

Guides to New Testament Exegesis

Scot McKnight, General Editor

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Interpreting the Pauline Epistles

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- A. T. Robertson and W. H. Davis, *A New Short Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 10th ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1933; Baker, 1977). A useful intermediate grammar for the student who is not ready to tackle Robertson's massive work (see below).

Advanced Tools

- C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963). Clearly written with many helpful examples.
- E. D. Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1900; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976). An illuminating study of the Greek verb with many examples.
- F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and ed. R. W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961). This work is a mine of information. For the advanced student.
- J. H. Moulton, W. F. Howard, and N. Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906-1976). Volume III, *Syntax*, by Turner is particularly helpful for the student.
- A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 4th ed. (Nashville: Broadman, 1934). A massive work of great value; dated in places and not well organized.
- M. J. Harris, "Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. C. Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 3:1171-1215. A valuable article that includes many exegetical examples.

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Tracing the Argument

One of the most challenging parts of the exegetical process is the reconstruction of the argument used by Paul. In this step the interpreter asks questions about the function of different propositions in the text until he or she can see how the entire paragraph or letter fits together. In the case of Pauline literature, the interpreter must examine Paul's carefully crafted arguments in order to unfold his message to specific churches with specific needs. The interpreter who endeavors to do this will undoubtedly acquire more confidence in doing exegesis, knowing that he or she can piece together the structure of a passage and explain the structure to others.

In the last chapter we explained in some detail how to diagram. No one can follow the thread of Paul's arguments if the syntax and grammar of the text are not understood. If one cannot diagram a Pauline text, then one will have difficulty in tracing the argument of that text. The ability to diagram the text and the ability to follow an argument go hand in hand.

I am convinced that tracing the structure of the argument in the Pauline epistles is the most important step in the exegetical process. One of the weaknesses in many commentaries today is the failure to trace the argument in each paragraph, and the failure to explain how each paragraph relates to preceding and following paragraphs.¹ Instead, the commentaries focus on individual words and verses. Readers gain

1. For this same criticism, see P. Cotterell and M. Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1989), 223-25. For an exception to this, see C. Caragounis (*The Ephestian "Mysteries": Meaning and Content* [Lund: Gleerup,

much knowledge about individual elements of the text, but they do not acquire an understanding of the argument of each paragraph or of the complete text.

The student should understand from the beginning that this step involves effort and discipline. Not only should the student know Greek and be able to diagram, but he or she must also discover the function of every proposition in a Pauline letter. Hard thinking like this cannot be achieved if one does not avoid distractions (like the radio or television) when studying. So where does the student turn to find a method that will help him or her to reconstruct the line of reasoning in a Pauline text? The best method I have found is presented by Daniel P. Fuller in his as yet unpublished work on hermeneutics. I am heavily dependent on Fuller in the following exposition of this method.²

Propositions

The key to tracing the argument in the Pauline letters is by understanding the relationship between different proposi-

1977), who presents his understanding of the structure of some texts in Ephesians. A careful analysis of the structure of the text is also apparent in the exegesis of Romans 9:1-23 by John Piper in *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983). Piper was a student of Dan Fuller's. Contemporary commentaries often show a careful analysis of the structure of the text, but perhaps the structure is not being set forth in a manner that is explicit enough for students. Older commentaries were often more successful in communicating the structure. See, for example, C. Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, rev. ed. (New York: Armstrong and Son, 1900).

2. This material is included with Fuller's permission. Fuller's categories for the propositions, his definitions, and many of his specific examples are used here. There are some adaptations where I have combined different categories together or changed the wording for some definitions. Nevertheless, the substance of this chapter is found in Fuller. If he publishes his valuable work on hermeneutics, the reader can compare this chapter to Fuller's work and clearly see how much I stand in his debt for this chapter. I am also grateful to Dan Fuller for reading this chapter (although I should note that he did not read the three examples at the end of the chapter). He pointed out a number of deficiencies and made many helpful suggestions that have improved it. Nevertheless, he is not in agreement with several elements in this chapter. Thus, any weaknesses here should be attributed to me rather than to Fuller. I have also consulted and used some of the material in the book by J. Beckman and J. Callow, *Translating the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974); see especially pp. 287-312, although all of 267-342 is relevant. See also E. A. Nida, J. P. Louw, A. H. Snyman, J. v. W. Cronje, *Style and Discourse* (Capetown: Bible Society, 1983), 99-144; Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation*, 188-229; J. P. Louw, *Semantics of New Testament Greek* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 67-158.

tions in the text. Paul did not usually write proverbially, offering random bits of advice to his congregations. He usually engaged in a sustained argument in his letters. We cannot understand his arguments unless we can set forth and trace the building blocks of his reasoning. The building blocks of his reasoning are found in his propositions. Thus, if the thread of Paul's line of reasoning is to be discerned, we must understand the relationship between different propositions. In this chapter we shall explain and classify the different kinds of propositions, and then give some examples of how to trace the argument in the Pauline letters.

What is a proposition? A proposition is an assertion or statement about something. The words "she ate" is a proposition, for it makes a statement or an assertion about something. In order to be a proposition, a statement must have a subject and predicate. The subject or predicate can be implied. If my child were to run toward the street I would yell, "Stop!" The one word "stop" is a proposition because the implied subject is "you," and the imperative verb "stop" is the predicate.

Relationships Between Propositions

How do propositions relate to one another? All propositions relate in either a *coordinate* or *subordinate* way to previous propositions. We can see the relation between propositions in sentences. For instance, coordinate propositions are found in compound sentences. Compound sentences have two or more independent clauses joined together. The sentence "I listened to the radio, and I washed my car" is a compound sentence. Both of these clauses are independent and could be separate sentences. Also, there is no dependent relationship between the two clauses. Two separate activities were performed: washing the car and listening to the radio. However, these two clauses can easily be rewritten so that one clause is a *subordinate* clause. If I write, "I listened to the radio while I washed my car," then the sentence is now a complex sentence (containing at least one subordinate clause) instead of a compound sentence. The clause "while I washed my car" is not an independent clause but a subordinate one. In fact, it is a temporal subordinate clause because it explains

when I listened to the radio. The independent clause "I listened to the radio" is a sentence in its own right, but the clause "while I washed the car" is not a sentence. The latter clause is dependent (subordinate) upon the main clause in the sentence; it indicates *when* I listened to the radio.

We should note that coordinate and subordinate relations do not exist only in individual sentences. A paragraph or a larger section in a work may be coordinate or subordinate to another paragraph or larger section. Thus, when we say that a proposition is subordinate, we are not always referring to a subordinate clause in an individual sentence. A sentence, paragraph, or larger section may be subordinate conceptually to another sentence, paragraph, or larger section without being a subordinate clause in a sentence. In other words, a proposition may be subordinate conceptually without being subordinate grammatically. Generally speaking, it is easier to see the relations within sentences than the relations between two different paragraphs.

Coordinate Relationships

We will examine the three different kinds of coordinate relationships: *series*, *progression*, and *alternative*. As we delineate the different kinds of propositions, each category will be briefly defined. In addition, common conjunctions that are used for each category will be listed both in English and Greek. The listing of these conjunctions is not exhaustive; some of the most common are listed. Also, we will offer examples from the NT for each category.

