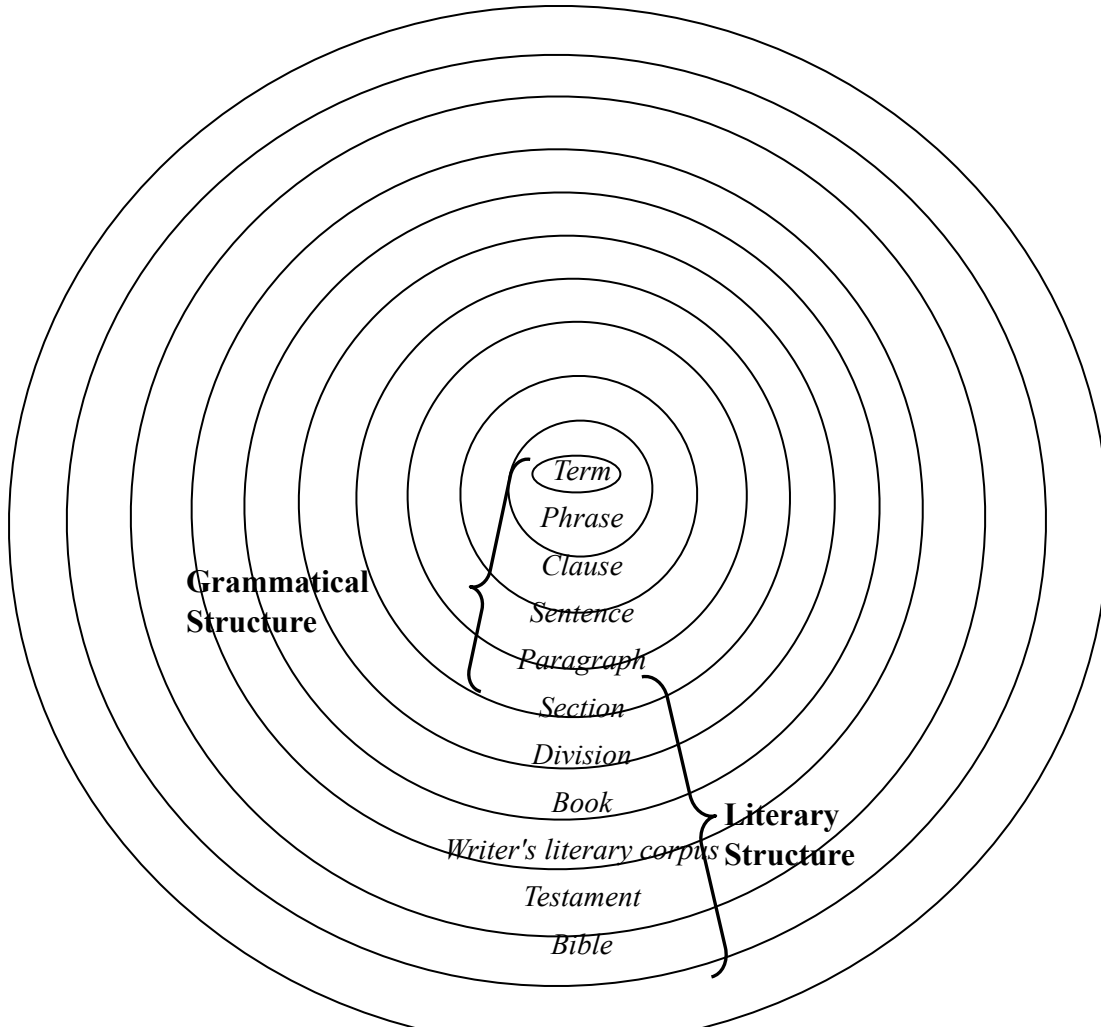


WEEKS 6 & 7 | READING WELL

THE GRAMMATICAL | The Message in Writing

We begin our study of any text of Scripture as broadly as possible. First, we establish the context, moving from the broad context of history to its literary context in the Bible. Once this context is established, we are ready to attack the text itself. Throughout the exegetical process we are slowly narrowing our focus, moving from general to specific, as visualized in the figure below:



Having done the work of establishing the context—both historical and literary—of a passage, we must now begin the work of carefully analyzing the text itself. The most critical part of this stage is reading the text slowly and carefully, becoming as familiar with the text as we can be. An old story, *The Student, the Fish, and Agassiz*, illustrates this point.

