5

Diagramming and Conducting a Grammatical Analysis

I would like to relay my own experience with diagramming before explaining how one goes about doing it. I thought diagramming was superfluous when it was first assigned in one of my classes. Surely, the text could be understood without undergoing this tedious procedure. It is true that one *can* understand the Greek text without diagramming, but no one can comprehend the Greek text unless the grammar and syntax of the text are understood. And no one can claim to comprehend the syntax of the passage unless he or she is *able* to diagram the passage. Some people can understand a passage without diagramming it because they understand how every word and phrase relates in the sentence. This means, however, that they would be able to diagram the passage if they were asked to do so and knew the diagramming conventions. I began to see that diagramming forced me to think through the syntactical relationship of every word, phrase, and clause in the sentence. Diagramming compelled me to ask and answer questions that I would not always ask otherwise, such as, where does the participle go in this sentence, what kind of participle is this syntactically, and how does it relate to the rest of the sentence? And what word or words does the prepositional phrase modify?

One of the great values of diagramming, then, 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. Diagramming is also helpful because it lays out the text visually. Such a schematic immediately shows the main clause, main verb, direct object(s), indirect object(s), modifiers, subordinate clauses (if any), and other key grammatical parts. Diagramming is particularly helpful in Pauline literature where the syntax is involved and complex, and the arguments tightly structured. By diagramming, one can unravel a Pauline text which initially appears to be a maze. For example, Ephesians 1:3–14 is one sentence in Greek. If an interpreter could not diagram this sentence, then the syntax of the sentence would not be clearly grasped. And if the interpreter does not understand a sentence syntactically, then he or she will lack confidence in the validity of his or her interpretation.

Diagramming is frightening to many people; for some it evokes horrible memories of the diagramming done in elementary school. My experience as a teacher, however, indicates that diagramming can be learned by anyone who is willing to work at it. Of course, it cannot be learned in a day. Most of my students are able to use diagramming as a useful tool after diagramming one passage per week for ten weeks. I have heard many comments from students who grow in confidence in their handling of the Greek as they diagram. Nothing can replace the first-hand analysis of the text that occurs when one diagrams. The challenge and excitement of unlocking the grammar of a text for oneself brings great satisfaction. This rigorous, grammatical analysis also better prepares the interpreter for evaluating the work of others in commentaries.

The following information is designed to give basic instructions in diagramming. Obviously, not every possible construction can be presented, but it is hoped that most of the main constructions are represented so that the student will have a good idea of how to proceed. Even though definite articles should technically be placed underneath the word they modify, I have put them on the same line so that the diagram does not become unnecessarily cluttered. There are different systems for diagramming, and I make no claim that *my* way is

the *only* way to diagram.[1] My goal is to present as simple a system as possible. For the sake of simplicity, Greek accents and breathing marks are omitted in diagramming, and thus no accents or breathing marks are included in the examples below. Words implied by the Greek text are put in brackets.[2]

I should also say here that the following instructions on how to diagram assume the student knows the meaning of the terms used in Greek grammar. Thus, no attempt will be made to define terms such as predicate nominative, appositives, etc. The student who does not understand the terms should consult a beginning Greek grammar.

Specific Constructions

One should begin a diagram by locating the main verb, the subject and object of that verb (if it has one), and then the modifiers, subordinate clauses, etc.

1. The simple subject and its predicate verb are placed on a horizontal line. A vertical line that goes through the horizontal separates the subject and verb.

subject	verb

o Ιησους	εδακρυσεν	John 11:35

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1. I have looked at a number of different sources and have borrowed from many, although I have not followed any one source consistently. I have used unpublished material that has been developed at Bethel Seminary over a number of years, but I am most indebted to the the unpublished notes from the Hermeneutics Syllabus of Daniel P. Fuller of Fuller Seminary (with his permission). He has carefully read this chapter and pointed out many defects, and thus I am grateful to him for making this chapter a better one. Nevertheless, I have not followed all of his suggestions, and any shortcomings in the chapter should be attributed to me. See also the following on diagramming: L. L. Kantenwein, *Diagrammatical Analysis*, rev. ed. (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 1985); J. A. Brooks and C. L. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Lanham, Md.: University Press, 1979), 139–47; W. S. LaSor, *Handbook of New Testament Greek: An Inductive Approach Based on the Greek Text of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 2:137–44; S. McKnight, "New Testament Greek Grammatical Analysis," in *Introducing New Testament Interpretation*, ed. S. McKnight (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 75–95.

2. One could also leave a blank space in places where words are implied, for usually the implied words are obvious from the context.

