ, and masters cannot assume absolute lordship over their slaves in contradiction to the authority and lordship of Christ. This would apply analogously to the modern relationship between employers and employees, management and labor. If obeyed, the passage would have enormous implications for modern economies.

However, to the extent that submission to earthly masters does not contradict the lordship of Christ, slaves should serve their masters as if they are serving Christ himself because this is what they are really doing. If they obey their masters from the heart as if they were obeying Christ, they will be rewarded accordingly, for they are actually serving Christ. The same submission applies to employees who are not slaves. Masters and employers are reminded that they, too, have a Master in heaven who does not show partiality to human masters on earth. God has placed every human being in the place where He wants him or her. Just because a person is a master, this does not mean that God somehow favors him above the slave, or that He favors the employer above the employee. God is no respecter of persons precisely because He is sovereign over the life of each individual. The slave may be chosen unto salvation, while the master may be ordained to eternal punishment.

Therefore, the lordship of Christ governs the workplace and the ordinary, mundane tasks which we all perform. If we do our work heartily for the Lord, no task is mundane; it is an act of worship. There is no *sacred-secular dichotomy* (separation) in the theology of Paul. That is, there is no sphere of activity or labor on earth which is somehow disconnected with one's relationship to the Lord (v. 17; **whatever you do**). The false teachers of Gnosticism believed that the Colossians should focus on a higher level of thought and life which was more spiritual and important than the mundane routine of normal everyday life. Surely these routine things must be avoided, even discarded, as much as possible to allow for further contemplation of the higher life of *pure spirit* the ultimate goal of escape from the human body. God was not concerned (they taught) about the body or the things associated with the body, like work. Paul believed otherwise. Work was the ordinary means of submitting to the lordship of Christ. Most of man's life consists in his work, and if his work becomes disconnected to his faith, then most of his life is spent in faithlessness and whatever is not from faith is sin (Rom. 14: 23b). On the other hand, anyone who submits his work to God will be rewarded for any good deed done **in the name of the Lord Jesus**.

⁷With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, ⁸ **knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord**, whether slave or free; Ephesians 6:7-8 NASB).

It is worthy of notice that Paul wrote one verse each instructing wives, husbands, children, fathers, and masters, and three lengthy verses instructing slaves. In Eph. 5-6, husbands receive most of the emphasis, but even in that passage, slaves are given four verses. Why this emphasis upon slaves? For one thing, many Christians were slaves, and few were masters plain and simple (1 Cor. 1: 26). However, this was not the primary reason for the emphasis upon slaves. Paul was dealing with a very fundamental aspect of one's life his work. Marriage and family was certainly fundamental, and faithfulness in this sphere was crucial for the evangelistic witness of the church. But faithfulness in this other fundamental area was also crucial. If the Christian faith produced slackness in work, insolence and disrespect, and unreliability, among Christian slaves, then the name of God and the Christian faith would be dishonored throughout Roman and Greek society (cf. 1 Tim. 6: 1). Faith in Christ would be viewed, therefore, as a threat to social and political order. On the other hand, if slaves (*doulos*) would demonstrate faithfulness in the mundane, sometimes distasteful tasks set before

themô doing their work as for the Lordô then God would be honored among the heathen. Why? Because others, including non-Christian masters and slaves, would see that the Christian God was worthy of being worshiped even in spite of unpleasant external circumstances. Who was in a better position than a common slave to proclaim the wonder, joy, and freedom of Christian salvation?

Giving thanks, mentioned three times in Colossians 3, is crucial to the success of doing one's work **heartily**. **To do** good work, we must be thankful that God has given us work **to do** and that we have a Savior **for whom to work**. Most people have nothing but themselves or a boss to work for, but we have a **Lord** who also loved us enough to die for us, and loves us still to intercede for us daily before the throne of God the Father. No other boss is so capable and loving.

Christian masters (employers), on the other hand, must be this kind of boss because their **Master in heaven** is this kind of boss (4: 1). Jesus is the kind of Master that every master and employer on earth must imitateô fair, just, kind, generous, understanding, humble, forgiving, and impartial. Earthly masters must give up threatening (Eph. 6: 9) as a means of motivation, but through kindness and generosity should set a Christ-like example. Through the kindness of their masters, many slaves would be won to the Christian faith; and the mutually respectful relationship between Christian masters and Christian slaves would be a witness to God's glory.

G. Suggested Meaning Blocks of Colossians 3: 17—4: 1

- (242) ¹⁷ Whatever you do in word or deed,
 (243) *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus,
 (244) giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

J

Everything you do must be done with the goal of honoring Christ, whose **name** is either honored or dishonored by the way believers treat one another. Further, everything must be done with an attitude of thanksgiving to God the Father for what He has done for us through Jesus Christ. Thankfulness is the mark of true Christian distinguishing him from the ingratitude of unbelievers (cf. Rom. 1: 21a).

- (245) **18** Wives, be subject to your husbands,
 (246) as is fitting in the Lord.

K

Wives should submit to their husbands as far as the higher authority of Christ allows. They should do this because Christ has given the husband spiritual authority over them.

- (247) ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives
 (248) and do not be embittered against them.

L

Husbands should love their wives in practical, observable ways and should avoid all harshness or bitterness toward the imperfect behavior of their wives. The compassion and kindness they owe to others surely must be evident in their marriage.

- (249) ²⁰ Children, be obedient to your parents in all things,
 (250) for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.

M

Children must submit to the authority of their parents as far as the authority of Christ allows. This is pleasing to the Lord who established the home as the basic authority structure of society.

(251) ²¹ Fathers, do not exasperate your children,
 (252) so that they will not lose heart.

N

Fathers should not be over-zealous or unrealistic in their correction and training of children. If they do so, their children may lose any hope of doing anything right. Discipline should be a mixture of both positive and negative exhortations, not just negative criticism.

(253) **22** Slaves, in all things obey
 (254) those who are your masters on earth,
 (255) not with external service,
 (256) as those who *merely* please men,
 (257) but with sincerity of heart,
 (258) fearing the Lord.

O

Slaves must submit to their earthly masters as far as the authority of Christ will allow. They should do this because God has ordered society in such a way that there are some who are *in authority* and others who are *under authority*. Any other ordering of society would result in chaos and the tyranny of pure democracy where everyone does what is right in his own eyes (Judges 17: 6; 21: 25). Slaves should submit to their masters with the goal of pleasing Christ and not men, knowing that Christ is watching everything they do.

(259) ²³ Whatever you do,
 (260) do your work heartily,
 (261) as for the Lord
 (262) rather than for men,

P

It does not matter what kind of work you do or how unpleasant it may seem. The important thing to understand is that you are doing it for the Lord and not for men. For this reason, you should be able to do any kind of work **heartily**—from the heartô knowing that you are doing it for the Lord.

(263) ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord
 (264) you will receive the reward of the inheritance.
 (265) It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

Q

Anything you do for the Lord will be rewarded by the Lord Himself. This reward is not the reward of eternal life, but special rewards for services rendered that are included in the inheritance (cf. Eph. 6: 5-8).

(266) ²⁵ For he who does wrong
 (267) will receive the consequences
 (268) of the wrong which he has done,
 (269) and that without partiality.

R

The additional incentives for faithful service are the **consequences** for unfaithful service. Not only are there rewards in heaven for obedience, but there are consequences for disobedienceô whether a man is a slave or a free man makes no difference. All will be judged (cf. 2 Cor. 5: 10; Matt. 16: 27).

