I. Introduction to Grammatical Analysis

“Language is the sheath of the sword of the Spirit.” –Martin Luther

II. The Importance of Grammatical Analysis

A. In setting forth the revelation of His Word, God chose to reveal truth through existing human languages. As Roy Zuck notes, “Each biblical writing — that is, each word, sentence, and book — was recorded in a written language and followed normal, grammatical meanings.”

B. For this reason, in order to determine the divinely intended meaning of Scripture, the interpreter must be careful to analyze the grammar of any given passage according to the normal grammatical use of that language at the time the passage was written.

**KEY QUALIFICATION:** Your grammatical analysis of an English translation will eventually be replaced by your grammatical analysis of the text in its original language. For this reason, much of this section is provisional and will only be used until you study Greek and Hebrew. But at the same time, it will lay an important foundation for future study.

III. The Process of Grammatical Analysis

Three Steps:

1. Analyze the Grammar of the Passage
2. Diagram the Structure of the Passage
3. Outline the Flow of the Passage
A. Step 1: Analyze the Grammar of the Passage

Analyzing the grammar of a given passage of Scripture involves recognizing the various parts of speech and understanding the role they play in the structure of the text. In addition, it is also necessary to understand the relationships of various phrases and clauses, as well as the contribution that each of them make to an accurate interpretation of the author’s intent.

1. Nouns

A noun is a person, place, thing, or abstract concept. To understand the significance of the nouns in the passage under consideration, it is essential not only to identify them, but also to determine how they are functioning in the passage. There are several possibilities:

- **Subject**
  - “God so loved the world” (John 3:16)
  - “And [you] be kind to one another” (Eph 5:32)

- **Direct Object**
  - “God so loved the world” (John 3:16)
  - “He took along some soldiers and centurions” (Acts 21:32)

- **Indirect Object**
  - “He would have given you living water” (John 4:10)
  - “He had given them a signal” (Mark 14:44)

- **Object of a Preposition**
  - “Rejoice in the Lord” (Phil 4:4)
  - “Speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1)

- **Predicate Nominative**
  - “God is spirit” (John 4:24)
  - “Abraham is our father” (John 8:39)

- **Appositive**
  - “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus” (2 Cor 1:1)
  - “in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:14)

- **Vocative**
  - “Many will say to Me on that day, ’Lord, Lord’” (Matt 7:22)
  - “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance” (Luke 12:13)
2. Pronouns

A pronoun is a word that serves as a substitute for a noun which occurs elsewhere in the context, usually just prior to the pronoun. There are several different types of pronouns:

- **Personal Pronouns**
  - “For I give you sound teaching” (Prov 4:2)
  - “So they will be life to your soul” (Prov 3:22)

- **Possessive Pronouns**
  - “All a man’s labor is for his mouth” (Eccl 6:7)
  - “They direct their desire toward their iniquity” (Hosea 4:8)

- **Reflexive Pronouns**
  - “Let him deny himself” (Mark 8:34)
  - “Consider yourselves to be dead to sin” (Rom 6:11)

- **Intensive Pronouns**
  - “They themselves report about us” (1 Thess 1:9)
  - “The Spirit Himself intercedes for us” (Rom 8:26)

- **Demonstrative Pronouns**
  - “This is the word which was preached to you” (1 Pet 1:25)
  - “Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh” (Gal 6:12)

- **Relative Pronouns**
  - “Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified” (Acts 4:10)
  - “the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge” (Eph 1:14)

**KEY STEP:** Identify the antecedent of every pronoun in the passage under consideration. For example:

- Acts 17:28:
  - Ephesians 1:4:
  - Ephesians 2:8:
  - Colossians 1:13:
3. **Verbs**

A verb is *a word that describes an action or state of being*. Analyzing the grammatical significance of a given verb involves understanding its tense, mood, and voice.

- **The Tense of the Verb**

Verb tense in particular is an area that is better left to an analysis of the text in its original language. At the same time, even prior to studying Greek and Hebrew, the interpreter can begin to observe verb tenses in the English translation, especially when there is a contrast in tenses between two verbs in the same context:

- “I have made [past tense] Your name known to them and will make [future tense] it known” (John 17:26)

  **QUESTION:** What is the significance of the change in verb tense?

- **The Mood of the Verb**

- The *Indicative Mood* (states a fact)
  - “God so loved the world” (John 3:16)
  - “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you” (Phil 1:3)

- The *Imperative Mood* (expresses a command)
  - “Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good” (Rom 12:9)
  - “Bless those who persecute you” (Rom 12:14)

**PRIMARY INDICATIVE / IMPERATIVE PATTERNS**

As the interpreter identifies the mood of the verbs in a given passage, it is extremely helpful to note the relationship between the indicative and imperative. The following are some of the more common patterns found in Scripture.