1. **Series.** The relationship between propositions is a series when each proposition makes its own independent contribution to the whole. The following illustrates this: "She laughed, and she sang." Both propositions make an independent statement, and neither is dependent on the other in any way. Nor is there any sense of attaining a climax in this sentence. Propositions in a series may refer to several events that occur at the same time or may also portray events that occur chronologically.

Conjunctions: and, moreover, furthermore, likewise, neither . . . nor (καί, ἔτι, οὐτε, οὐδέ, μήτε, μηδέ)

Examples: "The sun will be darkened, and the moon

will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken" (Matt. 24:29). "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer" (Rom. 12:12). (Note that this last example lacks the word "and," but it is clearly a series.)

2. **Progression.** The relationship between propositions is called progression when each proposition is a step closer toward a climax. The statement, "Jesus became a man, and he lived humbly, and he died a criminal's death," is clearly an example of progression. Even though Jesus became a man, he could have lived as a king. And even though he lived humbly, he could have died a noble death. Thus each proposition builds toward a climax and serves to show the extent of his love.

Conjunctions: then, and, moreover, furthermore, neither . . . nor (καί, ἔτι, οὐτε, οὐδέ, μήτε, μηδέ)

Examples: "And those he predestined, he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified" (Rom. 8:30). "The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear" (Mark 4:28).

3. **Alternative.** Each proposition expresses different possibilities arising from a situation. For example, consider the following: "I could work on this book, or I could watch the tennis match on television." Here I have two alternatives for how I spend my time.

Conjunctions: or, but, while, on the one hand . . . on the other hand (ὁλλά, ἔτι, ἢ, μέν . . . ἔτι)

Examples: "Some were convinced by what he said, while others disbelieved" (Acts 28:24). "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (Matt. 11:3).

Subordinate Relationships

Subordinate propositions are those that do not stand alone but are related in some supporting way to the main proposition. Subordinate propositions can be divided into three different types: those that support by *restatement*, those that support by *distinct statement*, and those that support by *contrary statement*.

The student should note that there are nine different kinds of adverbial clauses in the categories listed below. Not all of the categories contain adverbial clauses, but the student's ability to identify propositions will be strengthened if the nine different types of adverbial clauses are mastered. The nine types that appear in the subordinate clauses below are: (1) modal, (2) comparative, (3) causal, (4) result, (5) conditional, (6) purpose, (7) temporal, (8) locative, and (9) concessive. These will be highlighted in each category so that the student can begin to master these types of subordinate clauses.

Support by Restatement

The main proposition may be supported by restatement, that is, by further defining or explaining the main proposition. There are five ways by which this can be accomplished. A list of these different kinds of restatement clauses with NT examples follows.

1. **Action-Manner.** The statement of an action, and then a more precise statement that indicates the way or manner in which this action is carried out. For example, "Last night I cleaned my house by vacuuming the carpet and dusting the furniture." Vacuuming and dusting explain in more precise detail how I cleaned the house. Used in *modal clauses*.

Key words: by, in that

Examples: "He emptied himself by taking the form of a servant" (Phil 2:7). "She brought much gain to her masters by prophesying" (Acts 16:16).

2. **Comparison.** A statement or action in the main proposition is explained more precisely by a comparative statement showing what the statement in the main proposition is like. For instance, if someone says, "I love you like a brother," the phrase "like a brother" further describes the kind of love that one has. Used in *comparative clauses*.

Conjunctions: just as, even as, like, as . . . so (ὥς, καθὼς, οὕτως, ὅσπερ)

Examples: "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). "As the Father has sent me, so send I you" (John 20:21).

3. **Negative-Positive.** Two alternatives are given: one is denied and the other is affirmed. The sentence, "It is not hot, but it is cold" explains in more detail what the writer means in saying that it is not hot. The antithetical statement explains that it is the opposite of hot, that is, it is cold. Note that the order of these can be reversed so that the positive precedes the negative. The two statements may be essentially synonymous (first example below), or they may stand in contrast (second example below).

Particles and conjunctions: not, but (οὐ, μὴ, ἀλλὰ, ὅτι)

Examples: "Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph 5:17). "We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ" (1 Cor 4:10).

4. **Idea-Explanation.** The addition of a clarifying statement to the main proposition is also considered an example of support by restatement. For example, "There is a drought, that is, there has been no rain for three months." Here we have an idea and an explanation that further explicates the idea. The clarifying statement either explains the whole of the preceding statement (first example below), or one word of the preceding statement (second example below).

Conjunctions: that is, for (τοῦτ' ἔστιν, γὰρ)

Examples: "Jacob supplanted me these two times; he took away my birthright and now he has taken away my blessing" (Gen 27:36). "And they drank of the rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ" (1 Cor 10:4).

5. **Question-Answer.** The question is stated and the answer to the question is given. The question and answer (the answer is implied if the question is rhetorical) can often be rephrased as a statement.

Examples: "Shall we continue in sin in order that grace might increase? May it never be!" (Rom. 6:1). "What does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God . . ." (Rom. 4:3). The latter could be rephrased as, "Scripture says that Abraham believed God."

Support by Distinct Statement

Subordinate propositions that support by distinct statement allow the author to develop his point further. Eight different categories are found within this second group of subordinate propositions. We now proceed to give definitions and NT examples for these eight categories of subordinate relationships that support by distinct statement.

1. **Ground.** A statement is made in the main proposition, and the subordinate one gives a reason or ground for the statement. "Do not eat the berries because they are poisonous." The word *because* introduces the clause that provides the ground or reason for the command not to eat the berries. In this case the supporting proposition always follows the main one. We should note here that the word "for" (γάρ) can also introduce Idea-Explanation. This little word is extremely important and requires careful interpretation. Used in *causal clauses*.

Conjunctions: for, because, since (γάρ, ὅτι, ἐπεὶ, ἐπειδὴ, διότι)

Examples: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, *for* theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). "If they do not have self control, let them marry, *for* it is better to marry than to burn" (1 Cor. 7:9).

2. **Inference.** A statement or event from which a conclusion or inference is drawn. The only difference from the previous category is that the supporting proposition precedes. One should note here that inference and ground function similarly. The difference between them is the order of their propositions. If a proposition is a ground, then the supporting statement comes *after* the statement it supports. For example, "I worship Jesus *because* he is God." If an inference is being drawn, then the support for that inference is found in the first proposition. Thus, the same sentence would appear as follows if the second proposition draws an inference from the first: "Jesus is God, *therefore*, I worship him."

Conjunctions: therefore, wherefore, consequently, accordingly (οὖν, διό, ὁστε)

Examples: "The end of all things is at hand, *therefore*, be sensible and sober for prayer" (1 Pet 4:7). "Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. *Therefore*, do not let sin reign in your mortal body . . ." (Rom. 6:11-12).

3. **Action-Result.** The relationship between an action and a consequence or result that accompanies that action. "It did not rain for three months, so there was a drought." The drought resulted directly from the lack of rain. Used in *result clauses*.