As Duval and Hays note, “Most of us read the Bible too quickly, and we skip over the details of the text. However, the meaning of the Bible is intertwined with the details of every sentence. Our

first step in grasping a Biblical text is to observe as many details as possible. We want to see as much as possible.”¹ The grammatical study of a passage is dependent on close observation. Your goal is to unearth all the raw data present in the text that will need to be explained. You’re not yet trying to explain why all the peculiarities are there—that will occur in the next step, interpretation.

MAKING OBSERVATIONS

1) Read the text repeatedly: the closer and slower you read, the more you’ll notice and observe. Observations should be made at multiple levels:

a. *Words:* At times you will want to do a word-study on a term that carries special significance in a passage. The goal is to understand the word as a contemporary of the author would have understood it. This is especially true of theological terms like: propitiation, justification, sanctification, law, grace, mercy, etc.

b. *Sentences*

i. Repetitions

1. “World” in 1 John 2:15-17
2. “Abide” in John 15:1-10
3. “Father” in Matthew 6:1-18

ii. Contrasts

1. Proverbs 14:31
2. Proverbs 15:1
3. Romans 6:23

iii. Comparisons

1. Proverbs 25:26
2. James 3:3-6

iv. Lists

1. 1 John 2:16
2. Galatians 5:19-21, 22-23

v. Cause and Effect

1. Proverbs 15:1
2. Romans 6:23
3. Colossians 3:1

vi. Figures of Speech

¹ Duval and Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 39.

1. Psalm 18:2
 2. Psalm 119:105
 3. Isaiah 40:31
 4. Matthew 22:37
- vii. Parts of Speech (verbs, conjunctions, pronouns, etc.)
1. Verbs: where the action is
 - a. Tense: past, present, future
 - b. Indicatives vs. Imperatives
 - i. Position vs. Practice
 - c. Passive vs. Active
 - i. Example” Colossians 3:1
 2. Nouns & Pronouns
 - a. Nouns: subject vs. object
 - b. Pronouns: find the antecedent
 - i. 2 Corinthians 5:21
 3. Conjunctions: what’s their function?
 - a. “but” in Romans 6:23
 - b. “Therefore” in Romans 12:1
 - c. *Example:* 2 Timothy 1:7-8

c. Paragraphs

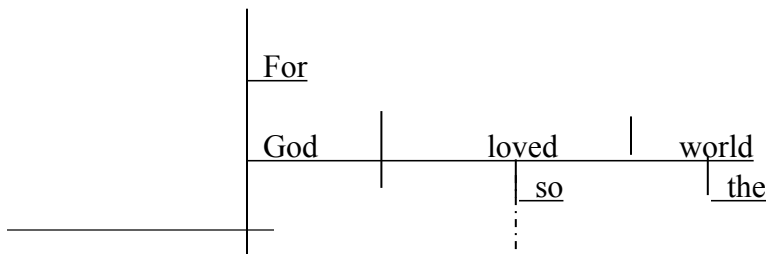
- i. General and Specific: Sometimes an author will introduce an idea with a general statement, then follow this general statement with the specifics of the idea.
 1. Galatians 5:16 → 5:19-21a
- ii. Questions and Answers: Sometimes the author will raise rhetorical questions and then answer them, or use a question-answer format to demonstrate theological principles
 1. Paul in Romans 3:1-2, 5-6, 9, 27-31; 4:1-2, 9; 6:1-2, 15; 7:1, 7, 13; 8:31-35; 11:1, 7, 11)
 2. Mark 2:1-3:6 (2:7, 16, 18, 24; 3:4 and 2:10-11, 17b, 19, 25 & 28)
- iii. Dialogue: Overlaps with question-answer features. Much of Scripture has been given to us in dialogue form.
- iv. Purpose or Result Statements: Phrases or sentences that describe the reason, result, or consequences of an action.
 1. Ephesians 2:10
 2. John 3:16

3. John 15:16
 4. Deuteronomy 6:3
 5. Psalm 119:11
- v. Means: When an action, result, or purpose is stated, look for the means by which it is accomplished.
1. Romans 8:13b
 2. Psalm 119:9
- vi. Conditional Clauses: These clauses present conditions whereby some action, result, or consequence will happen.
1. 1 John 1:6 (“if. . . we lie”)
 2. 2 Corinthians 5:15 (“if. . . then”)
 3. Deuteronomy 28:1 (“if. . . the LORD God”)
- vii. Actions or Roles of People
- viii. Actions or Roles of God
- ix. Emotional Terms
1. Galatians 4:12-16
- x. Tone
1. Colossians 3:1-4 vs. Galatians 3:1-4
 2. Matthew 23:33-35
 3. Lamentations 3:1-6

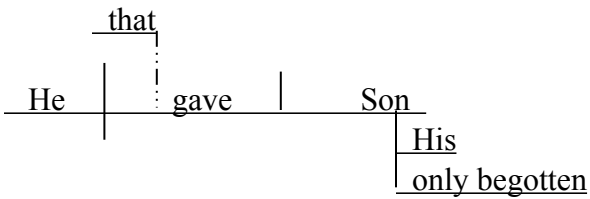
d. Discourses (see Literary Context)

2) **Diagram² the passage:** diagrams make the structure of a sentence or paragraph visible and can aid in grasping its meaning.