- **Indicative THEREFORE Imperative**
  - 1 Corinthians 6:20:
  - 1 Peter 4:7:
  - Hebrews 4:15-16:
• Romans 13:12:
• Ephesians 4:1:
• Romans 12:1:

b. Imperative FOR Indicative
• Hebrews 10:23:
• James 5:8:
• Romans 13:1:
• Galatians 6:9:
• Philippians 2:12b-13:
• 1 John 4:7:
• 1 Peter 1:16b:
• Colossians 3:2-3:

c. Imperative SINCE Indicative
• Colossians 3:9:

d. SINCE Indicative Imperative
• 1 Thessalonians 5:8:
• Hebrews 4:14:
• 1 Peter 1:22:
• Hebrews 10:19-22:

- The Voice of the Verb
The Active Voice
- “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie” (Rom 1:25)
- “I will vindicate the holiness of My great name” (Ezek 36:23)

The Passive Voice
- “All Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26)
- “The promises were spoken to Abraham” (Gal 3:16)

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4. Adjectives

An adjective is a word that describes a noun by ascribing a certain quality or qualities to it. It generally answers one of the following questions about the noun it modifies: Which one? What kind? How many? or How much? There are four different types of adjectives:

- Articles
  - “Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father” (Prov 4:1) (definite)
  - “Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father” (Prov 4:1) (indefinite)

- Demonstrative Adjectives
  - “this Man...you nailed to a cross” (Acts 2:23)
  - “the least of these commandments” (Matt 5:19)

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<tr>
<th>Near</th>
<th>Far</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>this</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>these</td>
</tr>
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</table>

- Possessive Adjectives
  - “take the log out of your own eye” (Luke 6:42)
  - “He promised beforehand through His prophets” (Luke 12:42)

- Descriptive Adjectives
5. **Adverbs**

An adverb is *a word that describes a verb, adjective, or another adverb*:

- “The Spirit *explicitly* says that some will fall away” (1 Tim 4:1)
- “It is a *very* small thing that I should be examined by you” (1 Cor 4:3)
- “We have acted *very* corruptly against Thee” (Neh 1:7)

6. **Prepositions**

A preposition is *a connective word that shows the relationship of a noun or pronoun* (known as the *object* of the preposition) *to some other word in the sentence*. A prepositional phrase consists of the preposition, the object of the preposition, and any words that may modify that object.

**FOR EXAMPLE:** “The Light has come into the world” (John 3:19)

- Preposition: “into”
- Object of Preposition: “world”
- Prepositional Phrase: “into the world”

As Gordon Fee observes “there are times when the force of the prepositional phrases makes a considerable difference in the meaning of a whole sentence.” For this reason, it is essential to identify prepositional phrases and to understand the contribution they make to the meaning of the passage under consideration. See “Prepositional Phrases” below for an example of how to do this.

7. **Conjunctions**

A conjunction is *a word or group of words that connects or joins together two or more words, phrases, or clauses*. In some cases, a conjunction connects even larger blocks of material, such as paragraphs. In functioning as a connector, a conjunction establishes a relationship between the two or more elements it joins together.

As Robert L. Thomas writes, “It is impossible to follow an author’s logic without paying close attention to the conjunctions he uses. There is a sense in which conjunctions constitute the skeleton on which the meaning of the New Testament hangs. The meaning
assigned to each statement to some degree grows out of the connective word used to introduce it.”