Conjunctions: so that, that, with the result that (ὥστε)

Examples: "There arose a great storm in the sea, so *that* the boat was being swamped by the waves" (Matt. 8:24). "God so loved the world *that* he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16).

4. **Action-Purpose.** An action-purpose proposition involves an action to accomplish a certain outcome. "He quit eating desserts so that he could lose weight." Notice that Action-Result and Action-Purpose are very close in meaning. The difference is that Action-Purpose focuses on an *intended result* which may not come to fruition. In the example above the person who stopped eating desserts purposed and intended to lose weight, but he may not lose any. Sometimes it is exegetically difficult to decide whether a clause is purpose or result. Used in *purpose clauses*.

Conjunctions: in order that, that, with a view to, to the end that, lest (ἵνα, ὅπως, ἵνα . . . μὴ)

Examples: "I long to see you, *that* I might impart some spiritual gift to strengthen you" (Rom. 1:11). "For good reason do you reject the command of God *in order that* you might establish your own tradition" (Mark 7:9).

5. **Conditional.** Conditional propositions show that the causing action is potential only. "If she scores 95 on her exam, then she will earn an 'A' in the class." The 'A' is not guaranteed, but conditioned on her getting a 95. The

result will be obtained only if the condition is met. We should note, however, that with some conditional clauses in the NT, the context clearly indicates that the stated condition is a reality. For example, "If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live together with him" (Rom. 6:8). It is evident from the context that Paul believes that it is true that Christians have died with Christ, and so it follows that believers will also live with him. In cases where the condition is an assumed reality, the conditional clause is really equivalent to a ground. Used in *conditional clauses*.

Conjunctions: if . . . then, if, provided that, except (ἐἰ, εἰν)

Examples: "If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law" (Gal. 5:18). "If any person is overtaken in any trespass, you the spiritual ones should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness" (Gal. 6:1).

6. **Temporal.** The relationship between the main proposition and the occasion when it occurs. Temporal propositions describe the time period in which the action in the main proposition is carried out. In the sentence "Jim ate a candy bar after he went to the store," the temporal clause tells us that the candy bar was eaten subsequent to going to the store. Even though temporal clauses focus on the time of a particular action, a causal idea may be implicit. The sentence "After I cleaned up my room, I received my allowance," stresses the time relation between the two clauses, but it is also possible that the author is implicitly suggesting that the allowance was received *because* the room was cleaned. Nevertheless, the presence of a temporal clause demonstrates that the author desired to emphasize the occasion rather than the cause of the action described in the independent clause. Used in *temporal clauses*.

Conjunctions: when, whenever, after, before (ὅτε, ὅταν)

Examples: "When you fast, do not look gloomy" (Matt. 6:16). "Count it all joy, my brothers, whenever you encounter various trials" (James 1:2).

7. **Locative.** Locative propositions indicate the place in which the action occurred, or the place where the action is operative. Consider the following: "Where one sees vultures, one will find a dead body." The locative clause informs us where vultures will be, namely, near a corpse. Locative clauses, like temporal ones, can also have an implicit causal idea. For example, Ruth said to Naomi, "Whither you go, I will go" (Ruth 1:16). This is a locative clause, but it is also clear that Ruth will go *because* Naomi goes. Used in *locative clauses*.

Key words: where, wherever (ὅπου, οὐ)

Examples: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst" (Matt. 18:20). "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17).

8. **Bilateral.** A bilateral proposition supports two other propositions: one preceding and one following. This is not really a new category. It is simply an example of a proposition that is the ground of the preceding proposition, and an inference is drawn from it in the subsequent proposition. Examine the following: "May God be praised. He is good. Praise him forever." In this simple example the statement "He is good" functions as the ground for the first statement, "May God be praised." In addition, an inference is drawn from his goodness, namely, that he should be praised forever.

Conjunctions: See numbers 1 and 2 above.

Example: Only one example will be given here since these are inevitably longer: "For when you judge others you condemn yourself as well, for you the one judging do the same things, therefore, we know that God's judgment is according to the truth upon those who practice such things (Rom. 2:1b-2).

Support by Contrary Statement

In subordinate relationships the main proposition may also be supported by contrary statement. For those propositions that fit this type of subordinate relationship, there are two categories of subordinate propositions.

1. **Concessive.** A concessive proposition develops the argument with a contrary statement that contrasts the main proposition with the concessive one. Consider the following: "Even though he was only five feet tall, he could stuff a basketball." Here the main clause is supported by the concessive clause. The concessive clause indicates that the proposition in the main clause stands, even though there are conditions that would cause one to expect the opposite. No one expects a five foot person to stuff a basketball, and thus it is all the more remarkable when he can. Used in *concessive clauses*.

Conjunctions: although . . . yet, although, yet, nevertheless, but (καίτε, εἰ, καί, ἐάν καί). We should note here that the conjunction "but" is ambiguous. It may occur in alternative propositions, negative-positive propositions, or concessive ones.

Examples: "Although he was a Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered" (Heb. 5:8). "Though you have 10,000 instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers" (1 Cor. 4:15).

2. **Situation-Response.** Situation-Response is the relationship between a situation in one proposition and a response in another. Depending upon the person's response, the relationship between the two statements can be either positive or negative. However, Situation-Response differs from Action-Result. In Action-Result the effect is usually an inevitable result of the described action, whereas Situation-Response focuses on a person's response. Depending upon the person's response, the relationship between the two statements can be either positive or negative. In the examples listed below, the first illustrates a negative response, the second, a positive.

Examples: "How often I would have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not" (Matt. 23:38). "Jesus did this beginning of signs . . . and his disciples believed in him" (John 2:11).

Further Comments on Propositions

The student should master the nine different kinds of adverbial clauses that we highlighted above. As we have seen, these propositions can be introduced by various conjunctions. However, these propositions can also be introduced by adverbial participles. Adverbial participles can be modal, causal, conditional, temporal, concessive, or show purpose. Adverbial infinitives may also introduce subordinate clauses, which can be temporal, causal, resultative, or show purpose. The student should study and master the helpful examples of these categories in Brooks-Winbery.³ The student should retranslate subordinate clauses with a subject and a finite verb and specify in the translation the relationship between the main clause and the subordinate clause. For example, Romans 5:1 literally reads, "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God." This is clearly a causal participle and it should be translated as follows: "Because we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God." Another example occurs in Acts 5:30, which says, "You killed him hanging him on a tree." It should be retranslated, "You killed him in that you hanged him on a tree." In other words, the student should not translate the second proposition "hanging him on a tree," nor should it even be rendered "by hanging him on a tree." Instead, the subject should be explicitly included so that the clause is translated "in that you hanged him on a tree." Note that by supplying an explicit subject the participle "hanging" is now rendered in translation as the finite verb "hanged."