(270) ¹ Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness,
 (271) knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.

S

Masters must recognize that they also are men under authority, the authority of the **Master** in heaven. As their Master is always fair and just, so also should they.

Note to the reader: These meaning blocks were actually worked out in my head before I wrote the summaries of each section—Col. 3: 1-4; 3: 5-11; 3: 12-17; and 3: 17—4: 1. I simply put them all together here.

Excursus: Review of Wolvaardt’s Five Steps of Exegesis

Wolvaardt lists five **Steps of Exegesis** (p. 79). For those who do not have his book, *How to Interpret the Bible—A Do-It-Yourself-Manual*, I will reproduce them here with further comments.

1. Research the communication situation. Study the historical context of the text under examination, including the questions: Who wrote the book, to whom, under what circumstances, for what purpose, etc.⁵⁰ In addition to the Bible, other sources may be consulted such as Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, notes in study Bibles (your best source outside the Bible itself) etc. Remember also that the very best source of information about any single text in the Bible is the Bible itself (look at the cross references in the margins of your study Bibles). We have not spent any time on these questions; however, by studying the text itself, much of the *historical* context can be discovered even without consulting outside sources.⁵¹

2. Establish the Literary Context. This includes the study of the text itself. What kind of literary *genre* (form) is under examination: (1) the exposition and exhortation of the NT epistles; (2) the poetry of Psalms, Proverbs, other wisdom books, and the prophets; (3) apocalyptic literature of Revelation or Daniel; (4) the narratives of the OT, Acts, or the Gospels; (5) the parables of Jesus; or (6) a mixture of several types, as in the prophets? The type of genre used will determine the strategy for interpretation.⁵²

3. Analyze the Passage. Wolvaardt breaks this step down into five separate steps:

3.1 Write out the passage in smaller units.

3.2 Mark the significant meaning indicators (cf. *I. Meaning Indicators: A. Persons, things, events, and attributes, B. Stylistic features, C. Relationships between the different syntactic units*, from your notes).

3.3 Explain words and phrases (cf. *II. The meaning of words and phrases* from your notes).

3.4 Establish the meaning structure. This step includes the identification of meaning blocks. However, one must first study the historical context (1), the literary context (2) and analyze the passage (3.1, 3.2, and 3.3) before he is able to determine blocks of meaning.

3.5 Conclude and summarize the message to the original receiver. Summarize the meaning of the text in your own words, using the words of the Biblical author as sparingly as possible. If you cannot summarize the meaning in your own words, you don’t understand the text.

4. Relate message to broader biblical and theological framework.⁵³ If our interpretation contradicts the plain teaching of the Bible elsewhere, then something is wrong with our interpretation—unless, of

⁵⁰ See Wolvaardt, *HTIB*, p. 81, and McNeill, *Hermeneutics, II. The Context, D. Historical-Cultural Context*

⁵¹ (See McNeill, *Hermeneutics, II. The Context, B. The Context of the Book in which the Passage is Found*).

⁵² (See McNeill, *Hermeneutics; Synoptic Gospels; Wisdom Literature; Major and Minor Prophets; and Biblical Interpretation—the Synoptic Gospels; Biblical Interpretation—OT Narratives; and Biblical Interpretation—Old Testament Poetry*

⁵³ Cf. *II. The meaning of words and phrases*, from your notes which includes a discussion of the *analogy of faith*. See also my notes on *Hermeneutics, The Analogy of Faith*

course, we were mistaken about what we thought the Bible taught, which is very possible. This leads to the last step.

5. Read interpretations of others (e.g. commentaries). Don't be arrogant. The Holy Spirit was teaching His church centuries before you were born, and He will be doing so centuries after you are dead. Allow the Holy Spirit to teach you through what He has taught others. Men of God have spent lifetimes studying the scriptures in the original languages. They are God's gifts to His church (Eph. 4: 11-14); use them. However, Wolvaardt is correct in putting this step **last**. Because of our inherent laziness, our first tendency is to grab a commentary off the shelf before we have spent extensive time and effort interpreting the text ourselves. We like short-cuts to any hard labor. But our laziness robs us of any self-discovery of what the text teaches. It also makes us too susceptible to the opinions of scholars who may be mistaken in their interpretation. Besides, many African pastors today will not have a large library of commentaries to use in their study of the text, and this situation is not likely to change in the near future. To help with this matter, my wife Fran has distributed dozens of Kindles loaded with resource materials.

H. Possible Sermon Outline for Colossians 3: 17—4: 1

Main Idea: Everything we do in life must be done for the purpose of honoring the name of Christ and showing our gratitude to Him for what He has done.

This elicits (brings up) a question from the text: **What are the most common activities and responsibilities for all people?** The answer is: marriage, family, and one's occupation or labor. To carry this further, what are the responsibilities of marriage, family, and occupation which are most likely to bring friction and strife within each of these spheres of activity? The answer is: **submission to the authority established by God.** This was obviously the point of friction in Colossae and Ephesus—failure to submit willingly and heartily to authority in those ordinary and mundane tasks God had given them. Why else would Paul mention the exhortations in Colossians 3?

The question, therefore, which I would use as the basis for my sermon is this: **What does it mean to submit to authority as a wife, husband, child, slave, and master?** If you are asking about why I included husbands and masters, the answer is simple: *Everyone* must submit to some kind of authority. Implicit in Colossians 4: 1 is the necessity for the master (the employer) to submit to Christ, *his* master. The same is certainly true of the husband, for Paul *commands* the husband to love his wife—not a polite suggestion, but an imperative demanding compliance (obedience). Loving one's wife in ways she can understand is not an option for husbands, but is part of their submission to Christ. Thus, the outline would look something like this:

Revised Main Idea: Honoring the name of Christ in every part of our lives must include grateful submission to His authority in marriage, in family, and in our work.

But what does this mean? How do we practice submission to Christ in all these crucial areas? The answer to this question provides the points of my sermon (which, by the way, I have never preached).

I. Wives must submit to their own husbands as if they were submitting to Christ.

A. The Pattern of Submission—the church's submission to Christ

B. The Limitations of Submission—as far as the authority of Christ allows (She cannot submit to her husband in ways which violate her submission to Christ's authority.)

II. Husbands must love their own wives in observable, practical ways.

A. The Pattern of Submission Christ's self-sacrifice for His church (note: This is not in the Colossians text, but any treatment of this subject would need to use the Ephesians text as well as the Colossians text.)

B. The Limitations of Submission as far as the authority of Christ allows (That is, the husband cannot love his wife in ways which violate his loyalty to Christ, for this would not be true love. For example, he cannot allow her to be the head of the family since Christ has given this responsibility to him. Thus, it is not love by which a husband becomes subordinate to his wife.)

III. Children must obey their parents as if they were obeying Christ.

A. The Pattern of Submission Christ's submission to His heavenly father

B. The Limitations of Submission as far as the authority of Christ allows (Thus, children are not the slaves of their parents who must do anything they ask. They must obey only if obedience does not violate the law of God. Children are first and foremost, the slaves of Christ).

IV. Employees must obey their employers in everything related to their jobs.

A. The Pattern of Submission Slavery to Christ (You are really working for Christ, and this knowledge will make all the difference in the way you work.)

B. The Limitations of Submission as far as the authority of Christ allows (Employees must not do anything which violates the Law of God, even if it results in getting fired.)