2. The direct object of a transitive verb follows the verb and is separated from it by a vertical line above the horizontal.

subject	verb	direct object

| Μωυσης | υψωσεν | τον οφιν | John 3:14
|---------|--------|----------|

3. Some verbs take two objects: one common construction is when there is an object of person (υμας) and an object of thing (παντα).

subject · | verb ⟨ object of person / object of thing

εκεινος | διδαξει ⟨ υμας / παντα   John 14:26

4. Another construction with two objects is called the predicate accusative (or object complement). In this construction the second object completes the meaning of the first object. The predicate accusative follows the direct object with a line sloping toward the object to which it is related.

subject	verb	direct object \ predicate accusative

| [αυτου] | ειχον | Ιωαννην \ υπηρετην | Acts 13:5
|---------|-------|---------------------|

5. A predicate nominative or predicate adjective is separated from the "to be" verb or another linking verb by a line that slopes back toward the subject to which it is related.

subject	copulative \ predicate nominative

| ο θεος | εστιν \ αγαπη | 1 John 4:8
|--------|--------------|

6. An appositive is shown by the equal (=) sign.

appositive = subject	verb

| Παυλος = εγω | λεγω | Gal. 5:2
|--------------|------|

7. Words in the dative case (including indirect objects), without a preceding preposition, usually go under the main verb with a diagonal line.

subject	verb	direct object
/ dative

ο κυριος	δωσει	συνεσιν
/ σοι   2 Tim. 2:7

8. Genitive modifiers go underneath the word they modify with a diagonal line.

subject	verb	direct object
/ genitive modifier

η αγαπη	συνεχει	ημας
/ του Χριστου   2 Cor. 5:14

9. Some verbs take a genitive object or a dative object. These are portrayed in the same way as accusative direct objects.

```
 subject  |  verb  |  genitive (or dative) object
_____
```

```
 τα προβατα  |  ακουει  |  της φωνης
_____/  αυτου        John 10:3
```

```
 ο μειζων  |  δουλευσει  |  τω ελασσονι     Rom. 9:12
```

10. Prepositional phrases and adverbs go underneath the word they modify. Use a diagonal line for prepositional phrases. Adverbs can be put immediately under the verb without any line at all.

```
 subject  |  verb
_____
          adverb / prepositional phrase
```

```
 ουδεις  |  ελαλει
_____
        παρρησια / περι αυτου      John 7:13
```

11. If a word or phrase does not modify the verb, and it modifies the first phrase which modifies the verb, then it is portrayed as follows:

```
 subject  |  verb
_____
            / dative
             / genitive
```

```
 Παυλος  |  [γραφει]
_____
         / τη εκκλησια
          / θεσσαλονικεων     1 Thess. 1:1
```

12. Attributive adjectives are placed underneath the word they modify with a diagonal line.

```
 subject  |  copulative  \  predicate nominative
_____\ attributive adjective
```

```
 εγω  |  ειμι  \  ο ποιμην
_____\  ο καλος        John 10:11
```

13. Periphrastics are diagrammed as follows:

```
 subject  |  periphrastic verb  |  direct object
_____
```

```
 [αυτος]  |  ην εκβαλλων  |  δαιμονιον     Luke 11:14
```

14. The following shows diagramming for constructions of two subjects and two verbs.

```
 Ιουδας              παρεκαλεσαν
      τε                 και          τους αδελφους
      και
 Σιλας              επεστηριξαν
                                          Acts 15:32
```

15. Vocatives and exclamations are disconnected from the main diagram lines.

```
 exclamation or vocative   subject | verb | dative direct object
_____   _____
```

```
 πατερ   [εγω]  |  εξομολογουμαι  |  σοι      Matt. 11:25
```
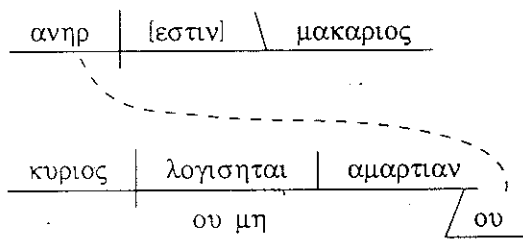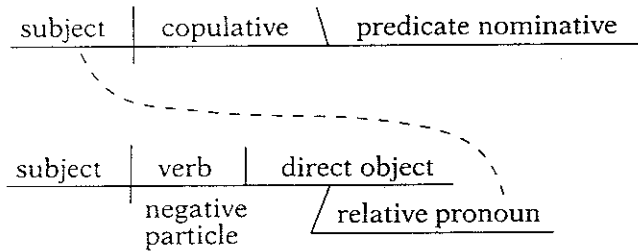
Only the word "πατερ" is in the vocative here.

```
 θεος  |  [ειη]  \  ευλογητος     αμην
_____/ εις τους αιωνας      Rom. 9:5
```
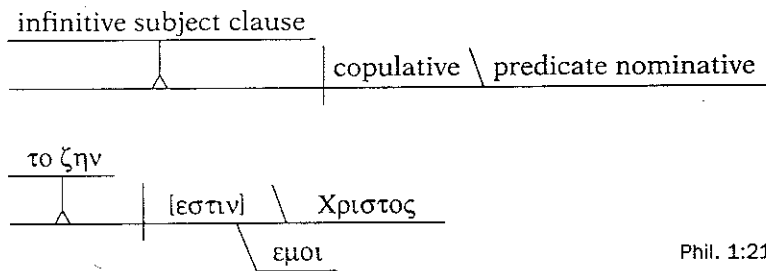
The word "αμην" is an exclamation here.

