

Methodology

Before looking at the text of Paul's letters to the Colossians or even the world in which Paul and the Colossian church lived, it is necessary to make some remarks about the method I have followed or the steps that I have taken to produce these notes.¹ This is necessary in part because it spells out my expectations for those who are taking this course for full college credit. I have endeavored to tailor the method specifically to these two letters to the Colossian church.

- **Prayer**—Bible interpretation should never be approached apart from prayer. We must ask the Spirit who inspired the text to illuminate the text. In this very letter, Paul himself provides an example of how prayers like this ought to work:

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Col 1:9–14).

Judging from the warnings that Paul gives, the Spirit's help in understanding the Scripture was desperately needed for the Colossian believers. He tells them not to pay attention to those who would "judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day" (2:16). To us, this may seem straightforward. However, if we consider that the

¹I am indebted to my colleague, Jonathan Moore, for reducing his own discussions on the method of interpretation (with me and with students) to a set of stages which I have revised and expanded below.

Colossians would not have had most of the New Testament (NT), if we remember that the Old Testament (OT) has quite a bit to say about judgments on the basis of Sabbath observance and other violations of the Mosaic covenant, then the need for wisdom in applying the Scriptures becomes more clear to us. We, who claim to worship the same God as Abraham, Moses, and Paul, also desperately need the help of the Holy Spirit to teach us the will of God, to grant us wisdom and understanding for living a life that is worthy of him.

The Spirit is indispensable in interpretation even though many without the Spirit have come to understand much about the biblical text. For instance, Jesus himself calls Nicodemus, “Israel’s teacher,” yet Jesus is emphatic that Nicodemus did not have the Spirit—that he was not born again (John 3:1–15). It is the Spirit who keeps us from an arrogant rebellion against the Scripture or a self-righteous satisfaction in superficial observance of it. This is what I mean that we must have the Spirit’s help in interpretation.

If the Spirit’s help is indispensable in interpretation, and if simple study of the Word does not guarantee such help from the Spirit, then it follows that we must plead with God for that help. The Spirit blows where he wills; perhaps he will come if we ask!

With this in mind, it has been my commitment (1) to pray vigilantly the above prayer each time I sit down to study the text of Paul’s letters to the Colossians and Philemon on my own behalf as well as for your sake. I am also resolving (2) to make prayer a foundational part of the way class is conducted, at the very least starting and ending our days together with prayer. Finally I am planning (3) to memorize this prayer, i.e., Col 1:9–14, as a means of guiding my ministry of intercession for those with whom I serve our Lord Christ.

- **Pre-understanding**—It is helpful to have a limited “pre-understanding” of the text and its situation to help bridge the geographical, cultural, and historical gaps that exist between our own time and culture and that of the biblical author and original audience. This step is absolutely necessary if

we wish to be equipped to faithfully apply the Scriptures to those to whom we minister.

It is obvious that Paul's audience, the recipients of the letter to the Colossians, had some idea of who they were and who Paul was. When Paul writes about the ministry of Epaphras (Col 1:7), the philosophy of the world (Col 2:8), or the slavery of Onesimus (Phlm 12–16), the Spirit is inviting us to consider a specific historical situation that became an occasion for the miraculous production of Holy Writ. That means carefully using our imagination to picture a certain time for specific people in a real place.

Of course, using one's imagination in any branch of theology is a dangerous business, and exegesis is by no means an exception. Therefore, we must ground our understanding about the occasion of these letters in the letters themselves. The Scriptures themselves must provide the backbone of our pre-understanding of the letter; and then we can consult secondary resources about the cultural context of the day to fill in the gaps. The Bible text is the main thing; most of the history that is necessary for the understanding of the Scriptures is contained in the Scriptures. Bible dictionaries and similar tools help bridge a gap but we should be careful not to overemphasize the gap.

With this in mind, I encourage you to read the letters 10 times. Both books can be comfortably read aloud together in less than 15 minutes total, so this first Bible-reading assignment should take less than 3 hours total. God communicated the text using normal, human means and intended for it to be understood by the average reader using ordinary means. So the words that resulted in Augustine's conversion are apropos: "Take up and read!" If possible use more than one translation—preferably of different philosophies, formal and functional equivalence. For the first two readings, use two different translations if possible, try to make it through the entire book quickly, in 3–8 minutes. Pay special attention to the section headings the translators have inserted for ease of reading. These initial scans will give you a basic orientation to the shape and function of the letter.

Then each additional time you read the book, record in complete sentences at least 5 facts about the occasion of the letter each time you read the letter. These observations can include answers to the following questions:

- ✦ Who wrote the letter?
- ✦ Does the author give any clues about his current living situation?
- ✦ Did he record a specific reason for writing? If so, what is it?
- ✦ Did he give other hints and clues about why he wrote the letter? If so, what are the other clues?
- ✦ What was the relationship between the author and his audience?
- ✦ How does the author communicate? What tone does he use? For example, is the letter primarily an expression of gratitude, a summary of doctrine, a dire warning or something else?
- ✦ According to the author's perspective, what were some difficulties, problems, or struggles that the audience was undergoing?
- ✦ How would the audience have heeded the author's advice, warnings, or instructions?
- ✦ What would the consequences be if the audience ignored the letter?

By the end you should have 40 facts recorded about the background of the books. Feel free at this point to add 5 or 10 facts you may have missed by consulting a Bible dictionary or NT introduction.

- **Paragraphing and Outlining**—Every thoughtful written work is structured, and these letters of Paul are certainly no exception. The structure of any given work may not be easily anticipated or deciphered, but it is present. If an interpreter were to try to mix up Paul's sentences in his letters to the Colossians, arranging each sentence randomly, the letters would cease to function as they were intended. If the result made any sense whatsoever, it would not be the sense that Paul (and thus the Holy Spirit) intended to convey.

Have you ever heard the rule that a verse must be taken in its context if it is to be understood properly? This step of paragraphing is the step where we consider

the question, “What is the immediate context of each verse?” “How do the author’s ideas and sentences fit together?”

Therefore, our next step is to observe the structure of Paul’s thoughts. While secondary sources can certainly be helpful at this stage, it behooves us to reread the text itself again and to paragraph and outline its contents ourselves. I suggest that you read the letters straight through 10 more times. Each time you should take care to notice how the various translations divide the text. Reading the text carefully involves noting key markers and key words/phrases (especially connecting words, e.g., *therefore*, *for this reason*, *now concerning*, and *so that*) in the text. These important words and phrases help us answer the questions of *why* the author is writing or *what* central idea the author is driving at or emphasizing.

Copy the entire text of the letters into a word processor; delete the section divisions, paragraph markers, and verse numbers. Actively read the text for the twenty-first time, tracing the flow of thought in the text by looking for sub-sections, noting content breaks, highlighting key verses in those sections, and seeing how they complement or relate to each other in bringing out what exactly the author is saying. Try to imagine how you would divide the text if you were a translator. Insert paragraph breaks and section headings where you believe they belong.

Finally, produce a sentence outline of the book with references. Each line in the outline should be a complete sentence that summarizes the entirety of the section. Obviously, you will want to consult and edit this outline throughout your study of the book.

- **Paragraph-by-paragraph summarizing**—One essential component of comprehension is the ability to paraphrase and summarize. You know a father has thoroughly learned an idea when he is able to explain it to his children, and, in the same way, a teacher knows you have understood what he has taught when you are able to restate it without leaning on the words that the teacher himself used. Unless you have had a good deal of practice

in this exercise, you may need to think through several steps in the process.

1. Read through a section (that is, multiple paragraphs that hang together as a unit of thought) carefully rereading the text noting and extracting what God is saying and what we are to do with it.
2. Come to terms with the author. What is it about an individual paragraph that brings questions to your mind? What about it is difficult to understand? What words are central? What words are confusing? One fact that can make exegesis difficult is that sometimes the confusing words of a given passage and the important words of that passage are the same words! Write your questions down to force you to think through what it is that you do not understand. If you have taken biblical language courses during your time here, then use a standard Greek lexicon to find the range of meaning, and make a determination about which meaning fits best in the context. Usually the best meaning for a word is the one that contributes the least amount of new information to the context. Sometimes we want to read all the definitions or the most profound definition of a word into the context. We want our language study to totally revolutionize our understanding of the passage. But our English translations have purposefully endeavored to communicate the intent of the author adequately in our own tongue, so it is unlikely (but not impossible) that you will so surpass their abilities as to transfigure the meaning of a passage with one word study. Again, least meaning is usually best.

(1) If you have not had any language training, then you will find the following helpful.

- a. Look up the difficult word in Strong's concordance.
- b. Determine the "Strong's number" assigned to the word *in your context*.

- c. Look up the “Strong’s number” in Strong’s dictionary in the back of the concordance. Alternatively, sources like Mounce’s Expository Dictionary are keyed to this numbering system to provide definitions for Greek and Hebrew words.
- d. Choose the best fitting definition. Remember, least meaning is usually best.

(2) Secondary sources like study Bibles and commentaries can often be of help in these areas. But you should take care to do your own work first. Before you consult commentaries, make sure you take time to think through—even write down—your specific questions. This will allow you to scan the commentaries for answers and not obligate you to read the entire section of the commentary.

3. Identify the key verse. Which verse holds the central point that the author is making in that section? Answering this question will help you in restating the main point of each paragraph. Do not look for the most familiar verse, the verse that is easiest to apply to your situation, or the most devotional thought. Good works and worship must come from an adequate understanding of the document as a whole. Drawing implications about life and worship is essential, but we cannot apply aright until we have understood aright. Look instead for the verse that exposes the author’s main point. This key verse is the point to which the rest of the section builds up, or the point from which everything else proceeds.
4. Find the Big Idea: Identify the subject and subsequent compliment/predicate for each paragraph. Once you have isolated the key verse for the section in your mind and teased out its relationship to the rest of the sentences and paragraphs, you should be able to answer two questions. (1) What is each paragraph talking about (i.e., What is the subject or topic of this paragraph)? (2) What does each paragraph in the section say about its subject (i.e., What predicate or compliment

goes with this subject)? Be precise. Use one word each to identify the subject and the complement. This forces us to know exactly what is being discussed.

One set of tools in arriving at the big idea may be found if we ask the question, “What is the implied question that the text is answering?” Does the paragraph primarily give reasons? Then it answers a why question. Does the paragraph primarily describe or explain an person, thing, place idea, or event? Then it answers a what question. Does it describe the way or manner an action was performed? Then it answers a how question.

One example of this kind of subject/complement pair is found in a story told about a husband and wife discussing a Sunday sermon. The wife was tending to sick children during the sermon and had to be absent for much of the time. So later that afternoon she asked her husband, “So what did pastor talk about in the sermon this week?”

Giving the question some quick thought, the husband said, “I think he was talking about sin.”

The wife replied with another question, “What did he say about it?”

“I think he said it was bad,” came the reply.

There you have a succinct subject and complement: Sin is bad. Now hopefully we can be much more specific than this example. But the form, at least, is correct.

What does the author talk about (subject), and what does he say about that topic (complement)?

A better example is drawn from Matthew 1:18–24. This text was designed to answer the question, “How did the birth of Christ come about?” According to that paragraph, the birth of Christ came about through the miraculous working of God’s Holy Spirit, in fulfillment of OT prophecy. The account of the *birth of Christ* (subject) answers the question *how* by recounting the announcement of virgin conception and its connection to the OT prophets (complement).

4. Relate the Big Idea to the Big Picture. Once you have completed the subject/complement exercise for each paragraph, repeat it for entire

sections of the letter. Get the big picture of a section of text by describing the connections between the paragraphs you have summarized. The author wrote the paragraphs in order on purpose. So at this stage we need to answer the question, “Why is this paragraph here?” To answer the question, classify the way the rest of the sentences and paragraphs in the section relate to this key verse. Two basic categories form the foundation for our classification: *support* and *inference*. *Support* sentences and paragraphs lead the reader to the conclusion that the author is trying to make. *Inference* sentences and paragraphs take the main point of the paragraph and draw out implications. The interpreter will eventually need to be more detailed in his description of the connection between one paragraph and the section in which it appears. But a good place to start is endeavoring to understand whether the author is using basically inductive logic (gathering details to *support* a conclusion), deductive logic (using an idea to *infer* several conclusions), or some combination thereof. (You will need to revise your broad idea of the section by checking it back with the paragraphs repeatedly over time to arrive to as accurate a broad idea as possible while keeping it succinct.)

5. Each time you complete the subject/complement exercise for a section, compare your findings with the letter as a whole, by reading through the entire letter again. When applied to these two letters, this process should yield roughly 12 more readings for Colossians and around 5 for Philemon. It should give you a better understanding of how the pieces of each book fit together as a whole. Can you find a single verse that stands out as the key verse of the entire letter?
6. Draw together your summary, allowing one sentence to stand for each paragraph, and one paragraph to stand for each section. You should be able to fit the letters of both Colossians and Philemon on the front of one A4 sheet of paper.

7. Compare your outline from the previous step with this summary and make necessary adjustments to reflect your new insights into the structure of the book.

- **Producing an exegetical outline of each paragraph.** You have already outlined the entire book. Now we are concentrating on individual paragraphs. Here we are seeking to answer the question, “How does each sentence in the paragraph relate to those around it?” This is where tools like Bible Arcing and sentence flow diagrams may be used to great advantage. We are disciplining ourselves to represent these relationships visually. This discipline is helpful in several ways: (1) For visual learners, it is an essential part of demonstrating understanding of a passage. (2) It helps us to be able to quickly remind ourselves of the mechanics of each paragraph. (3) If we have a crisp image in our mind of how the passage works, we are better able to convey that information to others. (4) It informs our body language and nonverbal communication as we seek to explain the passage to others. The following notes will provide examples of such outlines.
- **Principializing**—We are finally ready to ask “So what’s the BIG DEAL?” What does the author want us to do with the information and his argument? Unfortunately, this is where we usually try to go first. However, if we cannot answer (1) “What does it say (big idea)?” and (2) “Why does it say it here (big picture)?”, then we have no business asking (3) “What does it mean for me (big deal)?”

Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9–14 reminds us that understanding and insight are not intended to be sources of academic pride. On the contrary, he believes it should lead to worship and work. He expected the Colossians to grow in their ability to do good works, to grow in their knowledge of and relationship with God, to have their character strengthened for the purpose of endurance, and to have their worship enhanced with understanding of the work of God in Christ. Methodologically, it is helpful to begin with the theological implications of each paragraph. This order follows Paul's rhythm throughout his letters of doctrine

preceding action, indicative preceding imperative. Here our mission is to press beyond the section and letter in which the paragraph appears and see how it relates to the revealed, written Word as a whole. We are seeking to answer questions like, “How does this passage inform my knowledge of God?” and “What about the character, power, and plan of God is found in this text and may provide fuel for worship?”

After our biography of God has been enriched by the passage, we should be ready to consider our own situation. At this stage we should seek to relate each paragraph, section, and document to our personal lives and cultural setting by drawing out a succinctly stated principle from the big idea and formulating concrete applications to follow based on that principle.

The principle may simply be a restatement of the big idea in imperatival form. Ultimately we want to use the author’s idea(s), and what he is actually saying in the text, and then relate it to today. For example, “Paul prayed for insight,” is a big idea. The principle could be, “Pray for insight!” or “Believers should pray for insight!” This main principle should be short and memorable. One common recommendation is that it should be able to pass the 02:00 test. If in the middle of the night on Friday, your wife were to shake you awake and ask you what you were going to preach on Sunday, you should be able to state the main principle of your sermon based on the big idea of the text.

While the main principle or proposition of your sermon should be crisp and succinct, your applications may take a bit more time. For an application to qualify as concrete, it should meet the following criteria:

Specific—“You should be a better Christian this year” is not a good application. Using God’s Word as a standard, this resolution is measurable. By God’s grace, it is attainable. Because you can try again next year, it is repeatable. And the phrase “this year” sets a time limit on it. All of these items are good, but the problem is that it is not specific. You could preach a sermon from any text in the Bible and come to that application. How *specifically* should you improve in your Christian walk?

Measurable—Applications like, “I need to love more this week,” are difficult to quantify. Is there any way you can know whether you have indeed loved more this week? If so, make that measurement the application.

Attainable—“I’m not going to sin this month,” is an admirable goal, but given the continual confession recommended by Matthew 6 and 1 John 1, I do not believe it is biblically attainable. You run the risk of deceiving yourself about where you are spiritually in order to feel like you have met your goals. Make sure your applications are within reach.

Repeatable—One signal that indicates whether an application is concrete is whether you can repeat it. “Let’s live a worshipful life” is certainly a vital principle, but it is not a concrete application. We only have one life to live. After that is eternity. A better application would be more like, “Start your day with worship on the basis of the truth of the Scripture.”

Time-bound—Adding a phrase like “this week,” or “this year,” gives us an opportunity to measure and repeat our application of the Scripture.

An example of a concrete application would, “Next time you are tempted to cheat by accepting a bribe to overlook a building code violation, don’t!” Here a specific sin has been prohibited. The application is time-bound and repeatable (“next time”). You can measure whether you have fulfilled the application or not, and by the grace of God in the cross of Christ, a believer can say, “No!” to dishonesty and all ungodliness (Titus 2).

The value of making your applications concrete like this is that, even though not all of your people are building inspectors, they are able to imagine similar situations in their own experience in which they must be honest. We often find it easier to transfer application from concrete to concrete than from abstract to concrete.

Because application is culturally relevant and deeply personal, I will endeavor to make time for discussion of application at the end of each section throughout our study of the books.

Pre-understanding

Paul

Paul, a personally commissioned delegate of the of the resurrected Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth (Col 1:1), is known almost entirely through his letters (especially Galatians, the Corinthian correspondence, and Romans) and through the book of Acts.

What we know about Paul centers on his missionary activity.² After a significant ministry in Antioch of Syria and two visits to Jerusalem, he conducted his first missionary journey with Barnabas in Gentile Asia minor around AD 47. After this, he wrote the book of Galatians, attended the doctrinal hearing in Jerusalem, and embarked on a second journey with Silas, eventually picking up Timothy. Around this time he composed the Thessalonian correspondence while he stayed for around 18 months in Corinth (Acts 18:11, c. AD 51). After returning to Antioch for a short time, Paul embarked on a third expedition, one which would result in a three year stay in Ephesus. He wrote the first of two extant letters to Corinth from there and the other from Macedonia (the region where Thessalonica and Philippi are located). After finally arriving in Corinth from Macedonia, he composed his famous letter to the Roman church, a letter which prepares us for the tensions that Paul was to face in his fateful visit to Jerusalem (c. AD 57). He is imprisoned there and travels to Rome under arrest via Caesarea Philippi and Malta. It is during this imprisonment, which probably ends in AD 62, that he will pen the letters under our consideration in this class—Colossians and Philemon. In a letter like this with eternal consequences and the gospel itself on the line, Paul made clear that his apostleship is by God’s will (Col 1:1). Paul’s special stewardship came from God (Col 1:25); his account, warning, and teaching about Christ were infused with God’s wisdom (Col 1:28); and Christ’s energy

²The dates and chronology in this paragraph are based on the consensus of two works: D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo’s *New Testament Introduction* (KL 9146–9190), and “Reading the Epistles,” and “Introduction to Colossians” in ESVSB.

empowered Paul's work (Col 1:29). Straying from the Pauline teaching was not merely leaving a teacher behind; it was leaving behind salvation in Christ. This divine calling entrusted Paul with nearly unparalleled authority. Even where it is clear that Paul did not personally plant a church, Paul felt responsibility for the Colossian believers (Col 1:1). In fact, Paul took responsibility for more than one church that he had not personally planted or even visited (Col 2:1). It is worth noting that Paul did not use this authority to boss people around, to dominate or micromanage them. Instead, he presses his claim to authority "so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery — Christ" (Col 2:2, HCSB). Being an apostle made Paul a servant of the gospel and a servant of the church (Col 1:23–24). Paul's task was to proclaim the complete word to the Gentiles (Col 1:25) for the purpose of universal maturity (Col 1:28). This proclamation ministry took the tone of warning as well as teaching (Col 1:27), but it never devolved into bullying. Far from using his position in the church for personal advancement, Paul was currently in chains for proclaiming the gospel (Col 4:3). A fact that Paul wanted the Colossians to remember (Col 4:18).

Colossians

The story of the Colossians is the incredible if now familiar story of early Christianity in the first decades after the resurrection of Christ. All of the evidence points to a largely Gentile congregation (Col 1:27), and before the gospel came through Epaphras, the picture was bleak. The Colossians were at one time hostile to God (Col 1:21). They used to lust for sex and money (Col 3:7). As with all humanity, the Colossians practiced dishonesty and abusive patterns of speech and behavior (3:8-9).

Everything changed when Epaphras proclaimed the gospel in Colossae (Col 1:7). He spoke a message of hope that motivated love (Col 1:5). Some Colossians received the message from the day they heard the gospel (Col 1:6). They embraced the teaching about Jesus the Messiah and recognized him as their

Master (Col 2:6). They put off the old self and put on the new self (Col 3:9–10), repenting from their evil behavior (Col 1:21). That is to say, their lives were transformed by hearing the gospel (Col 1:6). That is why Paul calls the Colossians holy and faithful (Col 1:2). Like the rest of the human race, the Colossians continued to have faults (Col 3:13), but they were known for a broad love of Christians everywhere (Col 1:4).

This conversion was by no means an individualistic affair. Paul's community standards imply that the Colossian believers saw themselves as a community. He assumes that they are gathering and taking part in one another's lives (Col 3:12–17). The Colossian church was made up of households, including people of both sexes, all ages, and various economic backgrounds (Col 3:18–4:1). This believing community did not isolate itself, but maintained contact with outsiders (Col 4:5–6).

One can only imagine what their gatherings were like; the letter gives us several clues: Paul assumes that the Colossian believers had the ability to teach one another with God's wisdom, even without the presence of Epaphras (Col 3:16). Paul also assumes that the Colossians had access to a known set of doctrinally-oriented musical pieces, probably including but not limited to the biblical psalms (Col 3:17). The instructions regarding the letter itself give us a glimpse into the life of the early church which would have at least occasionally read apostolic letters in their gatherings (Col 4:16). Some previous instruction on the practice of prayer is implied by Paul's prayer requests (Col 4:3). In addition, the church in Colossae (and Epaphras personally) was in contact with the nearby church of Laodicea (Col 4:15, 18).

While Paul is thankful for the evident work of grace among his audience, he is aware that soul-endangering teaching had found purchase among them. Among the community of those who died with Christ, there are some who are submitting to the rules of those who were propagating this teaching (Col 2:20). So even as he is assuring them that they have been reconciled to God, he hastens to add that this has taken place *if it proves true* that they continue in the faith (Col 1:22–23).

Colossians were hearing fine-sounding arguments (Col 2:4). The faith of the Colossians was being threatened by “deceptive philosophy” (Col 2:8).³ This doctrinal threat constitutes the occasion of Paul's letter.

Deceptive Philosophy

In Col 2:1–4, Paul gives us a clear statement about why he was writing the letter to the Colossians. He was "contending" for them "so that no one may deceive you" (Col 2:4). While we do not have a full account of events that precipitated the letter, we can piece together a few details about what happened. The philosophers appear to have been associated with the orthodox community at one point, but, by the time of the writing of the letter, they clearly had departed from the authority of Christ (Col 2:19). Paul sees the danger of the spread of this teaching and attempts to head it off or hamper its progress by circulating this letter (Col 4:16). Paul feels it necessary to reassert his authority as Christ's handpicked representative (Col 1:1). Paul desires the Colossians “to reach all the riches of full assurance,” implying that the philosophers were causing them to doubt the apostolic teaching (Col 2:2, cf. 1 John 2:18–19, 5:13).

The error that the Colossian congregation was facing is notoriously difficult to identify historically. However, the difficulty is not exegetical but historical: Paul gives us a plethora of details to digest regarding his opponents, but we find it difficult to put those details together into a cohesive whole that matches precisely any of the heretical groups we know about from sources outside the Bible. Left with no other choice (and not too concerned to look for another choice) we will restrict our observations to the biblical text.

Perhaps the most clear feature of the deceptive philosophy was its Judaizing elements. Someone was putting socioreligious pressure on the Colossians for not observing Jewish dietary restrictions and the Jewish calendar (Col 2:16). Physical circumcision could also have been part of the error (Col 2:11). The idea that the

³I have thus referred to the false teachers as “the philosophers.” The risk with this term is that does not convey the Jewish elements of the teaching, but a better term eludes me.

dietary restrictions and calendar observances were a shadow of Christ would seem to imply that real OT injunctions were used by its propagators (Col 2:17). Paul's eagerness to stress the international nature of the new body in Christ points to an exclusivism among the philosophers (Col 1:27, 2:2, 3:11). Ethnic exclusivism was one of the deepest struggles of the NT church. Of Paul's letters, only the Thessalonian correspondence does not substantially discuss the Jew-Gentile issue. The philosophers evidently capitalized on this confusion and made Jewish observances part of their platform.

Another plank in their platform was the offer of wisdom. Thirst for wisdom pervaded the world of the ancient church (See 1 Cor 1:18–25). Unfortunately, because this thirst was tainted with depravity, the world judged the revelation of God in the cross as foolishness. On the other hand, the appearance of wisdom is apparently what made the philosophers' regulations attractive (Col 2:23).

Whatever worldview elements the Colossians carried over from their previous lives in Greco-Roman culture, the philosophers were able to seduce them away from orthodoxy by aligning their restrictions with human wisdom. So it is no wonder that Paul reminds the Christians of Colossae to find the fullness of wisdom in Christ and to look for it nowhere else (Col 2:3).

Compatible with both Judaizing tendencies and the appeal to wisdom, asceticism was a third facet of the philosophers' error (Col 2:21). That is, they were “practicing strict self-denial as a measure of personal and especially spiritual discipline” (Merriam-Webster, s.v. “Ascetic”).⁴ The Colossians interpreted asceticism as wisdom (Col 2:23). And while some of the rules promoted by the philosophers were founded on OT injunctions, a departure toward human traditions and human commands is also evident (cf. Col 2:17, 8, 22). An

⁴“Asceticism” is how ESV renders ταπεινοφροσυνη in Col 2:18, 23. The same word is rendered “false humility” in the NIV, but BDAG makes clear that the negative connotation in these translations comes from the context, not from the word itself (ad loc.). In Col 3:12, the same word is translated simply as “humility” in a list of other virtues. My use of the term *asceticism* does not come from the ESV’s translation of ταπεινοφροσυνη as such but from the restrictions of Col 2:21.

undercurrent of “sensual indulgence” came along with the asceticism of the philosophers (Col 2:23).

Other issues were also involved in the philosopher’s teaching. The worship of angels fits somewhere into the error (Col 2:18). Paul reserves some of the most emphatic language in the letter asserting Christ’s preeminence over all things spiritual (Col 1:16–17). Christ’s victory in the cross is described in terms that seem most appropriately applied to the spiritual realm, where he “having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Col 2:15).⁵ Visions may also have been part of the philosopher’s spiritual power play (Col 2:18). But Paul does not waste time refuting these visions individually, so we do not have a clear idea of their content. The answer to the Colossian threat was recognizing the full deity of Christ and his sufficiency for them (Col 2:9–10). Part of the sufficiency of Christ that they needed to recognize was that their “legal indebtedness” was cancelled in Christ (Col 2:14). From that recognition should proceed thanksgiving, which is another key facet of the solution to the problem (Col 2:7, cf., Col 1:12, 3:15–17, 4:2). If the Colossians rested in the assurances of the sufficiency of Christ that Paul included in his letter (e.g., Col 2:9–10), then the seduction of the philosophers would be unable to take hold.

Outline of Colossians

The following outline represents my own attempt to complete the project assigned in the previous session.

1. Paul together with Timothy greets the Colossian believers (Col 1:1–2).
2. Paul recounts his constant prayers for the Colossians (Col 1:3–20).
 - 2.1. Paul thanks God for the Colossians (Col 1:3–8).
 - 2.1.1. Paul thanks God for their faith, love, and hope (Col 1:3–5).

⁵Some interpreters have also understood “elemental spiritual forces” (Col 2:8) to be related to this angelic facet of the philosophers’ teaching, and this is one possible understanding. However, the phrase could also refer to “elementary principles,” such as the ascetic prohibitions of Col 2:21.

- 2.1.2. Paul considers the worldwide spread of the gospel (Col 1:6–8).
- 2.2. Paul reports his prayer for the Colossians (Col 1:9–23).
 - 2.2.1. Paul prays that they would have growing insight and grateful endurance (Col 1:9–14).
 - 2.2.2. Paul concludes with Christ-centered thanks (Col 1:15–23).
 - 2.2.2.1. Christ is preeminent over the universe (Col 1:15–18).
 - 2.2.2.2. Christ reconciles the universe (Col 1:19–20).
- 3. Paul exhorts the Colossians not to shift away from the gospel (Col 1:21–2:23).
 - 3.1. Paul introduces the warning: You have been reconciled, if you remain steadfast in the gospel (Col 1:21–23).
 - 3.2. Paul explains his gospel ministry (Col 1:24–2:5).
 - 3.2.1. Paul explains his ministry in general (Col 1:24–1:29).
 - 3.2.2. Paul explains the ministry of this letter (Col 2:1–5).
 - 3.3. Paul exhorts the Colossians to continue in the gospel (Col 2:6–23).
 - 3.3.1. Live in him (Col 2:6–7)!
 - 3.3.2. Do not be taken captive (Col 2:8–15).
 - 3.3.3. Do not let anyone judge or disqualify you (Col 2:16–19).
 - 3.3.4. Do not submit to regulations (Col 2:20–23).
- 4. Paul exhorts the Colossians to live the new life (Col 3:1–4:6).
 - 4.1. Seek what is above (Col 3:1–4).
 - 4.2. Put to death what is earthly (Col 3:5–11).
 - 4.3. Don love (Col 3:12–16).
 - 4.4. Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus (Col 3:17–4:1).
 - 4.5. Speak steadfastly to God and wisely to outsiders (Col 4:2–6).
- 5. Paul passes greetings to the Colossians (Col 4:7–18).
 - 5.1. Tychicus and Onesimus have come with details about Paul’s affairs (Col 4:7–9).
 - 5.2. Men of the circumcision greet the Colossians as Paul’s fellow workers (Col 4:10–11).

5.3. Epaphras has worked hard and continues to do so in prayer (Col 4:12–13).

5.4. Luke and Demas send greetings (Col 4:14).

5.5. Paul greets those in the Colossian network (Col 4:15–17).

5.6. Paul signs the letter (Col 4:18).

1. Paul Greets the Colossians

Paul’s greeting matches traditional Roman form which would announce the author first, then the recipients.