V. Employers must treat their employees fairly and justly.

A. The Pattern of Submission Christ as the benevolent master who is always just and fair. (Employers do not have the liberty of treating employees any way they please, but must honor the pattern of Christ's mastery over the church. If they choose to mistreat them, then their Master in heaven will discipline them accordingly.)

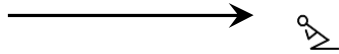
B. The Limitations of Submission as far as the authority of Christ allows (Employers must maintain proper leadership over their employees so that their authority is not despised or treated with contempt. Contempt for authority in any sphere of society is contempt of Christ who established the authority structures in society. The tyranny of the employer must not be replaced with the tyranny of the labor force which is what happens with labor unions on strike which hold their employers hostage to their demands, or students at a university striking against the administration. The *position* of leadership implies the *responsibility* of leadership.)

Quite obviously, this "sermon" with due preparation would actually become a *series* of sermons covering these crucial areas of obedience to authority. You could develop a whole seminar on marriage, family, and work from this outline.

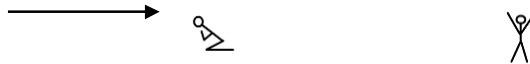
VIII. Examination of Colossians 4: 2-18

A. Meaning Indicators and B. Stylistic Features

(272) ² *Devote yourselves* to prayer,



(273) keeping alert in it with *an attitude of* thanksgiving



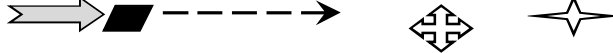
(274) ³ *praying* at the same time for us as well,



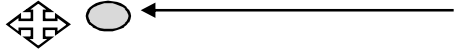
(275) that God will open up to us a door for the word,



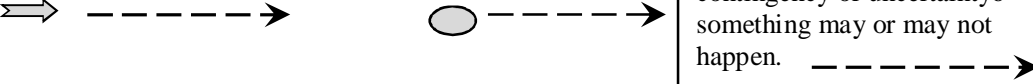
(276) so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ,



(277) for which I have also been imprisoned;



(278) ⁴ that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.



(279) ⁵ *Conduct yourselves* WITH WISDOM toward outsiders,



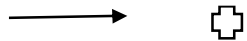
(280) making the most of the opportunity.