▪ ***Line Diagram of John 3:16***



² Note: I've found diagrams helpful to varying degrees, usually depending on the genre I'm working in. I almost always do block diagrams when I'm studying an epistle, because it so often brings clarity to what the author is emphasizing and what is central to the passage. In a narrative, however, I almost never diagram. I focus more on the movement of the action, the scenes, etc. I find it more helpful in narratives to focus on the big picture. That is not to say there aren't important details in the words and syntax of a narrative, but the type of writing is different—it's not a logical argument, it's a story, and should be read as such. The danger of diagramming is imposing meaning on the text through structure that does not actually match what the author is emphasizing.



▪ **Block diagram of 1 Peter 2:18-21**

18 Servants, be subject to your masters

↑
 with all respect, (subjection is genuine)
 not only to the good and gentle
 but also to the unjust. (subjection is irrespective of persons)

19 For this is a gracious thing, (unjust suffering is a GIFT)

when,

↓ mindful of God, (you can only endure by looking to God)
 one endures sorrows (the key is to persevere)
 ↑ while suffering unjustly. (you must persevere through the suffering)

20 For what credit is it if,

↓ when you sin
 and are beaten for it, (suffering for sin)
 you endure? (there is no gain in suffering for sin)

But if

↓ when you do good (the implication is a life of obedience)
 and suffer for it (suffering FOR YOUR OBEDIENCE)
 you endure, (you must persevere through unfairness)
 this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. (unjust suffering is a GIFT)

21 For to this you have been called, (part of the Christian life is suffering)

because Christ also suffered (because our life mirrors his)
 for you, (Christ suffered in our place)
 leaving you an example, (He is our model)
 so that you might follow (Called to follow)
 in his steps.

3) **Ask Questions:** Here you are playing investigator. Now that you've made observations, identified parts of speech, and diagrammed the passage to see its structure, you start asking questions about what you are seeing. Essentially, you are gathering all the raw data and asking, "what does the text say?"

Six Key Questions:

- **Who?** – This question seeks to identify the individuals or groups in the text. Who are they? How are they described? What is said about them?
- **What?** – What is happening? What is being described? What is being emphasized or de-emphasized? What is being affirmed or denied? What is being praised or condemned? What appears to be missing from the text? What is usual or unusual?
- **Where?** – This question seeks to identify the geographical setting of the passage. What locations are identified? Where are the characters of the passage? Where did they come from? Where are they going? Where is the writer? Where are the original readers? How are these places described?
- **When?** – This question seeks to identify the timing of the events or statements made in the passage. When was the statement made? When did the event happen? How do these events or statements relate to the timing of other events? What happened prior to the events or statements of this passage? What happened after?
- **Why?** – This question seeks to identify cause-and-effect relationships. Why did this happen? Why is a certain answer given? Why was a certain action carried out?
- **How?** – This question seeks to identify the means by which something is accomplished. How did this happen? Who is responsible for it? What means were necessary to accomplish it?

4) **Summarize Results:** This is where you want to summarize what you have found in the preceding steps. You might write down two lists you keep track of:

- Key Observations
 - Important, non-routine terms
 - Grammatical features
- Key Questions: those questions which are raised as you study the text.

STAGE #2 - Overview Making Observations From the Text	
<i>Step #1</i>	Read the text repeatedly.
<i>Step #2</i>	Diagram the text.
<i>Step #3</i>	Ask the text questions.
<i>Step #4</i>	Summarize the results.

WEEK 6 PRACTICUM

MAKING OBSERVATIONS | Make as many observations as you can from Romans 8:12-17

¹² So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

DIAGRAMMING | Block diagram the following sentences

¹² So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

ASKING QUESTIONS | Answer the following questions about Romans 8:12-17

- 1) Who is Paul talking to?
- 2) What kind of paragraph is this? Imperative (“do this”) or indicative (“this is true”)?
- 3) What is Paul talking about?
- 4) Why is Paul talking about this?
- 5) How does this happen? If an imperative: how do we accomplish this? If an indicative: how has this occurred?
- 6) When should this happen OR when did this happen?

SUMMARIZING RESULTS | Summarize this passage in one sentence