**Three-Step Process:**

1. Locate the Conjunction
2. Identify the Connected Elements
3. Determine the Nature of the Connection

**POSSIBLE CONNECTIONS:**

In determining the nature of the connection that a given conjunction establishes between the two elements it joins together, it is helpful to be aware of some of the more common possibilities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple Connection (and)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“They will kill Him, and He will be raised” (Matt 17:23)</td>
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<td>“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser” (John 15:1-2)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Contrast (but, rather, however)</th>
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<tr>
<td>“I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matt 10:34)</td>
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<td>“You did not choose Me, but I chose you” (John 15:16)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Disjunction (or)</th>
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<tr>
<td>“that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets” (Matt 5:17)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed” (Eph 5:3)</td>
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<th>Further Explanation (for)</th>
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<tr>
<td>“For just as Jonah was three days…” (Matt 12:40) — see context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“For I came to set a man against…” (Matt 10:35) — see context</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inference / Conclusion (then, therefore, wherefore)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The end…is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment” (1 Pet 4:7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“You were bought with a price: therefore glorify God” (1 Cor 6:20)</td>
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<th>Transition (now, then)</th>
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<tr>
<td>“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows” (Matt 1:18)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Now on the last day, the great day of the feast” (John 7:37)</td>
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<th>Cause/Reason (for, because, since)</th>
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<tr>
<td>“You shall be holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet 1:16)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“He gave Him authority…because He is the Son of Man” (Jn 5:27)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
- **Comparison** (*as, just as, thus*)
  - “forgiving each other, just as God has forgiven you” (Eph 4:32)
  - “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1)

- **Condition** (*if, if...then*)
  - “If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law” (Gal 5:18)
  - “We shall reap if we do not grow weary” (Gal 6:9)

- **Result** (*that, so that, and*)
  - “God so loved the world that He gave” (John 3:16)
  - “Who sinned...that [this man] should be born blind?” (John 9:2)

- **Purpose** (*that, so that, in order that*)
  - “They were watching so that they might put him to death” (Acts 9:24)
  - “Be submissive to your husbands so that they may be won” (1 Pt 3:1)

- **Time** (*before, after, when, whenever, since, as, while, until*)
  - “God...when we were dead...made us alive” (Eph 2:4-5)
  - “when evening came, after the sun had set, they began” (Mk 1:32)

- **Content** (*that*)
  - “I testify that he is under obligation to keep the Law” (Gal 5:3)
  - “I delivered to you...what I received, that Christ died” (1 Cor 15:3)

- **Concession** (*though, even though, although*)
  - “Even though they knew God, they did not honor Him” (Rom 1:21)
  - “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience” (Heb 5:8)

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**Phrases**

A phrase is a group of words that function together but do not contain a subject and a verb. There are three kinds of phrases: prepositional phrases, participle phrases, and infinitive phrases:

1. **Prepositional Phrases**

   A prepositional phrase consists of the preposition, the object of the preposition, and any words that modify that object. To understand the significance of prepositional phrases in the
passage under consideration, the interpreter must locate each prepositional phrase, identify which word is being modified by the prepositional phrase, and determine the contribution the prepositional phrase makes to the meaning of the verse.

### Three-Step Process:

1. Locate the Prepositional Phrase
2. Identify the Word Modified by the Phrase
3. Determine the Contribution of the Phrase

**FOR EXAMPLE:** Ephesians 3:16: “that He would grant you…to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man”

- **Step 1: Locate the Prepositional Phrase(s)**
  - “with power”
  - “through His Spirit”
  - “in the inner man”

- **Step 2: Identify the Word(s) Modified by the Phrases**
  
  These three prepositional phrases are all parallel to one another in that each of them modify the infinitive “to be strengthened” in Paul’s prayer. A mini block diagram of this verse provides a picture of this parallelism:

  
  ```
  that He would grant you to be strengthened
  with power
  through His Spirit
  in the inner man
  ```

- **Step 3: Determine the Contribution of the Phrase(s)**
  
  - “with power” — indicates the means by which Paul prays the Ephesians would be strengthened
  - “through His Spirit” — indicates the personal agent who Paul prays will strengthen the Ephesians
  - “in the inner man” — indicates the realm in which Paul prays they will be strengthened

**Summary:**
Paul’s Request:  

that He would grant you to be strengthened

Means:  with power  
Agent:  through His Spirit  
Realm:  in the inner man

What is Paul prayer for the Ephesians? 
That God would grant them to be strengthened

What is to be the means of this strengthening? 
The power of God

Who specifically is to be the One to bring this power to believers to strengthen them? 
The Holy Spirit

In what realm is this strengthening to take place? 
In the inner man (as opposed to the outer, physical man)

2. Participle Phrases

A participle is a verb form that functions either as an adjective or as a noun (although participles functioning as nouns are usually referred to as gerunds). Participles often end in either “-ing” (the present participle) or in “-d” or “-ed” (the past participle). The entire participle phrase consists of the participle itself plus any modifiers or complements.