16. A relative clause is a subordinate clause, and it is placed underneath the main clause. A dashed line is drawn up to its antecedent.
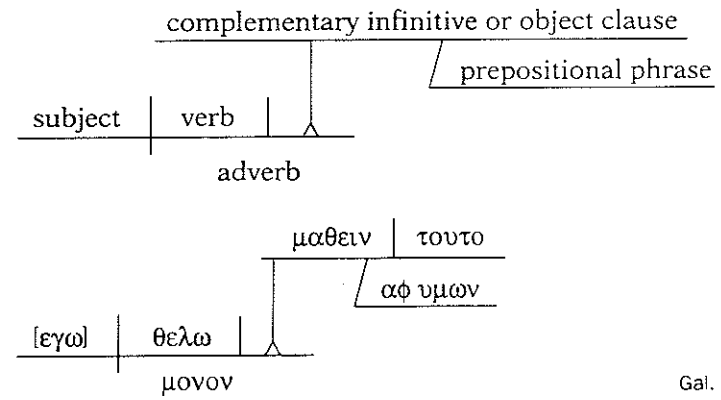

Rom. 4:8

17. An infinitive can be part of a subject clause. A subject clause is always put on stilts to identify it clearly as such.


Phil. 1:21

18. Infinitives can function as part of an object clause, or as complementary infinitives with certain verbs.
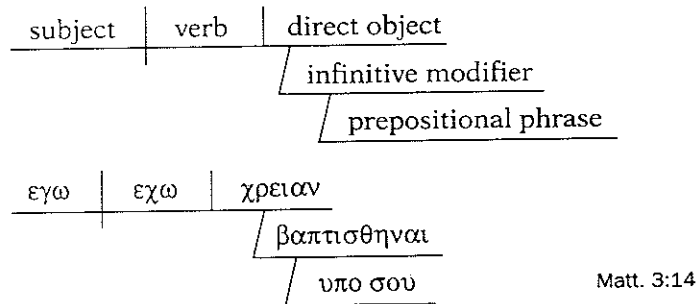

Gal. 3:2

It is difficult to distinguish between complementary infinitives and infinitives that are part of an object clause. Dan Fuller suggested to me that he has solved this problem by regarding infinitives that come off intransitive verbs as complementary, and infinitives that come off transitive verbs as part of an object clause.

19. Purpose, result, and temporal infinitives are placed underneath the main verb. Note in the example below that double lines separate the subject accusative (accusative of general reference) in the subordinate clause from the verb to which it is related.
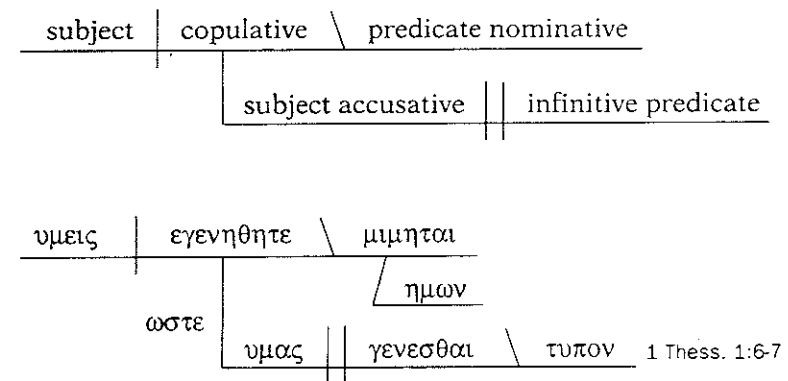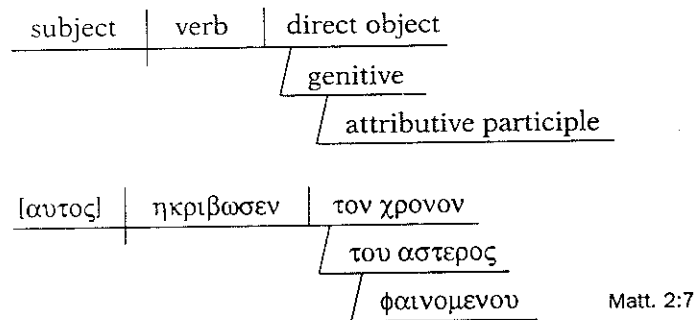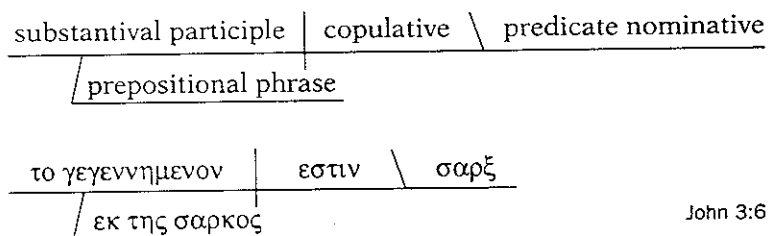