Text

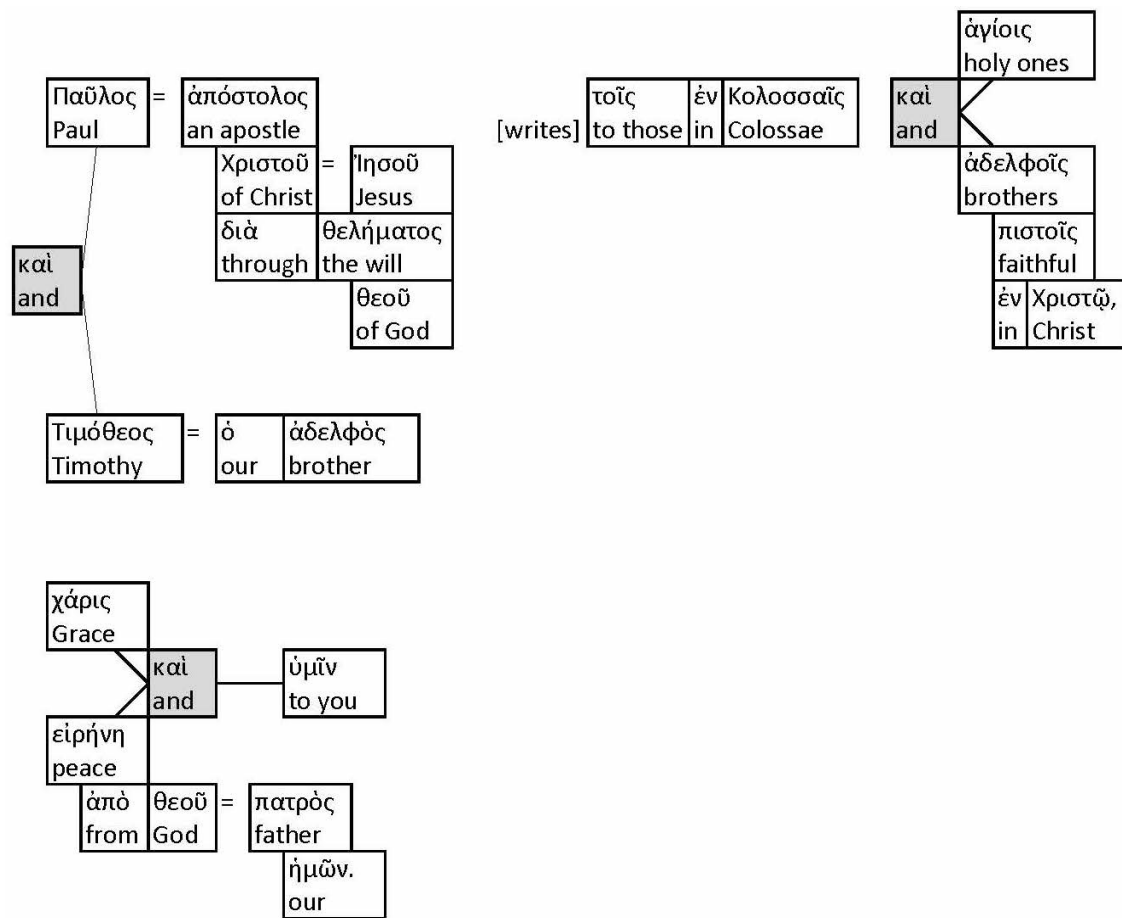
Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφὸς τοῖς ἐν Κολοσσαῖς ἀγίοις καὶ πιστοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ, χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν.⁶

Translation

Paul an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God and Timothy our brother [writes] to those in Colossae who are holy and faithful brothers in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

⁶I have used the NA28 text throughout. The Robinson-Pierpont Byzantine text (RP) preserves several differences, all of them dubious and minor: (1) In verse 1, Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ is transposed to Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. (2) Κολοσσαῖς is modified to Κολασσαῖς. (3) καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is added to the end of the verse 2 to match Pauline custom. A fourth variant present in several manuscripts adds Ἰησοῦ to the end phrase ἀδελφοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ. but the manuscript evidence favors the shorter reading. See the NA28 apparatus, Metzger, and the SBL-GNT Apparatus.

Diagram



Comment

While Paul’s greeting follows the standard for Roman letters, he does not adopt the form mindlessly, so a few of his phrases merit comment.

Apostle of Christ Jesus

Paul begins the letter with his title of apostle of Christ. Because Paul varies his title from letter to letter, we can infer that Paul believed the title, “apostle” (ἀπόστολος), to be fitting for this circumstance (cf., Rom 1:1, Phil 1:1—“slave”; Phlm 1:1—“prisoner”). If we look at the rest of the letter, we can understand why Paul would want to make his calling as an apostle clear. If he were merely another teacher among many, then his arguments could be weighed equally with the arguments of his opponents. Given that the Colossian believers were already being wooed away from Christ because of claims to superior wisdom, there is

little doubt how that evaluation would go. So Paul establishes the fact that he is a direct representative of Christ (the ruler of the universe, Col 1:15). The Colossians were not at liberty to assume the role of judge between Paul and his opponents. Loyalty to Paul's teaching was loyalty to Christ; straying from Paul's teaching was straying from Christ.

Through the Will of God

Similar comments can be made regarding the phrase "through the will of God." Paul's appointment to the office of apostle did not come through any human agency. While the other apostles *recognized* Paul's calling, they did not *originate* Paul's calling. The implied question that Paul is answering is, "Paul, why should we listen to you?" The answer is that he is a representative of Christ and that he holds that office by divine intent.

Timothy our Brother

After chapter 1, Paul speaks entirely in the first person singular. That is to say, he drops the "we" and speaks of himself as "I." Therefore, we can confidently award primary authorship to Paul.

So would Paul include Timothy in the initial greeting? Given that Paul was training Timothy and that he expected to pass some facets of his ministry on to Timothy, it is not surprising that Paul would want to include his close teammate in the heading of this letter. By endorsing this next-generation leader in this way, Paul was looking ahead to a time when he would no longer be on the scene.

Holy and Faithful Brothers

Glancing back through the outline of the book, we observe that holiness and faithfulness form primary concerns to Paul. Faithfulness to the gospel message is the primary call of Col 1:20–2:23. Holiness is the primary concern of Col 3:1–4:6. Paul recognizes up front that the Colossian church has already made progress in this area. He will continue to praise the Lord for that progress in the next section.

However, that is not to say that everything is perfect and that there is no room for more progress.

I have rendered as an adjective “holy” (ἅγιοις) what is often rendered with the noun *saints* to show that two groups, “the saints” and “the faithful brothers,” are not in view (See NIV⁸⁴). Paul is not supporting the idea that saints are a class of Christians separate from others. While that view of the saints as an elite group would grow in the centuries after Paul’s death, Paul’s view was that every Christian, having taken up his cross to follow Christ, was a saint, holy, separated from the dominion of sin and consecrated for God’s purposes (Rom 6:1–7, 14, 18).⁷

The word here translated “faithful” (πιστοῖς) is ambiguous. It could go one of two directions: trustworthy or trusting. The consensus of translations favors the former while the standard Greek dictionary suggests the latter. According to Paul, the Colossian believers are both trustworthy and trusting (Col 2:5). Perhaps if we allow context to guide us, we would lean toward understanding Paul to be encouraging them to remain faithful to Christ by reminding them of their good track record to this point. So while the idea of trusting is not excluded, the idea of trustworthy seems to be in focus.

Grace and Peace to You

The traditional Roman letter would have used the word “Greetings” (χαίρειν; see James 1:1, Acts 15:23), but Paul modified the tradition slightly to make a theological point. Instead of “Greetings” (χαίρειν), Paul said “Grace” (χάρις). Grace is the mode of our restoration to God. It is God’s favor, in our case, set upon those who do not deserve it. It is connected both to forgiveness and to transformation (Titus 2:11, 3:7). There can be no greater treasure than the smile of God on us. It was Paul’s wish for the Colossians to experience more and more of this divine favor. To this he added the traditional Jewish greeting, “peace.” The word translated “peace” is the same word that the Greek translation of the OT

⁷See John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, KL 1645–47.

uses to translate the familiar “shalom” (שלום). The idea is tied to Messianic salvation and the coming age (Isa 52:7, BDAG). Paul’s wish is that the wholeness of relationship between God and individuals and among the believing community would progressively heal the brokenness caused by sin.

Principles

Here is my understanding of the big idea of this passage:

Paul, writing with apostolic authority, wishes the transformed Colossians blessing from God.

Here are some principles for application:

Paul’s writings are authoritative.

Being a Christian entails holiness and faithfulness.

Christians are utterly dependent on God for grace and peace.

Application

How can we concretely apply the principle of Paul’s authority this week?

What would be the consequences of failing to heed Paul’s authority?

What can your church do this year to show itself faithful?

What can you do this week to show our need for grace and peace from God?

2.1 Paul Thanks God for the Colossians (1:3–8).

Position in the Letter

1. Paul together with Timothy greets the Colossian believers (Col 1:1–2).
2. Paul recounts his constant prayers for the Colossians (Col 1:3–20).
 - 2.1. Paul thanks God for the Colossians (Col 1:3–8).
 - 2.1.1. Paul thanks God for their faith, love, and hope (Col 1:3–5).
 - 2.1.2. Paul exults in the worldwide spread of the gospel (Col 1:6–8).
 - 2.2. Paul reports his prayer for the Colossians (Col 1:9–23).

Text

Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι, ἀκούσαντες τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχετε εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα τὴν ἀποκειμένην ὑμῖν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, ἣν προηκούσατε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ παρόντος εἰς ὑμᾶς, καθὼς καὶ ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ ἐστὶν καρποφορούμενον καὶ ἀύξανόμενον καθὼς καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν, ἀφ’ ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσατε καὶ ἐπέγνωτε τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ· καθὼς ἐμάθετε ἀπὸ Ἐπαφρᾶ τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ συνδούλου ἡμῶν, ὃς ἐστὶν πιστὸς ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διάκονος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ καὶ δηλώσας ἡμῖν τὴν ὑμῶν ἀγάπην ἐν πνεύματι.⁸

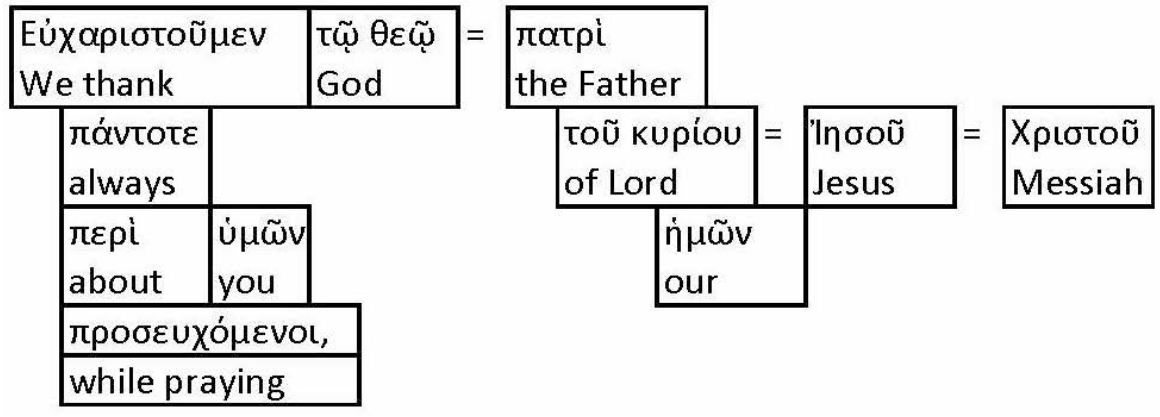
Translation

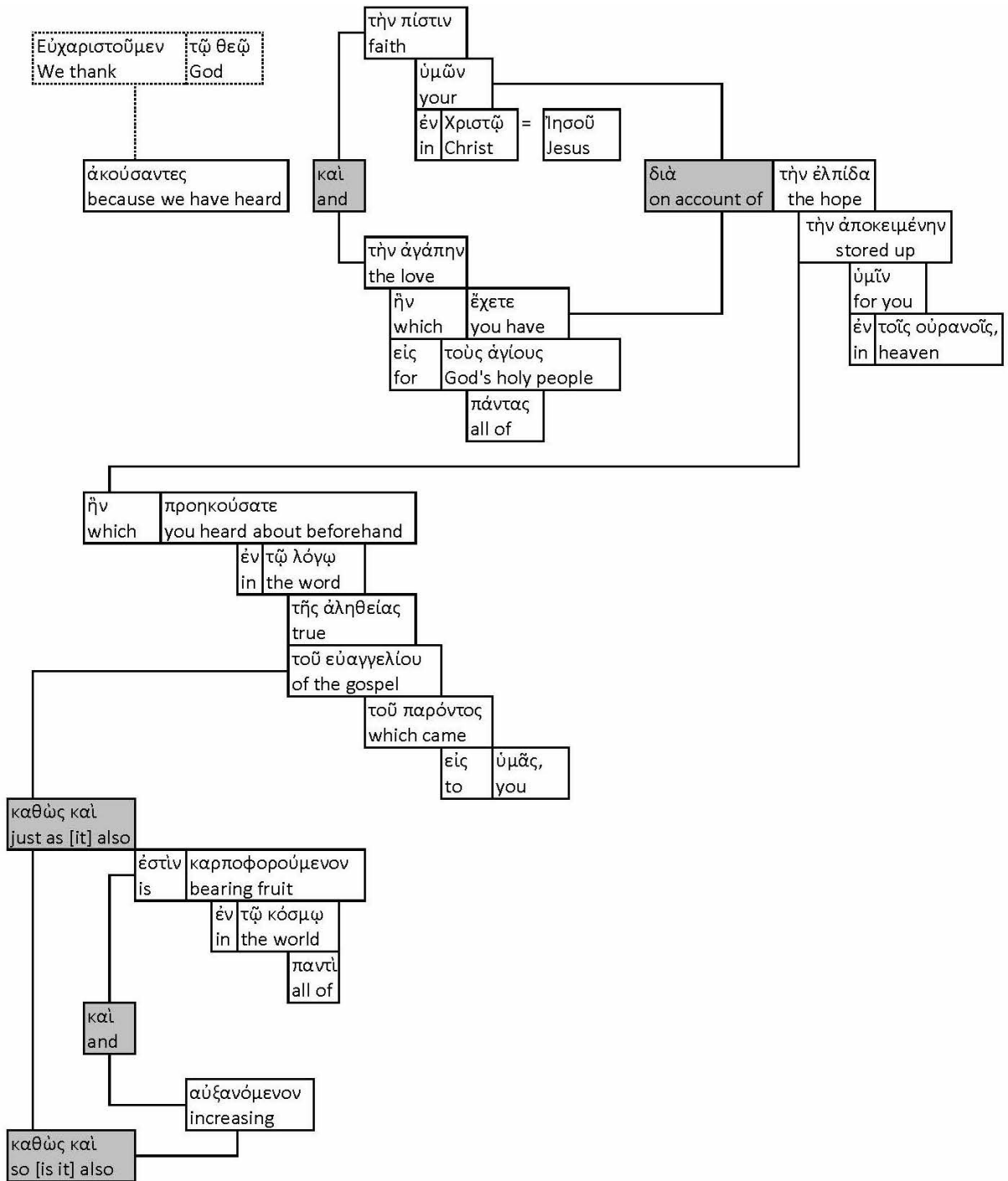
We always thank God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ concerning you when we pray because we have heard about your faith in Christ Jesus and the love you have for all the saints on account of the hope reserved as a reward for you in

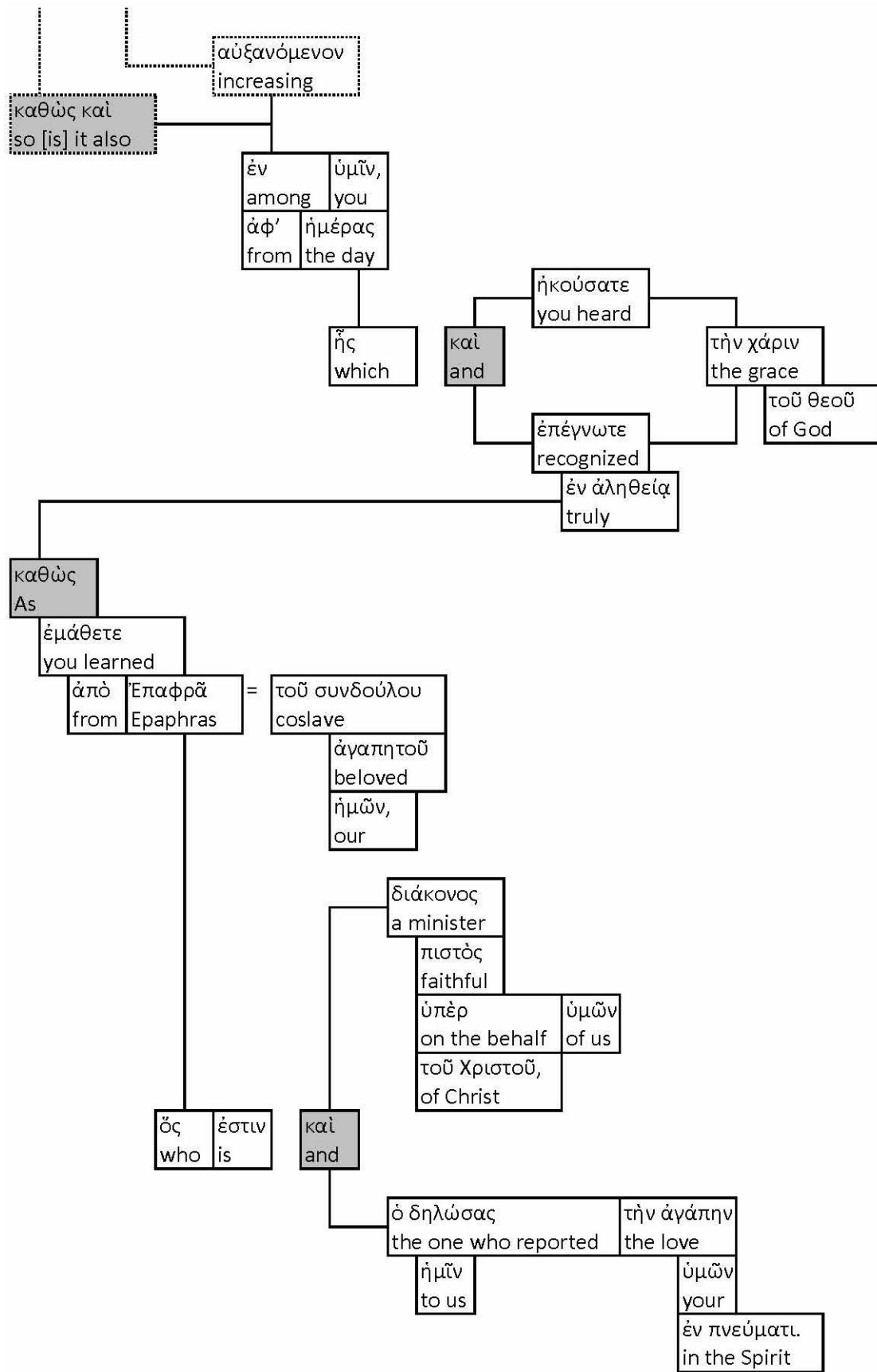
⁸Six minor variants listed in the apparatuses make little difference in meaning: (1) In v. 3, Tregelles and RP have θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ. The text is decided on internal grounds. (2) Vaticanus and the Vulgate omit Χριστοῦ after Ἰησοῦ, but it is well-attested otherwise. (3) Tregelles printed ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν instead of περὶ ὑμῶν. As with (1), the external evidence is not poor, but the more difficult text is more likely. (4) The MT of v. 4 alone replaces ἣν ἔχετε with τὴν, adds καὶ after κόσμῳ in v. 6, and again (6) adds καὶ after καθὼς in v. 7. One variant in v. 7 can be seen in translation: The question is Epaphras “a faithful minister of Christ on *our* behalf” (niv, net) or “on *your* behalf” (hcsb, esv, nlt)? UBS⁴ gives ὑμῶν a B rating over ἡμῶν. Based on the Fathers and the ancient versions, Metzger concludes, “Copyists introduced the first person pronoun under the influence of the preceding ἡμῶν and the following ἡμῖν.”

heaven. You heard about this hope beforehand in the true message of the gospel. The gospel came to you just as it bears fruit in all the world, abounding just as it has among you from the day you heard about it and truly recognized the grace of God, just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved co-slave, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, and who has made clear to us your love in the Spirit.

Diagram







Comment

As is typical for Paul, he begins his letter with a report on his prayers for his audience, starting with thanking the Lord for the way that he has transformed them through the gospel. We can divide this thanksgiving into two portions. First, Paul takes note of the faith, love, and hope that presently characterizes the Colossian church. Second, he traces these virtues back to the arrival of the gospel in Colosse, and back further to the faithful ministry of Epaphras, who brought the gospel to this minor city.

We Always Thank...When We Pray for You

Paul begins by assuring the Colossians that he thanks God for them *always* (πάντοτε). We should not understand this adverb to function in an absolute sense as though Paul's concentration is never on anything other than thanking God for the Colossians. The frequency of the thanksgiving is qualified by the adverbial participle “whenever we pray” (προσευχόμενοι). Of course, Paul assures them that he “has not stopped praying” for them in the following verses, so we should imagine a relative frequency of thanksgiving.

Although Paul usually opens his letters with thanksgiving, one does well to note how often the idea of thanksgiving itself appears within the letter. This is only the first of six strategically placed occurrences of this stem (εὐχαριστ*) in this short letter.

God the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ

While the absence of a joining και was troublesome to some copyists, the established construction is intelligible. Jesus addressed God as father several times in the Gospel record (Matt 11, John 17), and taught his followers to do so as well (Matt 6). Paul's Christianity entailed the belief that the one that Jesus addressed as Father is the God of the universe, the God of the Jewish Bible. In this simple phrase is both the new claim of Christianity, i.e., that Jesus of Nazareth is the rightful emperor over all creation, and the radical continuity with Judaism,

i.e., that Jesus exercises this authority with the full endorsement of the God of the Hebrew Bible. While the words Paul is using here are common in his writings, his high Christology will be a load-bearing argument in his plea for the Colossians to persevere in him.

Because We Have Heard About Your Faith in Christ Jesus

The adverbial participle, "having heard" (ἀκούσαντες), introduces the reason that Paul is thankful to God. Note that Paul is not thanking God for the delivery of news via Epaphras (v. 8). He is thanking God because of the content of the news, namely, the faith and love of the Colossians.

The theological implication, while perhaps controversial, is nevertheless clear. God gets the credit when someone believes in Jesus. Paul could not *thank* God for the Colossians faith if faith were not a gift from God. How does the impartation of faith work? No little debate has been waged on the issue since at least the fourth century, so it is doubtful we will be able to settle it here. However, a survey of a few of the possible answers is in order.

(1) There are those who would say that God gets the credit because God created human beings to be capable of belief in him. While it is true that God deserves praise for his creation of humankind (Ps 139), one wonders if this gives God the credit that is his due. Paul is undeniably clear that humankind "suppresses the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom 1) and thus "no one seeks after God" (Rom 3). Instead we are God's enemies (Rom 8). Since Adam plunged us into condemnation, we have been under sin's dominion (Rom 5-6). The choice to believe itself is a gift from God not merely because God created human kind, but because he is redeeming certain humans for their sin.

(2) Another option acknowledges that humankind is under sin's dominion, but they posit that God has granted everyone the ability to choose against their nature and believe Christ. Those who resist are condemned, but those who allow God's grace to carry them along to faith are saved. While this view specifies what God can be thanked for in regard to our faith (i.e., the grace to be able to choose

to believe), and it does allow for the Colossians responsibility in believing, it is not without its problems. (A) While acknowledging universal depravity, this position attempts to mitigate depravity at precisely the point where the Scriptures seek to make its influence strongest, namely, where it concerns conversion. (See especially the OT Latter Prophets and Romans 9.) Ultimately, the claim that humankind is universally depraved--except when it comes to the ability to seek after God--is a case of special pleading. (B) Nowhere is the idea that God grants everyone the grace necessary to believe explicitly taught in the Scriptures. It is a logical construct inferred from the command to believe. Furthermore, the decisive element in faith remains in human hands, so the force of Paul's gratitude in this text is enervated.

(3) A third option swings in the opposite direction. Advocates of this idea hold that the Spirit of God trusts/exercises faith through the believer. This position obviously takes the thanksgiving of this text seriously. However, to say that faith is a gift from God does not mean that God himself is doing the believing. The simplicity of the text belies one of the greatest mysteries in Christian worship: it is the Colossians' faith in Christ Jesus for which Paul praises God.

(4) So finally, we are left simply to affirm what the text says: the Colossians believed in Christ Jesus, and this fact is fundamentally and decisively due to God. God created us upright, but we all went after our own schemes (Eccl 7:29, Isa 53:6). In the face of truth-suppressing slavery to sin, God shined the light in our dark hearts to grant us faith (Rom 1, Rom 6, 2 Cor 4). And so all the praise belongs to him.

And About the Love that You Have for All the God's Holy People

Just as Paul thanked God for the Christ-centered faith of the Colossian church, so he also thanks God for producing within them an indiscriminate and expansive love for his people. Having committed myself to a certain way of understanding the thanksgiving when we looked at faith, we now must follow through to see if that understanding makes sense when we look at love. Paul makes clear in this

letter that the Colossian believers' old way of life was nothing like the way of love taught in Christ (Col 3). When they were converted, they received a new identity in Christ which would continue to be renewed in the image of its Creator (Col 3). Paul will come back to this point in Col 1:8 when he says that their love was "in the Spirit." The beginning point was one of hopeless slavery to sin, not just in the suppression of truth, but also in the oppression of others. God granted a new life that both believes and loves. This parallelism finds a similar presentation in John's first epistle. There the apostle tells us that both believing in the Son and loving the children of God are the fruit of the seed of regeneration (1 John 3-4). Paul takes particular note that the Colossians' love is an indiscriminate sort of love. Later in the letter, Paul would affirm this mindset when he says, "Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all [that matters], and is in all [of us]" (Col 3:11). As we noted before, the philosophers were pushing an exclusivistic agenda, so as Paul affirms their indiscriminate love for those in Christ, he is implicitly undermining his opponents' desire to erect walls between believers on the basis of external observances of diet and calendar.

We must be careful not to divide between the abstract and concrete here. Just as the exclusivism of the philosophers was occurring at the local level, so also indiscriminate love must also occur at the local level if it is to be remarkable. Paul is not commending them for loving the church universal to the exclusion of the real people in their context. Paul is not confused about the difference between generic idealistic affection and personal, God-wrought, real-world commitment. This love would have been demonstrated in their community life as well as in their network of churches and beyond.

On Account of the Hope Reserved as a Reward for You in Heaven

Paul is famous for the triad of faith, hope, and love. Paul uses this term *hope* in two different ways. Sometimes he uses the term along with faith and love as a *virtue*. That is to say, the believer *hopes* in God, and this confidence about what

God has promised to do in the future on his behalf transforms his attitude about the past, his attitude about the present, and his decisions in the present (See, e.g., Rom 5:9–11). On the other hand, Paul also uses hope to refer not to the subjective virtue of personal confidence but to the object for which one hopes. That is clearly the meaning in this context. Paul is not discussing the *sense* of confidence we gain when our godly character has been demonstrated in the midst of difficulties. Paul is discussing the *content* of that confidence, that is, “the reward” reserved for us in heaven, the “inheritance of his holy people” (Col 1:12). Because the ideas of faith, hope, and love are usually parallel to one another (cf., 1 Thess 1:3 and 1 Cor 13), some commentators understand them to be parallel here (ExBC). The idea would be “We thank God because of your faith, your love, [and] on account of your hope.” However, in light of the fact that there is no conjunction, the preponderance of modern English translations are probably correct in understanding hope to be the reason or basis of both hope and love (See NIV, HCSB, NET, NLT). As the diagram indicates, both faith and love are rooted in the hope promised.

How does this work? How does the promised inheritance produce or cultivate faith and love? Perhaps the relationship between faith and hope is easier to understand than that between love and hope, so we will start there.

According the following verses, the announcement of the believer’s future inheritance was made as part of the broader gospel announcement. We do not have a record of Epaphras’ preaching, but Paul does tell us elsewhere that it was his own policy to include some information about the Christian’s hope in his preaching to Gentiles (Acts 20:25, 32; 1 Thess 1:9–10, 5:1–11). Evidently, Epaphras adopted this policy as well. When he announced this hope in Colosse, it motivated them (by God’s grace) to enter into the life of faith in Christ Jesus. The riches of the inheritance of God’s holy people prompted them to see with the eyes of hope what Jesus himself said, “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36). Paul describes what happened to the

Colossians next, “You have taken off your old self with its practices and have put

on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (Col 3:9–10). Their newfound faith arose “on account of the hope reserved” for them.

The relationship between love and hope is not quite as apparent, but three points may help us grasp how hope could be the root of love. (1) If we understand that our commitment to the eternal good of another will only enhance our own inheritance in glory, then our hope of glory motivates our love for others. This appears to be precisely how Paul’s affection for the Thessalonian believers is motivated: “For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way. For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy” (1 Thess 2:17). (2) When we realize that every believer is headed for the same glorious future because of Christ, a natural camaraderie develops as we celebrate our rescue together. Compare Revelation 5 with celebrations on the original Victory in Europe Day. (3) If a believer’s confidence is in the promise of God that he will receive a saint’s inheritance, then all the hardships that come along with loving sinful people in a fallen world become more tolerable. This plays out in Paul’s correspondence with the Corinthian believers. In 2 Cor 4:8–12, he enumerates the difficulties he encounters as a minister of the gospel. “All this,” he explains, “is for your benefit” (2 Cor 4:15). How is it that Paul is able to endure being “hard pressed on every side...perplexed...persecuted...struck down”? He is “being renewed day by day” with this *hope* in mind, “Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Cor 4:17). So Paul stays committed to working for the eternal benefit of the Corinthians because he himself is confident that “it will be worth it all when we see Christ.” Persevering faith and love are a result, then, of the promised hope, the inheritance of God’s holy people in the kingdom of his Son. The relevance of this relationship will become even more apparent as we look at Col 1:12 below.