- Participles Functioning as Nouns (Gerunds):
  - “The wishing is present…the doing of the good is not” (Rom 7:18)  
  - “There is…a time to shun embracing” (Eccl 3:1, 5)

- Participles Functioning as Adjectives:
  - “He would have given you living water” (John 4:10) 
  - “They kissed him, grieving over the word he had spoken” (Ac 20:37)

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PARTICIPLES:

- Philippians 2:7:  “Jesus…emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.”
  - Subject:  “Jesus” 
  - Main Verb:  “emptied”
Ø Direct Object: “Himself”
Ø Participles: “taking” and “being made”
Ø Pct Phrases: “taking the form of a bond-servant”
“being made in the likeness of men”

Significance: Indicates the means by which Jesus emptied Himself in Philippians 2:7

Question: How did Jesus empty Himself?
  o “[by] taking the form of a bond-servant”
  o “[by] being made in the likeness of men”

- Acts 3:8: “He entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God”
  Ø Main Clause: “He entered the temple”
  Ø Pct Phrases: “walking” / “leaping” / “praising God”

Significance: Indicates the manner in which the healed man entered the temple

Question: In what manner did he enter the temple?
“walking and leaping and praising God”

- James 1:2-3: “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance”
  Ø Subject: “[You]”
  Ø Main Clause: “Consider it all joy”
  Ø Participle: “knowing”
  Ø Pct Phrase: “knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance”

Significance: Indicates the reason that James’ readers should consider trials a reason to rejoice

Question: Why should you consider it all joy?
“[because you know] that the testing of your faith produces endurance”

3. Infinitive Phrases
An infinitive is a verb form which consists of the word “to” plus a verb (e.g., “to believe,” “to walk,” “to write”) and which functions as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb. The entire infinitive phrase consists of the infinitive itself plus the object of the infinitive and/or any words or phrases that may modify the infinitive.

- **Used as a Noun**
  - “To live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:12)
  - “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me” (John 4:34)
  - “Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another” (Rom 13:8)

- **Used as an Adjective**
  - “I have need to be baptized by you” (Matt 3:14)
  - “There is...a time to give birth, and a time to die” (Eccl 3:1-2)

- **Used as an Adverb** (indicates purpose)
  - “God raised up His Servant, and sent Him to bless you” (Acts 3:26)
  - “He who sent me to baptize in water” (John 1:33)
  - “They led Him away to crucify Him” (Matt 27:31)

- **Used to Complete the Idea of a Preceding Verb**
  - “But I do not allow a woman to teach” (1 Tim 2:12)
  - “His disciples began to pick the heads of grain and eat” (Matt 12:1)

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**Clauses**

A clause is a group of words that contains both a subject and a verb. There are two main types of clauses—**independent clauses** and **dependent clauses**.

- **Independent Clause**: is able to stand alone and make sense by itself
  (it is *independent*)

- **Dependent Clause**: is not able to stand alone and make sense by itself
  (it is *dependent* on another clause)

1. **Independent Clauses**

An independent clause is a group of words which contains a subject and a verb and which is able to stand alone and make sense by itself. An independent clause is often referred to as a *main clause* because it is not grammatically subordinate to another
clause. There is always at least one independent/main clause in each sentence. Locating the independent clauses in a given passage is one of the first priorities of the interpreter, because these main clauses contain the focal point of the sentences in which they occur.

Identify all the independent clauses in Romans 5:1-5:

(1) Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, (2) through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. (3) And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; (4) and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; (5) and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

- Main Clause #1: __________________________________________ ( )
- Main Clause #2: __________________________________________ ( )
- Main Clause #3: __________________________________________ ( )
- Main Clause #4: __________________________________________ ( )

Eventually, the interpreter should be able to pick the main clause in each sentence as quickly as he is able to read the sentence itself. To do so, he needs to cultivate the habit of temporarily pushing everything else aside in his mind and zeroing in on the main clause.

2. Dependent Clauses

A dependent clause is a group of words which contains a subject and a verb, but which cannot stand on its own because it is dependent on another clause. For example, notice how the following clauses cannot stand on their own and make sense by themselves: “so that Christ may dwell in your hearts” (Eph 3:17); “with which you have been called” (Eph 4:1); “if indeed you have heard Him” (Eph 4:21).
Because a dependent clause cannot stand on its own, it is said to be dependent upon—or subordinate to—another clause. There are three different kinds of dependent clauses—noun clauses, adjective clauses, and adverb clauses.