1 Thess. 1:6-7

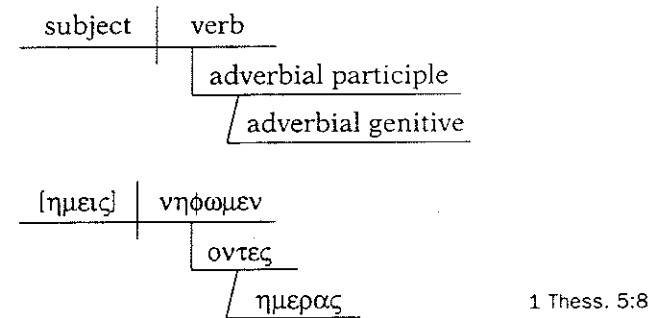20. An infinitive can modify another word just as adjectives or adverbs do.

```
subject  |  verb  |  direct object
                  \ infinitive modifier
                     \ prepositional phrase

εγω  |  εχω  |  χρειαν
            \ βαπτισθηναι
               \ υπο σου              Matt. 3:14
```

21. A participle can function attributively. In this case it modifies the word just as an attributive adjective does. A diagonal line is used.
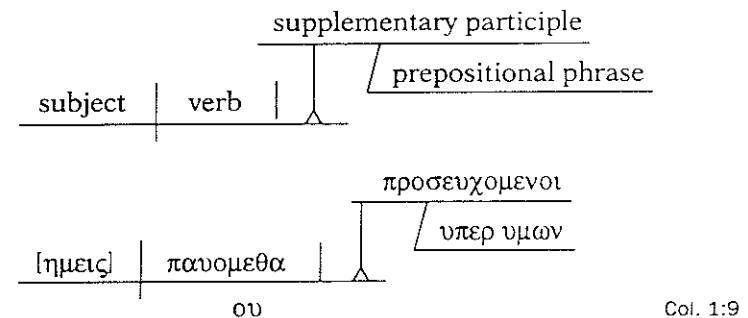
```
subject  |  verb  |  direct object
                  \ genitive
                     \ attributive participle

[αυτος]  |  ηκριβωσεν  |  τον χρονον
                       \ του αστερος
                          \ φαινομενου     Matt. 2:7
```

22. A participle can also function substantively. In this case it functions as any other noun.

```
substantival participle  |  copulative  \  predicate nominative
  \ prepositional phrase

το γεγεννημενον  |  εστιν  \  σαρξ
  \ εκ της σαρκος                    John 3:6
```

23. Adverbial participles (temporal, causal, conditional, etc.) are placed under the main verb with a vertical line.

```
subject  |  verb
              | adverbial participle
                 \ adverbial genitive

[ημεις]  |  νηφωμεν
              | οντες
                 \ ημερας              1 Thess. 5:8
```
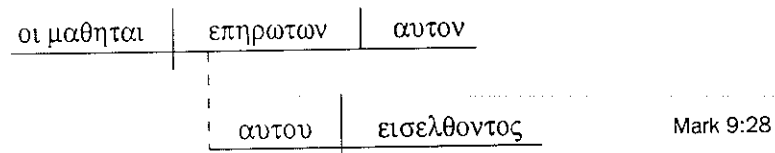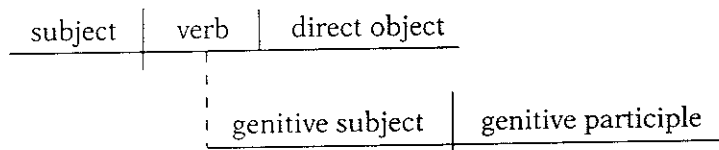
24. A supplementary (complementary) participle follows the main verb.

```
                        supplementary participle
                           \ prepositional phrase
subject  |  verb  |  Δ

                        προσευχομενοι
                           \ υπερ υμων
[ημεις]  |  παυομεθα  |  Δ
              ου                        Col. 1:9
```