Bearing Fruit and Growing Throughout the Whole World

A final question in this section is what Paul means when he says “throughout the whole world” with respect to the spreading fruitfulness of the gospel. Paul returns to this phraseology in Col 1:23, “This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven.” Without introducing any ideas from historical sources outside the Bible, we can be certain that these words cannot be understood in their fullest possible sense. Paul writes this letter to the Colossians while in Roman imprisonment. Before he was incarcerated, Paul wrote to the church at Rome, mentioning his desire to work in Spain because his work in Greece and Asia Minor was complete (Rom 15:19, 23–24). He explains his work as a foundation-laying ministry that properly functions in contexts where Christ is not named (Rom 15:20–21). So, unless someone completed Paul’s mission to Spain while he was stuck in prison, Paul was quite aware that there were places where Christ was not named, where the gospel was not bearing fruit, and where there were creatures to whom the gospel had not been proclaimed. So how should we understand Paul’s universal language? The simple answer is that this is a case of hyperbole.⁹ While it is true that “gospel centers” were being set up throughout the Roman empire on the Pauline model,¹⁰ this fact does not mean that the gospel had in fact been proclaimed to every creature or even in all of creation, so some form of hyperbole is still necessary. What is the point of the hyperbole? Paul is making the point that the gospel that he preaches is the one singular gospel for the whole world. The deceptive philosophy eroding the Colossians’ confidence had no right to such a claim. In fact, its exclusivism made it inherently parochial. The point of Paul’s hyperbole is to affirm the catholic orthodoxy of his gospel and by implication to show the inferiority of his opponents’ teaching.¹¹

⁹ExBC, PNTC

¹⁰WBC

¹¹Similarly PNTC, TNTC.

Principles

Big Idea: Paul gives God the credit for hope-driven faith and love for his people.

Principles:

Application

What's the best way you can give God credit for your conversion before the day is done?

What are some plans you can make for helping the people you serve anchor their faith in the hope of the gospel?

In what ways can you foster indiscriminate love in your community, remembering that hope energizes love?

2.2. Paul reports his prayer for the Colossians (Col 1:9–20).

Position in the Letter

2.2. Paul reports his prayer for the Colossians (Col 1:9–23).

2.2.1. Paul prays that they would have growing insight and grateful endurance (Col 1:9–14).

2.2.2. Paul concludes with Christ-centered thanks (Col 1:15–23).

2.2.2.1. Christ is preeminent over the universe (Col 1:15–18).

2.2.2.2. Christ reconciles the universe (Col 1:19–20).

3. Paul exhorts the Colossians not to shift away from the gospel (Col 1:21–2:23).

Text

Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἡμεῖς, ἀφ’ ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσαμεν, οὐ παυόμεθα ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν
προσευχόμενοι καὶ αἰτούμενοι, ἵνα πληρωθῆτε τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τοῦ θελήματος
αὐτοῦ ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ καὶ συνέσει πνευματικῇ,¹² περιπατῆσαι ἀξίως τοῦ κυρίου
εἰς πᾶσαν ἀρεσκείαν, ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ καρποφοροῦντες καὶ αὐξανόμενοι τῇ
ἐπίγνωσει τοῦ θεοῦ,¹³ ἐν πάσῃ δυνάμει δυναμούμενοι κατὰ τὸ κράτος τῆς δόξης
αὐτοῦ εἰς πᾶσαν ὑπομονὴν καὶ μακροθυμίαν.

Μετὰ χαρᾶς εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρὶ τῷ ἱκανώσαντι ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν μερίδα τοῦ
κλήρου τῶν ἀγίων ἐν τῷ φωτί¹⁴ · ὃς ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ σκότους
καὶ μετέστησεν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ, ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν
ἀπολύτρωσιν, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν¹⁵ ·

ὃς ἐστὶν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου,

πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως,

ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα

ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,

τὰ ὄρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα,

¹²NA notes the words καὶ αἰτούμενοι in v. 9 are missing from Vaticanus and the Vulgate. They may have been omitted intentionally for stylistic reasons or accidentally through homoeoteleuton with the previous participle.

¹³Several relatively recent mss/correctors have ὑμας after περιπατῆσαι in v. 10. AGR may have been added for clarity. Later in v. 10, τῇ ἐπίγνωσει reads either ἐν τῇ ἐπίγνωσει or εἰς τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν depending on the mss. The shorter reading explains the presence of the two longer, more explicit ones.

¹⁴Εὐχαριστοῦντες in v. 12 has a καὶ before it, and ἀμα after it in one or two ancient mss/citations, not enough support to merit inclusion in the text of the critical editions. Several manuscripts add θεω or θεω καὶ before πατρὶ in v. 12. The mss support is stronger with the shorter reading. Specifying θεω is a natural explanation for a scribe to make. Vaticanus reads καλεσαντι καὶ ἱκανωσαντι instead of ἱκανωσαντι only while several other mss and citations read καλεσαντι alone. The relative rarity of ἱκανωσαντι would explain the rise of καλεσαντι, which would in turn explain the combined reading. After ἱκανωσαντι, the mss evidence is again divided between you/us readings. Metzger explains that the committee believed that “us” makes for smoother reading with v. 13, and therefore is more likely to have replaced “you” than vice versa.

¹⁵In verse 14, Vaticanus and the Coptic translation support the 2nd aorist form ἐσχομεν, not enough support to merit inclusion in the text of the critical editions. The phrase δια τοῦ ἁματοῦ αὐτοῦ is found in the best manuscripts of Ephesians 1:7, but it is missing here in both RP and the eclectic editions (contra NKJV). According to Metzger both internal and external evidence is weak.

εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες
εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι ·
τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται¹⁶ ·
καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων
καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν,
καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας ·
ὃς ἐστιν ἀρχή,
πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν,
ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων,¹⁷
ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι
καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν,
εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ,
[δι' αὐτοῦ] εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς
εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.¹⁸

Translation

For this reason we have also not stopped praying and making requests for you since the day we heard about you that you would be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and understanding caused by the Spirit so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, a manner pleasing to him in every respect: bearing fruit in every good work, increasing in the knowledge of God, being

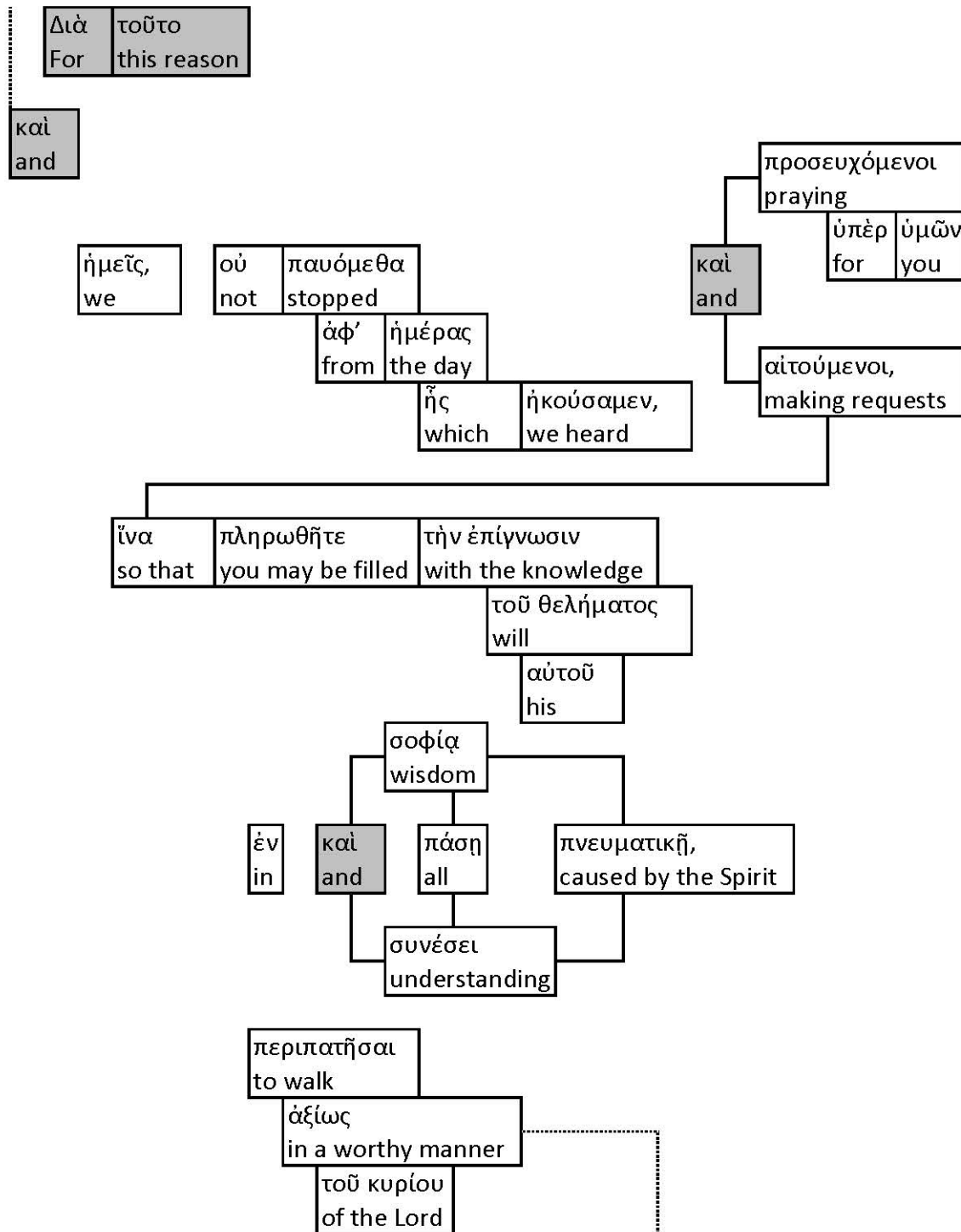
¹⁶The mss tradition preserves both the presence (especially RP) and the absence of the article in two places (before the prepositions ἐν and ἐπὶ) in verse 16, but neither external nor internal support is in their favor. Meaning is not affected either way. A single papyrus supports οτι πάντα instead of τὰ πάντα at the end of verse 16. The witness is old, but its reading is not widespread.

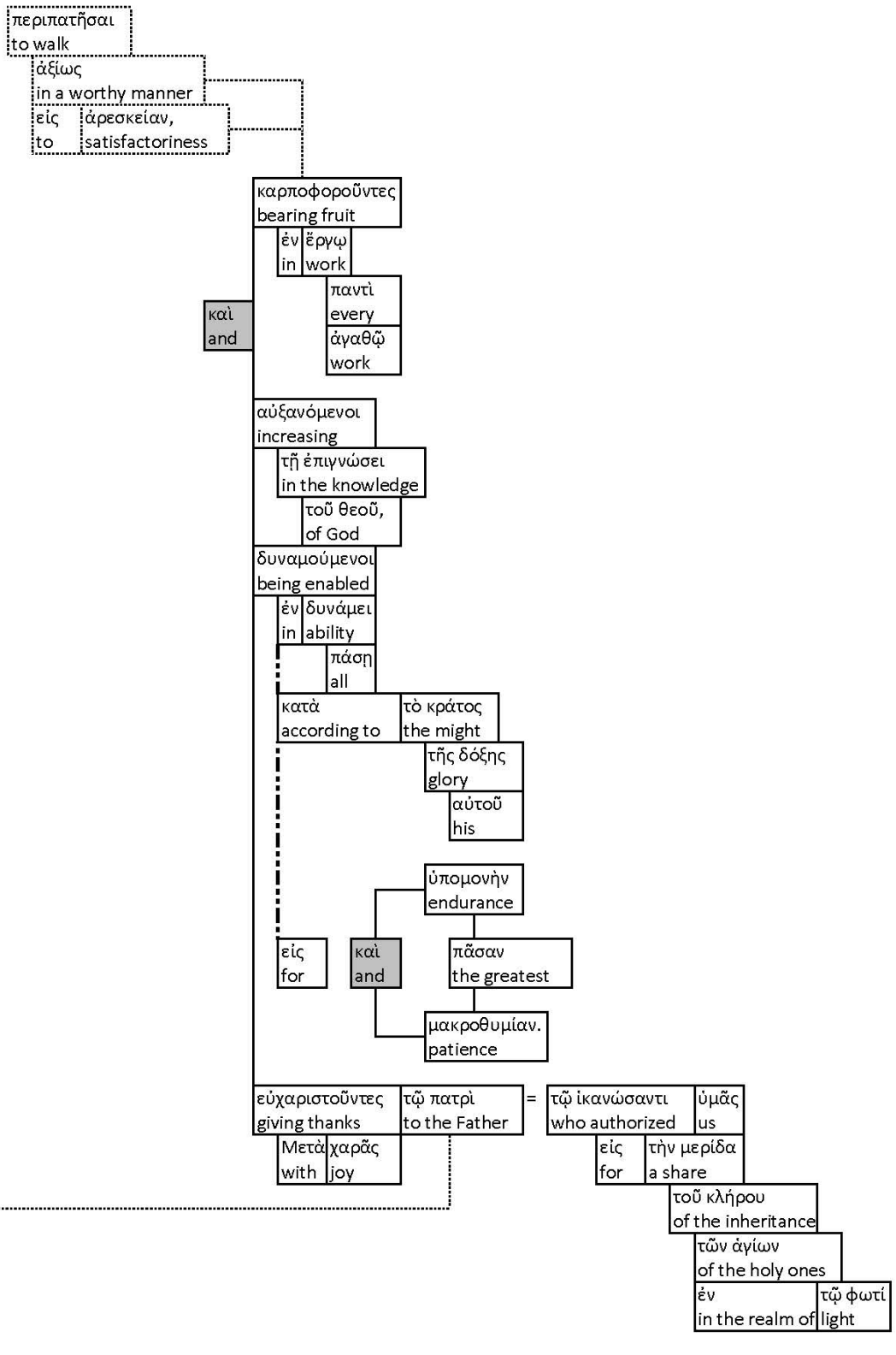
¹⁷In verse 18, the addition of the feminine demonstrative article, η, before ἀρχή has significant support from a papyrus and Vaticanus (so WH), but the consensus of critical editions have rejected the reading in favor of a more difficult but still well-supported one (NA²⁸, SBLGNT, RP). Also a few witnesses support the omission of ἐκ before τῶν νεκρῶν, but their support is insufficient for adoption in the critical texts (NA²⁸, SBLGNT, RP).

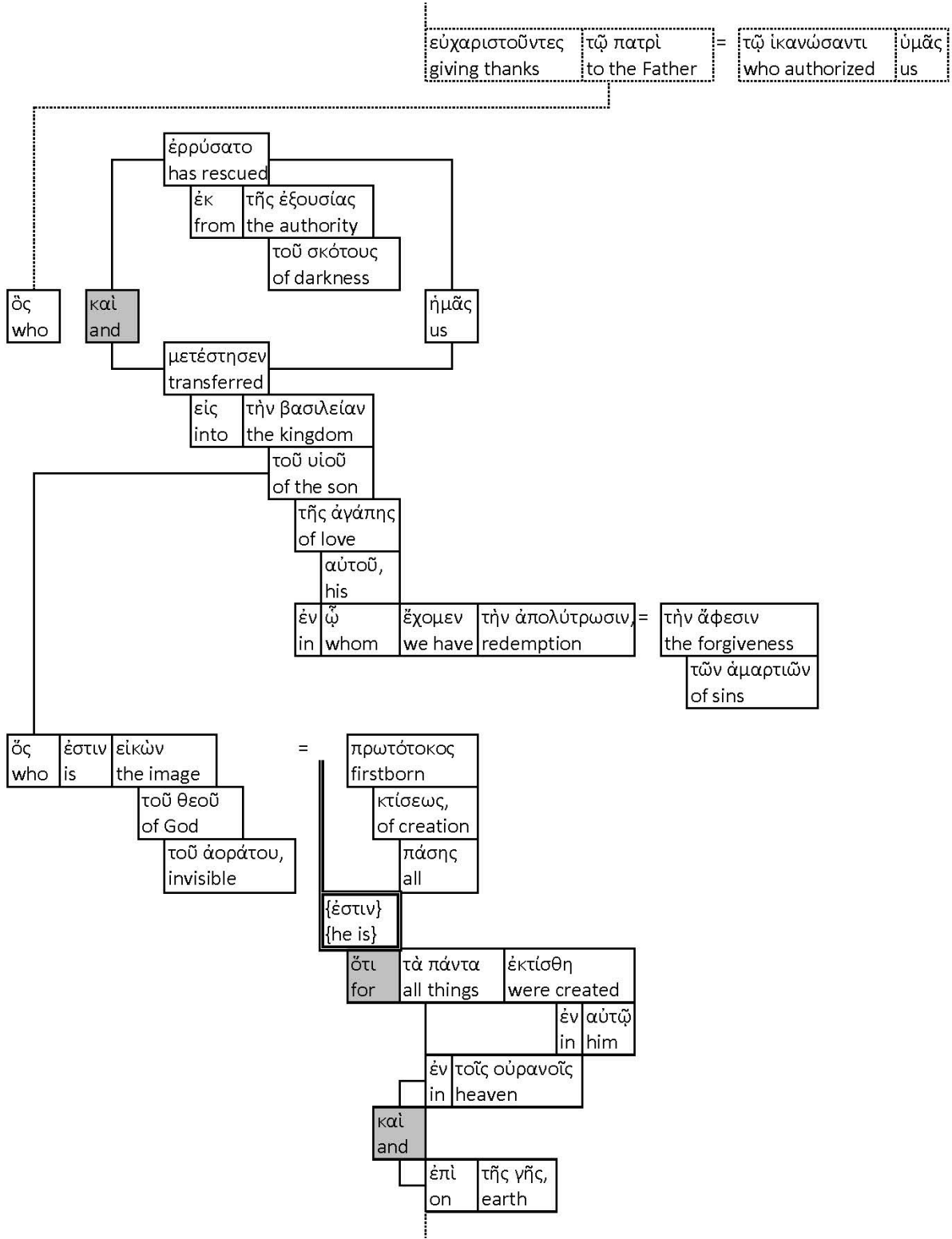
¹⁸Early and widespread support credits the inclusion of δι' αὐτοῦ in verse 20b, but Vaticanus and other significant witnesses omit it. Did these latter witnesses omit it because they had difficulty making sense of it? Or was it added accidentally perhaps due to the other two occurrences of the phrase in the context? Metzger's commentary includes it with a "C" rating, giving it tertiary certainty. NA²⁸ and SBLGNT include it, and the Reader's Greek NT (Zondervan) excludes it.

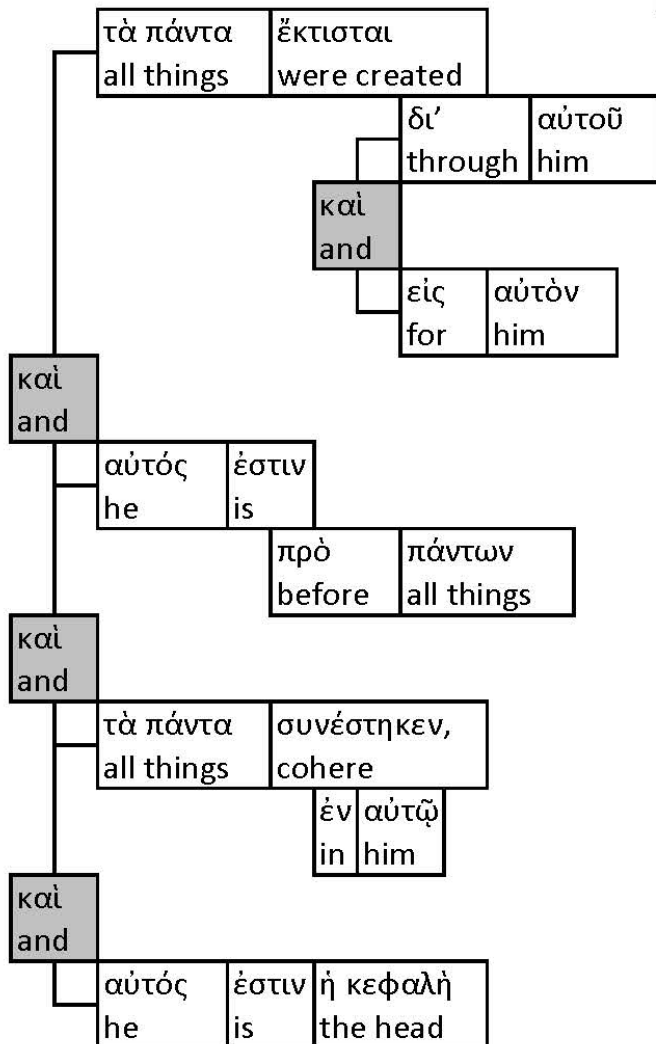
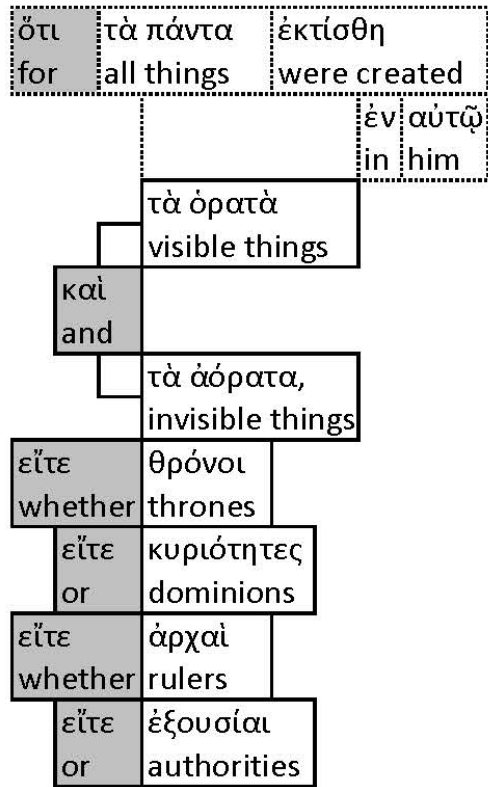
strengthened with the highest ability according to his glorious might for greatest endurance and patience, [Continued after Diagram.]

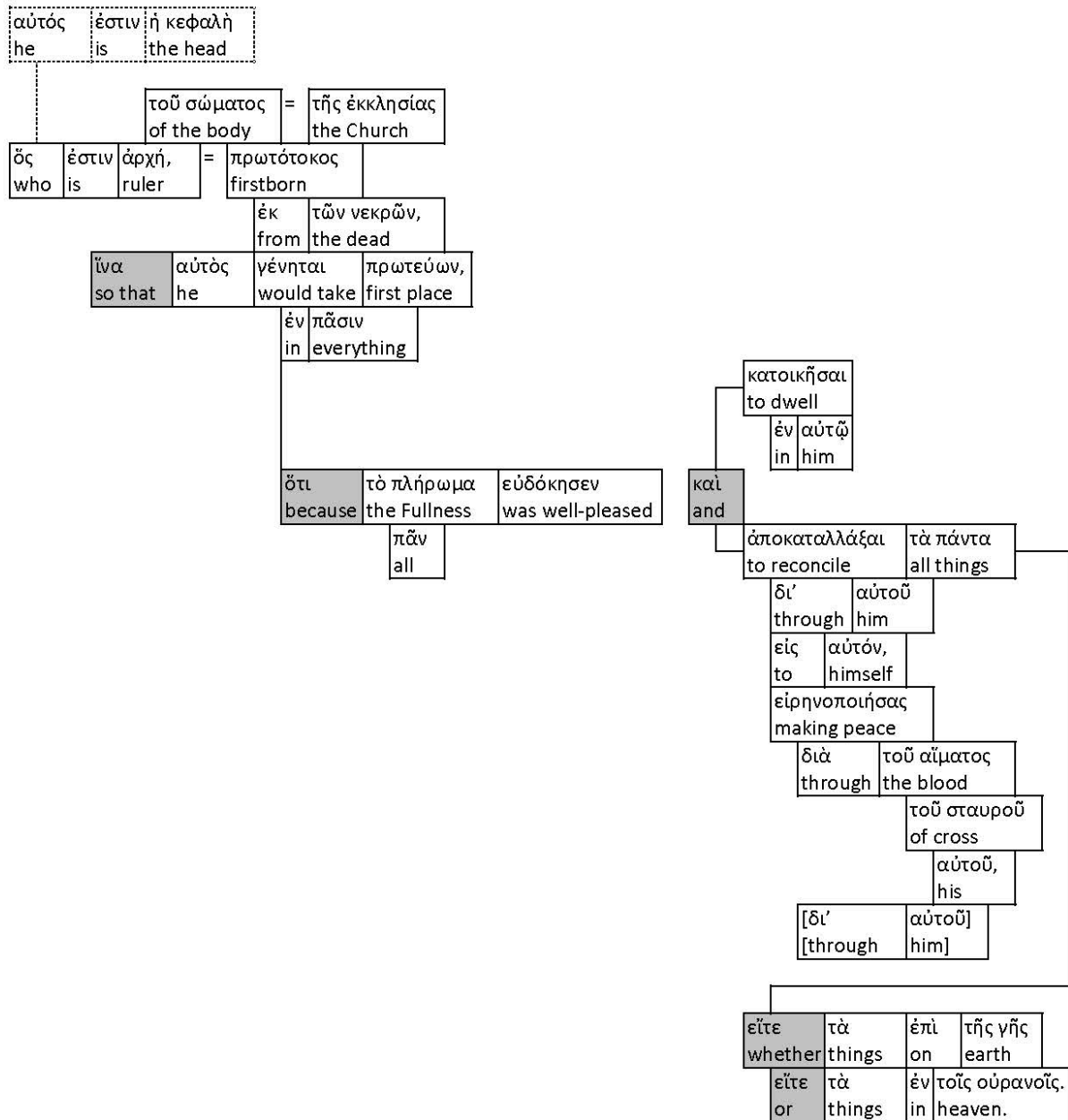
Diagram











giving thanks with joy to the Father who authorized us for a share of the inheritance with his holy people in the light, who rescued us from the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Who is the image of the invisible God,
 Firstborn over all creation,
 Because by him all things were created
 in heaven and on earth,

visible and invisible,
whether thrones or dominions,
whether rulers or authorities:
All things were created through him and for him.
And he is before all things
And all things cohere in him.
And he is the head of the Church body,
Who is the ruler
The firstborn from the dead,
so that he may have first place in everything,
because in him all the Fullness is pleased to dwell
And by him to reconcile all things to himself,
having made peace through the blood of his cross,
[by him,] whether things on the earth,
or things in heaven.

Comment

As Paul continues to report what he mentions before God regarding these Colossian believers, he shifts from thanksgiving to petition. In the face of the seduction of the worldly, philosophizing false teachers, Paul prays that the Colossians would have a kind of insight that comes from the Spirit, a wisdom that produces a life that is pleasing to the Lord. Paul then uses four participial phrases to describe what he means specifically by “walking worthy.” The fourth and final phrase, “and giving joyful thanks” leads Paul back to a Christ-centered hymn. Paul is praying that reverent, Christ-centered celebration would crowd out the solicitations of the false teachers. It is his desire that the Spirit would produce a wisdom that recognizes the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ which would produce endurance (especially endurance in sound doctrine), spiritual growth, and good works: a life well-pleasing to the Lord.

Filled with the Knowledge of His Will

The frequent use of this phrase to refer to the discovery of the will of God in the decision-making process of believers warrants some attention. We must be diligent in following Paul's flow of thought. It defies both common courtesy and biblical authority to make these words refer to whatever we wish. What is it specifically that Paul is praying for the Colossians?

As I was beginning to follow the Lord as a young person, I understood this to mean something like, "When a decision comes, I'll just know what to do *automatically*. I won't say the wrong thing, marry the wrong person, or make the wrong choice of vocation." I believe what I had in mind was something like a radio-controlled toy. I recently purchased one of these toys for one of my sons. The idea is that you stand in one place and use a controller to broadcast a weak radio signal. The vehicle remotely receives that signal and, in theory, does what you direct it to do. So I believed that texts like this referred to the Spirit remotely controlling individuals, causing them to make wise decisions in which they had an insignificant role. Spirit-filled Christians would consistently make the right decision in complex circumstances, not because they had thought carefully about the issue or because life experience had produced insight, but because the Spirit gave them the right *impulse*.

What is clear from this passage is that knowledge of God's will is indeed produced by the Spirit. This is the lexical force of the word πνευματικῆ which I have translated, "caused by the Spirit" above.¹⁹ But the Spirit produces that recognition of God's will by means of *wisdom* and *understanding*—that is to say, *not* by means of remotely implanted impulses.

Entire books of Scripture are dedicated to the pursuit of this Spirit-caused wisdom: Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and, of course, Proverbs, as well as many Psalms. This is the kind of wisdom that begins with the fear of the Lord (Prov 1:7), acknowledging the authority of his word (Ps 1:1). It includes taking

¹⁹So BDAG.

heed to the instruction of one's parents (Prov 23:22–25) and seeking guidance from “many advisors” (Prov 11:14). Far from automatic and impulsive, it comes only as we “search for it as for hidden treasure” (Prov 2:4).

Knowledge of God's will then is not the Spirit's implanting the impulses to make correct choices without careful consideration and reverent research. Instead it is the ability to discern the right path by applying the authority of the Scriptures to our own lives. The author of Hebrews points to a similar kind of wisdom, when he calls his audience to maturity: “Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil” (Heb 5:14).

This understanding of “the knowledge of God's will” fits the overall context where the Colossians needed to exercise discernment regarding the false doctrine that was being propagated in their midst: “The simple believe anything, but the prudent give thought to their steps” (Prov 14:15). Paul saw dire danger ahead for everyone who strayed from the true gospel of Christ, and so he prayed that they would be wise: “The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty” (Prov 22:3)!

Another support for this understanding of the phrase comes from a text in Ephesians where Paul uses similar terminology (Eph 5:15–20):

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit.

Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice several parallels between these two texts: (1) The believer's walk is under discussion. (2) Wisdom is necessary if that walk is going to be what it should be.

(3) The wise walk comes about in connection with grasping the Lord's will. (4)

The Spirit is at work to produce this kind of walk. (5) This kind of walk involves joyful thanksgiving. It stands to reason then when Paul talks about the Lord's will in these passages, then he has the same idea in mind. So what does Paul have in mind in Ephesians 5? In verses 3–13, Paul has been primarily discussing the futility of their previous way of life. In 5:19–6:9, Paul will discuss how Christians are to live as a community of believers and as households. Again knowing God's will is the ability to discern the right path by applying the authority of the Scriptures to our own lives.

Now, of course, choosing a spouse and choosing a vocation do involve discernment, but they also involve several unknowable factors. A godly person can choose a spouse who in the end becomes unfaithful; just ask Hosea and Job. So while the kind of knowledge of God's will discussed in this passage is helpful in making those life decisions, there are no guarantees, no magic formulas that will keep us safe and happy in the comforts of this life. Instead, what is offered to us is the Spirit-wrought ability to recognize that Christ is supreme and sufficient—even when the best laid plans go down in flames.