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<tr>
<th>Three Types:</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Noun Clauses</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Adjective Clauses</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Adverb Clauses</td>
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Once the interpreter has concluded that a group of words is indeed a dependent clause, the next step is to ask how the clause is functioning in the sentence—as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb. It will always be one of the three.

- **The Noun Clause**
  - “Whatever is not from faith is sin” (Rom 14:23)
  - “that you may prove what the will of God is” (Rom 12:2)

- **The Adjective Clause**
  - “Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us” (Titus 2:13-14)
  - “His might which He brought about in Christ” (Eph 1:19-20)
  - “he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law” (Rom 13:8)

- **The Adverb Clause**
  - “He gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us” (Titus 2:14)
  - “When they heard of the resurrection, some began to sneer” (Acts 17:32)

**NOTE:** Most adverb clauses are introduced by a conjunction which connects the adverb clause to the clause upon which it is dependent. For this reason, most of the various uses of the adverb clause have been categorized above in the discussion of conjunctions.

**CLAUSE ANALYSIS:**

One of the most important aspects of grammatical analysis is the process of discerning the relationship of the various clauses to one another. This allows the interpreter to follow the biblical author’s flow of thought and to see how one part of the verse/passage relates to the next. This type of clause analysis goes hand in hand with diagrammatical analysis, which will be discussed below.
Four-Step Process

1. Locate the Clauses
2. Categorize the Clauses
3. Determine the Relationships of the Clauses
4. Block Diagram the Relationships of the Clauses

1. Clause Analysis of John 3:16:

“God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

- Locate the Clauses
  - Clause #1: God so loved the world
  - Clause #2: that He gave His only begotten Son
  - Clause #3: that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life

- Categorize the Clauses
  - Clause #1: Ind Dep (dependent on clause #__)
  - Clause #2: Ind Dep (dependent on clause #__)
  - Clause #3: Ind Dep (dependent on clause #__)

- Determine the Relationships of the Clauses
  “God so loved the world, that [indicates result] He gave His only begotten Son, that [indicates purpose] whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

- Block Diagram the Relationships of the Clauses
  1. Main Clause: God so loved the world
  2. Result of #1: that He gave His only begotten Son
  3. Purpose of #2: that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life

2. Clause Analysis of Ephesians 6:1-3:

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother…that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.”
- **Locate the Clauses**
  - Clause #1: Children, obey your parents in the Lord
  - Clause #2: for this is right
  - Clause #3: Honor your father and mother
  - Clause #4: that it may be well with you
  - Clause #5: that you may live long on the earth

- **Categorize the Clauses**
  - Clause #1: Ind Dep (dependent on clause #___)
  - Clause #2: Ind Dep (dependent on clause #___)
  - Clause #3: Ind Dep (dependent on clause #___)
  - Clause #4: Ind Dep (dependent on clause #___)
  - Clause #5: Ind Dep (dependent on clause #___)

- **Determine the Relationships of the Clauses**
  
  “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, *for* [indicates cause/reason] this is right. Honor your father and mother…*that* [indicates result] it may be well with you, *and* [simple connective] *that* [indicates result] you may live long on the earth.”

- **Block Diagram the Relationships of the Clauses**

  1. Main Clause: Children, obey your parents in the Lord
  2. Reason for #1: for this is right
  3. Main Clause: Honor your father and mother
  4. Result of #3: that it may be well with you
  5. Result of #3: that you may live long on the earth

3. **Clause Analysis of Hebrews 13:17**:

  “Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”
- **Locate the Clauses**
  - Clause #1: Obey your leaders
  - Clause #2: submit to them
  - Clause #3: for they keep watch over your souls
  - Clause #4: as those who will give an account
  - Clause #5: Let them do this with joy and not with grief
  - Clause #6: for this would be unprofitable for you

- **Categorize the Clauses**
  - Clause #1: Ind Dep (dependent on clause #__)
  - Clause #2: Ind Dep (dependent on clause #__)
  - Clause #3: Ind Dep (dependent on clause #__)
  - Clause #4: Ind Dep (dependent on clause #__)
  - Clause #5: Ind Dep (dependent on clause #__)
  - Clause #6: Ind Dep (dependent on clause #__)

- **Determine the Relationships of the Clauses**
  
  “Obey your leaders, and [simple connective] submit to them; for [indicates cause/reason] they keep watch over your souls, as [indicates manner] those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for [indicates cause/reason] this would be unprofitable for you.”