Supplementary participles can also follow a noun and still be linked to a verb.

```
                  αυτου  |  λεγοντος
                     |
[ημεις]  |  ακηκοαμεν  |  Δ            Acts 6:14
```
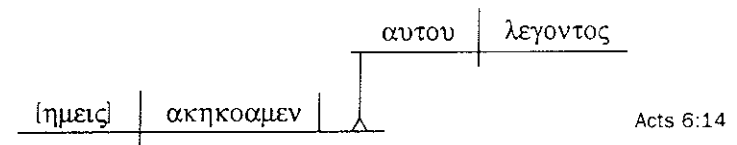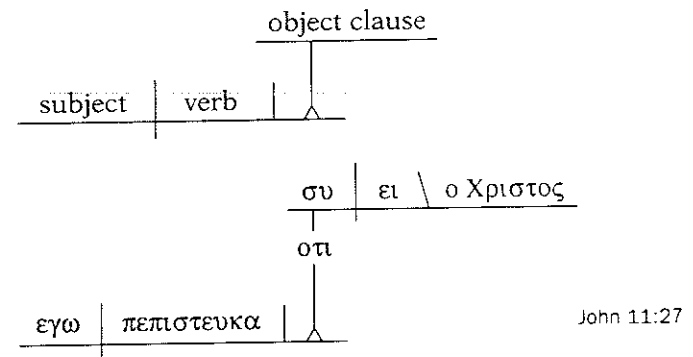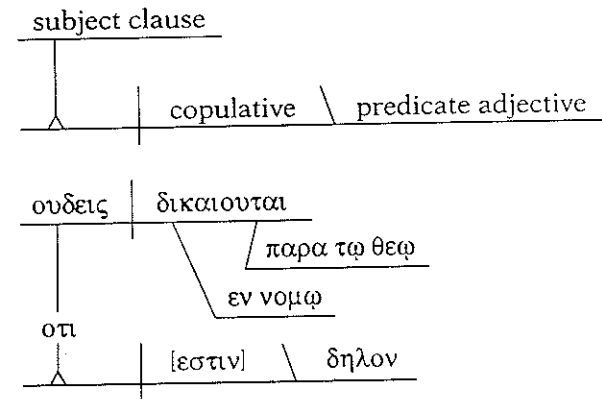
25. A genitive absolute construction is placed under the main verb, for all genitive absolutes are adverbial participles. A vertical dashed line is used to show that the construction is absolute.

subject | verb | direct object
genitive subject | genitive participle

οι μαθηται | επηρωτων | αυτον
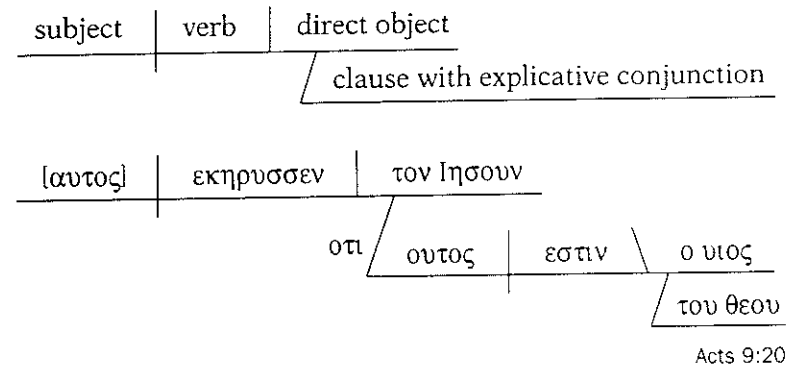αυτου | εισελθοντος   Mark 9:28

26. All subordinate clauses are placed under the main verb on diagonal lines: causal (ὅτι), result (ὥστε), purpose (ἵνα), temporal (ὅτε, ὅταν), locative (ὅπου), comparative (ὡς, καθώς), and conditional (εἰ, ἐάν).
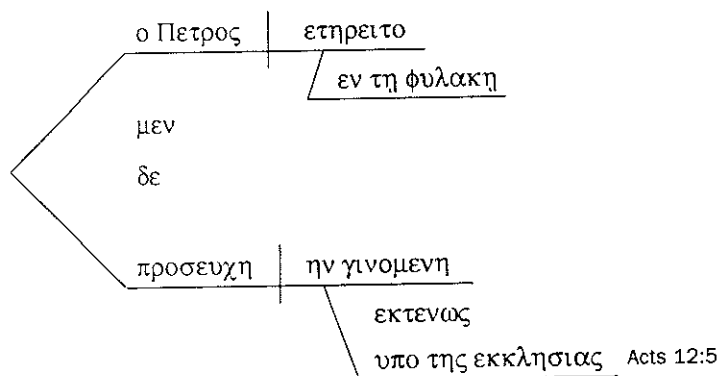
subject | verb | direct object
subordinate clause