Another alternative understanding of wisdom and knowledge would come more directly from the Colossians' own context. Paul wants the Colossians to have wisdom, but it is not the appearance of wisdom offered by the philosophers (Col 2:23). We know from the Corinthian correspondence that Paul's world was enamored with wisdom (1 Cor 1–2). We do not know, however, specifically how the false teachers aligned themselves with the philosophies of the day. Whatever the philosophical school, it was compatible with Jewish dietary restrictions (taken out of their redemptive historical context) and *incompatible* with the gospel of Christ. The context of the entire letter indicates that the Spirit would be producing a kind of wisdom found only in Christ “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3).

Walk in a Manner Worthy of the Lord

It is important that we do not read into this phrase a blurring of the Creator/creature relationship. If we understand the phrase to mean that our lives could lived in such a way that the exact value or worth of God the Creator is replicated by the creature then we have vastly misunderstood Paul. Paul echoes the rest of Scripture in making an absolute divide between the Creator and the creature (Rom 11:33–36, 1 Cor 8:4–6). It is possible to imagine other, more orthodox ways of understanding this phrase. Is Paul praying for that perfection for which we all strive in the present but which we will not have until we see Christ face to face (1 John 1:8–10, 3:1–3)? Or is he praying for the kind of stable growth which we can attain as Christians in this world (Heb 5:11–15)? While it is evident (and glorious) that we will on that Day live more worthily than we do now, I believe the best way to determine what Paul has in mind is to look at the explanation he himself gives in this context. The following four participles point to the steady growth of a mature and well-rooted tree. He is praying that their lives would do God credit in the public sphere (“bear fruit in every good work” v. 10b) and that they would live out of a joyful consciousness of his worthiness (v. 12–20).

A Manner Pleasing to Him in Every Respect

This phrase is in apposition to the previous phrase, so it states the same idea in different words. Similarly, we should understand it in the context of the explanatory participles to follow. An unfortunate ambiguity exists in English where we can sometimes use the word *please* as a synonym for *satisfy*. That is to say, we may be tempted to understand this phrase to refer to a satisfaction or appeasement for God’s anger against our sin. But as the context indicates, the way in which the Colossians would please the Lord was by thanking him for redemption (v. 14). Our confidence in the sufficiency of Christ’s blood leads to celebration of a finished work, not a laboring to please an angry God.

Instead of the idea of appeasement, we should remember that God delights in his works because, and to the extent that, they reflect his glory. Take care to grasp the significance of what Paul is doing here: Paul is praying that God work in the Colossians in such a way that they live a life that is pleasing to God. This is remarkably close to what Augustine would pray several centuries later: "Give what you command, and command what you will."²⁰ God produces in us that which pleases him, and firmly grasping that idea results in prayer. John Piper explains:

*God has great pleasure in obedience. He beams like any father would when his children are courageous because they know their daddy's strong arm is behind them. He takes pleasure in us when our obedience shows that we put our treasure in him and not the enticements of sin. He delights in the meekness and humility of our submission that loves to make a name for God and not for man. He rejoices over the resting of our souls in the sufficiency of his wisdom. And he exults over us with singing when we enthrone his will as more precious than all the ways of the world.*²¹

This kind of obedience builds up to a life over which God will one day say, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matt 25:21).

Bearing Fruit in Every Good Work

The four participles are parallel, each describing what a worthy, God-pleasing life looks like. It is important to remember that good works are viewed as positive contributions, not merely negative abstentions. For instance, Paul is praying not merely that the Colossians would eschew lying (Col 3:9); he is praying that they would also "teach and admonish one another with all wisdom" (Col 3:16). A God-

²⁰Confessions Book 10, Chapter 29

²¹The Pleasures of God, KL 4555–4560.

pleasing life does not merely say, “No,” to what is wrong. It says, “Yes,” to what is good. It makes a productive addition, a *good work*. It replaces darkness with light.

Growing in the Knowledge of God

Knowing God is a relationship with God based on revealed truth about God. Neither side of that definition is negotiable. Claiming a relationship with God without pursuing truth about God is meaningless. Possessing truth about God without enjoying a relationship with him is worthless. Part of Paul’s purpose in this letter is exulting in facts about Christ so that the Colossians would remain faithful to Christ. Worthwhile theology produces love and loyalty.

Greatest Endurance and Patience, Giving Thanks

The final two participles highlight two desperate needs that the Colossians had in the face of false teaching. First, they needed to stick with Christ, to continue walking with him; they needed endurance. In the face of social pressure (Col 2:16), perseverance in the faith requires God-given endurance, and Paul’s terminology (πᾶσαν ὑπομονήν, greatest endurance)²² is emphatic and superlative.

But second, Paul’s desire is not simply that they would stick with Christ by sheer grit. The solution to resisting the onslaught of the false teachers is, in part, giving thanks. Worshipful celebration of the doctrine of Christ’s person and work robs false teaching of its seductive power. So Paul begins an exposition of what God has done in sending Christ to save them.

Share of the Inheritance...the Kingdom of His Beloved Son

The thanksgiving that Paul recommends is not a simple “count your many blessings” sort of thanksgiving. While it is absolutely essential and thoroughly Pauline to be “always giving thanks to God the Father for everything” (Eph 5:30), Paul’s point here is focused more narrowly on thanking God for the share we *will have* “in the realm of light” (ἐν τῷ φωτί). The Father has authorized our entrance

²²So BDAG.

into the promised glories of his own victory over the powers of darkness. Paul's focus is on the future: remember, hope is the root of faith and love.

Our inheritance is certain because we have been authorized for it by God. Thus we even now may be said to *have been* transferred into the kingdom of Christ. In the teaching of Jesus, it is the “people of the kingdom” who enter the kingdom (Matt 13:36–43). We are already people of the kingdom though we have not yet entered into our share of the inheritance.

Firstborn Over All Creation

The word translated *firstborn* (πρωτότοκος) can have two meanings according to the standard Greek dictionary. First, the child who was literally born first in the family (e.g., 1 Sam 8:2, LXX). The other meaning is figurative. Because the literal firstborn was the one in charge, “the man of the house,” when the father was absent, the term came to refer to a position of supreme authority. For instance, God promised that David would be “the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth” (Ps 89:27, ESV=Ps 88:28 LXX). David, of course, was not the literal firstborn; 1 Sam 17:13 makes that clear enough when it gives Eliab that honor. However, God was promising to make him firstborn of the kings, the highest member of that group. The point here is that Jesus was not literally the first creation; he would enter creation only 2,000 years ago. Nevertheless he is the king over creation. This is because, according to the text, every created thing of every sort—heavenly, earthly, visible, invisible—everything is created by him, through him, and for him.

In Him All the Fullness Is Pleased to Dwell

The subject of the verb “is pleased” is difficult to identify. Grammatically, it appears to be “all the Fullness” (πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα). Verse 20 makes clear that this “Fullness” is the One who planned to reconcile all things to himself through the cross of Christ. Thus God the Father seems to be in view. This suggestion is confirmed by Col 2:9, which uses similar terminology, but with an important

addition: “For in Christ all the fullness (πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα) of *the Deity* lives in bodily form” (NIV, emphasis added).

Reconciles All Things to Himself

Origen of the third century AD evidently understood this phrase in an absolute sense. That is to say, he taught that the entire universe—including demons and Satan himself—would one day live in a friendly relationship to God. This is an outright denial of the eternity of conscious suffering for the damned, which Jesus and the book of Revelation both clearly teach (Mark 9:48, Rev 20:10, 21:8). Are there any other ways to understand this text?

Another option takes notice of the fact that it is things in heaven and things on earth that are reconciled. Each of these spheres are understood to be a metonymy of sorts, representing God in the sphere of heaven and mankind in the sphere of earth. This would mean that Paul is saying that God (with his attendant hosts) and mankind (with his cursed dwelling place) are reconciled, made friends, through the cross. This is certainly a more orthodox option than the previous version, and it may be the simplest understanding. Yet, while this view removes the difficulty of seeing Satan as returning to God, one may still wonder in what sense it is true that all of mankind are reconciled. It is clear from the texts cited above that some will finally perish in enmity with God and suffer the second death.

A third option takes note of the same phrase and compares it to a similar text in Philippians 2. Here in Colossians, Paul is discussing the reconciliation of all things. In Philippians 2, he speaks of the universal recognition of Christ’s lordship. At some point, “every knee will bow.” In that context, Paul enumerates three spheres in which the recognition will take place: “in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (2:10, NIV). From this point of contrast, the line of reasoning points out that angels and men who are in rebellion against God will still have to acknowledge Christ’s lordship, albeit from “under the earth” (i.e., in a place of punishment). On the other hand, reconciliation to God only occurs in the top two

spheres, “whether things on the earth, or things in heaven.” This solution solves both the question of the destiny of unrepentantly rebellious men and angels, but it raises its own question. The difficulty with this solution is that one wonders if the same logic can be applied a few verses earlier where Paul says, “all things were created in heaven and on earth” (1:16). Paul does not mention “under the earth” there; are we to conclude that all things *except* the realm under the earth were created by Christ? We likely would never have come to such an interpretation if it had not been for the difficulties we had with the later verse. Another option would be to understand the word “reconcile” in some other way than coming to live in mutual friendship with God. For instance, when a financier helps a business set its money manners in order, he is said to have *reconciled* their accounts. Several alternative understandings have been suggested: (1) Everything will be put into its proper place: the saints in glory and the damned in darkness. (2) Everything is *potentially* set in a friendly relationship contingent upon some decision made by the creature. (3) Everything enjoys some sort of better relationship with God, though not everyone is fully on friendly terms with him. (That is, everyone receives a measure of common grace.) The difficulty with these suggestions is that none of them derive their understanding of the infinitive *to reconcile* (ἀποκαταλλάξαι) from the surrounding context. Paul tells us what he means by giving an explanatory participle, “making peace” (εἰρηνοποιήσας). The same word is repeated in v. 22 where it is the antonym or solution to the problem of estrangement and enmity. Verse 23 further makes clear that this reconciliation has been granted only to believers who show it through persevering in the faith.

While none of these interpretations are without difficulties, verse 23 leads me to believe that the second option, the option of metonymy is the most likely. The Lamb of God came to take away the sin of the world, and indeed the world will one day be sin free. Heaven and earth will one day be entirely reconciled. Every human being who held fast to the teaching of the gospel will be one of that number. And this is not merely due to the sheer decree and immovable plan of

God, but because God was pleased to reconcile all these things to himself through the blood of the cross of the Son he loves.

Principles

The big idea of this text is, “Paul prayed for the Colossians that Spirit-produced wisdom would guide them into God-pleasing and joyful perseverance.”

The enduring principles from this passage are numerous; these are only a few:

Application

What can you do in the next six weeks that will help you incorporate lessons from this model prayer into your prayer life?

What will you do this year to develop your ability to discern the right path from the wrong path?

What can you do in the next five years to help those you serve to develop discernment?

Who is suffering a temptation to stray from the faith among the congregation you serve? Who needs “the greatest endurance and patience”? Is there any way you can serve them today? Before the month is out?

What can you do today to bring theology and celebration together?

3.1 Paul Introduces the Warning

We have come to the beginning of the heart of the letter, the exhortation to stand firm in the faith, to stay true to the true gospel.

Position in the Letter

3. Paul exhorts the Colossians not to shift away from the gospel (Col 1:21–2:23).

3.1. Paul introduces the warning: You have been reconciled, if you remain steadfast in the gospel (Col 1:21–23).

3.2. Paul explains his gospel ministry (Col 1:24–2:5).

3.3. Paul exhorts the Colossians to continue in the gospel (Col 2:6–23).

Text

²¹Καὶ ὑμᾶς ποτε ὄντας ἀπηλλοτριωμένους καὶ ἐχθροὺς τῇ διανοίᾳ ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς πονηροῖς, ²²νυνὶ δὲ ἀποκατήλλαξεν ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου παραστῆσαι ὑμᾶς ἀγίους καὶ ἀμώμους καὶ ἀνεγκλήτους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ,²³ ²³εἴ γε ἐπιμένετε τῇ πίστει τεθεμελιωμένοι καὶ ἐδραῖοι καὶ μὴ μετακινούμενοι ἀπὸ τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ εὐαγγελίου οὗ ἠκούσατε, τοῦ κηρυχθέντος ἐν πάσῃ κτίσει τῇ ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν, οὗ ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ Παῦλος διάκονος.²⁴

²³A couple of important witnesses, namely Vaticanus and Papyrus 46, support the reading, “you were reconciled” (ἀποκατηλλάγητε, see SBLGNT) in verse 12. With this support and the fact that it is the more difficult reading syntactically, Metzger goes against the UBS⁴/ NA²⁸ committee to support this reading in his commentary. The UBS⁴ and NA²⁸ texts, however, follow the preponderance of mss evidence. Moo concludes: “This may be one of those occasions when a reading is too difficult to be accepted; the reading assumed in the English translations should probably be retained” (ad loc.).

Codexes Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus among others preserve αὐτοῦ after θανάτου. However, none of the critical editions have seen it as worth including in their text. It is longer, smoother, and may be a duplication of the same pronoun after σαρκὸς.

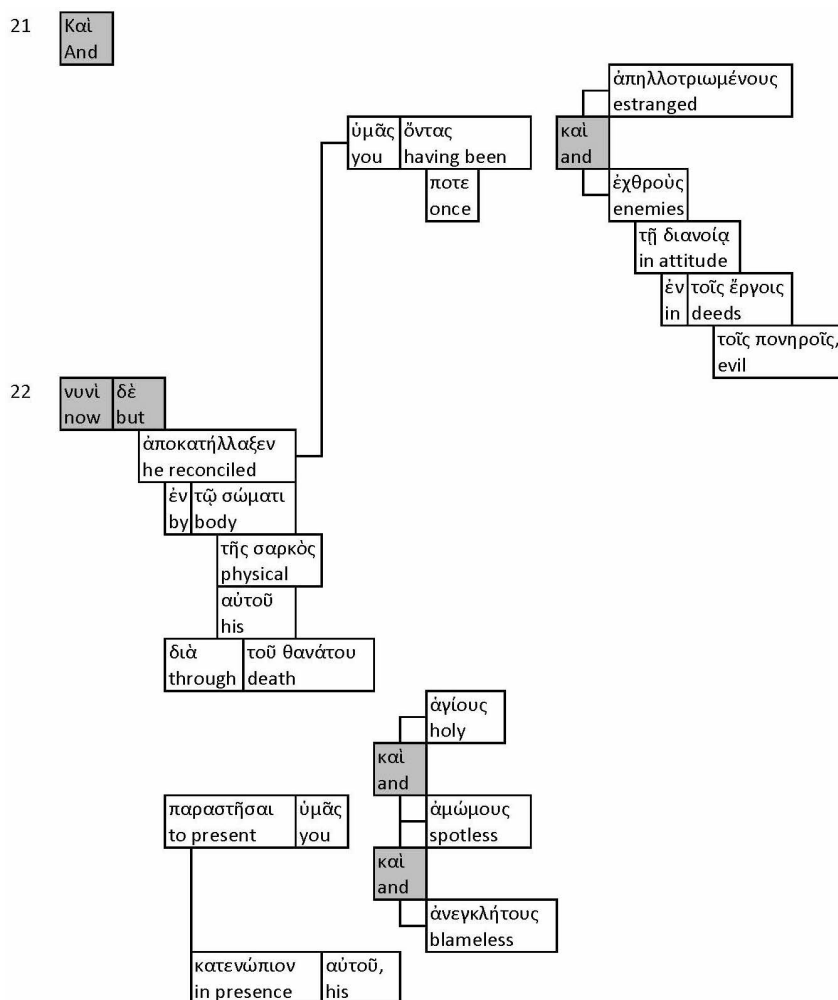
²⁴Papyrus 46 apparently omits the second καὶ in verse 23, but no other major witness supports this reading.

The RP preserves the article τῇ before κτίσει, but the older mss evidence does not support it.

Translation

²¹You also who were once estranged and enemies in attitude by evil works, ²²but now he has reconciled {you} by his physical body through death to present you holy, spotless, and blameless in his presence—²³if indeed you remain steadfast in the faith having been set on the foundation and firm, without shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven,²⁵ of which I, Paul, have become a minister.

Diagram



The NA²⁸ notes several alternatives for the reading “minister” (διάκονος), but all of them are longer and appear to be secondary; none of them are as well-supported in the bulk of mss.

²⁵This phrase was addressed in connection with the parallel in Col 1:6.

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ἀποκατήλλαξεν	ὑμᾶς
he reconciled	you

23

εἰ	γε	ἐπιμένετε			
if	indeed	you remain steadfast			
		τῇ πίστει			
		in the faith			
		τεθεμελιωμένοι			
		having been set on the foundation			
καὶ					
and					
		ἑδραῖοι			
		firm			
καὶ					
and					
	μὴ	μετακινούμενοι			
	not	shifting			
	ἀπὸ	τῆς ἐλπίδος			
	from	the hope			
		τοῦ εὐαγγελίου			
		of the gospel			
	οὗ	ἠκούσατε,			
	which	you heard			
		τοῦ κηρυχθέντος			
		having-been-proclaimed			
	ἐν	κτίσει			
	in	creation			
		πάσῃ			
		all			
	τῇ ὑπὸ	τὸν οὐρανόν,			
	under	heaven			
οὗ	ἐγὼ	=	Παῦλος	ἔγενόμην	διάκονος.
of which	I	=	Paul	became	a minister

Comment

Paul begins a new sentence applying the universal reconciliation mentioned in the previous verses specifically to his hearers. As far as syntax is concerned, the emphasis in this paragraph has clearly shifted from the supremacy of Christ to the position of the letter's hearers. Christ is the grammatical subject of the main verb of this long sentence, but the emphasis of the word order has shifted to the Paul's hearers. Christ reconciled *them*, if *they* remain steadfast. This shift in emphasis substantiates my decision to mark off here the beginning of Paul's main

exhortation section. After beginning on primarily affirmative footing, he now transitions to instructing them on how to deal with the false teaching.

He Has Reconciled...If Indeed You Remain Steadfast

The terms of this paragraph are relatively straightforward—except for those phrases which make the most difference to one’s understanding of the letter as a whole. This sentence is one of many sections of the NT called “warning passages.” Several approaches to these warning passages have been followed:

- (1) Some interpreters understand warning passages in terms of true Christians losing their Christianity. A Christian may be genuinely converted, truly reconciled to God, and then become estranged again to him. This text however, does not say, “You will be reconciled, if” or “You will continue to be reconciled, if.” Paul says, “You have been reconciled, if.” So those who seek support for such a view will have to look elsewhere.
- (2) Others take warning passages to refer, not to the loss of salvation, but to the loss of reward. A Christian who is genuinely converted, truly reconciled to God, may never become estranged to him again. However, he may lose significant eternal reward, if he fails to live a life worthy of the Lord. I do believe that the NT teaches us to seek reward in heaven (See, e.g., the Sermon on the Mount); therefore, the converse must also be true: loss of reward should motivate Christians to good works. However, *reconciliation* not reward is at stake in this text.
- (3) Another group take warning passages as merely hypothetical. A Christian who is genuinely converted, truly reconciled to God, may never become estranged to him again. However, if a genuine believer were to (impossibly) turn from the faith, then he would indeed lose his reconciliation to God. Sometimes added to this explanation is the idea that such warnings actually serve as part of the reason that it is impossible for believers to turn from the faith. In other words, the warnings are a means

to perseverance. While it is certainly true that the warning passages are a means to the perseverance of the truly converted, Paul's logic in this present passage is not one that warns of loss of reconciliation, hypothetical or not.

(4) Instead, Paul is warning the church at Colosse the following way: (a) All and only those who have been reconciled to God through the blood of Christ have a God-wrought, persevering faith rooted in and springing from the hope announced in the gospel (cf. Col 1:4–5). (b) Therefore, if you persevere in the faith, it is because you already have been reconciled to God. Paul, however, has also left the implication clear that a failure to persevere in the faith would demonstrate that the individual—perhaps even a full member of the church of Colosse, hearing Paul's letter—was never actually reconciled to God in the first place. Despite all initial appearances to the contrary, he was estranged from God; he was God's enemy the entire time. As Jesus will say on the last day to many who have performed miracles in his name but failed to heed his teaching, "I *never* knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (Matt 7:23, NIV, emphasis added).²⁶

Paul has set out the beauty of the work of God in Christ. This is the glorious story of a rebellious and miserable world finding peace and restoration through the substitutionary death of an innocent man whose sacrifice was of infinite value because he was no mere man, he was also the Creator of the universe and the goal of all creation. However, the Colossians could only see themselves as part of this restoration if they were persevering in the hope-filled faith announced in the gospel.

²⁶On my reading, this is also how the logic of the warnings in Hebrews works as well, e.g., "We *have come* to share in Christ, if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first" (Heb 3:14, NIV, emphasis added).

Principles

Paul's big idea in this sentence is, "You too have been included in God's mission of bringing the earth from enmity to friendship with him by the cross, but this is only the case if you stay true to Christian orthodoxy."

Application

Who do you know who will be tempted to follow another gospel this week? Do they understand the consequences of the decision they are making? How can you pray for them? How can you help them stay firm?

What means does God give his under-shepherds to keep the flock from straying?
What plans do you have for using those means this year?

3.2 Paul explains his gospel ministry (Col 1:24–2:5).

Paul outlines his special calling to the Gentiles and his particular purpose in writing this letter. His calling is to present everyone complete in Christ, and his purpose is to ensure that this happens by warning them not to be deceived by the false teaching.

Position in the Letter

3. Paul exhorts the Colossians not to shift away from the gospel (Col 1:21–2:23).

3.1. Paul introduces the warning: You have been reconciled, if you remain steadfast in the gospel (Col 1:21–23).

3.2. Paul explains his gospel ministry (Col 1:24–2:5).

3.2.1. Paul explains his ministry in general (Col 1:24–1:29).

3.2.2. Paul explains the ministry of this letter (Col 2:1–5).

3.3. Paul exhorts the Colossians to continue in the gospel (Col 2:6–23).

Text

²⁴Νῦν χαίρω ἐν τοῖς παθήμασιν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ ἀνταναπληρῶ τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου ὑπὲρ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ, ὃ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐκκλησία,²⁷ ²⁵ἧς ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ διάκονος κατὰ τὴν οἰκονομίαν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν δοθεῖσάν μοι εἰς ὑμᾶς πληρῶσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, ²⁶τὸ μυστήριον τὸ ἀποκεκρυμμένον ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν γενεῶν — νῦν δὲ ἐφανερώθη τοῖς ἁγίοις αὐτοῦ, ²⁷οἷς ἠθέλησεν ὁ θεὸς γνωρίσαι τί τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης τοῦ μυστηρίου τούτου ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, ὃ ἐστὶν Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν, ἡ ἐλπίς τῆς δόξης²⁸ · ²⁸ὃν ἡμεῖς καταγγέλλομεν νουθετοῦντες πάντα ἄνθρωπον καὶ διδάσκοντες πάντα ἄνθρωπον ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ, ἵνα παραστήσωμεν πάντα ἄνθρωπον τέλειον ἐν Χριστῷ²⁹ · ²⁹εἰς ὃ καὶ κοπιῶ ἀγωνιζόμενος κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐνεργουμένην ἐν ἐμοὶ ἐν δυνάμει.

²⁷A few mss and a corrector add μου after παθήμασιν. As a clarification, however, it is unlikely to be original.

²⁸P46 omits τῆς δόξης between τὸ πλοῦτος and τοῦ μυστηρίου. The evidence is old, but not widespread, and thus none of the critical editions adopt it. τούτου after τοῦ μυστηρίου is replaced by του θεου in several witnesses and by του alone in Sinaiticus. The phrase τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ θεοῦ does occur in Col 2:2, so it is possible a duplication of that phrase occurred by fault of hearing or memory. Evidence for ος ἐστὶν Χριστὸς instead of ὃ ἐστὶν Χριστὸς is not inconsiderable, but the more difficult reading has evidence at least as good (contra RP).

²⁹Several witnesses omit πάντα ἄνθρωπον, but the preponderance of mss evidence includes it, probably meaning that omission is due to the successive repetitions of the same phrase in this short space. The preponderance of evidence also indicates that the Ἰησοῦ after τέλειον ἐν Χριστῷ in the RP is not original.

^{2:1}Θέλω γὰρ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι ἡλίκον ἀγῶνα ἔχω ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ τῶν ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ καὶ ὅσοι οὐχ ἐόρακαν τὸ πρόσωπόν μου ἐν σαρκί,³⁰ ²ἵνα παρακληθῶσιν αἱ καρδία αὐτῶν συμβιβασθέντες ἐν ἀγάπῃ καὶ εἰς πᾶν πλοῦτος τῆς πληροφορίας τῆς συνέσεως, εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ θεοῦ, Χριστοῦ,³¹ ³ἐν ᾧ εἰσιν πάντες οἱ θησαυροὶ τῆς σοφίας καὶ γνώσεως ἀπόκρυφοι.³² ⁴Τοῦτο λέγω, ἵνα μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς παραλογίζεται ἐν πιθανολογίᾳ.³³ ⁵εἰ γὰρ καὶ τῇ σαρκὶ ἄπειμι, ἀλλὰ τῷ πνεύματι σὺν ὑμῖν εἰμι, χαίρων καὶ βλέπων ὑμῶν τὴν τάξιν καὶ τὸ στερέωμα τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν πίστεως ὑμῶν.

Translation

²⁴Now I rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf, and I fill up what is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh on behalf of his body, which is the church. ²⁵I have become a minister of this church according to my God-given administration to bring the preaching of the word of God to you to completion,³⁴ ²⁶the mystery which has been hidden from ages and generations—but has now been revealed to his holy people, ²⁷to whom God desired to make known among the nations what are the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ among you, the hope of glory. ²⁸We ourselves proclaim him admonishing every man and teaching every man with deepest wisdom so that we may present every man complete in

³⁰RP has ἔχω περὶ ὑμῶν instead of ἔχω ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, but widespread and older evidence supports NA²⁸. A few mss, the Vulgate, and one Syriac translation support the addition of καὶ τῶν ἐν Ἱεραπολὶ after τῶν ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ. The NA²⁸ editors tie this to Col 4:13 where Hierapolis is mentioned. The evidence is not strong. ³¹NA²⁸ records witnesses for several different forms for the participle συμβιβασθέντες, one of which was adopted by RP. The more widespread and older evidence sides with the NA²⁸ reading. Each of the other versions match another nearby ending. A few mss omit the καὶ of ἐν ἀγάπῃ καὶ εἰς πᾶν πλοῦτος, but the reading is not well-supported enough to find its way into any of the critical editions. Tregelles and RP represent various readings of the phrase πᾶν πλοῦτος. Textual evidence is in favor of the NA²⁸ reading. The mss traditions preserve a host of readings for the phrase τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ θεοῦ, Χριστοῦ. Metzger's explanation is that the NA²⁸ text (supported by Vaticanus and P46 as well as the Vulgate among others) appeared to copyists to need clarification.

³²The RP among other witnesses have an article, τῆς, for γνώσεως, but the more abrupt reading is better supported among the mss.

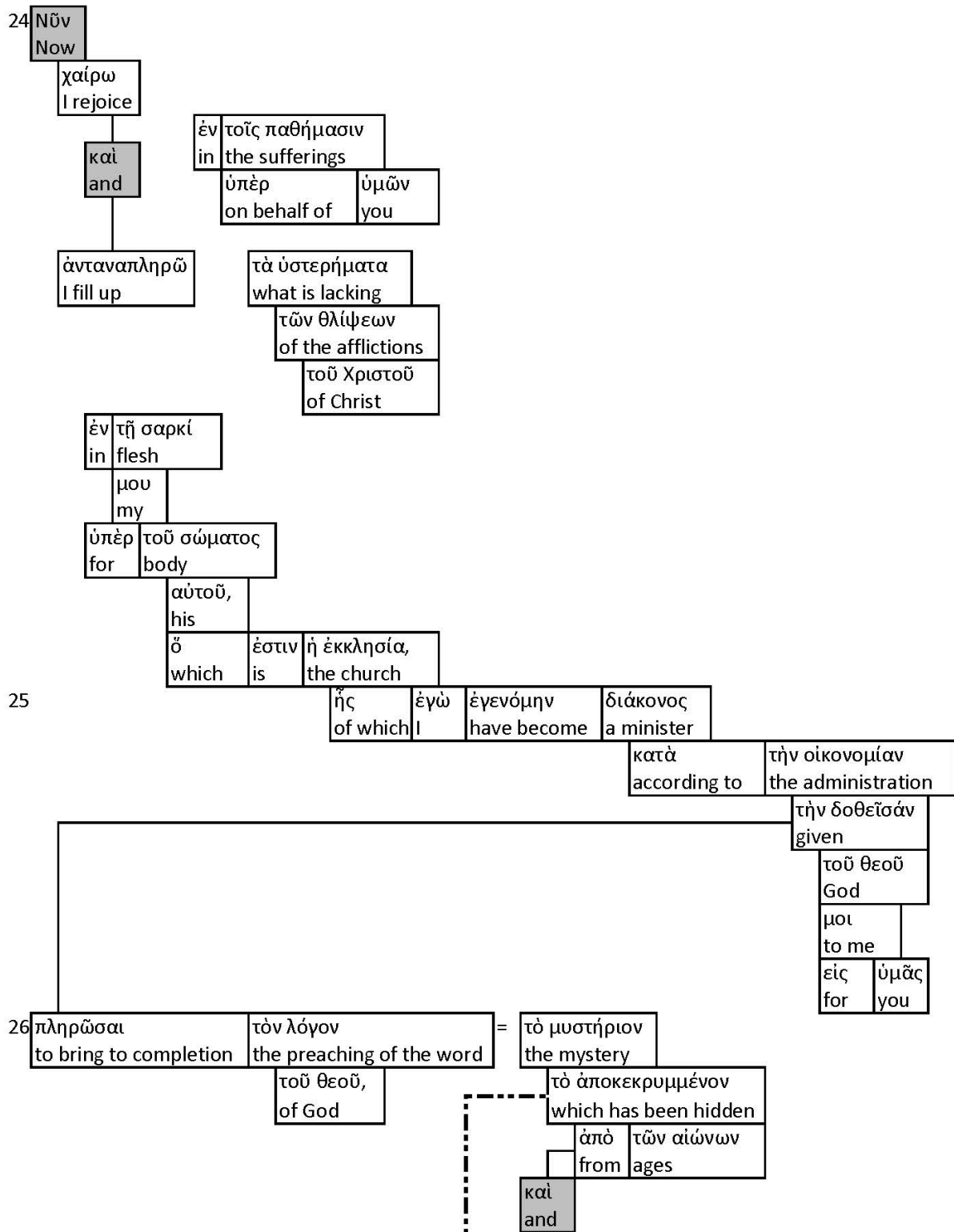
³³Evidence for a δε after Τοῦτο includes Alexandrinus and Byz, but the evidence against it is stronger still. RP has μη τις instead of μηδεὶς between ἵνα and ὑμᾶς. Widespread and older evidence supports the NA²⁸. Pronunciation and meaning would have been similar in any case.