- **Block Diagram the Relationships of the Clauses**
  
  (1) Main Clause: Obey your leaders
  (2) Main Clause: Submit to them
  (3) Reason for #1-2: for they keep watch over your souls
  (4) Manner of #3: as those who will give account
  (5) Main Clause: Let them do this with joy and not with grief
  (6) Reason for #5: for this would be unprofitable for you

B. **Diagram the Structure of the Passage**
“A sentence diagram is a visual schematic that organizes every element of a sentence according to a predetermined set of rules into a standardized framework…so that the syntactical relationships within the sentence are clearly revealed” (Jay E. Smith).

### Two Types of Diagramming

**Advantages of Line Diagramming**

Line diagramming forces the interpreter at the outset to think through the syntactical relationship of every word, phrase, and clause in the passage. In this way, it compels him to ask and answer questions he may otherwise ignore or gloss over. As Thomas Schreiner writes: “One of the great values of diagramming…is that it compels the interpreter to slow down and to think carefully through every element of the text, for the interpreter must make decisions about the placement of every word or phrase in the text…. If the interpreter does not understand a sentence syntactically, then he will lack confidence in the validity of his interpretation.”

**Recommended Resources:**


**Advantages of Block Diagramming**

“The advantages of block diagramming over line diagramming are: (1) it forces us to focus on the total flow and thread of meaning throughout the whole paragraph rather than on isolated abstractions of individual words or phrases; and (2) it offers invaluable preparatory assistance for preaching and teaching because we can
immediately see what is nuclear in the paragraph (the theme proposition) and what is subordinate” (Walt Kaiser).

**Recommended Resources:**


**RECOMMENDED APPROACH:**

- Line Diagram the passage in the original language.
- Block Diagram the passage in the English translation.

**Disclaimer:** Diagramming is much more helpful in analyzing passages with lots of grammatical subordination and for this reason is not as critical to use with biblical narrative (see “Diagramming and Outlining Narrative,” in *Expository Studying* by Joel James.)

**THE BASICS OF BLOCK DIAGRAMMING**

- Place the main/independent clauses flush left on the page.
- Indent subordinate clauses and phrases to show what they modify.
- Make sure coordinate clauses and phrases are parallel in their indentation.

The key is to observe a variety of examples of block diagrams. There is some flexibility regarding how many words or phrases are subordinated/indented in the diagram—and each interpreter may develop his own “style” to some degree—but the approach should be consistent and it should accurately reflect the syntax of the passage. The following examples should provide some helpful guidance. Note how the grammatical explanations alongside the diagram clarify the structure and flow of the passage even further.

**Block Diagram of 2 Timothy 3:16-17:**

Subject: All Scripture is

Adjective #1: God-breathed and

Adjective #2: profitable
Purpose #1: for teaching
Purpose #2: for reproof
Purpose #3: for correction
Purpose #4: for training in righteousness

Results: that the man of God may be

#1: adequate
#2: equipped for every
good work

➤ Block Diagram of Philippians 4:6-7:

Negative Prohibition: Be anxious for nothing
but

Positive Exhortation: Let your requests be made known to God
in everything
by prayer and supplication
with thanksgiving
and

Promised Result: The peace of God (which surpasses…) will
guard

your hearts
and
your minds
in Christ Jesus.

➤ Block Diagram of Isaiah 46:8-11:

Remember this
and
Be assured

Recall it to mind (you transgressors)

Remember the former things long past
for
I am God
and
There is no other

I am God
and
There is no one like Me

declaring the end from the beginning
and
from ancient times things which have not been
done

saying: “My purpose will be established,
and
I will accomplish all My good pleasure”
calling a bird of prey from the east
the man of My purpose from a far country.

Truly I have spoken
Truly I will bring it to pass.

I have planned it
Surely I will do it.

- **Block Diagram of Proverbs 5:1-4:**
  
  My son
  
  **Imperative:** Give attention to my wisdom
  Incline your ear to my understanding
  
  **Purpose:** you may observe discretion
  and
  your lips may reserve knowledge.

  For

  **Reason:** The lips of an adulteress drip honey
  and
  Smoother than oil is her speech
  
  **Contrast:** but
  She is (in the end) bitter as wormwood
  sharp as a two-edged sword

- **Block Diagram of 1 Peter 2:9-10:**
  
  But

  **Your Identity:** You are a chosen race
  as the People of God
  a royal priesthood
  a holy nation
  a people for God’s own possession

  **Purpose of Your Existence:** so that
  you may proclaim His excellencies of Him
  as People of God:
  (who has called you…)

  **Reason for the Proclamation of God’s Excellencies:** for
  You once were not a people
  but now
  You are the people of God
  You had not received mercy
but now
You have received mercy

NOTE: For more examples of block diagrams, see appendix 8 of this syllabus, pages 165-181 of Kaiser’s Toward an Exegetical Theology, and pages 72-83 of James’ Expository Studying.