[ημεις] | οψομεθα | αυτον
καθως
[αυτος] | εστιν   1 John 3:2
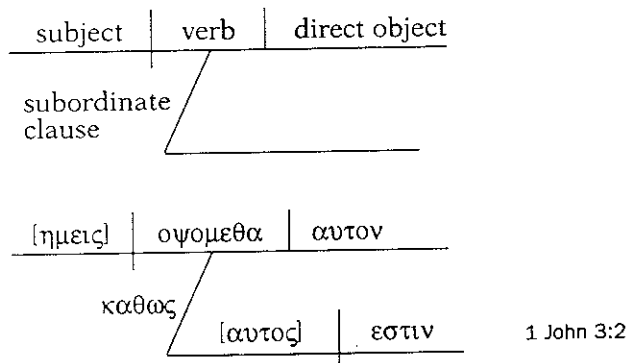
27. The words ὅτι and ἵνα can also be used to introduce subject or object clauses. In this case the clause is placed on stilts.

subject clause
copulative \ predicate adjective

ουδεις | δικαιουται
παρα τω θεω
εν νομω
οτι | [εστιν] \ δηλον   Gal. 3:11

object clause
subject | verb

συ | ει \ ο Χριστος
οτι
εγω | πεπιστευκα   John 11:27

28. Ἵνα and ὅτι may also further define a single word in a sentence. In this case they are explicative and diagrammed as follows:

subject | verb | direct object
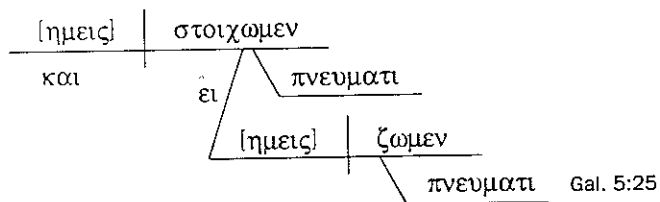clause with explicative conjunction

[αυτος] | εκηρυσσεν | τον Ιησουν
οτι
ουτος | εστιν \ ο υιος
του θεου   Acts 9:20

29. A μέν–δέ construction is diagrammed as follows:

ο Πετρος | ετηρειτο
εν τη φυλακη
μεν
δε
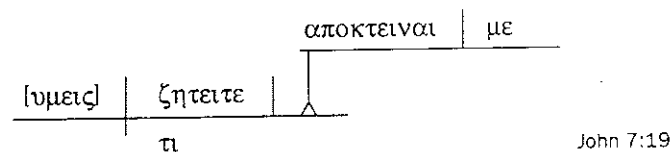προσευχη | ην γινομενη
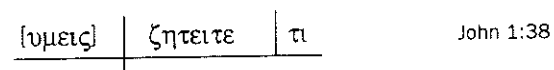εκτενως
υπο της εκκλησιας   Acts 12:5

30. Coordinating conjunctions indicate the beginning of a new independent clause, and thus should not be placed underneath the previous main verb. Instead they are placed above and before the main clause. The main coordinating conjunctions include ἀλλά, δέ, ἄρα, διό, γάρ, ἤ, καί (καί can also function as an adverb meaning "even" or "also"), μήδε, οὐδέ, οὔτε, οὖν, τέ, ὥστε.
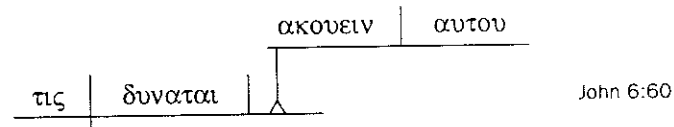

δε
ο νομος | εστιν
ουκ \ εκ πιστεως   Gal. 3:12
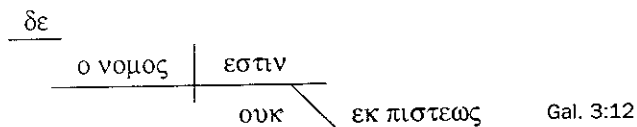
31. Subordinating conjunctions introduce dependent (subordinate) clauses and are placed under the main verb (see 26 above). Some of the most common subordinating conjunctions are ἐάν, εἰ, ἐπεί, ἵνα, καθώς, ὅπου, ὅπως, ὅταν, ὅτε, ὅτι, ὡς, ὥστε.
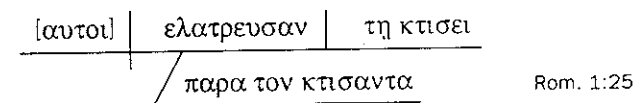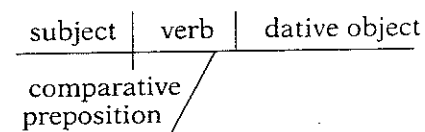

[ημεις] | στοιχωμεν
και
ει πνευματι
[ημεις] | ζωμεν
πνευματι   Gal. 5:25

32. Questions are diagrammed as follows:

συ | ει \ τις   John 1:19

[υμεις] | ζητειτε | τι   John 1:38

αποκτειναι | με
[υμεις] | ζητειτε
τι   John 7:19

Here τί goes underneath the verb because it functions as an adverb.