(281) ⁶ *Let your speech always be* WITH GRACE,

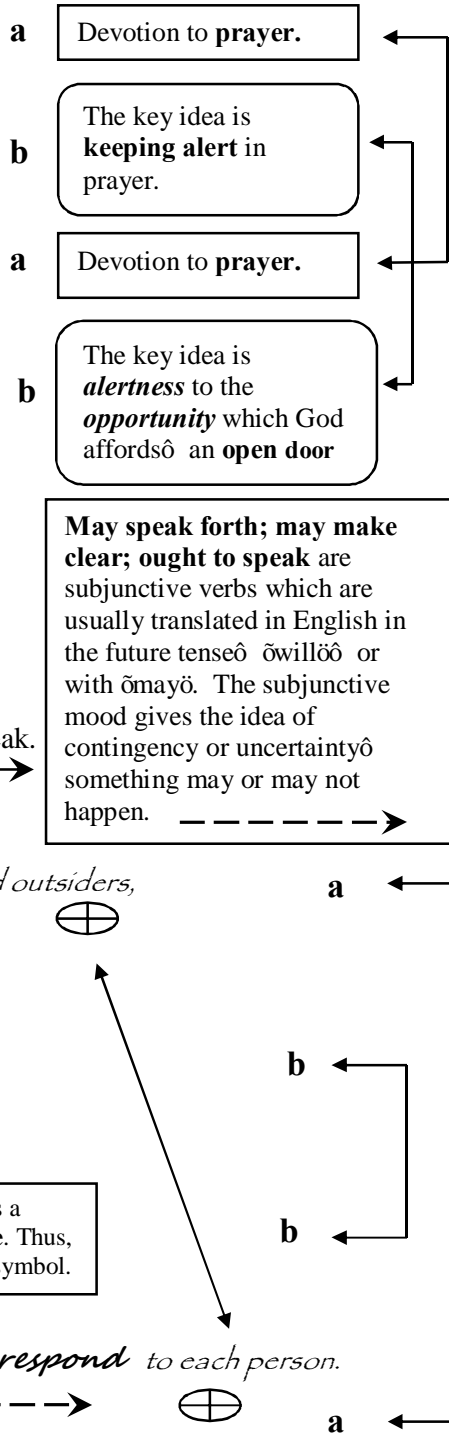


(282) *as though* seasoned WITH SALT,

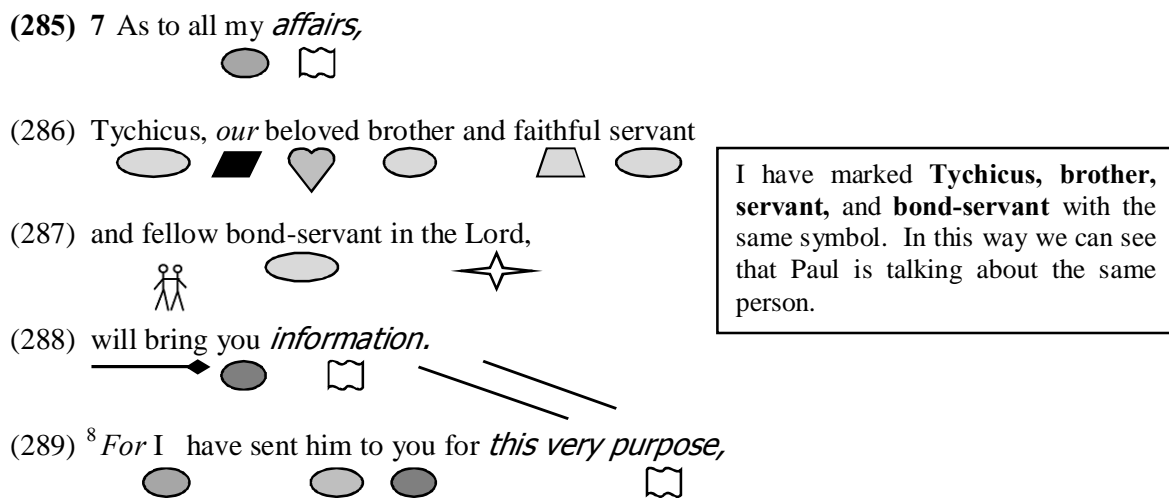
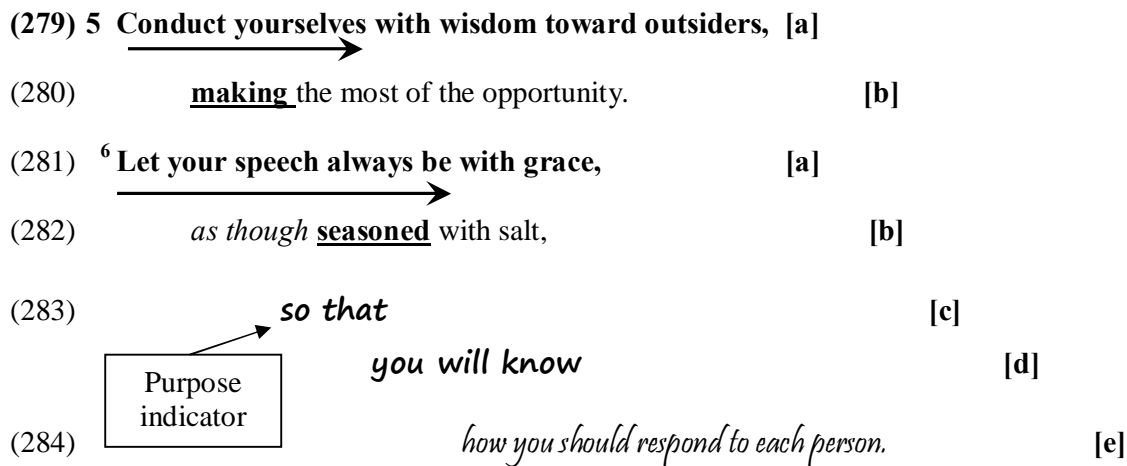
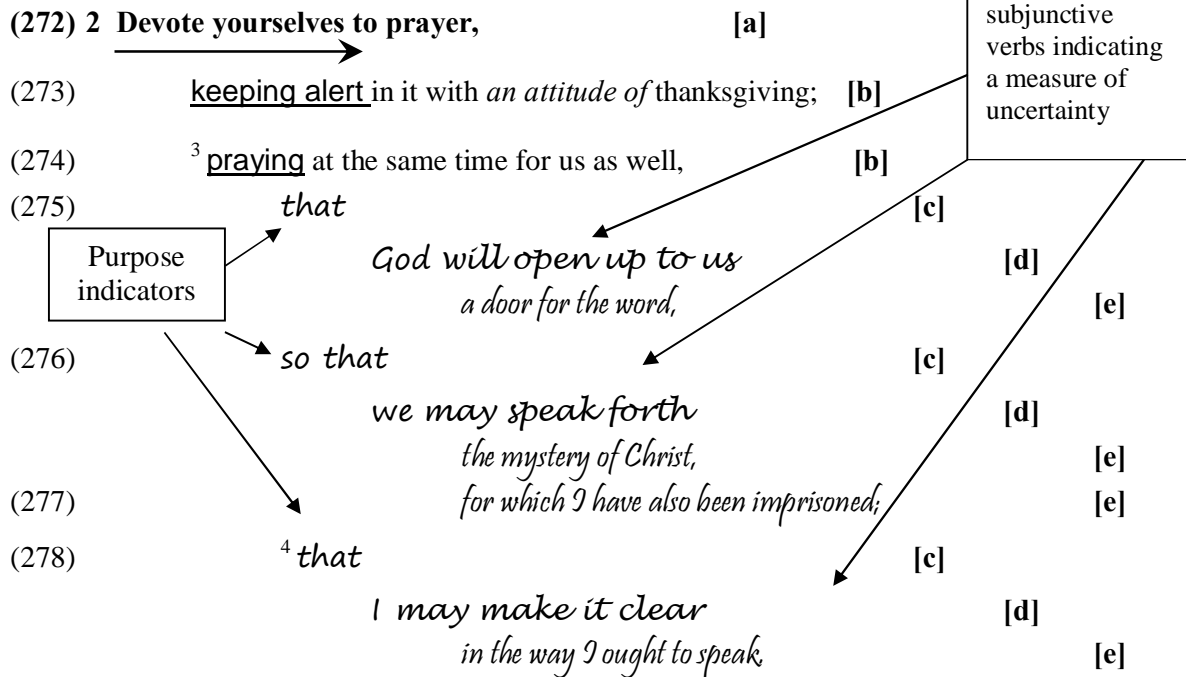


Salt is used here as a metaphor for **grace**. Thus, I gave it the same symbol.

(283) SO THAT you will know (284) how *you should respond* to each person.



Alternate structure for Col. 4: 2-4



(290) that you may know about our circumstances

(291) AND that he may encourage your hearts;

Affairs, information, purpose, circumstances, encourage, whole situation... Paul was in prison in Rome (Acts 28: 16-31); and, naturally, the Colossians would be concerned about his welfare. Thus, Paul wanted them to know that he was okay. Notices L285-294. Our circumstances refers the reader to Aristarchus, Paul's fellow prisoner.

(292) and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother,

(293) who is one of your number.

(294) They will inform you about the whole situation here.

(295) Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner,

(296) sends you his greetings;

(297) and also Barnabas's cousin Mark

(298) (about whom you received instructions;

(299) if he comes to you, [then—implied] welcome him);

(300) and also Jesus who is called Justus;

(301) these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God

(302) who are from the circumcision,

(303) AND they have proved to be an encouragement to me.

(304) Epaphras, who is one of your number,

(305) a bondsman of Jesus Christ,

(306) sends you his greetings,



(307) always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers,

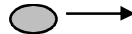



(308) that you may stand PERFECT

Paul did not do ministry alone, but had many faithful workers who labored alongside him. Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 NASB)

Once again, look at the network of people with whom Paul had been involved in ministry. Pastors need a network of people for mutual encouragement. Notice also the number of times greetings are mentioned. This is characteristic of Paul's letters.







(309) AND FULLY ASSURED in all the will of God.

(310) ¹³ For I testify for him  

(311) that he has a deep concern for you    




(312) AND for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

(313) ¹⁴ Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his **greetings**,   


(314) **and also** Demas.      


Not all of Paul's associates remained faithful (cf. 2 Tim. 4: 10).

(315) ¹⁵ **Greet** the brethren who are in Laodicea   


(316) **and also** Nympha **and** the church that is in her house.   



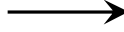

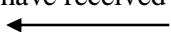

(317) ¹⁶ **When this letter is read** among you, 



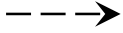

(318) **have it also read** in the church of the Laodiceans; 

(319) and you, for your part 



(320) **read my letter** that is coming from Laodicea. 


(321) ¹⁷ Say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry 

(322) which you have received in the Lord,      

(323) that you may fulfill it."    

(324) **18** I, Paul, **write this greeting with my own hand.** 

(325) Remember my imprisonment.  

(326) Grace be with you. 

Paul's letters circulated among the churches to establish the apostolic tradition, and he understood that his letters had apostolic authority. "If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment."³⁸ But if anyone does not recognize *this*, he is not recognized." (1 Corinthians 14:37-38 NASB).

A signature of authentication. Paul's signature would be recognized by the church to prevent fraud.

This is Paul's first imprisonment. Demas deserted him during his second imprisonment in Rome (2 Tim. 4: 10)

IX. Appendix to Interpreting New Testament Epistles

A. Clues for Finding the Author's Main Topics and Ideas⁵⁴

1. Locationô The main idea frequently occurs in the first or the last sentence of a section or paragraph, or in both.
2. Restatementô Authors restate, repeat, or return to the main concept.
3. Direct Addressô Authors may address their hearers before stating a main idea e.g. ôBrothersö, ôDear friendsö.
4. Introductory Formulasô To draw attention to their chief points, authors introduce them with phrases like ôI want you to knowö or ôI write these things to you so thatö.
5. Concluding Formulasô Look for words that summarize a discussion, such as *therefore, thus, or so*.

Example:

ôTherefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2 NASB)

1. ôPresent your bodiesöô the first proposition in the paragraph.
2. No restatement in this example.
3. ôBrethrenöô direct address
4. ôI urge youöô introductory formula which introduces a command or an idea
5. ôThereforeöô concluding formula referring to previous material

General Principles for Discourse Analysis⁵⁵

Principle 1: Look for words and phrases that explicitly connect one idea to another. Some of the most common connecting words are **but, if, then, therefore, for, so that**. Other English connecting words are **because, so, since, when, just as, in order that, while, after, etc**. These terms connect phrases within sentences, not just whole sentences.