Students often have questions about prepositional phrases and relative clauses. Normally I do not introduce a new proposition when relative clauses or prepositions are used. For instance, "Jim, who was a weaver, went to the store" contains the relative clause "who was a weaver." One could split this into two propositions: "Jim went to the store" would be the idea and "who was a weaver" would be the explanation. Even though the relative clause could be analyzed this way, I usually do not make a new proposition with the relative

3. J. A. Brooks and C. L. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek* (New York: University Press, 1979), 120-24, 132-38. Note that Brooks and Winbery distinguished between modal and instrumental participles, whereas all instrumental and modal participles fall under the Action-Manner category in the system explained in this chapter.

clause unless I deem the relative clause to be particularly significant exegetically. For instance, Romans 6:2 literally reads, "We who have died to sin, how shall we still live in it?" The relative clause here is "we who have died to sin." I think it is justified to identify a discrete proposition in the relative clause here because the relative clause is the foundation of Paul's entire argument. In other words, Paul is saying: "We should not live in sin any more *because* we have died to sin." The relative clause ("we who have died to sin") actually provides the ground for the claim that we should not live in sin.

The advice given for relative clauses above also applies to attributive participles. Attributive participles, which modify another substantive, should not usually be set off as new propositions. For example, in Philippians 4:7 Paul says, "The peace of God which passes all understanding shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." Now the word *ὑπερέχουσα* ("which passes") in this verse modifies *εἰρήνη* ("peace"), and the participle here is attributive. No new proposition is introduced by the words "which passes," and thus one should not split this sentence into two propositions.

Prepositional phrases do not add a new proposition to a sentence. In the sentence "Jill ate her sandwich in the house," the words "in the house" are a prepositional phrase, but they do not constitute a new proposition. These words are part of the single proposition stated in the sentence. Nevertheless, on some occasions the prepositional phrase may seem so significant exegetically that a new proposition is demanded. For instance, in Ephesians 1:6-14 Paul used a prepositional phrase three times, indicating the reason why God has showered the church with every spiritual blessing in Christ. He did this "for the praise of the glory of his grace" (1:6, *εἰς ἔπαινον δόξης τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ*), "for the praise of his glory" (1:12, *εἰς ἔπαινον δόξης αὐτοῦ*), "for the praise of his glory" (1:14, *εἰς ἔπαινον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ*). Note that all three of these constructions begin with the same preposition in Greek. Usually such prepositional phrases should not be made a separate proposition. But the threefold repetition of this phrase, and its obvious significance in context signals to the reader that discrete propositions are warranted for these prepositional phrases.⁴

4. Louw (*Semantics*, 82-83) rightly noted that prepositional phrases if unpacked may be retranslated so that they express a clause.

In summary, prepositional phrases, attributive participles, and relative clauses will normally not be separated into new propositions. On some occasions, however, the content of these constructions will be significant enough so that separation into new propositions is warranted. Of course, this means that on some occasions different interpreters will disagree on whether a relative clause or a prepositional phrase is exegetically significant enough to be made into a new proposition.

Sentences with direct and indirect discourse can be baffling to the student. An example is found in the sentence "I have believed that Jesus is the Christ." This sentence contains only one proposition, and that proposition really begins with the word "that." The words "I have believed" simply introduce the source of the proposition. All verbs of mental and physical perception, such as "think," "know," "see," "consider," and "realize," should be handled in the same way. These words do not contain a separate proposition per se; the clauses which stand as the objects of these verbs of perception contain the actual substance of the propositions.

A one sheet summary of the different relationships will be helpful so that the student can quickly scan the various categories. The abbreviation for each category is in the parentheses.

- I. Coordinate Relationships
 - A. Series (S)
 - B. Progression (P)
 - C. Alternative (A)
- II. Subordinate Relationships
 - A. Support by Restatement
 1. Action-Manner (Ac/Mn)
 2. Comparison (Cf)
 3. Negative-Positive (-/+)
 4. Idea-Explanation (Id/Exp)
 5. Question-Answer (Q/A)
 - B. Support by Distinct Statement
 1. Ground (G)
 2. Inference (..)
 3. Action-Result (Ac/Res)
 4. Action-Purpose (Ac/Pur)

5. Conditional (If/Th)
6. Temporal (T)
7. Locative (L)
8. Bilateral (BL)

C. Support by Contrary Statement

1. Concessive (C_{SV})
2. Situation-Response (S_{IV}R)

Some Final Comments on the Method

Before we proceed on to some examples on how to relate the various propositions in Paul, a few comments should be made about the method itself. We should remember that the identification of the different relations between propositions reflects an exegetical judgment, an exegetical conclusion about the passage. For example, whether one sees propositions as reflecting a series or progression is an interpretive judgment. Nevertheless, the context usually contains clues that suggest that one category is right rather than another. Incorrect interpretations run aground on some trait in the text that does not yield the meaning suggested by the flawed interpretation. Correct interpretations explain satisfactorily every trait in the text.

One concern I have heard raised about the method is that not all Pauline texts are written in such a logical way. This is a helpful caution, for it warns us against imposing an alien structure on any Pauline text. It may be that Paul did not always present his case in a logical fashion. The interpreter should let the text unfold itself in a distinctive way and not force a pattern onto the text. Nevertheless, this method does not assume that all Pauline texts are logically structured. This method can account for texts that simply contain random observations. In such a case there would simply be a series of propositions that do not build upon one another in any discernible way. I have found, however, that Paul usually builds his argument from section to section so that you can discern a connected structure. Of course, Paul did not write in logical syllogisms in which every premise of his argument is carefully set forth, and then a conclusion is drawn from the premise(s). He often skips steps in his argument.

Finally, different interpreters will surely disagree on the

structure of different passages. We hope that such disagreement will impel all to return to the text again in order to see what Paul really said. The reader should also note that this method is not the whole of the exegetical process. What Cotterell and Turner said about their method of portraying the text is true of this method as well: "The model is not the structure, but our emerging hypothesis about it. The model does not provide us with *new information* but may be expected to give us an *overall perspective* of the structure when we have examined the relations of the individual pieces."⁵

Using the Method

Tracing the argument involves three steps: (1) isolate the different propositions; (2) trace the argument schematically; and (3) explain the main and supporting points in the text. I suggest that students trace the arguments in paragraphs.⁶ The ultimate goal in the Pauline letters is to trace the argument in each paragraph, and then trace the argument between all the paragraphs so that the structure of the entire letter is evident. The best way to learn how to do this, as with any skill, is to practice it. Since this area is so crucial for exegesis, it is necessary to offer several examples so that the student will know how to proceed.

Example #1

Our first example is from 1 Timothy 6:1-2.⁷ First, the student must isolate the different propositions in the passage. Every proposition should be translated with a subject and predicate. The translation should also reflect the relationship between the propositions. A conjunction or particle describing the relation should be supplied if there is not one. I put these key linking words in italics. The translation below reflects the propositions in 1 Timothy 6:1-2. Propositions that support other propositions are indented so that the reader

5. Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation*, 196.

6. See Louw, *Semantics*, vii, 127-28. He pointed out that traditional methods of delineating paragraphs can be helpful, although one cannot determine where one paragraph ends and another begins until one has analyzed the text.