ακουειν | αυτου
τις | δυναται
   John 6:60

33. A comparative that follows a preposition is portrayed as follows:

subject | verb | dative object
comparative
preposition

[αυτοι] | ελατρευσαν | τη κτισει
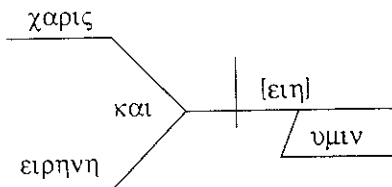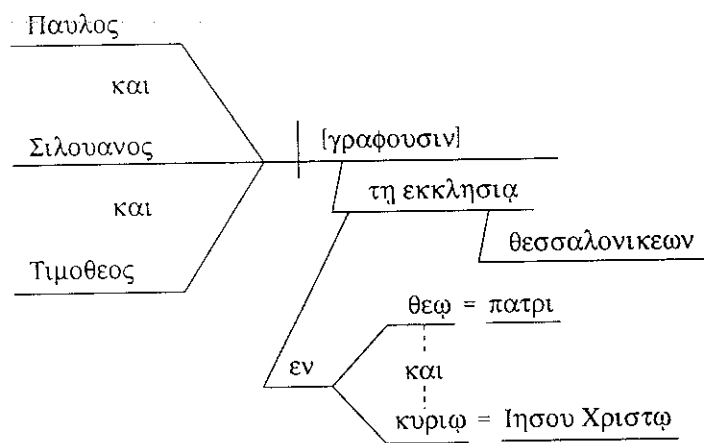παρα τον κτισαντα   Rom. 1:25

Final Note on Diagramming

I use vertical lines when an infinitive or participle functions adverbially, that is, when they modify a verb. If an infinitive or participle modifies a noun, adjective, or pronoun,
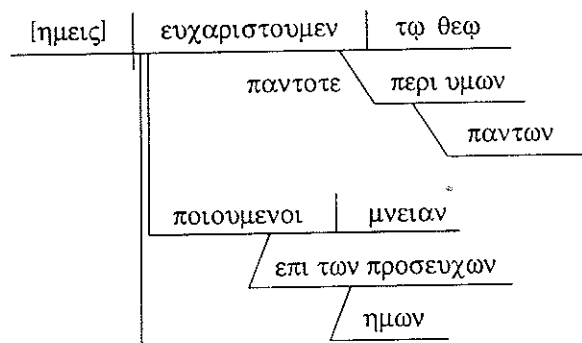
then I use diagonal lines. Diagonal lines are used with all other constructions that are placed under the main clause except adverbs and negatives. Adverbs and negatives are placed immediately under the words they modify without any lines at all. One can slant diagonal lines either way. One may also use straight lines for modifiers. After all, the main issue is the accurate placement of the words, phrases, and clauses, not which way the lines slant.