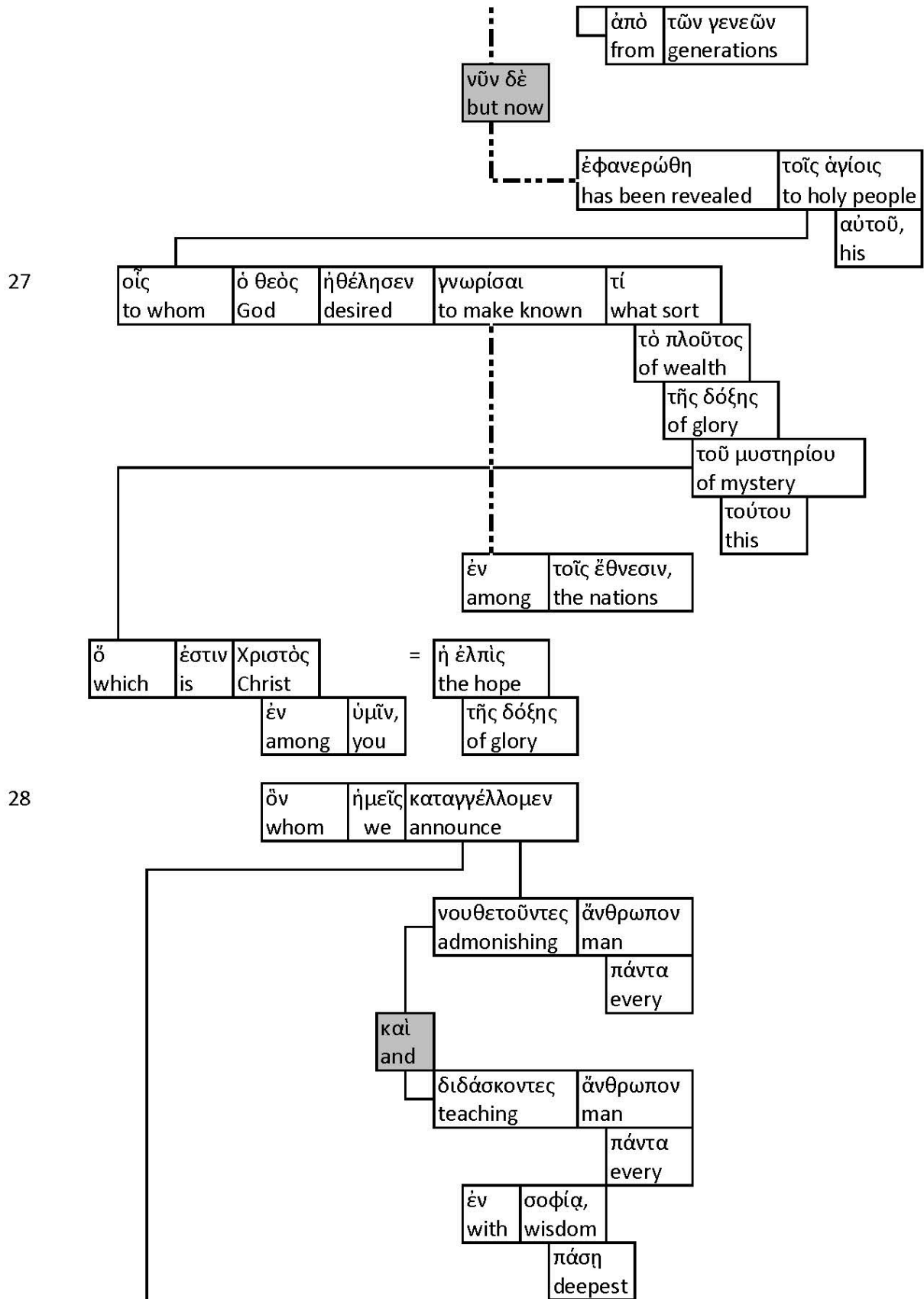
³⁴So BDAG, cf. Rom 15:19.

Christ. ²⁹To this end, I labor, striving according to all his energy which Christ with his ability works within me.

^{2:1}For I want you to know how great an struggle I have for you and for those in Laodicea and for whoever has not seen my face in the flesh. ²I strive so that their hearts having been bound together by love may also be encouraged toward the great riches of assurance, such as understanding brings, to a knowledge of God's mystery, namely Christ, ³in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. ⁴This I say so that not one of you will be deceived by fine-sounding but specious arguments. For if I am also absent in the flesh, I am with you in Spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

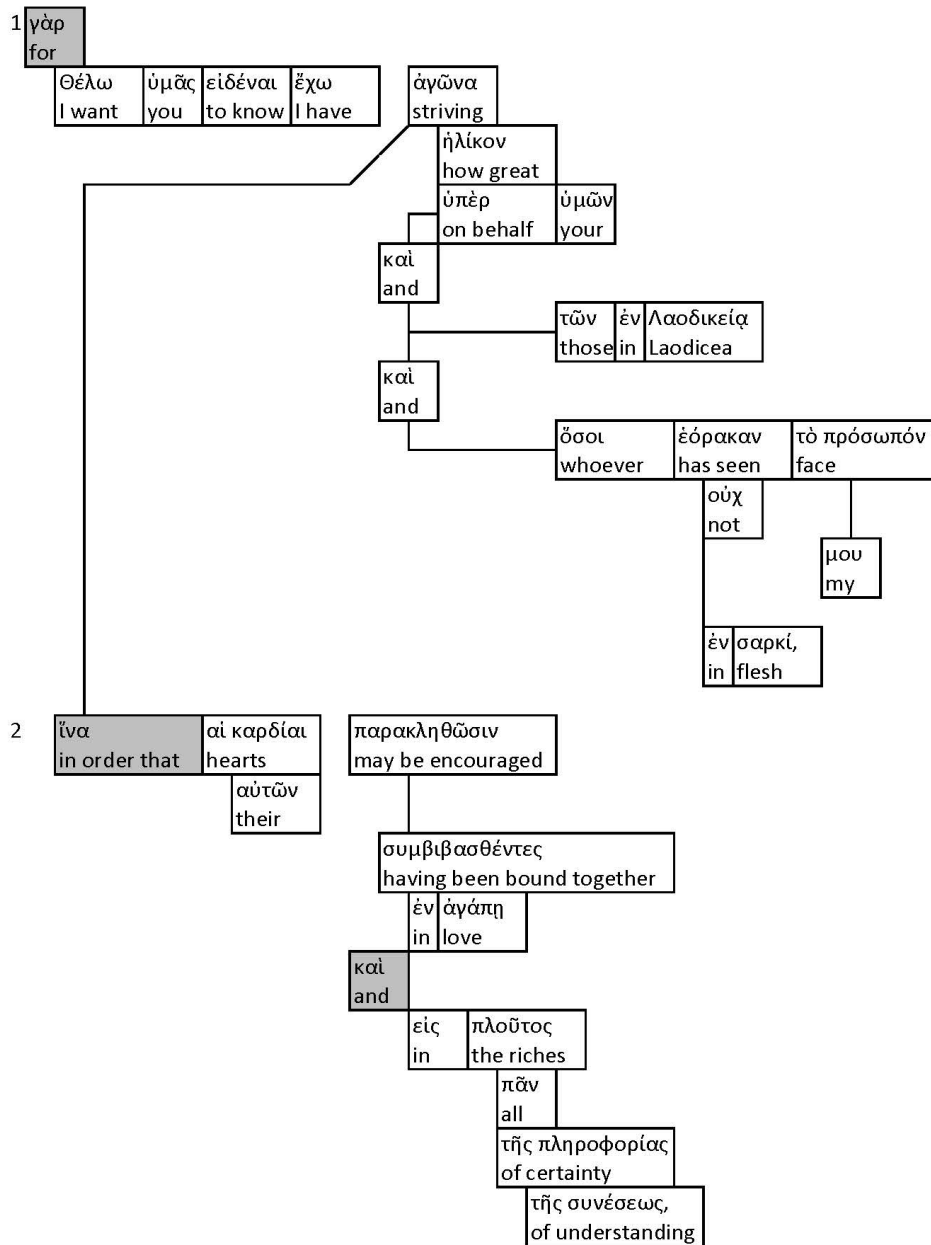
Diagram

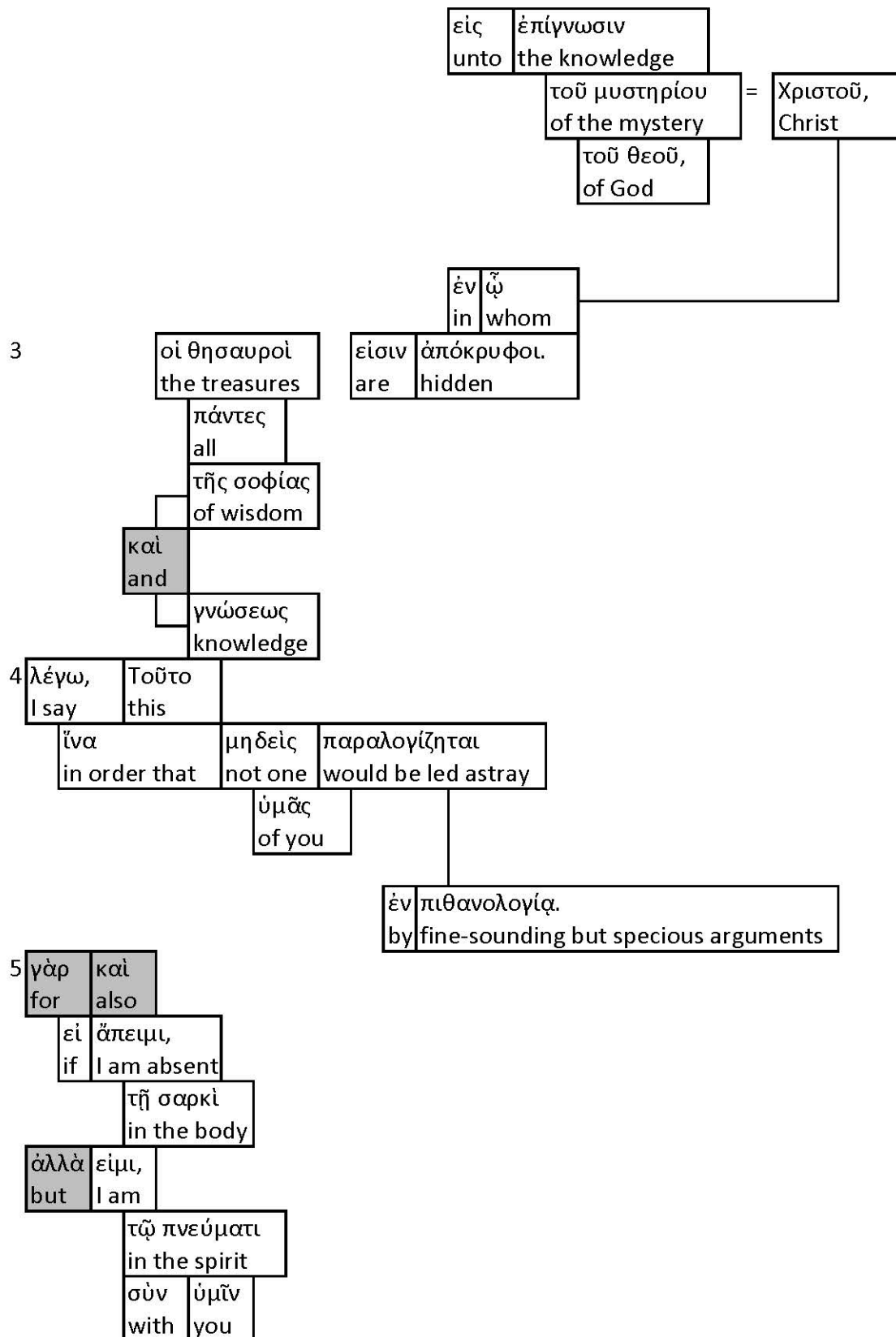


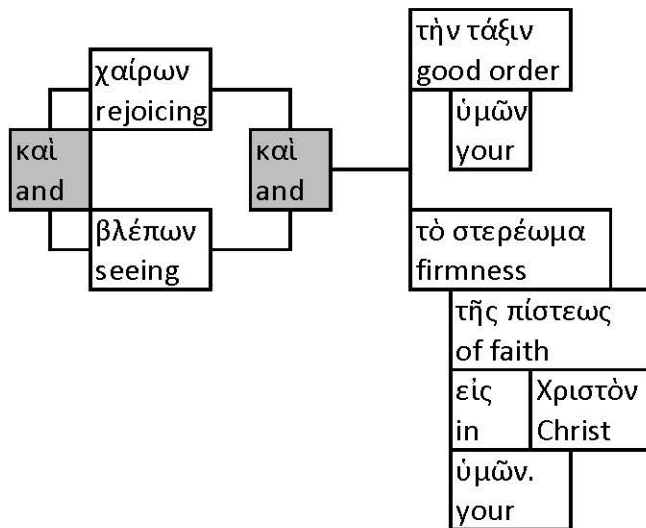


29

ἵνα	παραστήσωμεν	ἄνθρωπον	τέλειον
so that	we may present	man	complete
καὶ		πάντα	ἐν Χριστῷ
also		every	in Christ
εἰς ὃ	κοπιῶ		
for this reason	I labor		
	ἀγωνιζόμενος		
	striving		
	κατὰ	τὴν ἐνέργειαν	
	according to	energy	
		αὐτοῦ	
		his	
		τὴν ἐνεργουμένην	
		which is worked	
		ἐν ἐμοί	
		in me	
		ἐν δυνάμει	
		by ability	







Comment

After introducing his warning, Paul takes a step back, as it were, and verifies his credentials as the apostle to the Gentiles. God has entrusted to Paul the proclamation of the mystery that Christ would dwell among non-Jews as they came into his body the Church. Paul's claim here supports at least three purposes. (1) He has just given the Colossians a warning about their spiritual status. This section shows that he has authority as the apostle to the Gentiles to make such claims. (2) He undermines the authority of the philosophers precisely where their claim was strongest—namely, they claimed to represent the OT Scriptures.

After outlining his ministry in general, Paul narrows his focus to the matter at hand. He sees and rejoices in their “good order and firmness of faith,” but he wants to buttress that confidence by assuring them that the treasures that they seek are not to be found in the false teaching but in Christ.

I Fill Up What Is Lacking of the Afflictions Of Christ

One of the most perplexing statements in this letter is Paul's claim that something is lacking in Christ's affliction, and further that he fills this lack. A central thesis for Paul in this letter is that Christ's death is sufficient to put to rest the just accusations that were set against our account before God. So it is certain

that Paul's point is not that Christ's death lacked anything necessary for the reconciliation of everyone who would ever trust in him. Nor can Paul mean that he is accomplishing reconciliation through his sufferings. What is probably in view is that God has planned that the people of the Messiah would suffer up to a certain point and no more (1 Thess 3:3). Paul's own conversion story reminds us that Christ counts persecution against his body, the church, as persecution against himself. Paul is assuming the same here. His sufferings are part of the sufferings that were allotted to Christ, that is, to Christ's body through the centuries since he ascended to the right hand of God.³⁵

Mystery Which Has Been...But Has Now Been Revealed To His Holy People

Two ideas are obvious in this text: (1) progress of revelation through history and (2) discontinuities or developments in the modes by which God has dealt with humankind. Both of these ideas are essential to a theological system called Dispensationalism. Our limited time would prevent us from offering an adequate defense of the system as a whole, but we should note well that the Scriptures did not come down from heaven complete, with all 1189 chapters composed in some heavenly tongue. At one time it was unclear to the Jewish nation (people under the Mosaic administration, people who had received God's special revelation) that the Messiah would bring about a reorganization of God's treatment of non-Jews. The idea that *everyone who believed* would receive the Spirit sent by the ascended Messiah, that *everyone who believed* would be united into one body, whether Jew or Gentile, wise or barbarian—that idea was not understood from the original Hebrew Bible. Paul, as apostle to the Gentiles, was entrusted with the responsibility to set out the household structure for this new assembly, the pillar and ground of gospel truth (Eph 2:18–3:11; 1 Tim 3:16).

³⁵See BDAG, s.v. “ἀνταναπληρόω,” and Lightfoot, *ad loc.*

Encouraged Toward the Great Riches of Assurance, Such as Understanding Brings
Paul's goal in this entire letter is establish and support the faith of the Colossian believers. As we will see, the philosophers were using both man-made traditions and OT ceremonies to bludgeon the faith of this young church. With these words in mind, we should expect Paul to dismantle the claims of his opponents, and to commend Christ as supreme and sufficient. The letter is intended to battle the doubt and confusion caused by false teaching.

Your Good Order And The Firmness Of Your Faith In Christ.

In light of the previous discussion of warning passages, the parallel between this text and certain texts in Hebrews is striking:

In both contexts, the authors take special pains to temper their warnings with confidence that genuine faith will prevail. Pastoral wisdom is at play here. As with Jesus it may be said of these authors, "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out" (Matt 12:20, NIV).

Principles

The big idea of this passage is, "Paul has been commissioned to work, strive, and even suffer for the sake of Christ's body so that they would be bound to Christ by love and assurance."

Applications

Over the last six months, how has your ministry pointed to the authority of the apostles over our lives as followers of Christ?

How do you plan to point to that authority over the next six months?

What can we do to correct ethnocentric tendencies in our own hearts over the next three months?

3.3 Paul exhorts the Colossians to continue in the gospel (Col 2:6–23).

In this central section, Paul shows the fallacies of the false teaching, pointing to Christ as the fulfillment and satisfaction of the Law's demands and victor over angelic challengers.

Position within the Letter

Text

⁶Ὡς οὖν παρελάβετε τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον, ἐν αὐτῷ περιπατεῖτε, ⁷ἑρριζωμένοι καὶ ἐποικοδομούμενοι ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ βεβαιούμενοι τῇ πίστει καθὼς ἐδιδάχθητε, περισσεύοντες ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ.³⁶ ⁸Βλέπετε μὴ τις ὑμᾶς ἔσται ὁ συλαγωγῶν διὰ τῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ κενῆς ἀπάτης κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου καὶ οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν· ⁹ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς, ¹⁰καὶ ἐστὲ ἐν αὐτῷ πεπληρωμένοι, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας. ¹¹Ἐν ᾧ καὶ περιετμήθητε περιτομῇ ἀχειροποιήτῳ ἐν τῇ ἀπεκδύσει τοῦ σώματος τῆς σαρκός, ἐν τῇ περιτομῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ¹²συνταφέντες αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βαπτισμῷ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ συνηγέρθητε διὰ τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ

³⁶The mss evidence is divided when it comes to including ἐν τῇ before πίστει. Some, such as Alexandrinus, have ἐν alone; others, such as Vaticanus, have τῇ alone. Sinaiticus and the Byz have both. The longer reading (ἐν τῇ) is generally counted as secondary, and ἐν alone does not have enough external support. The consensus of critical editions side against the RP and with Vaticanus. Vaticanus and the Byz (and thus WH and RP respectively) support the addition of ἐν αὐτῇ after περισσεύοντες. Hence the translation, “abounding *therein* with thanksgiving” (KJV, emphasis added, cf., NASBmg). Other mss support minor variations of this reading. Metzger notes the parallel in 4:2 and reports that the committee felt (with secondary certainty, B-rating) that it gave rise to the longer text.

νεκρῶν · ¹³καὶ ὑμᾶς νεκροὺς ὄντας [έν] τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ τῇ ἀκροβυστίᾳ τῆς σαρκὸς ὑμῶν, συνεζωοποίησεν ὑμᾶς σὺν αὐτῷ, χαρισάμενος ἡμῖν πάντα τὰ παραπτώματα.³⁷ ¹⁴ἐξαλείψας τὸ καθ' ἡμῶν χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν ὃ ἦν ὑπεναντίον ἡμῖν, καὶ αὐτὸ ἤρκεν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου προσηλώσας αὐτὸ τῷ σταυρῷ · ¹⁵ἀπεκδυσάμενος τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας ἐδειγμάτισεν ἐν παρρησίᾳ, θριαμβεύσας αὐτοὺς ἐν αὐτῷ.

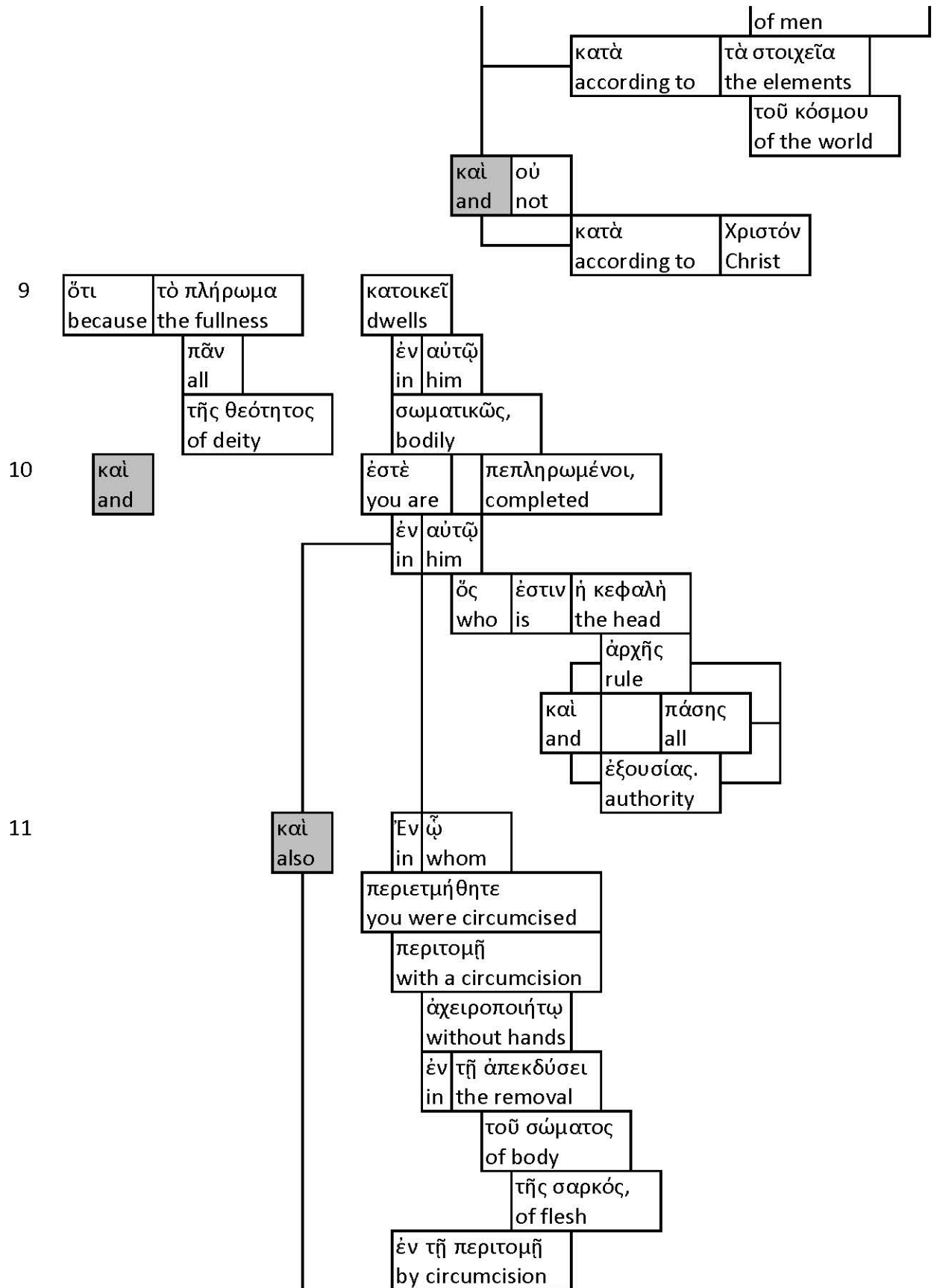
Translation

⁶As you have received Christ Jesus as Lord continue to live in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him: confirmed in faith as you were taught, overflowing in thanksgiving. ⁸See to it that none of you are led astray through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world and not according to Christ. ⁹See to it because in Christ dwells all the fullness of deity bodily, ¹⁰and you are completed in him who is the head over all rule and authority. ¹¹In Christ you were also circumcised with a circumcision without hands in the removal of the body of flesh by the circumcision of Christ, ¹²having been buried with him by immersion by which also you were raised through faith in the energy of God who raised him from the dead. ¹³You being dead in the trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive with him forgiving us all trespasses, ¹⁴blotting out the handwriting against us by decrees which was against us. It removed it from the way having nailed it to the cross. ¹⁵Disarming the rulers and the authorities, he exposed them with boldness having triumphed over them by him.

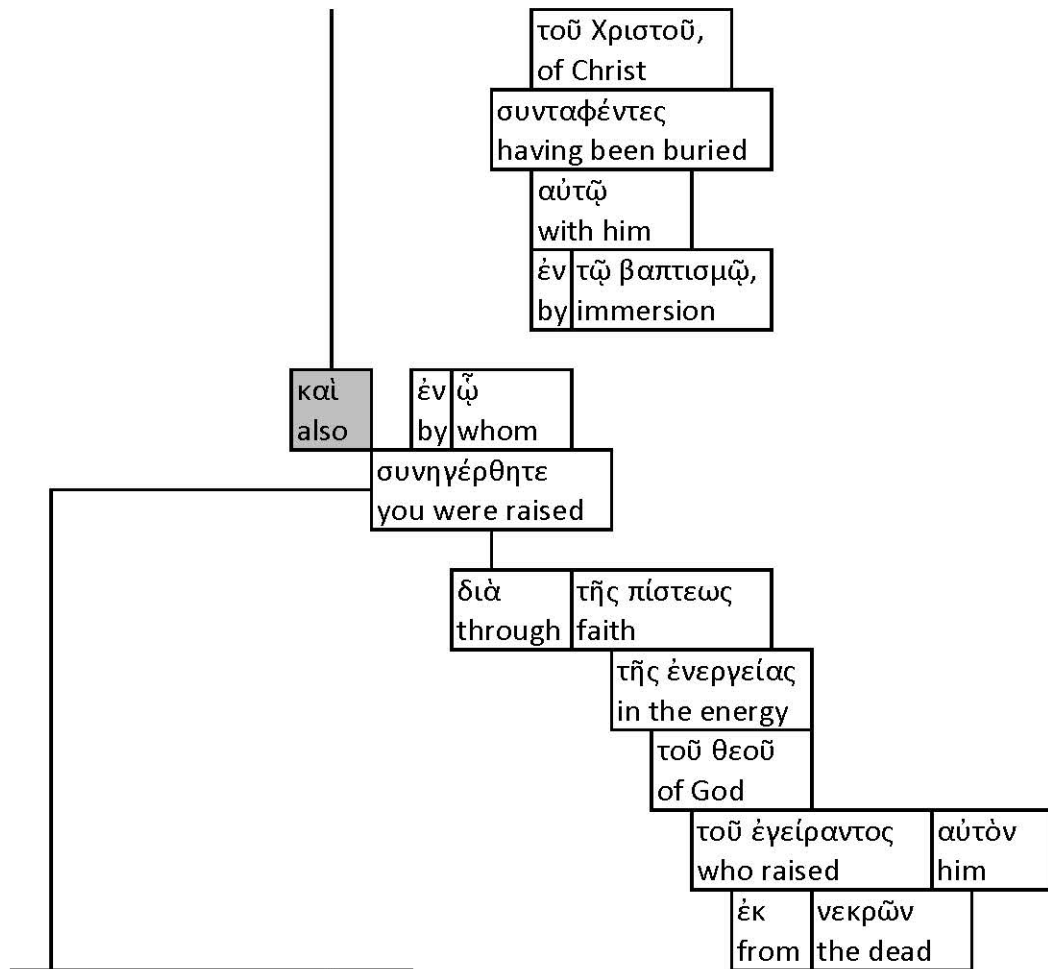
Diagram

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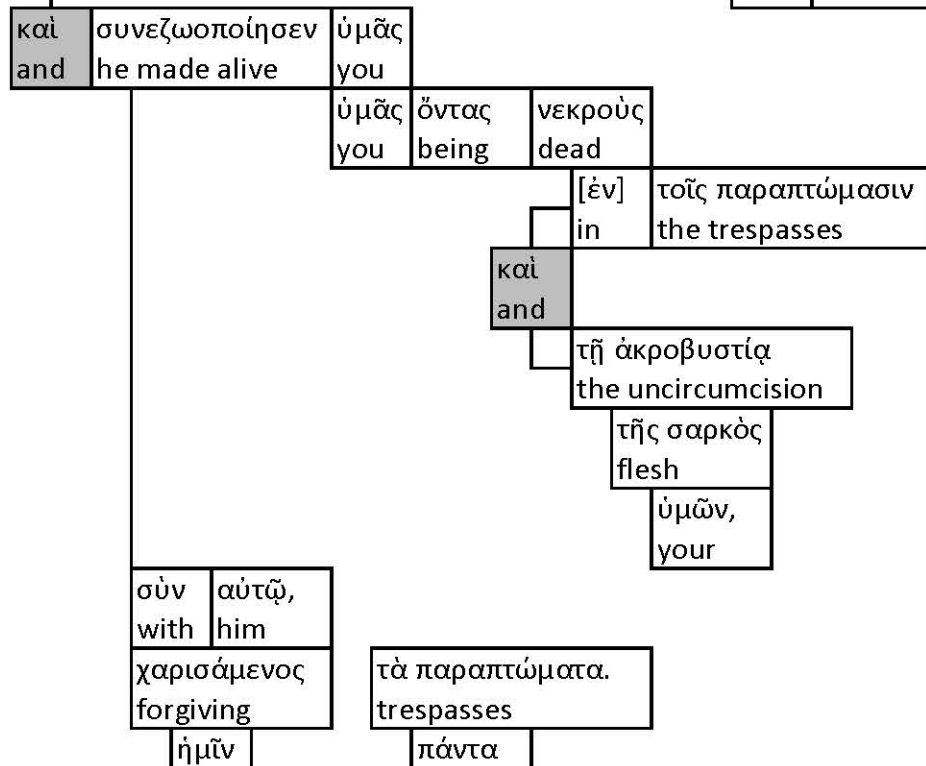
³⁷The pronouns of v. 13 are well-preserved until we get to the final two. Here we again have difficulty with the shade of difference between “you/we” in spelling and pronunciation. The consensus of critical editions is that Paul shifted to first person after χαρισάμενος. The well-supported variant συνεζωοποίησεν ἡμᾶς could have arisen from a desire to make it match with the later pronoun (So Metzger).