7. All of the possible interpretive issues in this text cannot be examined here. For a more detailed defense of the interpretation suggested here, see G. D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1988), 137-39.

can see the main proposition(s) and can see which propositions support the main one. Main propositions are not indented in the paragraph.

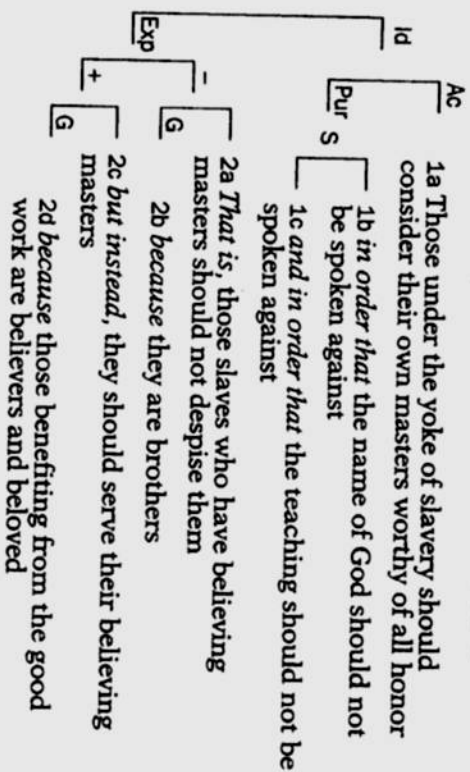
- 1a Those under the yoke of slavery should consider their own masters worthy of all honor
 - 1b *in order that* the name of God should not be spoken against
 - 1c *and in order that* the teaching should not be spoken against
- 2a *That is*, those slaves who have believing masters should not despise them
 - 2b *because* they are brothers
 - 2c *but instead*, they should serve their believing masters
 - 2d *because* those benefiting from the good work are believers and beloved

Second, the interpreter must trace the relationships between the different propositions. The interpreter has made some of these decisions in the translation, but a more comprehensive analysis of the text is still needed. Brackets are placed next to the propositions so that the interpreter can portray the text in a schematic way and thereby see clearly how the text has been analyzed. The brackets closest in reflect the most minute analysis of the text, while the farthest bracket represents the most comprehensive analysis of the text. The relationship between the different propositions should be written down in the brackets. The abbreviations given above should be used. First Timothy 6:1-2 is represented in figure 1.

The brackets can also be portrayed by a series of arcs. If a passage is longer, it is easier to follow the argument with arcs rather than brackets. If the student studies the brackets closely, then it will be easy to see that the arc of the passage listed below is another way of portraying the passage (see fig. 2).

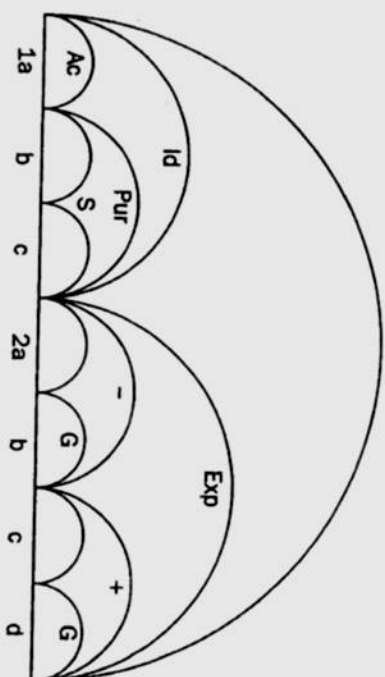
Third, the interpreter must explain the relationship between the different propositions. Writing out the explanation will ensure that the interpreter remembers how the text was understood. As one becomes more skilled in tracing the argument, this last step may become more apparent to the student, thereby making it unnecessary to write out the explanation.

Fig. 1 Bracketed Schema of 1 Tim. 6:1-2



Now we proceed to the explanation of 1 Timothy 6:1-2. The way in which the text is indented indicates the main point in these two verses. The main point is given in the two commands in verses 1 and 2. In verse 1 Paul made the general point that slaves should honor their masters, and in verse 2 he explained more precisely what he had in mind in verse 1, namely, slaves should honor *believing* masters. Verse 2 clarifies the nature of the real problem, namely, Christian slaves who had believing masters were probably questioning whether they should submit to masters who were brothers in

Fig. 2 Arc Schema of 1 Tim. 6:1-2



the faith. Thus, the relationship between verses 1-2 would be described as Idea-Explanation, and this is confirmed by the parallelism between the commands of the two verses, for to say that one "should not despise" a master (v. 2) is another way of saying that one "should consider a master worthy of all honor" (v. 1). Everything else in these two verses supports these two commands, and thus the rest of the propositions are indented to show that they function in a supporting way.

Now that we have seen the main proposition we can proceed with a more detailed analysis of verse one. The proposition in verse 1a clearly relates to 1b/1c as action-purpose. The action is given in 1a: slaves are to consider their masters as worthy of all honor. The reason or purpose for this action is given in 1b and 1c. Slaves are to honor their masters so that the name of God and the teaching of the gospel will not be spoken against and reviled. If believing slaves rebel against believing masters, the gospel message itself would be besmirched in the eyes of the unbelieving world. Thus, in 1b-c Paul supplied supporting propositions that explained why he thought it was so important to honor believing masters.

Both the name of God and the teaching are not to be blasphemed according to 1b and 1c. What is the relationship between the name of God and the teaching? The teaching does not seem to be climactic because it is unlikely that Paul thought the teaching was more important than God's name. Thus, the relation between 1b and 1c seems to be a series. Both the name of God and the teaching of the gospel should not be spoken against.

We have seen that the main proposition in verse 2, that slaves should not despise believing masters, is a further explanation of the main proposition in verse 1. The main proposition in verse 2 is explained by way of contrast, for 2a-b together function as the antithesis to 2c-d. Slaves are tempted to despise their Christian masters because these masters are brothers (2a-b), perhaps expecting better treatment or freedom from these masters. Paul used this same argument in 2c-d, however, for serving masters. They should serve masters all the more willingly because they are brothers! The relation between these two propositions is negative-positive: slaves should not despise Christian masters because they are brothers.

ers; instead, they should serve them all the more because they are brothers.

The remaining relationships to be analyzed in verse 2 are found in the relations between 2a and 2b, and 2c and 2d. The command in 2a is that those slaves who have believing masters should not despise their masters. Verse 2b provides the reason (ground) why Christian slaves would be tempted to despise believing masters: precisely because their masters were fellow-Christians they might be inclined to look down upon them. Perhaps these slaves expected their Christian owners to liberate them. In 2c Paul commanded slaves to serve their masters, and the ground or reason is given in 2d. Slaves should serve Christian masters for the very reason that these masters are brothers who will benefit from the slave's labor.

It may appear that tracing the logic in this way is a very laborious way to state what was obvious from the beginning. Even in short texts, however, this method is valuable because it constrains the reader to slow down and to note the function of every proposition in the text. The reader begins to observe more closely what is in the text, and then proceeds to ask questions about how the text coheres. In addition, the longer the text, the more such an analysis is necessary. It may be easy to consider the relationship between only two verses, but tracing the argument for extended paragraphs or even the entire letter can easily slip from our grasp unless we have some way of holding before our mind the logic of the text.