The example below illustrates a comprehensive diagram of 1 Thessalonians 1:1–5.
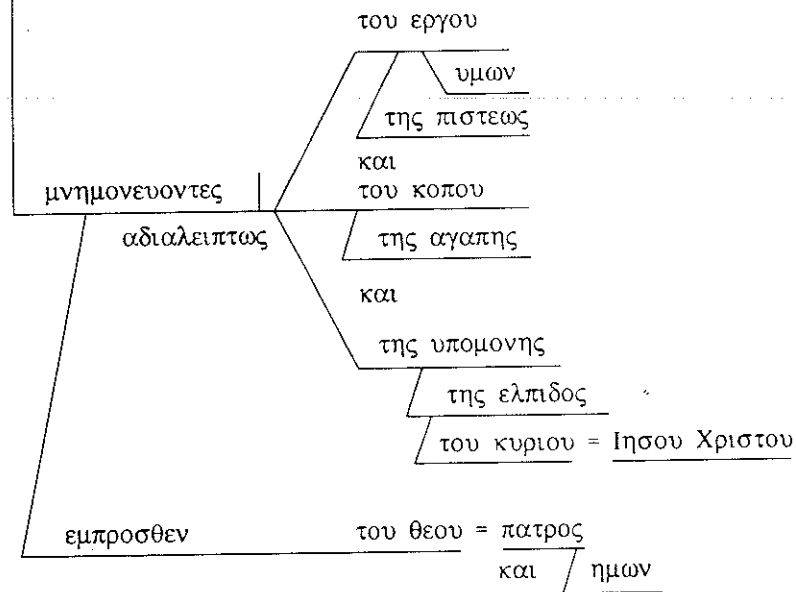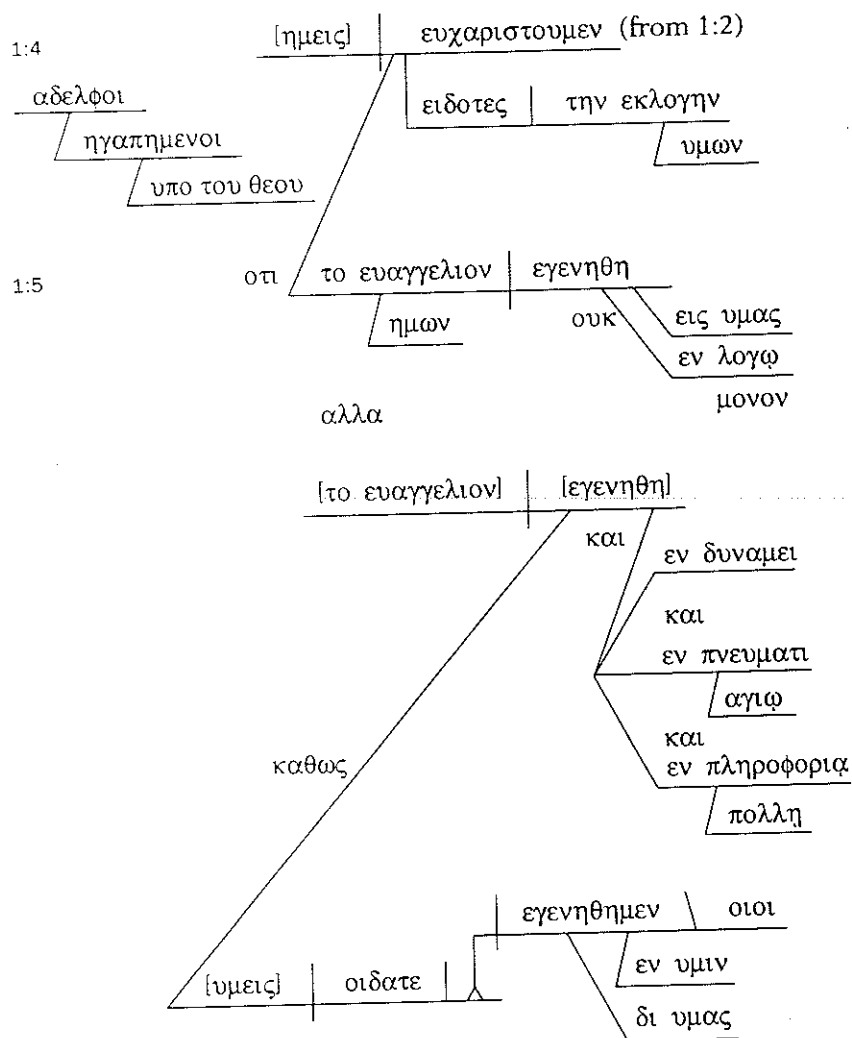
1 Thess. 1:1

1:2

1:3

1:4

1:5

ημεις | ευχαριστουμεν (from 1:2)
αδελφοι
ηγαπημενοι
υπο του θεου
ειδοτες | την εκλογην
υμων
οτι | το ευαγγελιον | εγενηθη
ημων
ουκ / εις υμας
εν λογω
μονον
αλλα
[το ευαγγελιον] | [εγενηθη]
και / εν δυναμει
και
εν πνευματι
αγιω
και
εν πληροφορια
πολλη
καθως
εγενηθημεν \ οιοι
εν υμιν
[υμεις] | οιδατε
δι υμας

The Use of Grammars

The student can diagram only after identifying the syntactical function of every word. I usually pencil in next to the word or clause on the diagram the function of the word or clause being examined. Thus, next to an adverbial participle I might write: adverbial concessive.

The best way to learn grammar is by reading and diagram-

ming the Greek text. Hands-on experience in doing interpretation is the ideal way to learn. I have also found that reading and studying grammars has sharpened my understanding of Greek. Some students find grammars daunting because they do not know how to use grammars as reference tools. All grammars, of course, have a table of contents. Most grammars, however, are also indexed. The advanced grammars contain a subject index (e.g., you may want to see what a grammarian says about objective genitives), a Scripture index, and an index of Greek words. The wise student will turn to these indexes often. The two sources immediately below are especially helpful for the beginner and both have useful bibliographies:

S. McKnight, "New Testament Greek Grammatical Analysis," in *Introducing New Testament Interpretation*, ed. S. McKnight (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 75–95.

D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 67–90.

Intermediate Grammars

J. A. Hewett, *New Testament Greek: A Beginning-Intermediate Grammar* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1986). A grammar that combines both beginning and intermediate Greek.

J. A. Brooks and C. L. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Lanham, Md.: University Press, 1979). Probably the best intermediate grammar because it contains many helpful examples.

H. E. Dana and J. R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1927). Outdated but still useful.

J. H. Greenlee, *A Concise Exegetical Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 3d rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963). The word concise tells it all, for this book is very brief.

M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek Illustrated by Examples* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1963). A helpful tool since it is keyed to his *Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*.

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

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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 Ephesian "Mysterion": Meaning and Content* [Lund: Gleerup,