Principle 2: Look for implicit and understated connections, e.g. the connection between Matthew 18:17 and 18.

Relations Between Propositions: A Simple English-Based Model⁵⁶

1. **Addition and Subtraction**—A simple sequence of events connected by **but, and, then**.

B-A-T

- a. But statements contrast two propositionsô they subtract or take away something from another statement. (**Yet, on the contrary, on the other hand, however**, are other words indicating subtraction.)
- b. And statements add ideas. (**And, also, furthermore, moreover, and in addition**).
- c. Then propositions describe sequences of events. (**Before, after, then, next, during, while, and meanwhile** are other sequence words.)

⁵⁴ Doriani, *Getting the Message, "Analyzing Discourse"*, p. 79

⁵⁵ Doriani, pp. 81-91

⁵⁶ Doriani, p. 89

2. Cause and Effect when one statement gives reasons, results, means, conditions, or conclusions to be drawn from another. P-R-I-C-E: purpose, reasoning, if-then, concession, effect.

- a. **Purpose statements** describe actions taken in order to obtain specific results. They tell why an action takes place. (**so that, in order to, or to** by itself, [as part of an infinitive])
- b. **Reasoning statements** draw conclusions from prior assertions or state the basis for conclusions that have already been stated. (**therefore, thus, so, since, then, consequently, for, for this reason, because** as well as combinations of these words)
- c. **If-then statements** express possibility. What is actually possible, or something that is impossible because of certain conditions. (**If...then**, but the *then* is often not stated but is assumed)
- d. **Concession statements** concede that one thing is true even though we have reason to expect another. "We had a wonderful picnic even though it rained" (**Although, even though, nevertheless, in spite of, yet, and nonetheless**)
- e. **Effect statements** one proposition describes what happened or what is true and the second explains how or why it came about. "Since it rained so hard, we had to cancel the football game." (**since, because, then, and consequently**)

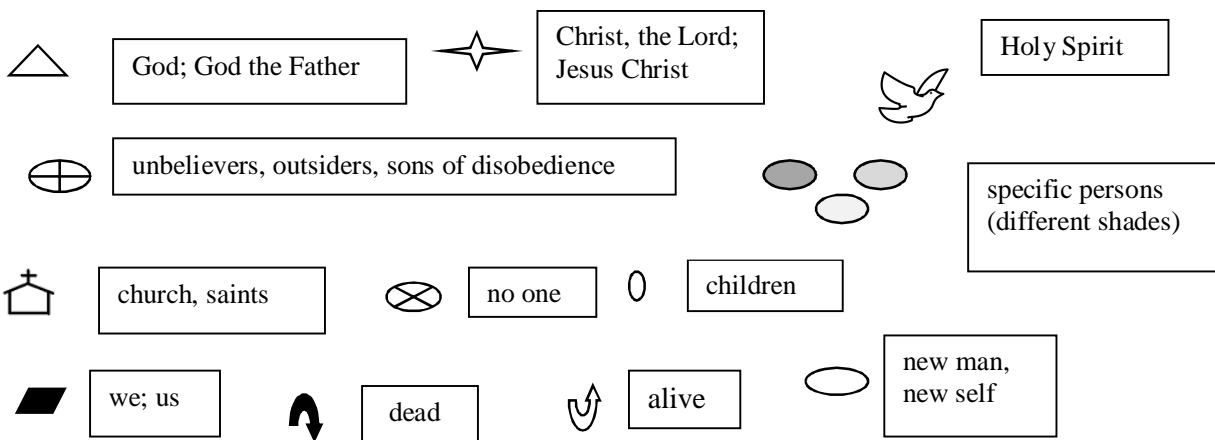
3. Clarification and Explanation

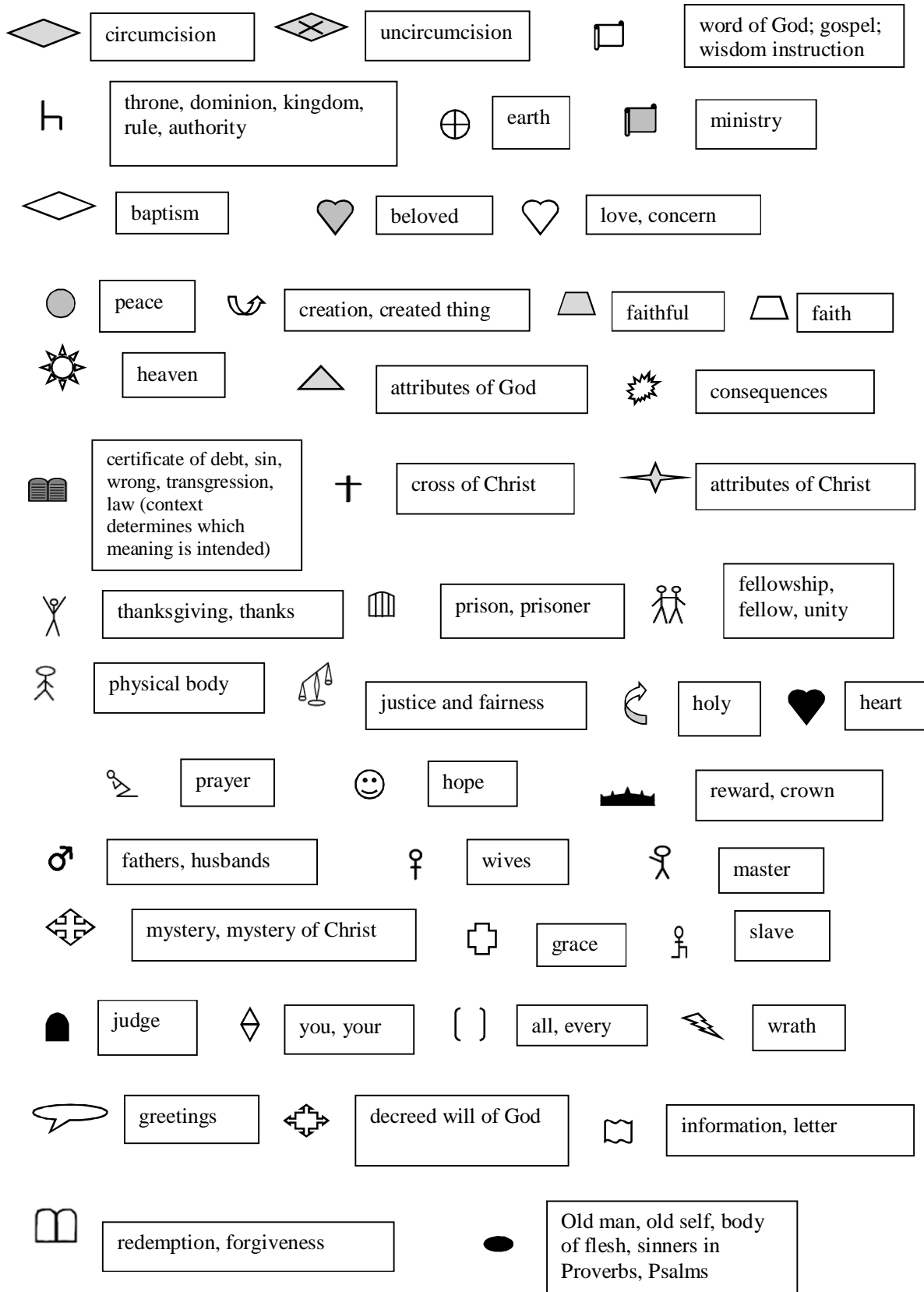
- a. Introductions—formulas such as **I urge you, I want you to know, truly I say to you, thus says the Lord, the Scripture says** prepare readers for important statements that follow.
- b. Summaries and restatements remind readers of what has gone before often before starting a new topic.
- c. Illustrations use events, stories, or figures of speech to make an abstract idea more concrete, or to add an emotional component to a passage.