Example #2

We will present a more extended example from Romans 4:1-8 so that the reader can see how a longer passage is handled. The first step, once again, is to isolate the different propositions and to translate them.

- 1 *Therefore, what shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, found?*
- 2a *For if Abraham was justified by works,*
- 2b *then he has a reason for boasting.*
- 2c *But he has no reason for boasting in God's sight.*
- 3a *For the scripture says "Abraham believed God"*
- 3b *and as a consequence his faith was counted to him as righteousness.*

- 4 *Now let me explain further*: To the one who works wages are not counted as a gift but as a debt
 5 *but* to the one who does not work but believes upon him who justifies the ungodly his faith is counted as righteousness
 6 *just as* David also speaks of the blessing of the person to whom God counts righteousness apart from works
 7a *He says*: Blessed is the person whose lawless deeds are forgiven
 7b *and* his sins are covered over
 8 *And* Blessed is the person whose sin the Lord will not count.

Second, trace the argument of the passage to portray how the argument has been understood by putting in brackets or arcs (see fig. 3).

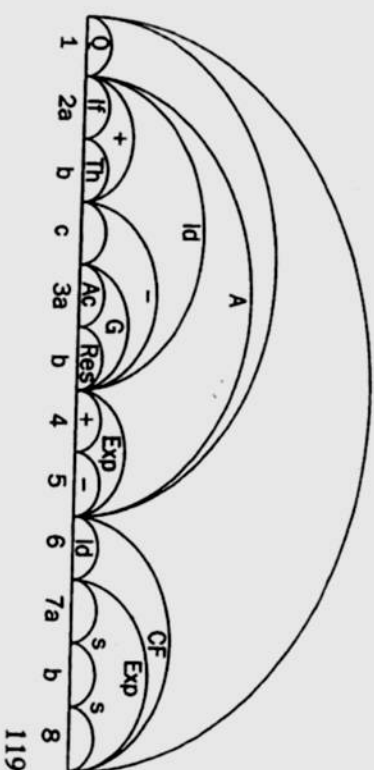
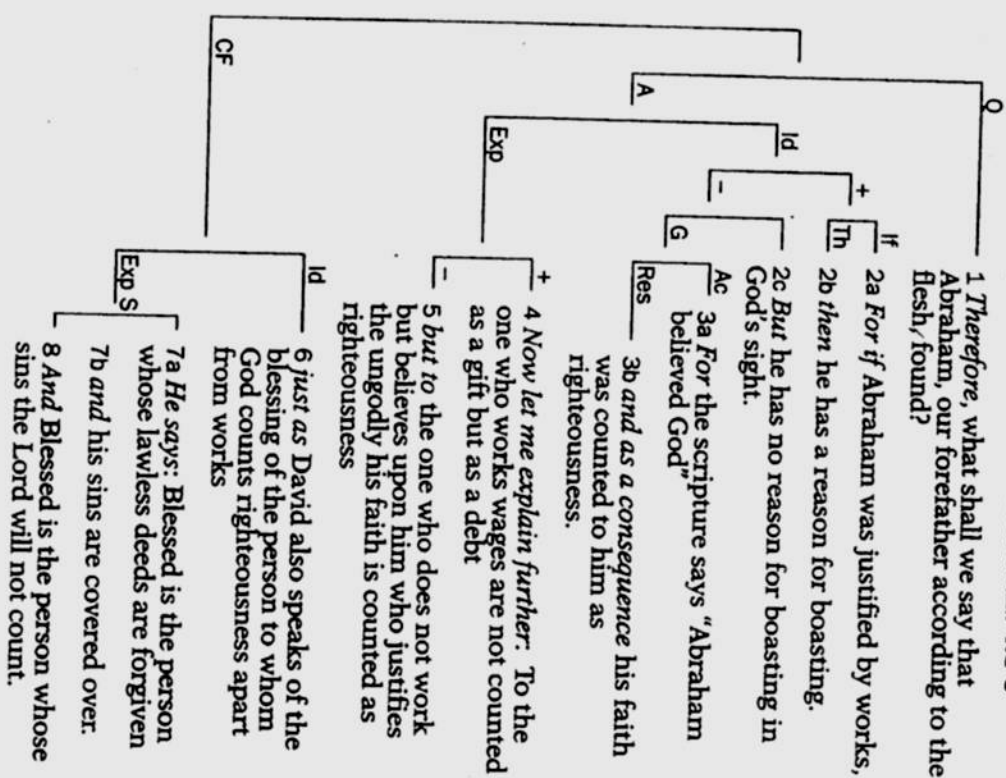
Third, explain the relationships between the different propositions. We need to say immediately that a number of exegetical issues cannot be discussed in this passage. For a detailed exegesis of this text, the reader should consult a commentary, such as Cranfield's on Romans (see appendix). The explanation that follows makes a number of assumptions regarding the meaning of the passage. Due to space restraints we will not attempt to defend all of these assumptions.⁸

The main proposition in Romans 4:1-8 is located in the answer to the question posed in verse 1. Here Paul inquired about the status of Abraham before God. The question arises because Paul has just contended that all people are justified by faith and not by the works of the law (Rom. 3:28). The one God does not justify Jews and Gentiles in a different way, for both are justified by faith (3:30). Paul's contention that all, both Jews and Gentiles, are justified by faith is flawed if Jews in the OT were justified by the works of the law. So in chapter 4 Paul anticipated a possible objection to the thesis of justification by faith presented at the close of chapter 3. Does the case of Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, support the Pauline understanding of justification?

Now as we said above, the answer to the question posed in

8. D. P. Fuller (*Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980], 105ff.) has significantly influenced my understanding of this text; however, I do not claim that he would necessarily agree with my analysis of this text.

Fig. 3 Propositional Schema of Rom. 4:1-8



verse 1 is the main proposition in this text. And the answer given in verses 2-5 is that Abraham has no grounds of boasting before God because he was counted righteous before God on the basis of his faith, not by his work for God. Therefore, Abraham supports Paul's claim in chapter 3 that both Jews and Gentiles are justified by faith. The example of David in verses 6-8 functions as a confirmatory argument for the same thesis. Paul introduced verse 6 with a comparative clause (*καθάρτε*, "just as"), demonstrating that David was justified in the same way as Abraham. David was counted righteous before God even though he was a sinner, even though works were lacking in his life. Thus, two of the most significant characters in Jewish history, Abraham and David, were not justified by working for God. They were counted righteous by believing God.

First, let us examine how Paul develops his argument regarding Abraham in verses 2-5. Paul acknowledged in verse 2 that if Abraham was righteous before God by virtue of his works, then he would have a reason to boast before God, and thus Paul's claim that boasting is excluded (Rom. 3:27) would be contradicted. The relationship between 2a and 2b is conditional: the main point here is that boasting is legitimate and warranted if Abraham has performed the necessary works.