12



13



14

	us		all	
	ἐξαλείψας		τὸ χειρόγραφον	
	blotting out		the handwriting	
			καθ'	ἡμῶν
			against	us
			τοῖς δόγμασιν	
			by decrees	
		ὃ	ἦν	ὑπεναντίον ἡμῖν,
		which	was	opposed to us
καὶ	ἦρκεν		αὐτὸ	
and	lifted		it	
	ἐκ	τοῦ μέσου		
	from	the middle		
	προσηλώσας	αὐτὸ		
	having nailed	it		
	τῷ σταυρῷ			
	to the cross			

15

			τὰς ἀρχάς	
			the rulers	
	ἀπεκδυσάμενος	καὶ		
	disarming	and		
			τὰς ἐξουσίας	
			the authorities	
	ἐδειγμάτισεν			
	he exposed			
	ἐν παρρησίᾳ,			
	in boldness			
	θριαμβεύσας	αὐτούς		
	having triumphed over	them		
	ἐν αὐτῷ			
	by him			

Comment

No other series of paragraphs in the letter is more important to Paul's thesis than the current set of paragraphs reaching all the way through the end of the chapter. For sake of convenience I have split the section into two subsections of two paragraphs each. The first paragraph of these two paragraphs in the current subsection may be the most familiar part of the entire letter. Paul's point is seen in the imperative, "See to it that you are not led astray!"

As You Have Received Christ Jesus as Lord Continue to Live in Him

The comparison that Paul makes between receiving Christ Jesus as Lord and continuing in him is one of the most familiar texts in the letter and perhaps among the most familiar words of Paul among some Christian groups. It is still necessary, however, to examine the context of familiar texts to see if we have understood them correctly. In the context of the letter, Paul is encouraging them to persevere in the faith. He is concerned that some of them are "submitting to rules" when they profess to already have died to such things. Paul's encouragement must be seen in that light. Indeed, if we are perplexed or doubtful about Paul's meaning with these famous phrases, we need only look to the next verse for a restatement in different terms. Paul's desire is that the Colossians be "established in the faith, just as you were taught." Notice the parallel function language, "just as," between v. 6 and v.7. As you received Christ Jesus, that is, just as you were taught the faith, continue in it. The plea here is that the Colossians would be steadfast and celebratory in their orthodoxy. Paul wants their commitment to right doctrine to be both determined and delighted, both loyal and loving toward Christ. They had come to a certain doctrinal commitment; namely they believed that Jesus of Nazareth, having been endorsed as Messiah by God by many public means, having been crucified on a Roman cross at the hands of wicked men, had been exalted as Master of the universe at God the Father's right hand. Paul is calling them to trusting and grateful faithfulness to those revealed truths about the identity and accomplishments of Jesus.

Therefore, what Paul is *not* saying is that the Christian life is lived out precisely the way the gift of forgiveness of sins is received. He is not saying that way to success in sanctification and victory over sin is achieved merely by receiving a gift from God like we received forgiveness of sins. He is not saying that the Christian life is to be attained by setting aside our own efforts at holiness and simply letting God do the work. Notice that this interpretation introduces several ideas that are foreign to the immediate context. The comparison is not between the way we receive forgiveness and the way we receive sanctification. The

comparison is between receiving Jesus's Christhood and lordship (i.e., being taught the faith) and persevering in a commitment to him (i.e., being rooted and established in the faith).

If the Christian life were to be attained without any striving, then all of Paul's efforts explained in the previous paragraph (Col 2:1–5) are thoroughly wrongheaded. One might well say, "Paul, why do you labor and strive? Don't you know that sanctification comes as a gift of God and is received by faith not by works? The Colossians don't need your striving; they don't need to strive for passionate perseverance themselves. They just need to let go and let God." Evidently, Paul had a different understanding of the path of perseverance.

Through Philosophy...According to the Elements of the World

As we have mentioned, it is difficult to identify the subversive teaching that Paul is encountering here with any one specific philosophical vantage point available to us in writings of the time outside the NT. Whatever school of thought is being discussed, Paul wants his readers to recognize that the teaching is according to the old way of looking at the world, the way people in their ignorance were allowed to look at the world before the advent of Christ. This is how I understand the force of the term "elements of this world." One of these elementary principles was the fearful manipulation of spiritual beings, what Paul calls, "the worship of angels"; so the idea of "elemental spirits" present in some translations is not foreign to the context. However, I believe that understand this word to refer more broadly to the primitive principles of life, like "Do not handle; do not taste; do not touch."

In Christ You Were Also Circumcised...Having Been Buried with Him by Immersion

The close tie between circumcision and baptism in this text has led some believers within Protestant tradition to use the text to justify infant baptism. The old covenant provided for the inclusion of infants within the covenant community through circumcision and thus, so goes the argument, the external sign of membership in the new covenant community must also be available to

infants. The grounds for the analogy between these external marks of membership are patent. However, Paul's explicit point hangs on the supposition that ritual was not accompanied by conversion was worthless. Therefore, to use this passage to support a conversion-less baptism would be to push the comparison precisely where Paul desires to make a contrast; it is to confuse the grounds for the analogy with the gaps in the analogy.

Position within the Letter

3. Paul exhorts the Colossians not to shift away from the gospel (Col 1:21–2:23).

3.1. Paul introduces the warning: You have been reconciled, if you remain steadfast in the gospel (Col 1:21–23).

3.2. Paul explains his gospel ministry (Col 1:24–2:5).

3.3. Paul exhorts the Colossians to continue in the gospel (Col 2:6–23).

3.3.1. Live in him (Col 2:6–7)!

3.3.2. Do not be taken captive (Col 2:8–15).

3.3.3. Do not let anyone judge or disqualify you (Col 2:16–19).

3.3.4. Do not submit to regulations (Col 2:20–23).

4. Paul exhorts the Colossians to live the new life (Col 3:1–4:6).

Text

¹⁶Μὴ οὖν τις ὑμᾶς κρινέτω ἐν βρώσει καὶ ἐν πόσει ἢ ἐν μέρει ἑορτῆς ἢ νεομηνίας ἢ σαββάτων · ¹⁷ἃ ἐστὶν σκιά τῶν μελλόντων, τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ. ¹⁸μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς καταβραβεύετω θέλων ἐν ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ θρησκείᾳ τῶν ἀγγέλων, ἃ ἔώρακεν ἔμβατεύων, εἰκῆ φυσιοῦμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ νοῦς τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ,³⁸ ¹⁹καὶ οὐ κρατῶν τὴν κεφαλὴν, ἐξ οὗ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα διὰ τῶν ἀφῶν καὶ συνδέσμων ἐπιχορηγούμενον καὶ συμβιβαζόμενον αὖξει τὴν αὖξησιν τοῦ θεοῦ.

³⁸In a rare twist, the mss evidence directly contradicts itself. Several witness insert a negative (μη in some and ουκ in others) before ἔώρακεν: “intruding into those things which he has *not* seen” (KJV, emphasis added). External testimony clearly prefers the NA²⁸. The addition may have arisen from a copyist desiring to further undermine the heresy.

²⁰Εἰ ἀπεθάνετε σὺν Χριστῷ ἀπὸ τῶν στοιχείων τοῦ κόσμου, τί ὡς ζῶντες ἐν κόσμῳ δογματίζεσθε ; ²¹μὴ ἅψη μηδὲ γεύση μηδὲ θίγης, ²²ἃ ἔστιν πάντα εἰς φθορὰν τῇ ἀποχρήσει, κατὰ τὰ ἐντάλματα καὶ διδασκαλίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ²³ἅτινά ἐστιν λόγον μὲν ἔχοντα σοφίας ἐν ἐθελοθησκίᾳ καὶ ταπεινοφροσύνη [καὶ] ἀφειδίᾳ σώματος, οὐκ ἐν τιμῇ τινὶ πρὸς πλησμονὴν τῆς σαρκός.³⁹

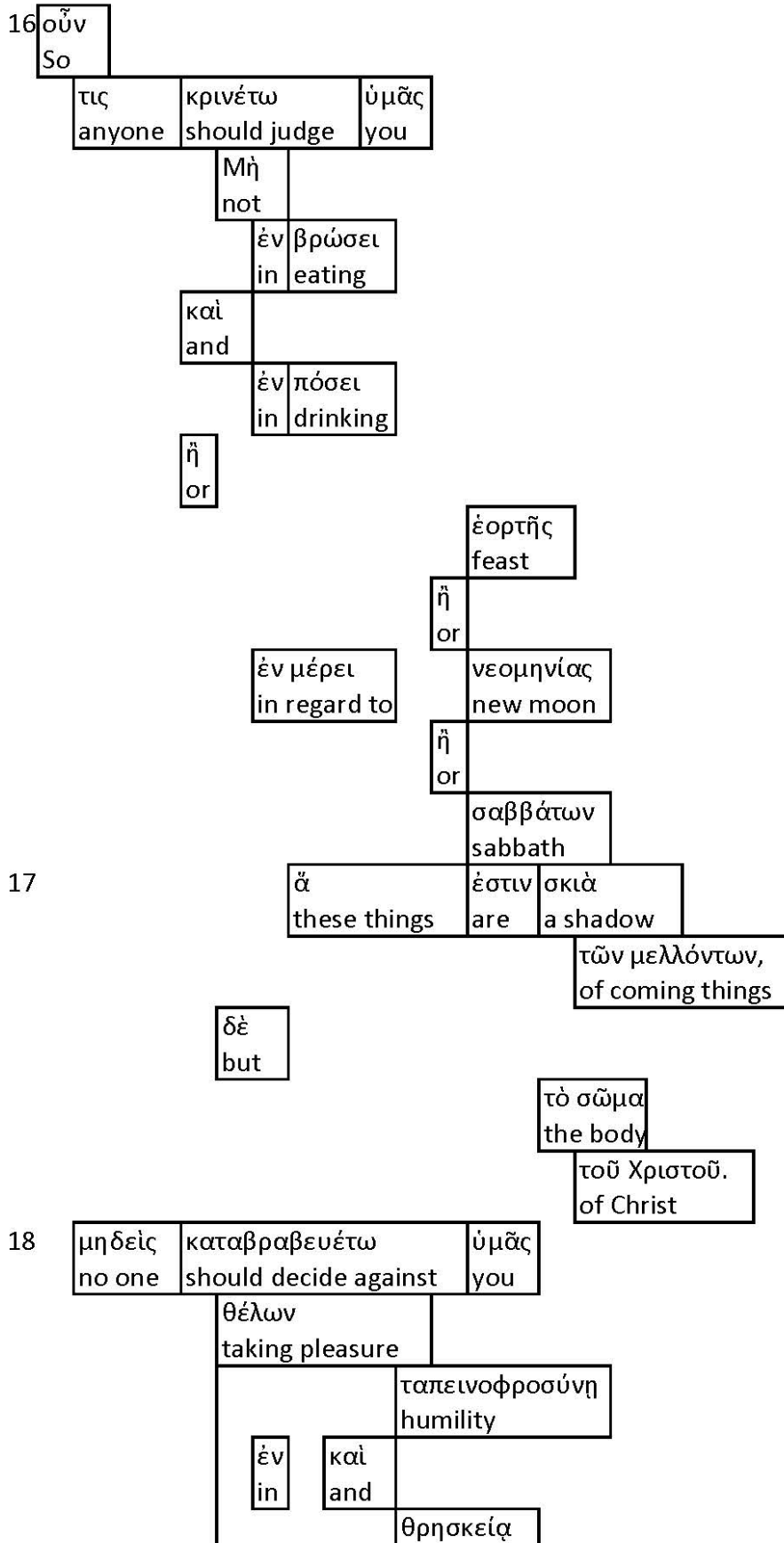
Translation

¹⁶So no one should judge you regarding eating or drinking or in regard to feast or new moon or Sabbath. ¹⁷These are a shadow of things that were to come, but the body {is} of Christ. ¹⁸No one should decide against you, taking pleasure in humility and worship of angels, going into depth concerning what he has seen, puffed up in his own mind without reason, ¹⁹and not holding on to the Head. Out of the head the whole body supported through ligaments and sinews is held together and grows with growth from God.

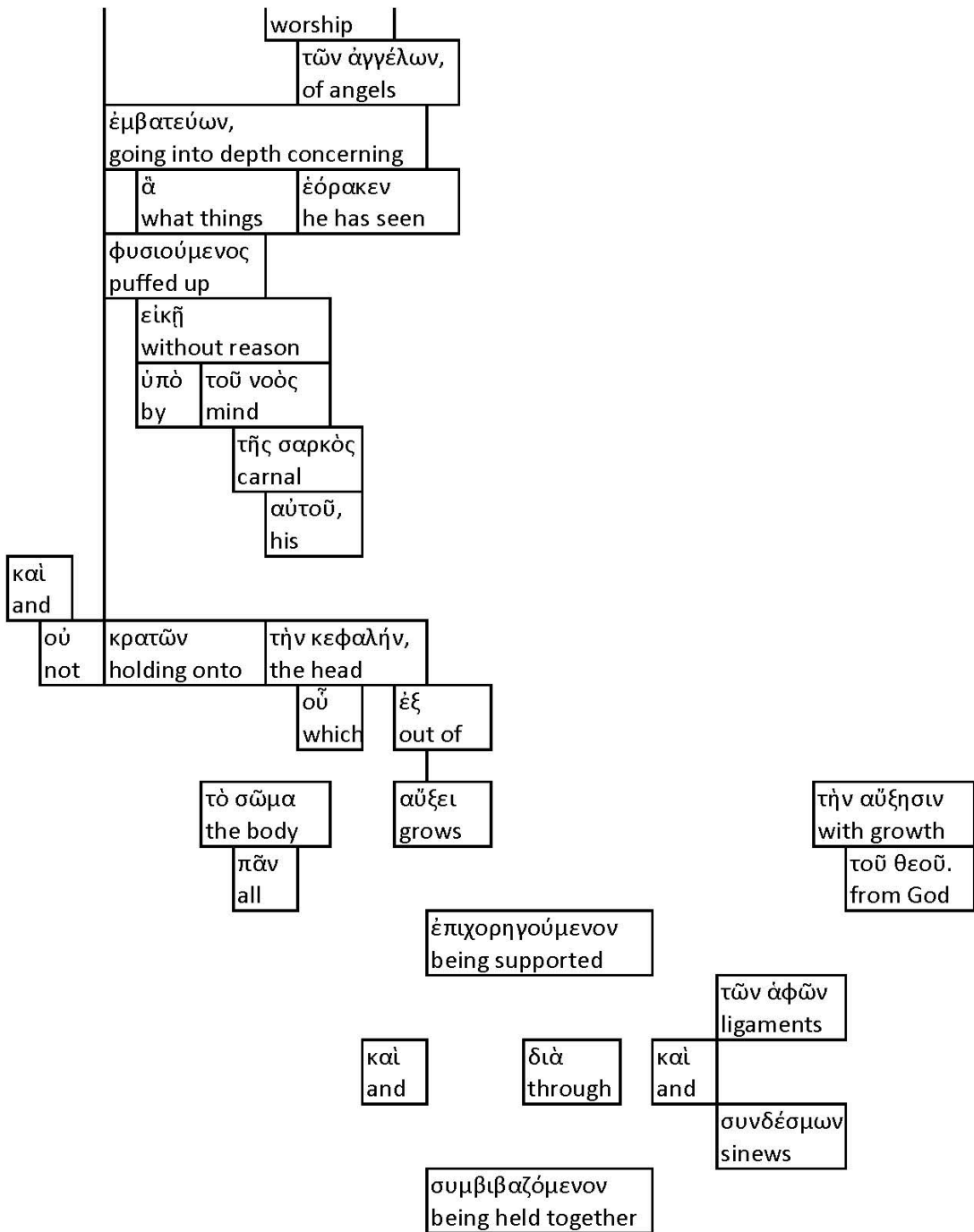
²⁰If you died with Christ from the elements of the world, why, as though living in the world, are you submitting to rules? ²¹“Do not handle; do not taste; do not touch.” ²²These things are all set for destruction through consumption and are according to commandments and teachings of men. ²³Such things are words on the one hand having (apparent) wisdom in self-imposed religion and humility [and] severe treatment of the body, but on the other, they are not of value any for slaking the flesh.

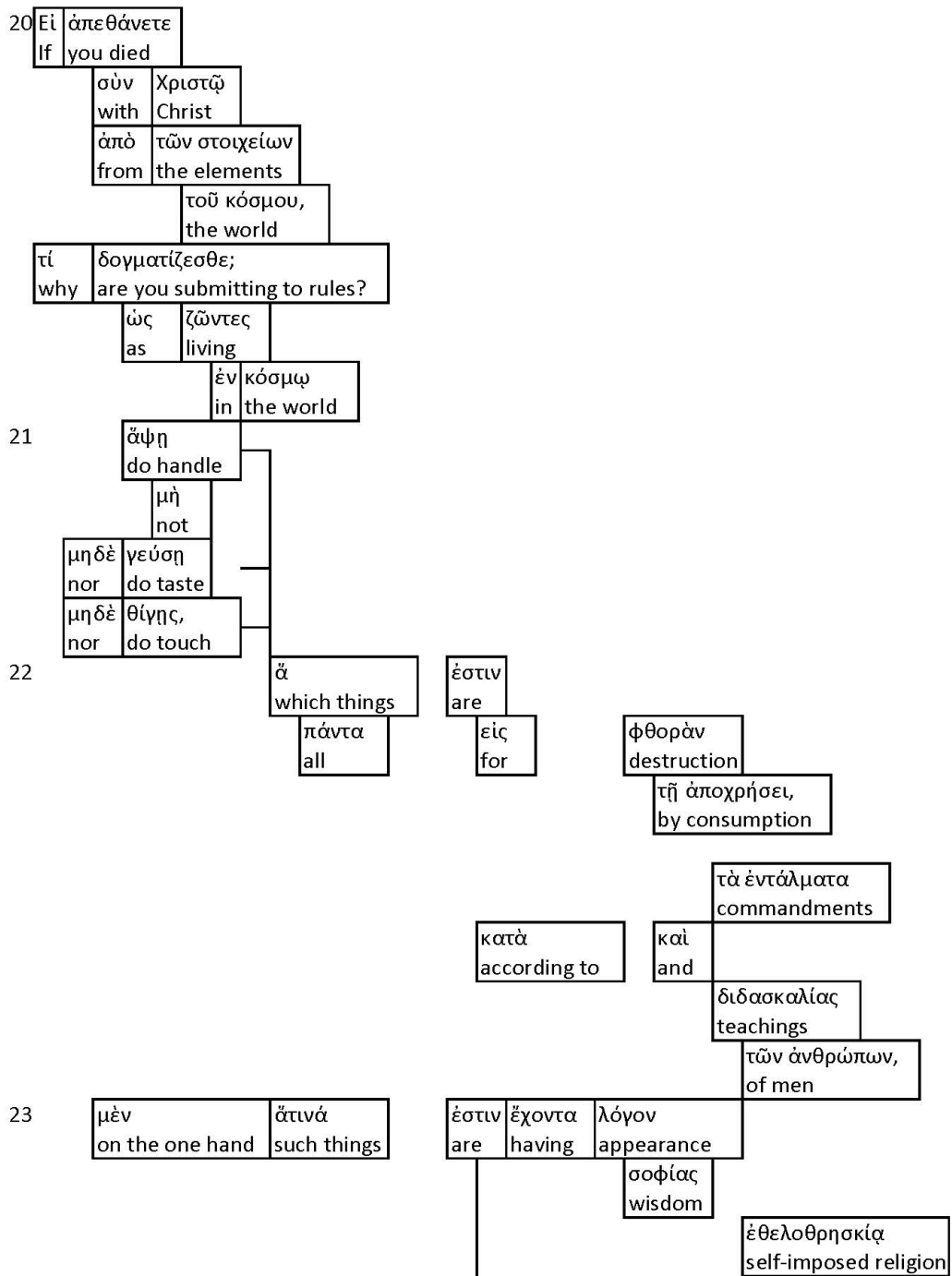
³⁹Several important witnesses, namely Vaticanus and Papyrus 46 among others, omit καὶ between ταπεινοφροσύνη and ἀφειδίᾳ. The net takes this alternative reading resulting in the translation, “false humility *achieved by* an unsparing treatment of the body” (emphasis added). The decision between the readings is difficult (C-rating), but the broader mss support belongs to the explanation that the omission of the καὶ in some mss was a simple copyist mistake. (See Metzger.)

Diagram



19





οὐκ
but on the other, not

καὶ
and

ἐν
in

[καὶ]
[and]

ταπεινοφροσύνη
humility

ἀφειδία
severe treatment

σώματος,
of the body

ἐν τιμῇ
of value

τινι
any

πρὸς πλησμονήν
for slaking

τῆς σαρκός,
the flesh

Comment

No One Should Judge You

The reason that Paul is striving in Col 2:1–5 is so that they would have grow again in their confidence and assurance in the gospel. The philosophers were using socio-religious pressure to erode their confidence and press them into conformity with their ideals. The third person negative prohibition is difficult to convey adequately in English, but it carries the strength of a full command. This sort of manipulation must not be allowed.

These Are a Shadow...the Body {Is} of Christ.

It is common to hear Christians dividing up the Mosaic law into its ceremonial, moral, and governmental or civil aspects. This can be a helpful way to categorize what can otherwise be a bewildering maze to a newcomer to the study of the Hebrew testament. Yet the Bible itself never divides the Law this way. In fact, Paul evidently sees the entire law as a unity (take it or leave it) when he says that if someone were to submit to circumcision under the circumstances in Galatia,

then that person would obligating himself to fulfill the whole law or fall under the curse of God (Gal 5:2–3). So a passage like which clearly declares Sabbath observance irrelevant should not surprise us, even when Sabbath observance is one of the ten commandments. The entire law has been fulfilled in Christ (Matt 5:17); it has reached its goal in him (Rom 10:4). He is the reality where the Law is the shadow.

Worship of Angels

Alongside a disregard for the significance of Christ for the history of redemption, the philosophers have elevated their own visions over the revelation of Christ and angels over God himself. Hardly ever has there been a more high-handed example of neglecting the weightier matters of the Law! They are observing Sabbath days and violating the first commandment! What we have inferred from Paul's emphasis on the supremacy of Christ has now become explicit. Paul has celebrated Christ's preeminence over "things in heaven" and "invisible things" because these "rulers and authorities" have illegitimately attracted the worship of the false teachers.

Not Holding on to the Head

The NIV translates the participle "not holding on" here as "they have lost connection." That is, the translators have inferred that the philosophers at one time belonged to the Christian community and had some spurious connection to the Head, that is, Christ. This situation would be parallel to Jesus's parable of the vine in John 15, where those who do not bear fruit show by that fact that they do not have a vital, . living connection to the Vine. These are eventually cast away. While is a possibility, it is also possible that those who have never had any connection to Christ whatsoever also can be said to be "not holding fast" to the Head. The inference is not a necessary one.

Why...Are You Submitting to Rules?

Paul's "Why?" question here is the first time he has explicitly accused the Colossians of straying. While his overall tone of confidence should be appreciated, we need to give due wait to this question as we seek to understand what was going on in this church. Such a person living dangerously close to the line of soul-damning hypocrisy. He says that he has died with Christ, but by submitting to unbiblical restrictions he is belying that confidence in Christ and seeking wisdom and physical restraint outside of Christ-centered worship. To my mind this is one of the clearest texts in favor of what is sometimes called the regulative principle. That is to say this text teaches that we may require of the people we serve only what the Scriptures require of them. Adding religious rituals or restrictions to the simple Christianity revealed by the apostles--even for ostensibly good purposes such as restraining the flesh--is disallowed by the apostles themselves.

Having (Apparent) Wisdom...Severe Treatment Of The Body...Not of Value Any for Slaking the Flesh

We must remember that our human assumptions about the way the world works (i.e., the "appearance of wisdom") would say that religious asceticism would be at least one effective means of becoming less driven by sensual desire. Paul explodes that myth and instead points us to the worship of Christ as the root of real sanctification. Setting our affections on him, setting our minds on where our life is hidden with him, these God-ordained means produce a beautiful community on earth—a place of singing and teaching, of love and respect, of equity and service.

Principles

As was stated before in this section, Paul's main point is "See to it that you are not led astray!"

Several enduring principles come to mind:

- Wisdom in discerning the right path for life and doctrine is found in a loyal and loving relationship to Christ.
- Harsh treatment of the body does not help curb our fleshly appetites.
- Christ is the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law, so no one should judge us by it.
- Baptism is the outward display of conversion obligatory for all and only believers.

Application

How many times over the last five years has someone you know strayed from true Christianity into some false form of religion, whether a cult or a Christianity of empty ritual? What can we do to make the next five years better?

To what extent do you judge people by what might be categorized as the traditions of men or mere shadows? What can you do over the next six weeks to drop the habit?

Who do you know whom you might encourage to publicly identify with Christ and God's holy people through believer's baptism before the end of this year?

4.1 Seek what is above.

While the philosophers' ascetic practices are to no avail when it comes to making real progress against our sinful inclinations, the true gospel grants progressive victory through a transformation of our priorities.

Position in the Letter

3.3. Paul exhorts the Colossians to continue in the gospel (Col 2:6–23).

4. Paul exhorts the Colossians to live the new life (Col 3:1–4:6).

4.1. Seek what is above (Col 3:1–4).

4.2. Put to death what is earthly (Col 3:5–11).

Text

¹Εἰ οὖν συνηγέρθητε τῷ Χριστῷ, τὰ ἄνω ζητεῖτε, οὗ ὁ Χριστός ἐστὶν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ καθήμενος · ²τὰ ἄνω φρονεῖτε, μὴ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. ³Ἄπεθάνετε γὰρ καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν κέκρυπται σὺν τῷ Χριστῷ ἐν τῷ θεῷ · ⁴ὅταν ὁ Χριστὸς φανερωθῆ, ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν, τότε καὶ ὑμεῖς σὺν αὐτῷ φανερωθήσεσθε ἐν δόξῃ.⁴⁰

Translation

¹Therefore if you were raised in Christ seek the things which are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ²Be mindful of the things which are above, not the things which are upon the earth. ³For you died and your life has been hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life has appeared, then also you shall appear with him in glory.

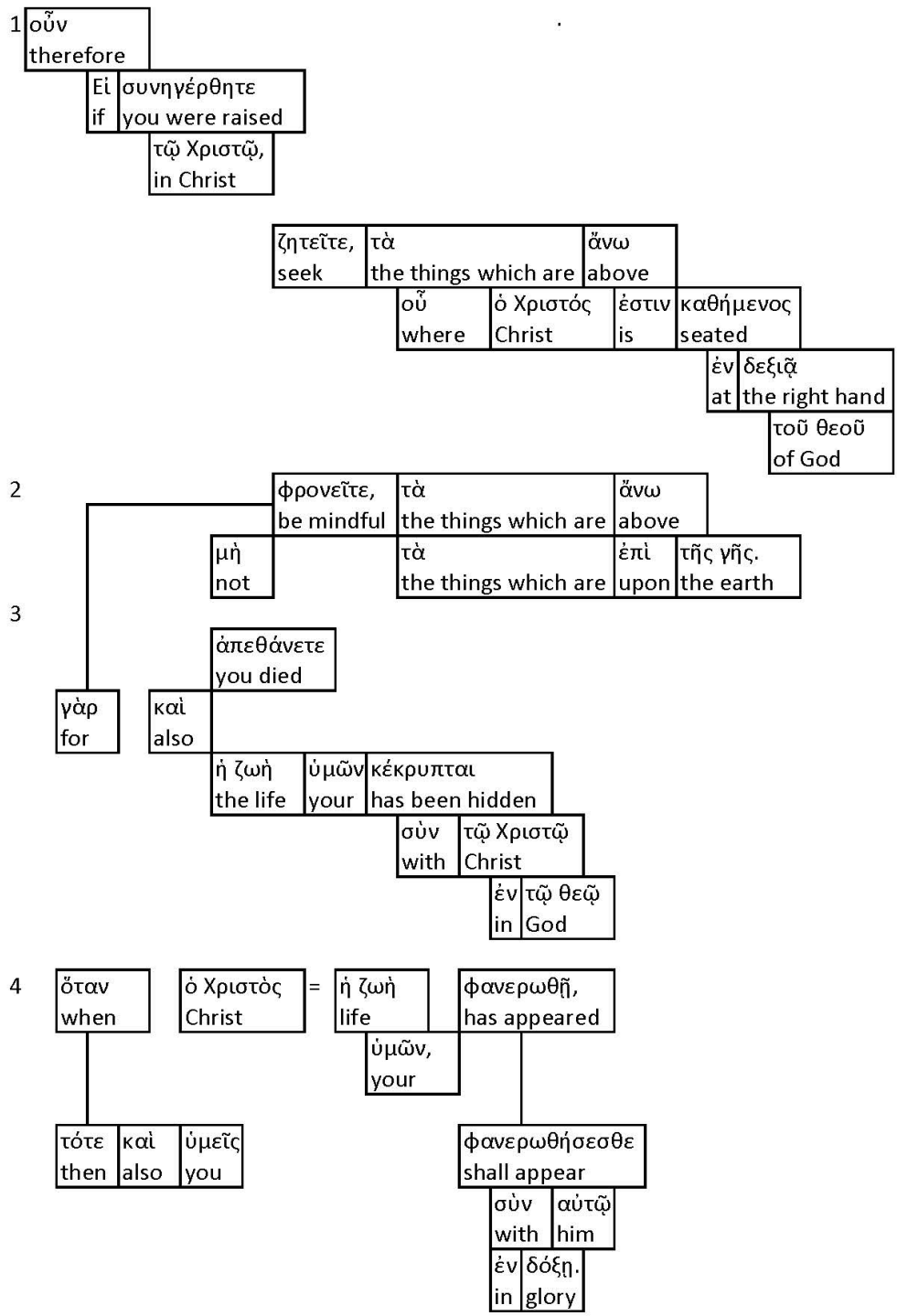
Diagram

(See next page.)

⁴⁰The repeated difficulty with you/we surfaces again after ἡ ζωὴ. The RP has ἡ ζωὴ ἡμῶν instead of the NA²⁸'s ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν. (So the KJV and the margins of ESV, NIV, HCSB, and NET.) The textual support is better for the ὑμῶν reading though in context a shift in person would be the more difficult and thus the preferred reading. The UBS committee gave ὑμῶν a B-rating.