B. Meaning Indicator Symbols Used in this Textbook

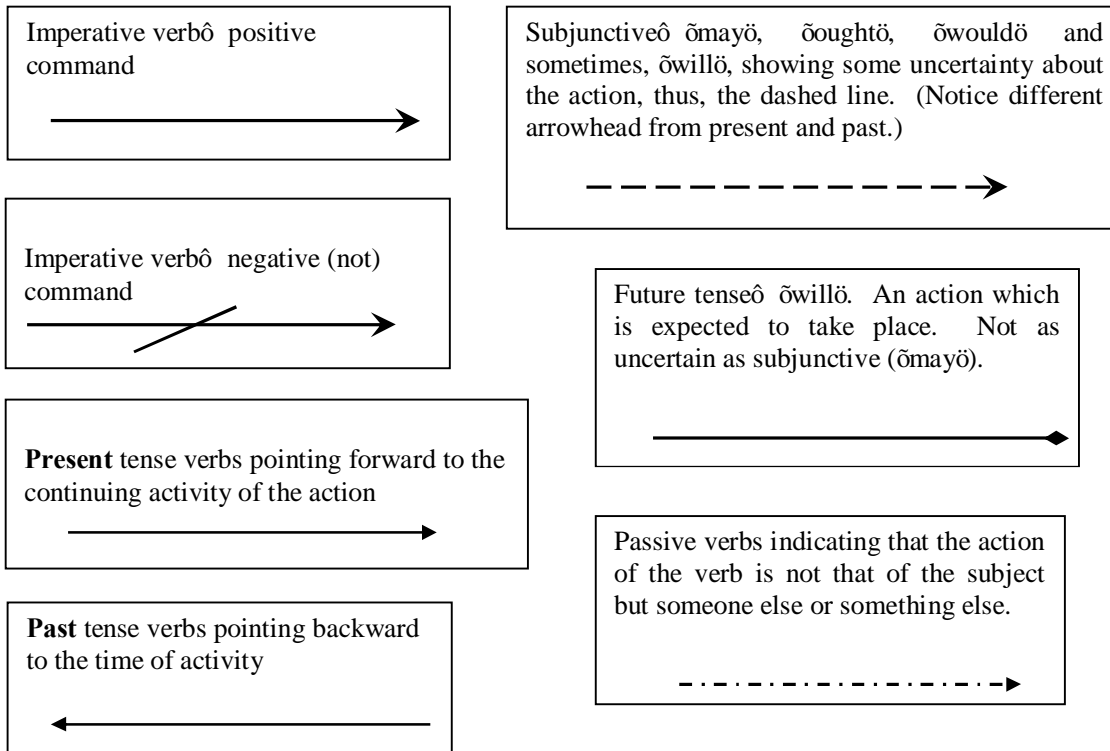
These are most of the symbols I have used throughout our study of Colossians. They are computer-generated, but would not be difficult to reproduce manually. You may use any symbol you wish to create, but be consistent in using *the same symbols* for the same persons, things, events, etc. This will help you interpret the text. As you move through each section marking the indicators, keep a record of the symbols you are using, as I have done below.

1. Marking persons, things, characteristics (descriptions of things or persons).



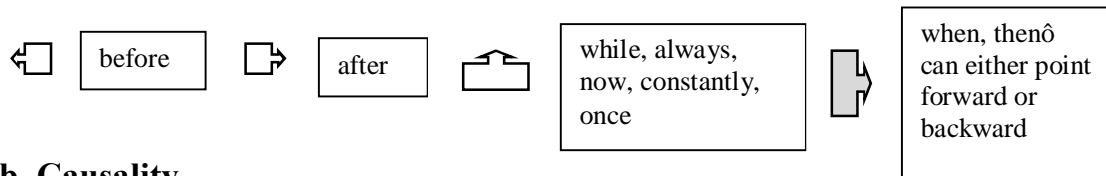


2. Marking Events

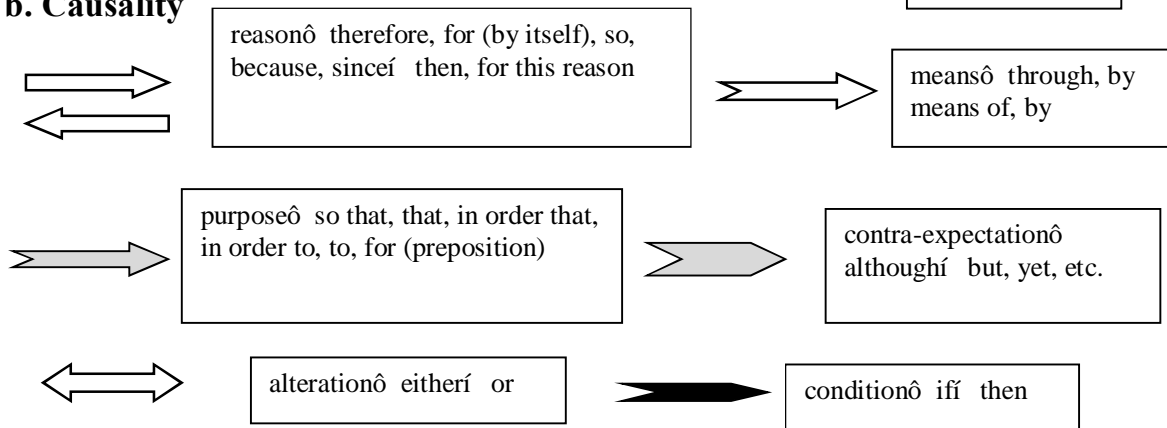


3. Marking Relationships between the Different Syntactical Units

a. Time



b. Causality



4. Develop a system for marking the indicators.

1. Mark all the persons.
2. Mark all the things which are not persons.
3. Mark all events (verbs) using underlining or arrows.
4. Mark syntactical relationships of causality and time.
5. Mark stylistic features—parallelisms and chiasms (if any. Do not expect to see parallelisms and chiasms everywhere.)

C. Meaning Indicator Symbols for Colossians 1: 1-20

(1) 1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ

(2) by the will of God,

(3) and Timothy our brother,

(4) 2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ

(5) *who are* at Colossae:

(6) Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

(7) 3 We give thanks to God,

(8) the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

(9) praying always for you,

(10) ⁽⁴⁾ since we heard

(11) of your faith in Christ Jesus

(12) and the love which you have for all the saints;

(13) ⁽⁵⁾ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven,

(14) of which you previously heard

(15) in the word of truth, the gospel ⁶ which has come to you,

praying is present tense, continuous activity, thus the arrow points forward

—————→

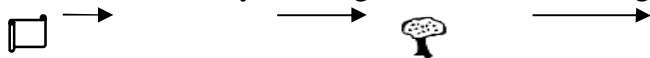
heard is past activity thus the arrow points backward to a previous time

←—————

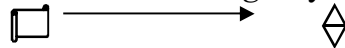
(16) just as in all the world also



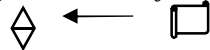
(17) it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing,



(18) even as *it has been doing* in you also



(19) since the day you heard *of it*



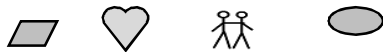
(20) and understood the grace of God in truth;



(21) ⁷ just as you learned *it* from Epaphras,



(22) our beloved fellow bond-servant,



(23) who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf,



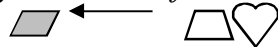
(24) ⁸ and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.