Verses 2c-3b, however, function as the antithesis to the proposition in 2a-b. This antithesis is marked by the strong adversative "but" (*ἀλλ'*, 4:2c). The main point of 2a-b is that Abraham can boast if he gained God's approval by working for him. But 2c-3b negates this assertion by saying that Abraham has no reason for boasting in God's sight. So 2a-b functions as a positive proposition: Abraham can boast if he has necessary works, while 2c-3b functions as a negative: Abraham has no reason to boast before God.

By isolating 2c-3b we can see that the main proposition here is that Abraham has no grounds for boasting before God. Paul needed to prove this assertion since it was the pivotal point in his argument. He cited Genesis 15:6 in verse 3 to ground his thesis. Note that verse 3 is indented above because it functions to support the proposition in 2c. Verse 3 is not the main point itself; instead, it functions as a support for the main point. How does verse 3 support Paul's main assertion in 2c? By citing the OT Paul defended his

claim that justification is by faith. This OT text does not say that Abraham was right before God by his works. Rather, this text shows that Abraham's faith was the determinative factor in his justification. The relation between 3a and 3b is action-result. Abraham believed God, and the result or consequence of this belief was that God counted or reckoned this faith as righteousness. Abraham's righteousness was not the result of working for God; instead, it was the consequence of trusting God.

Now it seems to me that verses 4 and 5 function as a further explanation of verses 2-3. Before we see how verses 4 and 5 explain verses 2-3, the relationship between 4 and 5 should be investigated. It is easy to see that a negative-positive relation occurs between verses 4 and 5. Verse 4 says that one who works does not view his wages as a gift from the employer. Instead, the employee rightly thinks that his wages are deserved and his right since he has worked for them. On the other hand (verse 5), a person who does not work at all but merely believes is clearly in a different category than the person described in verse 4. He does not expect a reward from his own effort but looks to another for righteousness.

We are now in a position to see how verses 4-5 further explain verses 2-3. Verse 4 really functions as a further explanation of verse 2. If Abraham worked for God as an employee, then what he did for God would surely deserve a reward since no employee views wages as a gift from the employer. And if Abraham did work for God in such a way that he deserved payment (v. 4), then he could boast (v. 2) that his justification was due to his working for God. But Paul affirms in verse 3 that Abraham was not justified by works; he was justified by trusting God. Verse 5 further explains what is involved in trusting God for righteousness. Saving faith recognizes that no one can work for God. Instead, saving faith trusts God to work for us. He justifies the ungodly. He makes ungodly sinners—like Abraham—what they were not previously, namely, righteous in God's sight. It is a great delusion for ungodly sinners to think that they can do anything to warrant God's approval. The faith that is counted for righteousness believes that strength is found only in God and humbly expects him to work for people.

We pointed out above that verses 6-8 function as a com-

parison to verses 1-5, showing that David was justified in the same way that Abraham was. Righteousness was counted or reckoned to David in the same way that it was counted to Abraham. The main proposition in this section is found in verse 6. David also recounts the blessing or happiness of the person to whom righteousness is reckoned apart from working for God. The three propositions in verses 7-8 serve to explain further the main idea found in verse 6. Thus, verse 6 is the idea and verses 7-8 are the explanation. In 7-8 Paul cites Psalm 32:1-2, which picks up on the words "blessing" and "count" used in verse 6. Indeed, the continued use of the word "count" or "reckon" (*λογίζομαι*) also links this section with 4:1-5.

The blessing of righteousness apart from works, therefore, is recounted in Psalm 32:1-2. The three propositions in verses 7-8 seem to be a series in which each proposition says basically the same thing, but in different ways. The blessing of justification is experienced when one's lawless deeds are forgiven. Another way of speaking of forgiveness is to say that God covers over a person's sins (v. 7b). The last metaphor used is one from accounting: God does not reckon or count a person's sin against him. These citations from David's life confirm the central proposition that righteousness is not attained by working for God. Righteousness is experienced when God works for someone by forgiving lawless deeds, by covering over past sins, and by not counting such infractions against the person. David did not experience God's favor because he was so noble that he did mighty things for God. Instead, David experienced God's saving favor in spite of the fact that he was a sinner. The fact that he needed forgiveness of sins shows that he could not put God in his debt by doing good works. Instead, God justified the ungodly David by forgetting his sins. David was right before God because he believed in a God who delights in working "for those who wait for him" (Isa. 64:4).

Example #3

In our last example, Titus 2:1-10, for reasons of space we will keep the explanation quite brief. First, we isolate the propositions.

Tracing the Argument

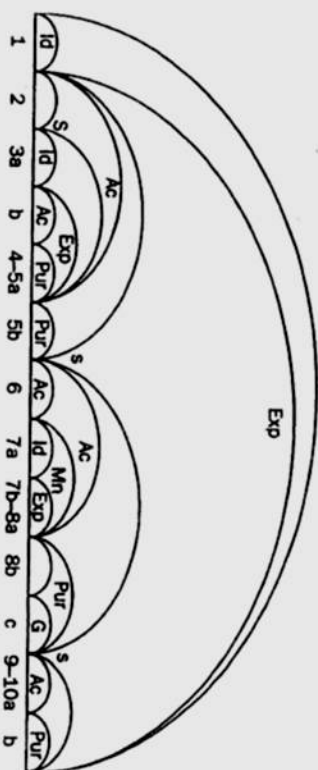
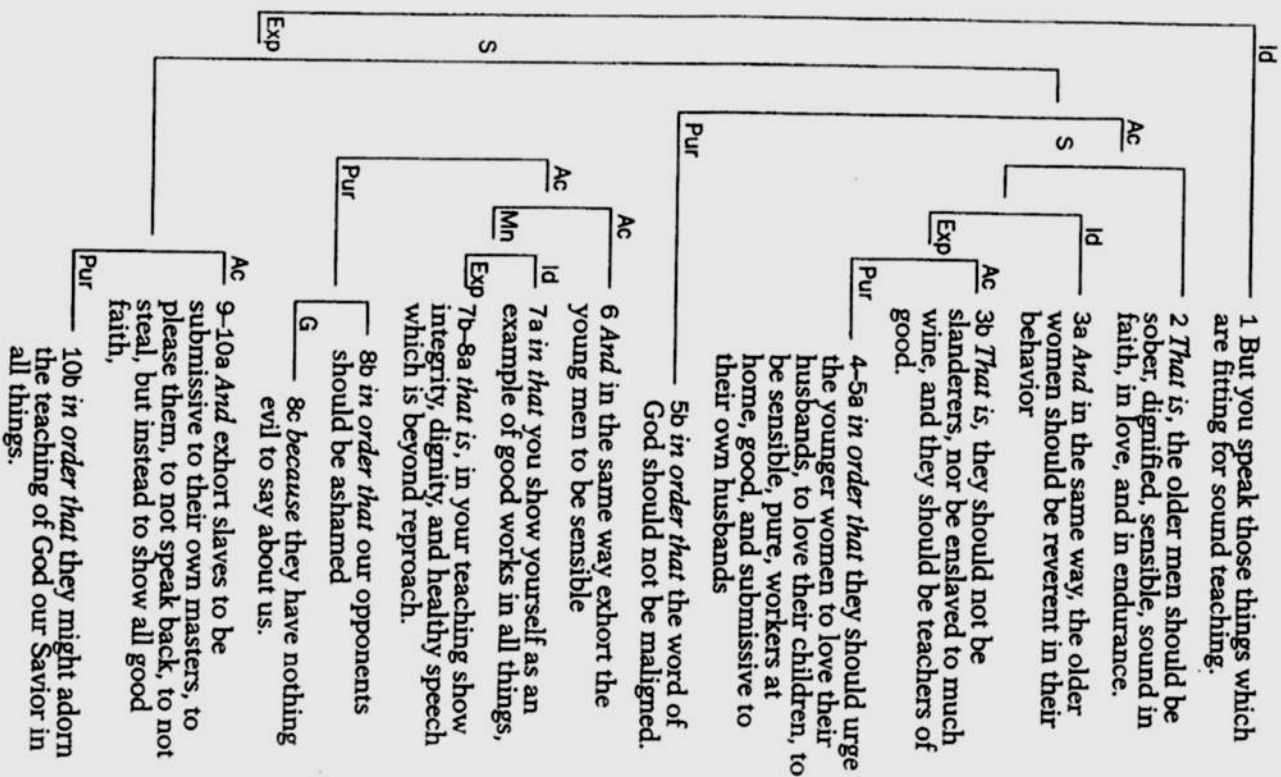
- 1 But you speak those things which are fitting for sound teaching.
- 2 *That is*, the older men should be sober, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, and in endurance.
- 3a *And* in the same way, the older women should be reverent in their behavior
- 3b *That is*, they should not be slanderers, nor be enslaved to much wine, and they should be teachers of good.
- 4-5a *in order that* they should urge the younger women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, good, and submissive to their own husbands
- 5b *in order that* the word of God should not be maligned.
- 6 *And* in the same way exhort the young men to be sensible
- 7a *in that* you show yourself as an example of good works in all things,
- 7b-8a *that is*, in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and healthy speech which is beyond reproach.
- 8b *in order that* our opponents should be ashamed
- 8c *because* they have nothing evil to say about us.
- 9-10a *And* exhort slaves to be submissive to their own masters, to please them, to not speak back, to not steal, but instead to show all good faith,
- 10b *in order that* they might adorn the teaching of God our Savior in all things.