Comment

Verses 1-4 expand the concept we introduced in chapter 1. Hope produces love and persevering faith. Here Paul tells them explicitly to set their hearts and minds on those new realities that have come about on account of the victory of God in Christ. We have been raised with Christ. A decisive break with the mastery sin has been accomplished in the life of everyone who has repented and hung his hopes on Jesus. Now new life has begun in us. This new life has more in common with the risen and returning Christ than it does with the things that will soon pass away under the wrath of God (v. 6). As will become clear, Paul is not asking us to leave behind our relationships and join a monastery where we can continually contemplate the joys of heaven to come. This is not at all what Paul himself did. Instead, within the everyday lives we live, a radical shift of priorities has occurred. Our whole life is bound up in the risen, ascended Messiah, and we will only be truly whole when we are reunited with him in our own bodies when he appears. With that radical identify shift in mind, the Global Emperor's mission must now become my mission; his priorities must become my priorities. We must stop trying to establish our own little dominion through power plays or defense mechanisms. We have been freed from such petty lives and been granted a place in the global mission of Christ.



Principles

The big idea here is the counterpart to something Paul said in an earlier section, “If you have died with Christ, why do you submit to these rules (2:20)?” Here Paul tells the Colossians that they have new life in Christ, so they should make Christ’s priorities their own.

- A Christian's priorities should be centered on Christ.
- A Christian's priorities should not reflect the passing interests that consume this doomed planet.

Application

List out five areas that would fit under “things which are upon the earth” in your life? List out five areas that you could set your mind on as “things which are above.” In the coming days, compare your lists to Paul's (3:5–4:6), re-evaluate, and plan to make progress in prioritizing “things which are above” over the next six months.

4.2 Put to death what is earthly.

Paul sets out specifically what he means to “Be mindful...not of the things which are upon the earth” (4:2).

Position in the Letter

4. Paul exhorts the Colossians to live the new life (Col 3:1–4:6).
 - 4.1. Seek what is above (Col 3:1–4).
 - 4.2. Put to death what is earthly (Col 3:5–11).**
 - 4.3. Don love (Col 3:12–16).

Text

⁵Νεκρώσατε οὖν τὰ μέλη τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, πορνείαν ἀκαθαρσίαν πάθος ἐπιθυμίαν κακὴν, καὶ τὴν πλεονεξίαν, ἣτις ἐστὶν εἰδωλολατρία, ⁶δι’ ἧς ἔρχεται ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ [ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας].⁴¹ ⁷ἐν οἷς καὶ ὑμεῖς περιεπατήσατέ ποτε, ὅτε ἐζῆτε ἐν τούτοις · ⁸νυνὶ δὲ ἀπόθεσθε καὶ ὑμεῖς τὰ πάντα, ὀργὴν, θυμὸν, κακίαν, βλασφημίαν, αἰσχρολογίαν ἐκ τοῦ στόματος ὑμῶν · ⁹μὴ ψεύδεσθε εἰς ἀλλήλους, ἀπεκδυσάμενοι τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον σὺν ταῖς πράξεσιν αὐτοῦ ¹⁰καὶ ἐνδυσάμενοι τὸν νέον τὸν ἀνακαινούμενον εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν κατ’ εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν, ¹¹ὅπου οὐκ ἔστι Ἕλληνας καὶ Ἰουδαῖος, περιτομὴ καὶ ἀκροβυστία, βάρβαρος, Σκύθης, δοῦλος, ἐλεύθερος, ἀλλὰ [τὰ] πάντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν Χριστός.

Translation

Therefore put to death the members that are upon the earth: sexual immorality, uncleanness, illicit passion, bad desire, and greed which is idolatry. The wrath of God is coming on account of these things [upon the sons of disobedience]. You also walked in these things once. Then you were living in these things, but now you should put from your mouth all of these: wrath, rage,

⁴¹The phrase [ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας] is in brackets because it is not found in Vaticanus or Papyrus 46 (so ESV, NIV). This would mean that the phrase was added by copyists with the results that it better matches Eph 5:6. However, the evidence for including it is not poor, and the καὶ ὑμεῖς of the next verse would seem to presuppose its presence. For these reasons the UBS committee retained it (so NET), albeit with a C-rating (Metzger).

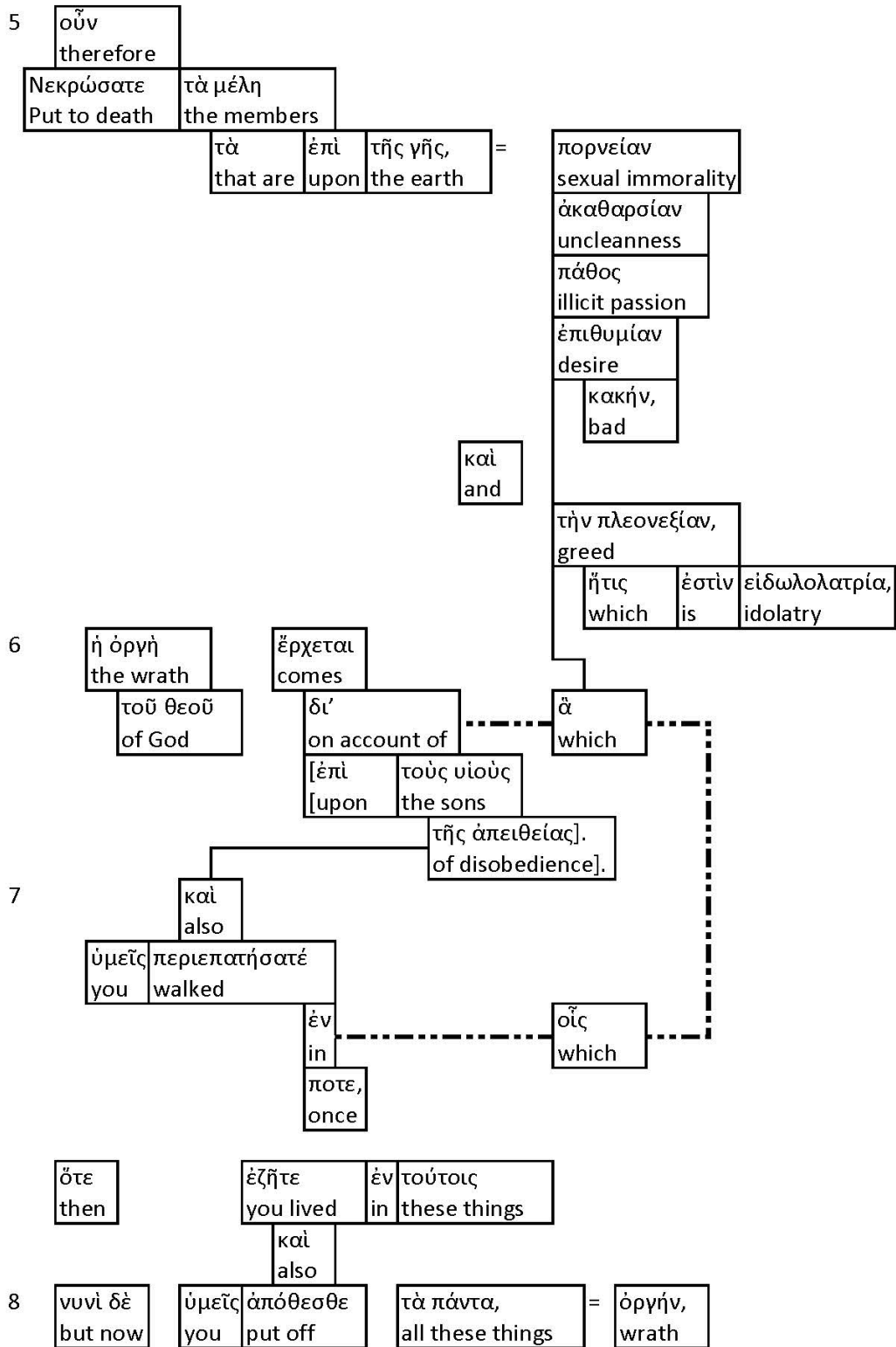
malice, slander, obscene and derogatory remarks. Do not lie to one another, having put off the old man with his practices, and having put on the new which is being renewed into knowledge according to the image of his creator. Here there is not one Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or freeman. But Christ is all that matters, and he is in all of us.

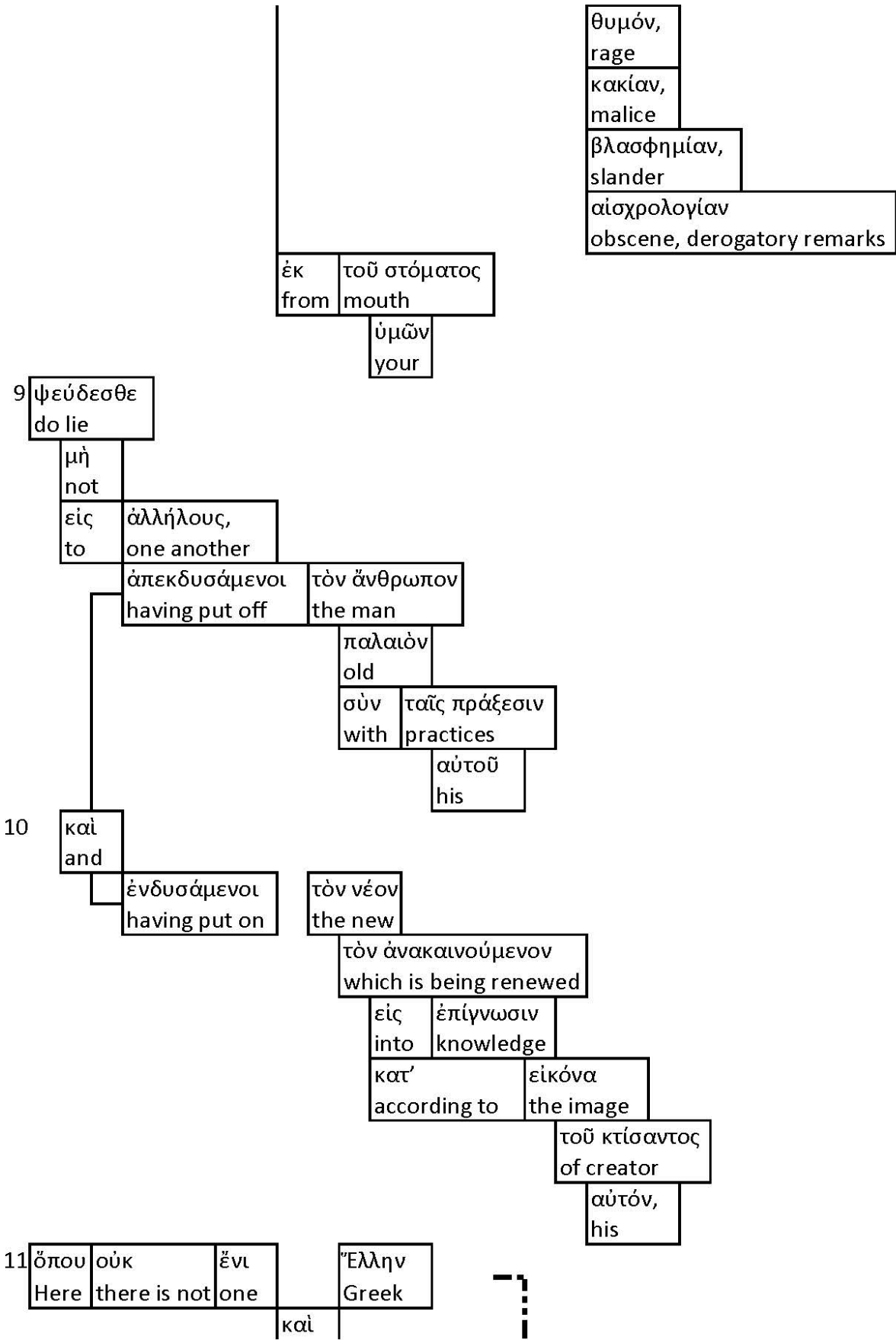
Diagram

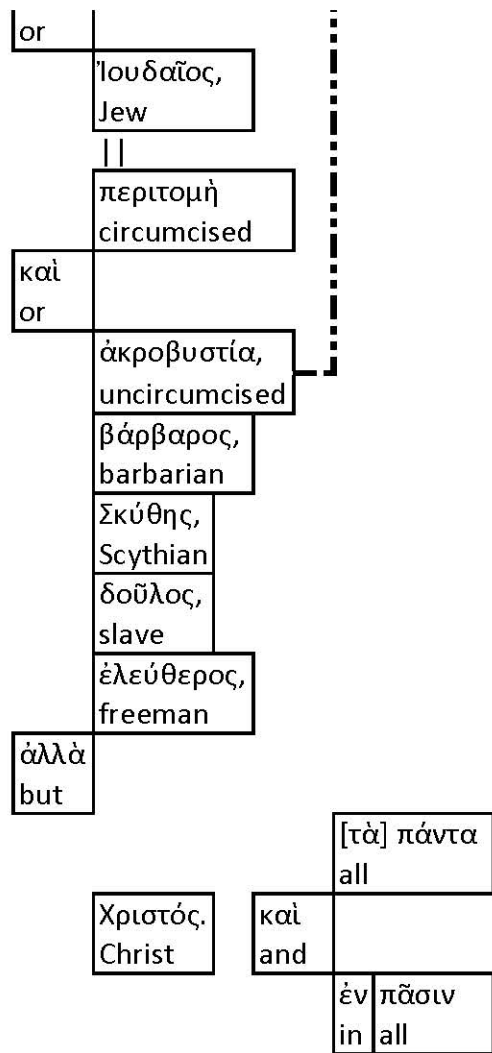
(See next page.)

Comment

Part of the problem with the idea that ascetic practices help us restrain our desires is that the idea is not nearly radical enough. Inflicting suffering on oneself is too tame; what is necessary is that we die altogether to the slavery to sin. We must be changed completely, like removing one set of garments and putting on







another. And Paul says that this is exactly what happened to us at conversion. The mastery of sin over us has been broken. That person who was under slavery to sin has died.

Those who have given their lives and hearts to the sinful affections and activities listed here are those upon whom the wrath of God is coming. But those for whom the wrath of God was satisfied in Jesus, they have a new life to live. We must become a slaughterhouse and a butchery of sin: making mince meat of it wherever we see it in our lives.

Principles

The big idea of this passage is expressed pastorally by the Puritan theology, John Owen, in his *Mortification of Sin*, “Be killing sin,” he warned, “or it will be killing you.”

- The sin-killing process is not merely a matter of externals.
- The sin-killing process is a matter of exposing idols of the heart.
- Frequently our sin issues are corporate issues. One of the most broken things about us as fallen humans is how we relate to one another.

Application

Later today, compare your list of “things which are of the earth” to what Paul lists in this text. What are similarities? What are some differences? Record your thoughts on the space provided in the previous section.

What specific sins listed here will you be slaughtering?

What is your plan for killing sin this year? Can you partner with a trusted friend to work on killing sin together through resetting godly affections and rekindling God-centered hope, through prayer, and through theologically-fueled worship?

4.3 Don Love

The Christian life has never been simply a list of prohibitions. After darkness, there is light. After death to sin, there is life to God. We do not take a vow of silence when we put off deceit and slander. We start building one another up with our words. From this fact, we can see why the rules and rituals of the philosophers could never have been resulted in “a life worthy of the Lord” (1:10).

Position in the Letter

4. Paul exhorts the Colossians to live the new life (Col 3:1–4:6).
 - 4.2. Put to death what is earthly (Col 3:5–11).
 - 4.3. Don love (Col 3:12–16).**
 - 4.4. Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus (Col 3:17–4:1).

Text

¹²Ἐνδύσασθε οὖν, ὡς ἐκλεκτοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ ἅγιοι καὶ ἠγαπημένοι, σπλάγχνα οἰκτιρμοῦ χρηστότητα ταπεινοφροσύνην πραῦτητα μακροθυμίαν, ¹³ἀνεχόμενοι ἀλλήλων καὶ χαριζόμενοι ἑαυτοῖς ἕαν τις πρὸς τινα ἔχη μομφήν · καθὼς καὶ ὁ κύριος ἔχαρίσατο ὑμῖν, οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς⁴² · ¹⁴ἐπὶ πᾶσιν δὲ τούτοις τὴν ἀγάπην, ἧ ἔστιν σύνδεσμος τῆς τελειότητος. ¹⁵καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ Χριστοῦ βραβευέτω ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν, εἰς ἣν καὶ ἐκλήθητε ἐν ἐνὶ σώματι · καὶ εὐχάριστοι γίνεσθε. ¹⁶Ὁ λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐνοικεῖτω ἐν ὑμῖν πλουσίως, ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ διδάσκοντες καὶ νουθετοῦντες ἑαυτοὺς, ψαλμοῖς ὕμνοις ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς ἐν [τῇ] χάριτι ᾄδοντες ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν τῷ θεῷ⁴³ ·

Translation

¹²Therefore, put on—as God’s elect, holy and beloved—compassion, mercy, goodness, humility, gentleness, forbearance, ¹³putting up with one another and forgiving one another (if anyone has a cause for complaint against someone), just as the Lord also forgave you, so you also forgive them. ¹⁴But above all these, put on love, which is the tendon binding all of these in perfect unity. ¹⁵The peace of Christ should be the deciding factor in your hearts—into this peace you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶The word of Christ should dwell among you

⁴²The best mss evidence supports κύριος over Χριστος. Metzger reports that the committee believed that Χριστος arose out of an effort to explain the more ambiguous κύριος.

⁴³Though there are two early variations on Ὁ λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, none have external support to match NA²⁸, and both other readings (Ὁ λογος του θεου, Ὁ λογος του κυριου) are more common, and therefore less likely to have been original. The Byz evidences the reading τω κυριω instead of the NA²⁸’s τῷ θεῷ at the end of verse 16. Thus, “singing with grace in your hearts to the *Lord*” (NKJV, emphasis added).

Internally, it is more likely that a copyist made the text match Eph 5:19 than that he introduced something entirely new, so the better external evidence should be followed.

richly with deepest wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another, singing psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, by grace, with your hearts, to God.

Diagram

(See next page).

Comment

That person who was under slavery to sin has died. The new person, whose life is hidden with Christ, now is able to make progress, to put off individual sins like dishonesty and abusive behavior. The new person is being renewed, growing into the compassionate, kind, humble and forgiving, image of God.

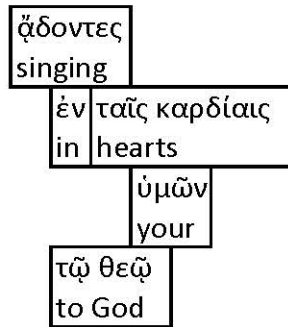
Put On—As God's Elect, Holy and Beloved—Compassion

Directly at the center of this practical section, between the negative side to which we must die, and the positive side for which we are being renewed, there is a reminder that all of this started with God's grace. Christianity is not about turning over a new leaf and getting one's act together. To be a Christian is to be a member of Christ's church, his body and his bride. There is a special, exclusive love that Christ reserves for his bride, that God reserves for his elect.

It is this special underserved love that forms the foundation of all of our Christian action. Our Christian action does not begin with our doing what we ought to do.

10

and	ἡ εἰρήνη	βραβευέτω
	the peace	should be the deciding factor
	τοῦ Χριστοῦ	ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις
	of Christ	in hearts
		ὑμῶν,
	καὶ	your
	also	
	εἰς ἣν	ἐκλήθητε
	into which	you were called
		ἐν σώματι
		in body
καὶ		ἐνὶ
and		one
	γίνεσθε. εὐχάριστοι	
	be. thankful	
16	Ὁ λόγος	ἐνοικεῖτω
	the word	should dwell
	τοῦ Χριστοῦ	ἐν ὑμῖν
	of Christ	among you
		πλουσίως,
		richly
	ἐν σοφίᾳ	
	in wisdom	
	πάσῃ	
	deepest	
	διδάσκοντες	
	teaching	
καὶ		ἐαυτούς,
and		each other
	νουθετοῦντες	
	admonishing	
	ψαλμοῖς	
	by psalms	
	ᾠμοῖς	
	hymns	
	ὕδαϊς	
	songs	
	πνευματικαῖς	
	from the Spirit	
	ἐν [τῇ] χάριτι	
	by grace	



Our Christian action does not begin with us at all. It begins with God’s choice, his uncompelled selection of us, his “elect” (ἐκλεκτοὶ), not for anything that was valuable in us (to the contrary see 1 Cor 1), but out of his sheer grace and kindness.

Having been loved and chosen by God, we were set apart for his good purposes. At some point in our life, we were converted. He worked by his Spirit to open our eyes to the filthiness of our sin, the despair of our case before him, and the beauty of his plan to send his spotless Son to suffer his wrath against sin, which was justly due to us, and thus to save everyone who would call upon his name.

In this death of the Messiah, we died. We died to the mastery of sin over our lives, and we were raised to live a new life. God’s selection of us and his love inevitably pursues not merely our salvation, but our sanctification, or holiness and Christlikeness.

The grand drama of this little phrase is what makes these put-off and put-on sections diametrically different to the rules of the philosophers. Their tactic is to pressure people to conformity to their own set of prohibitions. The philosopher’s model is to press conformity to human standards addressing external, temporary realities with the reward of human approval and with the threat of human disapproval.

The Christian model begins with the Father who qualifies his holy people for a share in an indescribable inheritance and with a Son who redeems us and grants forgiveness of sins. We persevere in the faith not because we are working to be reconciled to him, but because having been reconciled, we have a hope beyond

anything this world has to offer and the Spirit renewing our minds to help us know and love the will of God.

Teaching and Admonishing One Another, Singing

The assembly of God's people is not a spectator sport. Paul as a missionary was the master of empowering new Christians with the ministry of the churches he planted. This policy was one of the means that God used to establish churches in the gospel quickly and allow for the spread of the gospel throughout the Roman world. He did not expect trained professionals to do the work of teaching and admonishing, he expected the average church member to take part in this ministry.

He also expected the average church member to take part in singing. Though they would not usually had formal training, Paul expected them to be able to take part in the public musical affirmation of our precious faith.

By Grace, with Your Hearts, to God

The phrase "with your hearts" has sometimes been rendered "in your hearts" with some confused results. The understanding that often comes to the readers mind is that this singing is supposed to be silent, i.e., "in your hearts." Paul's point is, rather, that we sing "heartily," or perhaps, "passionately."

Principle

The big idea here is that we must continue to be renewed in the image of our Creator through the Word of Christ understood in the context of a believing community, so that like our Creator we may love one another.

Application

Working hard to understand the word of Christ is not always a popular Sunday morning activity. Over the next five years, what can you do to cultivate a love for reading, studying, meditating on, and applying the Word in your family and/or church context?

In this age of technology, we have unprecedented access to musical performances, but we must fight the mentality that musical performance is the mission when we gather as God's people. How can you improve the congregation's participation in the singing this year?

Singing is a facet of the word of Christ dwelling in us richly. And yet our singing in church is so often devoid of any real contemplation of the truths of the word of Christ. Can you collaborate with others before the next block class to produce songs in familiar dialects that communicate the word of Christ clearly and richly?

4.4 Do Everything in the Name of the Lord Jesus

As Paul transitions from discussing his household, i.e., the church, to discussing individual believing households, he segues with a general verse that puts Christ at the center of all of our roles, whether we are young or old, male or female, rich or poor.

Position in the Letter

4. Paul exhorts the Colossians to live the new life (Col 3:1–4:6).
 - 4.3. Don love (Col 3:12–16).
 - 4.4. Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus (Col 3:17–4:1).**
 - 4.5. Speak steadfastly to God and wisely to outsiders (Col 4:2–6).
5. Paul passes greetings to the Colossians (Col 4:7–18).

Text

¹⁷καὶ πᾶν ὃ τι ἐὰν ποιῆτε ἐν λόγῳ ἢ ἐν ἔργῳ, πάντα ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου Ἰησοῦ, εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ δι' αὐτοῦ.⁴⁴

¹⁸Αἱ γυναῖκες, ὑποτάσσεσθε τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ὡς ἀνῆκεν ἐν κυρίῳ. ¹⁹Οἱ ἄνδρες, ἀγαπᾶτε τὰς γυναῖκας καὶ μὴ πικραίνεσθε πρὸς αὐτάς, ²⁰Τὰ τέκνα, ὑπακούετε τοῖς γονεῦσιν κατὰ πάντα, τοῦτο γὰρ εὐάρεστόν ἐστιν ἐν κυρίῳ. ²¹Οἱ πατέρες, μὴ ἐρεθίζετε τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν, ἵνα μὴ ἀθυμῶσιν.

²²Οἱ δοῦλοι, ὑπακούετε κατὰ πάντα τοῖς κατὰ σάρκα κυρίοις, μὴ ἐν ὀφθαλμοδουλίᾳ ὡς ἀνθρωπάρεσκοι, ἀλλ' ἐν ἀπλότητι καρδίας φοβούμενοι τὸν κύριον. ²³Ὅ ἐὰν ποιῆτε, ἐκ ψυχῆς ἐργάζεσθε ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ οὐκ ἀνθρώποις, ²⁴εἰδότες ὅτι ἀπὸ κυρίου ἀπολήμψεσθε τὴν ἀνταπόδοσιν τῆς κληρονομίας. τῷ κυρίῳ Χριστῷ δουλεύετε · ²⁵ὁ γὰρ ἀδικῶν κομίζεται ὁ ἠδίκησεν, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν προσωποληψία. ^{4:1}Οἱ κύριοι, τὸ δίκαιον καὶ τὴν ἰσότητα τοῖς δούλοις παρέχεσθε, εἰδότες ὅτι καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔχετε κύριον ἐν οὐρανῷ.

Translation

¹⁷And whatever you may do in word or in deed, do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the father through him.

¹⁸Wives submit yourselves to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹Husbands love your wives, and do not become embittered against them.

²⁰Children obey your parents according to everything, for this is pleasing in the Lord's sight. ²¹Fathers do not irritate your children lest they lose heart.⁴⁵

²²Slaves obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not in eye-service as fawners but in sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³Whatever you do, put your heart and soul into it working as to the Lord and not to men ²⁴knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of an inheritance. You serve the Lord Christ.

⁴⁴God the Father (τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ) seems to have been a problematic construction for copyists; see discussion of 1:3 above. As in that case the external evidence strongly favors the more difficult construction (contra RP).

⁴⁵Many ancient manuscripts have παροργίζετε instead of ἐρεθίζετε, but again this matches Eph 6:4 and is therefore internally less likely. The Byz and Vaticanus both support the more rare word, ἐρεθίζετε, and the critical editions agree.

²⁵The one who does wrong will receive what is due him from that which he did wrong. There is no favoritism. ^{4:1}Masters provide justice and equality to your slaves, knowing that you have a Master in heaven.

Diagram

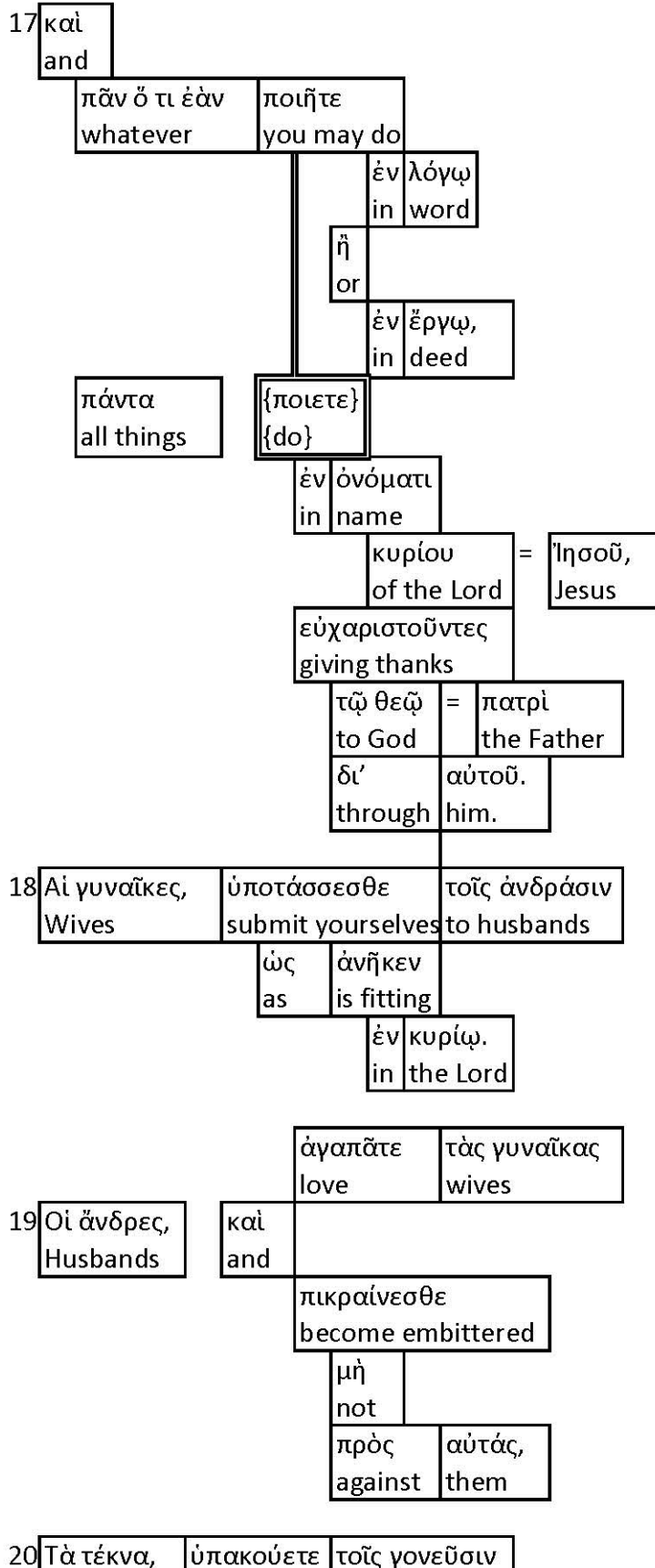
(See next page.)

Comment

The transformation that comes with this renewal in the image of our Creator (3:10) was never intended to be an individualistic affair. Renewal happens in the community of God's people and is intended to benefit that community. Paul proceeds from renewed individuals to renewed households, beginning with the household of God and then moving to individual households. Nearly two millennia after these letters were written, we can miss the importance of the standards Paul sets out here. Genuine godliness is expressed in those closest relationships with people who know us best, people within our household.