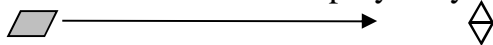
(25) ⁹ For this reason also,



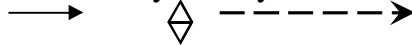
(26) since the day we heard *of it*,



(27) we have not ceased to pray for you



(28) and to ask that you may be filled



may be filled is subjunctive mood which means the action is potential or not already completed.

(29) with the knowledge of His will



(30) in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,



(31) ¹⁰ so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord,



Will walk, to please, bearing, increasing, are all verbs which are potential, not actual. That is, Paul is exhorting them to walk in such a manner from this point and into the future that they will be pleasing to the Lord, bearing fruit and increasing. They are doing this now, but He wants them to continue this activity into the future. Therefore I have used the future verb symbol.

(32) to please *Him* in all respects,



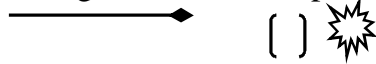
(33) bearing fruit in every good work



(34) and increasing in the knowledge of God;



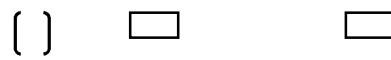
(35) ¹¹ strengthened with all power,



(36) according to His glorious might,



(37) for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience;



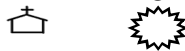
(38) joyously ¹² giving thanks to the Father,



(39) who has qualified us to share in the inheritance



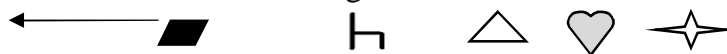
(40) of the saints in Light.



(41) ¹³ For He rescued us from the domain of darkness,



(42) and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,



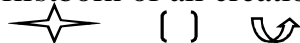
(43) ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.



(44) **15** He is the image of the invisible God,



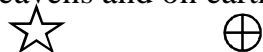
(45) the firstborn of all creation.



(46) ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created,



(47) *both* in the heavens and on earth,



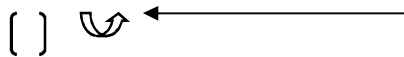
(48) visible and invisible,



(49) whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities^o



(50) all things have been created



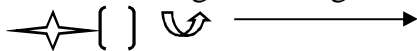
(51) through Him and for Him.



(52) ¹⁷ He is before all things,



(53) and in Him all things hold together.



(54) ¹⁸ He is also head of the body, the church;



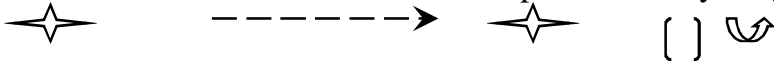
(55) and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,



(56) so that



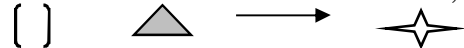
(57) He Himself will come to have first place in everything.



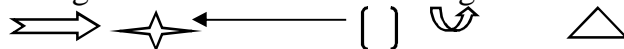
(58) ¹⁹ For it was the *Father's* good pleasure



(59) for all the fullness to dwell in Him,



(60) ²⁰ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself,



(61) having made peace through the blood of His cross;



(62) through Him, *I say*,

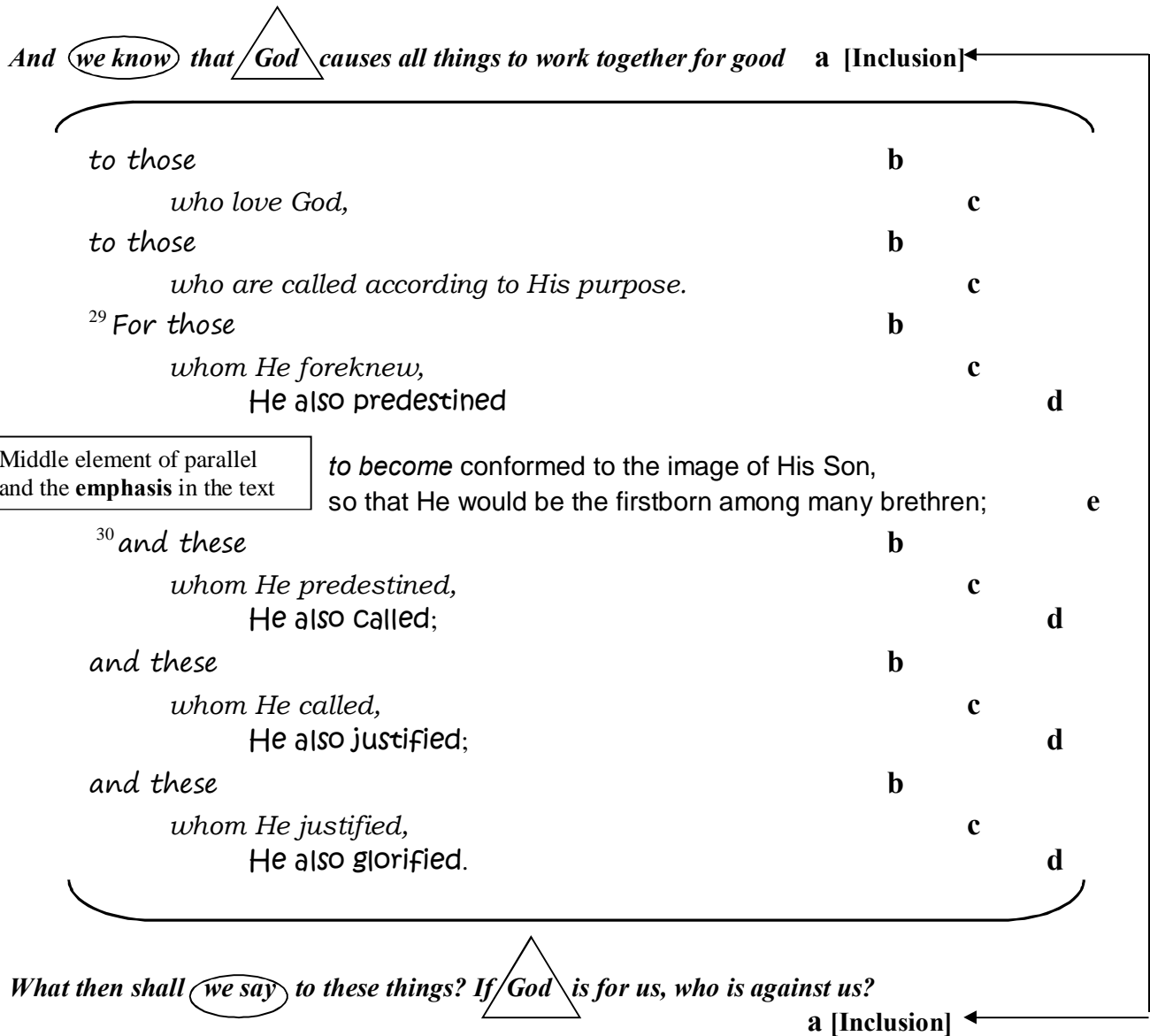


(63) whether things on earth or things in heaven.



will come to have is actually a subjunctive verb. In this case, the action is not uncertain but potential. That is, the action has not already taken place.