The series of commands within the individual verses above could be separated and presented in a series. Instead, I have chosen to include all of them as the object of what is commanded so that the larger structure of the text can be easily detected.

Second, we trace the argument between the different propositions (see fig. 4).

Third, we need to explain the structure of the text. Titus 2:1 is the topic sentence or the idea which is fleshed out in 2:2-10. In other words, the things that are fitting for sound teaching (v. 1) are explained in the admonitions to older men, older women, younger women, young men, and slaves in vv. 2-10. Note that the women are to live their lives in accordance with sound teaching "in the same way" (*ὁμοῦτως*) as the older men. And the young men are exhorted to live "in the same way" as the older and younger women, and the older

Fig. 4 Propositional Schema of Titus 2:1-10



men. Even though the exhortations are introduced with a comparative word (*ὡς*), the text is probably better understood as a series of commands to these different groups.

In verse 3a Paul exhorted the older women to be reverent in their behavior, and in 3b he explained in more detail the nature of such reverent behavior. The *ὡς* in 2:4 could be understood as a "teacher of what is good," or it could be a purpose *ὡς*. I take it to be a purpose clause since in the pastoral Epistles both behavior and words are necessary for healthy teaching. Thus, the older women teach the younger women not only with words but by the way they live. The instructions given to the younger women are described in verses 4-5a.

The purpose clause in verse 5b at first glance seems to be attached only to the instructions given to the younger women. On the other hand, this purpose clause could possibly be understood as the purpose for all of verses 2-5. This latter view is strengthened by the use of a purpose clause to conclude the exhortations to young men and slaves in verses 8 and 10. If this latter view is the case, then it means that Paul concluded each major exhortation section in this passage with a purpose clause, explaining why he gave these exhortations. In each case he was concerned about the witness of believers in the world. By their good behavior they prevent the word of God from being maligned (v. 5b), they forestall any criticism of the gospel (v. 8c), and they make the teaching of the gospel attractive (v. 10b).

In Titus 2:6 Paul exhorted the young men to live sensibly. Interestingly, Paul said that Timothy should set an example for the younger men by his own life (2:7-8a). As the older

women should instruct the younger women with the beauty of their lives, so Timothy should instruct the younger men by his godly example of good works. In 2:7b-8a Paul specified the good works he had in mind. We note again that Paul gave the purpose for this exhortation in 8b, namely, that the opponents of the gospel should be ashamed. The ground or reason for such shame is given in 8c, namely, the good works of Timothy and the young men make it impossible for anything evil to be said about them.

We have already pointed out that Paul exhorted slaves in verses 9-10 and provided the purpose for such an exhortation. If we continued our analysis of the structure of this text, it would be apparent that in 2:11-14 Paul provided the ground for his instructions in 2:1-10 (note the *γὰρ* ["for"] in v. 11). The grace of God has appeared in Christ Jesus, and thereby provides the motivation to live as new people.

Perhaps at this point the student is thinking, "Such detailed work is too much, and there are other things to do in life, too!" Admittedly, the task of trying to understand someone who wrote 2,000 years ago in a different language is not an easy one. Certainly, careful study and disciplined reading requires a great investment of time. Yet the rewards are great. The pleasure of unlocking a text and knowing that one understands it is inexpressible. If time is a problem the wise student will spend it in the languages and in the texts. First hand knowledge of Paul is the goal, not a derived knowledge that cannot be evaluated. Commentaries can shed a great deal of light on a text of Scripture, but I have found again and again that careful study of the text will inevitably deal with the same issues discussed in commentaries. And such intense study provides the student with the necessary tools for evaluating the commentaries.

Of course, tracing logic is not the whole of exegesis. It is dependent upon grammatical analysis as we have already seen. But how we understand propositions is inevitably related to how we understand the words that make up the propositions. Thus, lexical study is imperative, and to this subject we now turn.

7

Doing Lexical Studies

An objection could be raised here regarding the order of the chapters. How can one understand propositions before one understands the individual words contained in the propositions? Thus, it could be claimed that one should study the meaning of terms in Paul before trying to comprehend the relationship between different propositions. A few things can be said in response to this anticipated objection. First, as recommended in chapter four, the interpreter should already have looked up the meaning of words when translating the passage being studied. Therefore, it would not be the case that one would analyze propositions without any understanding of what individual words mean. Second, if one finds it more helpful to study individual terms before diagramming or tracing the argument, I have no great objection. It is true that the understanding of a particular word or words may cause one to understand the meaning of a proposition differently. Third, I have decided, however, to put the chapter on lexical study in Paul here because the hermeneutical circle functions in such a way that the context also plays a major role in determining the meaning of an individual word. Interpreters can also make serious mistakes in assigning a particular meaning to a word without carefully understanding the entire context of a passage. The interpreter cannot understand propositions without understanding the individual words that make up those propositions, and yet the mean-