C. Outline the Flow of the Passage

1. The purpose of an exegetical outline is to capture the biblical author’s flow of thought in outline form. Some outlines are driven by the grammatical structure of the passage, others are more conceptually driven, and still others are a combination of the two. The basic format of an exegetical outline involves using various levels of subordination which exist between main points and sub-points in the passage. The relationship between these points can be indicated by using a consistent series of indentations and symbols:

I. First Main Point
   A. First Subordinate Point
   B. Second Subordinate Point
      1. First Supporting Idea
      2. Second Supporting Idea

II. Second Main Point
   A. First Subordinate Point
   B. Second Subordinate Point
      1. First Supporting Idea
      2. Second Supporting Idea
         a. First Supporting Detail
         b. Second Supporting Detail

III. Third Main Point
   A. First Subordinate Point
   B. Second Subordinate Point
   C. Third Subordinate Point
      1. First Supporting Idea
      2. Second Supporting Idea
      3. Third Supporting Idea

2. “In this way, [the exegetical outline] functions as a kind of picture of the logical development of the passage. The main ideas form the major headings and the subordinate and supporting ideas form subheadings, with each succeeding level containing more specific information than the preceding one” (Jay Smith).
3. The most important part of outlining is to make sure that the outline is not imposed on the passage but rather arises from an inductive study of the passage. At the same time, there is some degree of subjectivity in the outlining process, and therefore not everyone’s outline will be the same.

4. The key to constructing a good outline is to make sure that each point is a clear and accurate reflection of the text it represents. Furthermore, the relationships of subordination in the outline should accurately reflect the authorial intent of the passage. In other words, the main points of the outline should be the main points of the passage.

Examples of Exegetical Outlines

OUTLINE OF 1 PETER 2:9-10:
I. The Identity of God’s People (9a)
II. The Purpose of God’s People (9b)
III. The Redemption of God’s People (10)

OUTLINE OF PSALM 63:
I. David’s Passionate Craving for the Presence of God (1-2)
II. David’s Perfect Contentment with the Love of God (3-5)
III. David’s Persistent Concentration on the Faithfulness of God (6-8)
IV. David’s Prevailing Confidence in the Sovereignty of God (9-11)

OUTLINE OF ROMANS 11:25-32:
I. The Unveiled Mystery of Israel’s Future Salvation (25-27)
   A. The Hardening of Israel (25a)
   B. The Blessing of the Gentiles (25b)
   C. The Salvation of Israel (26-27)
      1. The Coming of the Redeemer (26b)
      2. The Fulfillment of the Covenant (27)
II. The Dual Status of Israel’s Present Rejection (28-29)
   A. Enemies According to the Gospel (28a)
   B. Beloved According to their Election (28b)
      1. The Irrevocable Gifts (29a)
      2. The Irrevocable Calling (29b)
III. The Divine Mercy of Israel’s Imminent Restoration (30-32)
   A. God’s Mercy to the Gentiles (30)
   B. God’s Mercy to the Jews (31)
   C. God’s Mercy to All (32)

OUTLINE OF PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11:
I. The Divine Exhortation to Unity (1-5)
   A. The Call to Oneness (1-2)
1. The Motivation to Pursue Unity (1)
2. The Mandate to Pursue Unity (2)

B. The Call to Humility (3-5)
   1. The Mortification of Pride (3a)
   2. The Cultivation of Lowliness (3b-5)

II. The Divine Example of Humility (6-11)
   A. The Humiliation of Christ (6-8)
      1. The Sovereign who Denied Himself (6)
      2. The Servant who Emptied Himself (7)
      3. The Savior who Humbled Himself (8)
   B. The Exaltation of Christ (9-11)
      1. The Underlying Prerequisite of Christ’s Exaltation (9a)
      2. The Unparalleled Position of Christ’s Exaltation (9b)
      3. The Ultimate Purpose of Christ’s Exaltation (10-11)