D. Stylistic features of Romans 8: 28-31



E. Sermon Outline for Romans 8: 28-31

Proposed Main Idea of the Text: God uses every event in a Christian’s life to conform him into the moral likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Analysis of this main idea: It captures the central idea of the text but it answers too many questions in the beginning, thus leaving no suspense for the audience.

Second possible Main Idea: God causes everything to work together for good.

Analysis of this main idea: It’s very simple. It leaves many questions remaining in the minds of the audience which may now be answered, e.g. For whom does God cause everything to work together for good? What does “everything” consist of? What is the **good**?

If we accept this main idea for the sermon, the next step is to formulate a series of questions which can be answered from the text. These questions can be the outline of your sermon or Bible study.

I. For whom does God cause all things to work together for good?

A. For those who love God

B. For those who are called according to His purpose

C. For believers only, not for unbelievers

A and **B** have to be explained. What does it mean to love God? Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments. Those who love God desire with all their hearts to please Him. "The one who says, "I have come to know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;"⁵ but whoever keeps His word, in him the **love** of God has truly been perfected" (1 John 2:4-5a; NASB). It is proper in developing the text in question to use the **analogy of faith** (other texts) which serve to illustrate and explain the text. Other non-Biblical illustrations are also acceptable. For example, how does a wife know that her husband loves her? By his actions. If he rarely spends any time with her, telling her how much he loves her would be empty words.

Furthermore, what is "His purpose"? And what does it mean to be "called"? You would need a concordance to look up the word "purpose" and "called" or "call" or "calling". All these terms must be explained for this verse to make sense. Eph. 1: 4 gives us a strong purpose statement for election. "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, **that** [in order that] we would be holy and blameless before Him" (Ephesians 1:4 NASB). Thus, Christians are chosen in Christ for the purpose of being holy. Eph. 2: 10 also gives us a purpose statement, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10 NASB). We are therefore called for the purpose of producing good works for the glory of God. If a person is not doing this, he is not "called according to His purpose."

II. What are the "all things" that God causes to work together for good for believers?

A. Good things that happen to us

B. Bad things that happen to us

C. All things that happen to us

Notice that the immediate context of this passage identifies some "bad things" which could conceivably not work together for our good. "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"³⁶ Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."³⁷ But in **all these things** we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.³⁸ For I am convinced that neither **death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,**³⁹ **nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing**, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35-39 NASB)

Particularly, "things present" and "things to come" may refer to "bad things" that may happen to God's people. Were the things which happened to Job good things or bad things? It depends on how you look at them. In the end, Job received the knowledge of God he had never had before. In filling out this heading, you may use both biblical examples and non-biblical examples of good things and "bad" things which God worked together for your good. Consider the story of Joseph who was sold into slavery. His brothers intended to do him harm, but God used it for Joseph's good and for the good of His people. We can all think of examples of things which happened to us that we considered

bad at the time but later recognized God's goodness in them. Therefore, for the believer, bad things may actually be good things. And sometimes, the things we consider to be good things turn out to be bad things because they are misused by us to take us farther away from God rather than closer to Him. For example, a good job may take us away from our spouse or away from the community of our church or Christian friends leading to isolation, loneliness, and even sin (due to lack of accountability to others). For the Christian, the good things can become bad things and the bad things can become good things.

III. What is the ultimate "good" that God causes all things to work toward?

- A. Christ's moral perfection (holiness)
- B. Our glorified bodies existing in the presence of God

Christ is the firstborn among many brethren. We are the brethren in this verse. In 1 Cor. 15: 20, Christ is the first fruits of those who are resurrected. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the **first fruits** of those who are asleep (1 Corinthians 15:20 NASB). Also in Colossians, He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the **firstborn** from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything (Colossians 1:18 NASB). Although the second element, glorification, can be emphasized, I believe that Christ's moral perfection is also in view. The good consists of both moral perfection **and** future glorification (since without holiness, no man shall see the Lord; Heb. 12: 14). Glorification is but an extension of the sanctification which God has begun in the believer in **this** life.

IV. How do we know for certain that God will cause all these things to work together for the good of believers?—the Unbreakable Chain of Salvation

- A. Because those whom God foreknows are also predestined.
- B. Because those whom God predestined are also called.
- C. Because those whom God called are also justified.
- D. Because those whom God justified are also glorified.

There is an unbroken connection in all these phrases between the "and these" and "He also" (New American Standard Bible). Glorification, which is a future event, is mentioned in the past tense indicating that it is certain. From the time a Christian is foreknown until the time he is glorified, there is an unbroken chain of events which God has ordained. Nothing (cf. 8: 38-39) can separate us from the love of God, a love that is consummated (completed) in glorification.

All the elements in heading **IV** must be explained: foreknew, predestined, called, justified, glorified. One can see, then, that this sermon or lesson may develop into a series of lessons or sermons if the audience is not familiar with these terms. For example, you could do a whole sermon on the word, foreknew. Does this mean that God simply **knew about** us before we were born? If this is all it means, then what makes us special or distinct from unbelievers? God **knew about** them, too. You would have to do a word study of foreknew and know (etc.) in which case you would find that foreknow means to fore-love or to love beforehand. For example, but if anyone loves God, he is **known** by Him (1 Corinthians 8:3 NASB). The implication of this verse is that if anyone does **not** love God, he is **not** known by Him. Thus, God only knows those who love Him, the very thing Paul says in Rom. 8: 28. If you had an exhaustive concordance, you would find the word known to be a derivative of *ginōskō* in the Greek (know). The word foreknew is a combination of *ginōskō* and the prefix, *pro* (before) to know beforehand. But, as I have shown, knowing in the Bible sometimes, not always, implies an intimate knowledge. In Gen. 4: 1, the KJV says that Adam knew

his wife. The Hebrew word (which you can find in an exhaustive concordance) is *yada* or *ōknewō*. Did Adam simply know about Eve? Is this how she got pregnant?

The same kind of diligence should be applied to the other words. What does it mean to be *ōcalledō*? A detailed study of this word would indicate that to be called means to be **effectually called by God through the Holy Spirit** (cf. 1 Tim. 6: 12; 2 Tim. 1: 9; Gal. 5: 13; Eph. 4: 16 notice that all these passages has the same author, Paul. It is therefore likely that he would use the word *ōcalledō* similarly in all these passages.) If you wished to preach this text in one sermon, which I would suggest, you could go back in subsequent lessons and deal with each word in more detail. In the initial sermon, you could simply give short definitions of the words while keeping the continuity of the main idea. When Paul wrote this, the Romans were familiar with all these terms, and it would not have been necessary for him to explain them in the text.

Another possible outline would be the following:

Main Idea: It is not necessary that Christians know everything, but there are some things all of us should know. (Notice that I am picking up on the words, *ōAnd we knowō* in v. 28.)

- I. All of us should know that everything that happens to us will be for our ultimate good.
 - A. Good things
 - B. Bad things
 - C. All things
- II. All of us should know that God's ultimate good for us is not a care-free existence in this life, but conformity to the image of Christ for all eternity
 - A. Conformity to His moral perfection
 - B. Conformity to His glorified existence in heaven
- III. All of us should know that nothing can prevent God's ultimate good to us
 - A. The Unbreakable Chain of Salvation
 - B. The Sovereign Protection of God (Notice that I am picking up on the words, *ōWhat shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?ō*) In this section, you could do a short explanation of vv. 32-39, or you could save it for the next sermon. Once you begin to preach or teach expositively through a book of the Bible, one lesson naturally leads to the next.