The One Who Does Wrong Will Receive What Is Due Him

That Paul spends the most time on the responsibilities of a slave is perhaps understandable given that a runaway slave has just been returned to Philemon. It would be unlikely if the church at Colosse did not find out that Paul had vouched for Onesimus and offered to pay damages for whatever Onesimus may have done as he had run away. The wording he uses in that context is very similar to the wording here. Paul would probably want to make sure that the Christian slaves understood that Onesimus's actions were not to be commended or mimicked. Onesimus' conversion was what made the difference. The Christian slaves knew better and would not receive the same treatment for illegal activity.



	Children	obey	parents					
			κατὰ according to	πάντα, everything				
		γὰρ for	τοῦτο this	ἐστίν is	εὐάρεστόν pleasing	ἐν in the sight of	κυρίῳ. the Lord	
21	Οἱ πατέρες, Fathers	ἐρεθίζετε do irritate	τὰ τέκνα children					
		μὴ not	ὑμῶν, your					
		ἵνα μὴ lest	ἄθυμῶσιν. they lose heart.					
22	Οἱ δοῦλοι, Slaves	ὑπακούετε obey				τοῖς κυρίοις, masters		
		κατὰ according to	πάντα all things			κατὰ according to	σάρκα the flesh	
		μὴ not	ἐν in	ὀφθαλμοδουλίᾳ eye-service				
			ὡς as	ἄνθρωπάρεσκοι, fawners				
	ἀλλ' but							
			ἐν in	ἀπλότητι sincerity				
				καρδίας of heart				
			φοβούμενοι fearing	τὸν κύριον. the Lord				
23	ὅ ἐάν Whatever	ποιῆτε, you do						
	ἐργάζεσθε work							
		ἐκ from	ψυχῆς the soul					
		ὡς as	τῷ κυρίῳ to the Lord					
	καὶ and							
		οὐκ not	ἀνθρώποις, to men					

25

knowing that	you will receive	a reward
ἀπό	κυρίου	τῆς κληρονομίας,
from	the Lord	the inheritance
δουλεύετε	τῷ κυρίῳ	= Χριστῷ
you serve	the Lord	Christ
γάρ	ὁ ἀδικῶν	κομίσεται
for	the one who does wrong	will receive what is due from
	ὃ	ἠδίκησεν,
	that which	he did wrong
καὶ	οὐκ ἔστιν	προσωποληψία.
and	not there is	favoritism

		τὸ δίκαιον	
		justice	
1 Οἱ κύριοι,	παρέχετε,	καὶ	τοῖς δούλοις
Masters	provide	and	to slaves
		τὴν ἰσότητα	
		equality	
εἰδότες	ὅτι	ὑμεῖς	ἔχετε κύριον
knowing	that	you	have a Master
		καὶ	ἐν οὐρανῷ.
		also	in heaven

Masters Provide Justice and Equality

The fact that Paul exhorts the masters to be fair with their slaves but does not even hint that releasing them would be the best thing to do may surprise us, but Paul appears to be content to function within the social structures of his day. Instead of abolishing slavery, Paul made it a venue for the Christian virtues of justice, sincerity, and hard work.

Principle

If we are permitted to include verse 17 in this section, perhaps the best way to summarize would be, “Whatever role you find yourself in, dispatch your responsibilities with an eye toward what your Master, Jesus will think of your work.”

Application

List out the roles that you currently occupy (e.g., for example, father, son, brother, pastor, lawyer).

How can you apply what you know about the supremacy and preeminence of Christ to your roles? For instance, “Jesus is Lord, and I am a father; therefore...” Write an application of your own that fits each of your own roles. Remember to include a due date for this application.

4.5 Speak steadfastly to God and wisely to outsiders (4:2–6).

Paul concludes his section on the Christian life and community with an exhortation to speech. First, speech to God, making requests of him by prayer, and second to neighbor, looking for opportunities to share the life-giving message.

Position in the Letter

4. Paul exhorts the Colossians to live the new life (Col 3:1–4:6).
 - 4.4. Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus (Col 3:17–4:1).
 - 4.5. Speak steadfastly to God and wisely to outsiders (Col 4:2–6).**
5. Paul passes greetings to the Colossians (Col 4:7–18).
 - 5.1. Tychicus and Onesimus have come with details about Paul’s affairs (Col 4:7–9).

Text

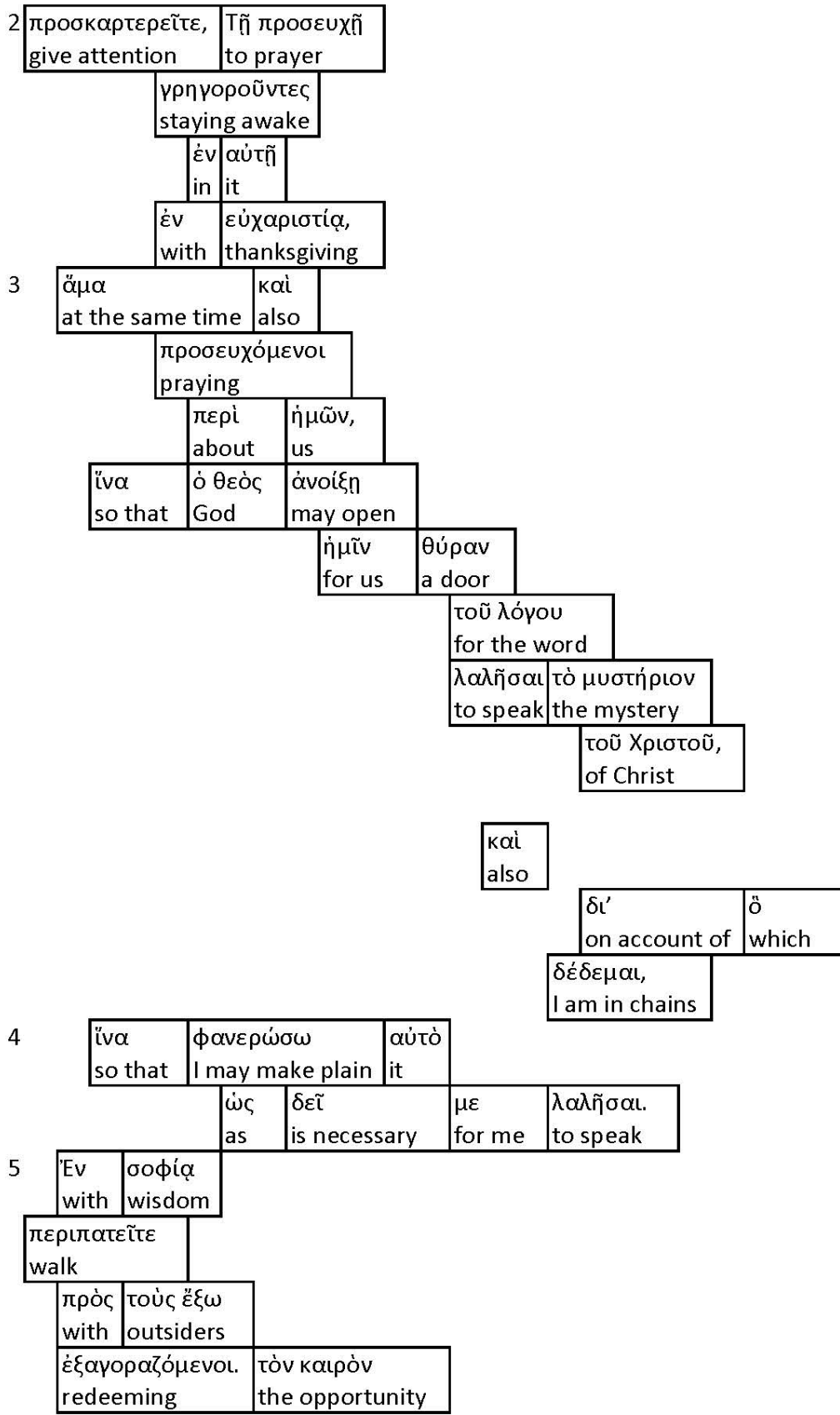
²Τῇ προσευχῇ προσκαρτερεῖτε, γρηγοροῦντες ἐν αὐτῇ ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ,
³προσευχόμενοι ἅμα καὶ περὶ ἡμῶν, ἵνα ὁ θεὸς ἀνοίξῃ ἡμῖν θύραν τοῦ λόγου

λαλήσαι τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, δι' ὃ καὶ δέδεμαι,⁴⁶ ἵνα φανερώσω αὐτὸ ὡς δεῖ με λαλήσαι. ⁵Ἐν σοφίᾳ περιπατεῖτε πρὸς τοὺς ἔξω τὸν καιρὸν ἔξαγοραζόμενοι. ⁶ὁ λόγος ὑμῶν πάντοτε ἐν χάριτι, ἄλατι ἡρτυμένος, εἰδέναι πῶς δεῖ ὑμᾶς ἐνὶ ἐκάστῳ ἀποκρίνεσθαι.

Translation

²Give attention to prayer, staying awake in it with thanksgiving, ³praying at the same time for me also that God may open to us a door for the word to speak the mystery of Christ on account of which also I am in chains, ⁴so that I may make it plain as is necessary for me to speak. ⁵Walk in wisdom with the outsiders, redeeming the opportunity. ⁶Your word should always be with grace, seasoned with salt so that you know how it is necessary for you to answer each one.

⁴⁶Vaticanus and a couple of other manuscripts and versions support θεου after τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ. Col 2:2 has similar wording, and though the text there also has variants, Metzger reports that the committee felt that Col 2:2 shaped the copyists' work in 4:3.



Diagram

6 ὁ λόγος word	εστω should be				
ὑμῶν you	πάντοτε always				
	έν with	χάρτι, grace			
	ήρτυμένος, seasoned				
	άλαι with salt				
	είδέναι to know	πώς how			
	δεῖ it is necessary	ὑμᾶς for you	ἀποκρίνεσθαι. to answer		
			ένι to one		
			έκάστῳ each		

Comment

Paul's final set of exhortations concern talking to God and talking to outsiders. He reminds us to pray regularly, earnestly, thankfully and with the mission of Christ in mind. He encourages them to walk in wisdom, making every opportunity and word with unbelievers count.

Seasoned With Salt

Moo comments on this phrase, “Paul is calling on Christians to speak with their unbelieving neighbors and friends with gracious, warm, and winsome words—all with the purpose of being able to ‘answer’ unbelievers.” The point of the analogy is that salt improves flavor. So also our speech should be pleasant, not obnoxious

Principle

Paul encourages the Colossians to use their mouths to bring needs—and thanksgiving!—before God and to adorn the gospel with wise and pleasant words to unbelievers.

Application

What can you do next week that will give you opportunities to speak to unbelievers and to speak to God about them?

5. Paul passes greetings to the Colossians (4:7–18).

In this final section, Paul takes an opportunity to pass greetings on from those who are with him and also asks the Colossians to pass his greetings on to those whom he knows in their area of Asia Minor.

Position in the Letter

4. Paul exhorts the Colossians to live the new life (Col 3:1–4:6).
5. **Paul passes greetings to the Colossians (Col 4:7–18).**
 - 5.1. **Tychicus and Onesimus have come with details about Paul’s affairs (Col 4:7–9).**
 - 5.2. **Men of the circumcision greet the Colossians as Paul’s fellow workers (Col 4:10–11).**
 - 5.3. **Epaphras has worked hard and continues to do so in prayer (Col 4:12–13).**
 - 5.4. **Luke and Demas send greetings (Col 4:14).**
 - 5.5. **Paul greets those in the Colossian network (Col 4:15–17).**
 - 5.6. **Paul signs the letter (Col 4:18).**

Text

⁷Τὰ κατ’ ἐμὲ πάντα γνωρίσει ὑμῖν Τύχικος ὁ ἀγαπητὸς ἀδελφὸς καὶ πιστὸς διάκονος καὶ σύνδουλος ἐν κυρίῳ, ⁸ὃν ἔπεμψα πρὸς ὑμᾶς εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο, ἵνα γνῶτε τὰ περὶ ἡμῶν καὶ παρακαλέση τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν,⁴⁷ ⁹σὺν Ὀνησίμῳ τῷ πιστῷ καὶ ἀγαπητῷ ἀδελφῷ, ὃς ἐστὶν ἐξ ὑμῶν · πάντα ὑμῖν γνωρίσουσιν τὰ ὧδε. ¹⁰Ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς Ἀρίσταρχος ὁ συναιχμάλωτός μου καὶ Μᾶρκος ὁ ἀνεψιὸς Βαρναβᾶ (περὶ οὗ ἐλάβετε ἐντολὰς, ἐὰν ἔλθῃ πρὸς ὑμᾶς, δέξασθε αὐτόν) ¹¹καὶ Ἰησοῦς ὁ λεγόμενος Ἰουῆτος, οἱ ὄντες ἐκ περιτομῆς, οὗτοι μόνοι συνεργοὶ εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ, οἵτινες ἐγενήθησάν μοι παρηγορία. ¹²ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ ἐξ ὑμῶν, δοῦλος Χριστοῦ [Ἰησοῦ], πάντοτε ἀγωνιζόμενος ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν

⁴⁷Papyrus 46, one of Sinaiticus’ correctors, and the Byzantine text have: γνω τα περι υμων, “that *he* may know *your* circumstances” (NKJV). The NA²⁸ reading has better external evidence and can explain how the variants arose. For a plausible account of transition from one reading to another, see Metzger.

έν ταῖς προσευχαῖς, ἵνα σταθῆτε τέλειοι καὶ πεπληροφορημένοι ἐν παντὶ
θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ.⁴⁸ ¹³μαρτυρῶ γὰρ αὐτῷ ὅτι ἔχει πολὺν πόνον ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ
τῶν ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ καὶ τῶν ἐν Ἱεραπόλει. ¹⁴ἀσπάζεταιται ὑμᾶς Λουκᾶς ὁ ἰατρὸς ὁ
ἀγαπητὸς καὶ Δημᾶς.⁴⁹

¹⁵Ἀσπάσασθε τοὺς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἀδελφοὺς καὶ Νύμφαν καὶ τὴν κατ' οἶκον αὐτῆς
ἐκκλησίαν.⁵⁰ ¹⁶καὶ ὅταν ἀναγνωσθῆ παρ' ὑμῖν ἡ ἐπιστολή, ποιήσατε ἵνα καὶ ἐν τῇ
Λαοδικέων ἐκκλησίᾳ ἀναγνωσθῆ, καὶ τὴν ἐκ Λαοδικείας ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀναγνωῶτε.

¹⁷καὶ εἶπατε Ἀρχίππῳ · βλέπε τὴν διακονίαν ἣν παρέλαβες ἐν κυρίῳ, ἵνα αὐτὴν
πληροῖς.

¹⁸Ὁ ἀσπασμὸς τῇ ἐμῇ χειρὶ Παύλου. μνημονεύετέ μου τῶν δεσμῶν. ἡ χάρις μεθ'
ὑμῶν.

Translation

⁷Tychicus, a brother beloved and faithful minister and co-slave in the Lord, will
make known all the details about my circumstances. ⁸I sent him to you for this
very reason so that you would know the news about us, and he would comfort
your hearts ⁹with Onesimus a faithful and beloved brother who is from you. They
will make everything known to you.

¹⁰Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas
(concerning whom you received instructions if he comes to you receive him)

¹¹and Jesus called Justus—these ones alone are from the circumcision among my
coworkers for the kingdom of God. They have become to me a comfort.

¹²Epaphras greets you. He is from you, a slave of Christ [Jesus], and always
striving on behalf of you in his prayers in order that you would stand mature and

⁴⁸The evidence is divided regarding whether the text should read Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ as in the NA28; simply Χριστου as in several important mss including Papyrus 46, in addition to the Byz; or as in a few mss Ἰησου Χριστου. This latter reading is least supported, but the choice between the other two is more difficult. The NA28 tentatively (Metzger's commentary has a C-rating) includes Ἰησοῦ, contra NET.

⁴⁹Metzger attributes the variety of readings occurring in connection with πολὺν in this verse to the rarity of the word πόνον. The NA28 text is quite well substantiated by the external evidence.

⁵⁰Determining the gender of Νύμφαν was evidently difficult for copyists. The Byz has οἶκον αὐτοῦ, "his house" (so NKJV). Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus have οἶκον αὐτῶν, "their house." Vaticanus and a few other mss gave sufficient support for οἶκον αὐτῆς as far as NA28 and SBLGNT are concerned.

complete in the whole will of God. ¹³I testify for about him that he has great toil on behalf of you and those in Laodicea and those in Hierapolis. ¹⁴Luke the beloved physician greets you, and Demas does as well.

¹⁵Greet those brothers in Laodicea and Nympha and also the church who meets in her house.

¹⁶And when this letter has been read for you make sure that it is read also in the church of Laodicea. And the one from Laodicea also, make sure that you read it.

¹⁷Tell Archippus, “Take care to complete the ministry you have received in the Lord.”

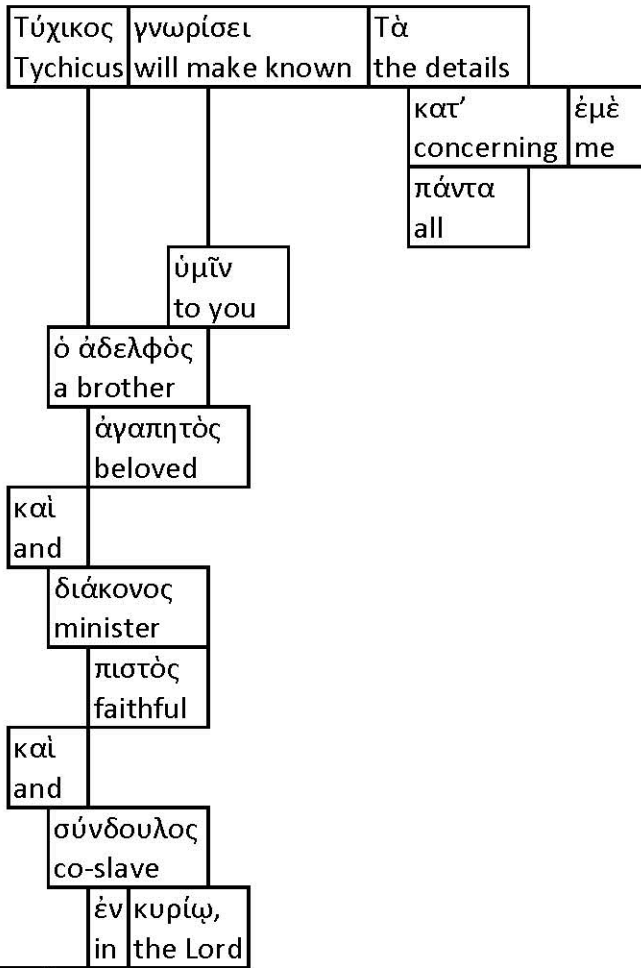
¹⁸A greeting in my own hand—Paul, Remember My Chains. Grace be with you.⁵¹

Diagram

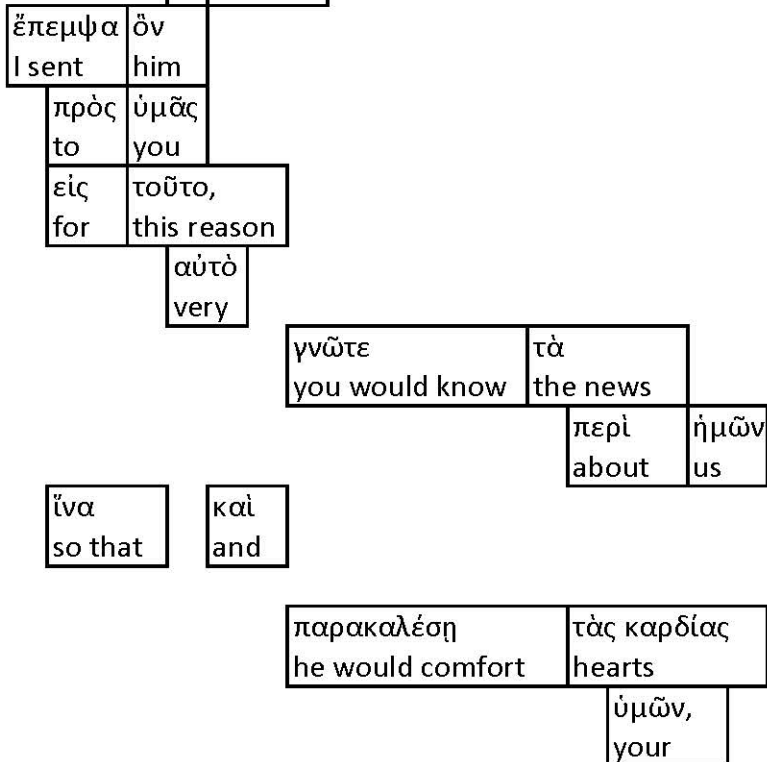
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⁵¹The Byz typically added αμην and a subscript to the end of texts like this; the closing has little support elsewhere.

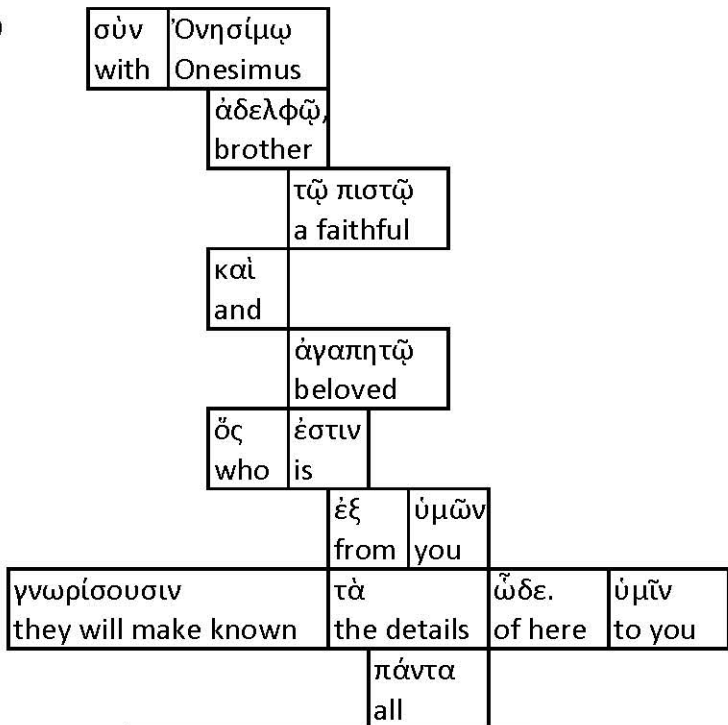
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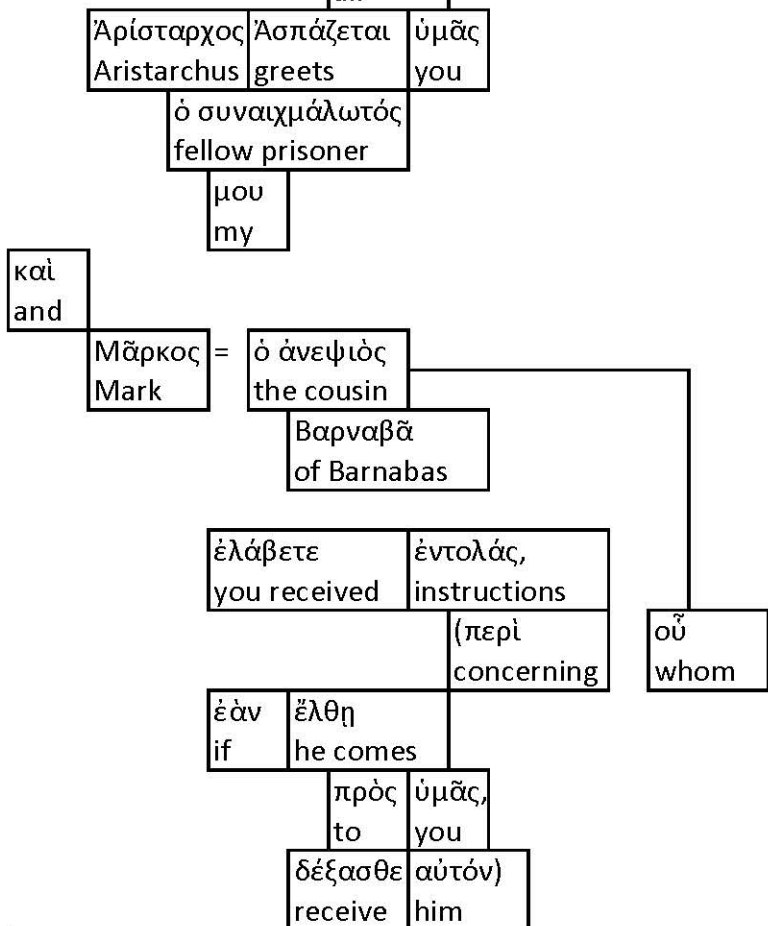
8



9



10



11

καὶ
and

Ἰησοῦς	Jesus				
ὁ λεγόμενος	called	Ἰουστος,	Justus		
οἱ	the ones	ὄντες	being		
		ἐκ	from	περιτομῆς,	the circumcision
οὗτοι	these	μόνοι	alone	συνεργοὶ	coworkers
		εἰς	for	τὴν βασιλείαν	the kingdom
				τοῦ θεοῦ,	of God
οἵτινες	who	ἐγενήθησάν	have become	παρηγορία.	a comfort
				μοι	to me

12

Ἐπαφρᾶς	Ἐραφρας	ἀσπάζεται	greet	ὑμᾶς	you
ὁ	who is	ἐξ	from	ὑμῶν,	you
δοῦλος	a slave				
		Χριστοῦ =	[Ἰησοῦ],		[Jesus]
		of Christ			

πάντοτε	always		
ἀγωνιζόμενος	striving		
ὑπὲρ	on behalf of	ὑμῶν	you
ἐν	in	ταῖς προσευχαῖς,	his prayers

ἵνα	in order that	σταθῆτε	you would stand
-----	---------------	---------	-----------------

τέλειοι	mature
καὶ	and
πεπληροφορημένοι	complete
ἐν θελήματι	in will

παντὶ
the whole
τοῦ θεοῦ.
of God

13 γὰρ
for

μαρτυρῶ	ὅτι	ἔχει	πόνον
I testify	that	he has	toil
αὐτῷ			πολὺν
about him			great

ὑμῶν				
you				
καὶ				
and				
ὑπὲρ		τῶν	ἐν	Λαοδικείᾳ
on behalf of		those	in	Laodicea
καὶ				
and				
τῶν		ἐν	Ἱεραπόλει.	
those		in	Hierapolis	

14

Λουκᾶς	ἀσπάζεται	ὑμᾶς
Luke	greet	you
ὁ ἰατρός		
the physician		
ὁ ἀγαπητός		
beloved		
καὶ		
and		
Δημᾶς.		
Demas		

15

τούς	ἀδελφούς
those	brothers
ἐν	Λαοδικείᾳ
in	Laodicea
καὶ	
and	
Ἀσπάσαθε	Νύμφαν
Greet	Nympha
καὶ	
also	
τὴν ἐκκλησίαν.	
the church	

κατ'	οἶκον
meeting with	house
	αὐτῆς
	her

16 καὶ ὅταν
and whenever

ἡ ἐπιστολή,	ἀναγνωσθῆ
this letter	is read

παρ'	ὑμῖν
for	you

ποιήσατε	ἵνα	ἀναγνωσθῆ,
make sure	that	it is read

καὶ
also

ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ
in the church

Λαοδικέων
of Laodicea

καὶ
and

τὴν
the one

ἐκ	Λαοδικείας
from	Laodicea

καὶ	ἵνα	ὑμεῖς	ἀναγνώτε.
also	that	you	read it

17

καὶ	εἶπατε	Ἀρχίππῳ
and	tell	Archippus

βλέπε	τὴν διακονίαν
Pay attention	to the ministry

ἣν	παρέλαβες
which	you have received

ἐν κυρίῳ,
in the Lord

ἵνα	πληροῖς.	αὐτὴν
that	you complete	it

18 Ὁ ἀσπασμὸς = Παύλου.
the greeting = Paul

τῇ χειρὶ
by hand

ἐμῇ

	my own	
μνημονεύετε	τῶν δεσμῶν.	
remember	chains	
	μου	
	my	
ἡ χάρις	μεθ’	ὑμῶν.
Grace	with	you

Comments

While it is true that this section is mostly concerned with the unfamiliar names and snippets of stories we will never know this side of eternity, it is also rich with information about the situation and circumstances concerning the letter.

Whatever details we glean help us draw a better picture of the occasion of the letter, which in turn helps us better understand and apply the letter to ourselves.

Onesimus, a Faithful and Beloved Brother

The mention of Onesimus in addition to several other overlapping names undoubtedly ties this letter to the intriguing story captured in Paul's letter to Philemon to which we will turn next. Here, Paul commends him as a trusted bearer of news along with Tychicus. This may have been surprising for the church who may have considered Onesimus a criminal because of his runaway status alone, not to mention any other property he took when he escaped Philemon.

These Ones Alone Are from the Circumcision

Several thoughts could have occasioned the mention of people "of the circumcision." First, Paul is making clear that if anyone comes with a message of circumcision, then the Colossians are to know that, whatever they may claim, they do not have Paul's endorsement. Another reason could be that it makes clear that circumcision itself is not a problem. Of course, he himself was circumcised as well. The problem came when people began to advocate circumcision as spiritually beneficial to Gentiles, or to say that the Gentiles were somehow

inferior followers of Christ as long as they remained uncircumcised. Such a teacher Paul does not tolerate.

Epaphras...Has Great Toil on Behalf of You and Those in Laodicea and Those in Hierapolis.

Epaphras evidently had some ministry beyond the local church at Colosse. This supports the idea that Paul expected people to follow after his foundation-laying ministry to preach the gospel in the smaller cities within reach of the major metropolitan areas. Such men would have influence and responsibility as church-planters beyond the local church who commissioned them to whom they were accountable. Again the issue of assurance arises as part of Epaphras' prayer for the Colossian church in this critical time.

The One from Laodicea Also, Make Sure That You Read It.

Perhaps through Epaphras, the Colossian church had some relationship and contact with the Laodicean church. Scholars have speculated on the basis of some manuscript evidence that the letter that they would have received from Laodicea was actually the circular letter we now know as Ephesians.

Principle

While it is difficult to derive an overarching principle from these details, one item does stand out: Paul had a complex network of friends and coworkers in the gospel, even in a city where he had possibly never visited. Surely this sort of interconnectivity among Christians should be cultivated for the sake of the mission to which Christ has called us.

Application

Will your personal network of Great-Commission contacts expand this week?

What can you do to make the most of this opportunity for the sake of the Name?

1
2

Training the Next Generation of Servant Leaders in Africa for Great Commission Living

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Philemon

This short letter came along with the longer letter to the broader Colossian church. It deals with something of a personal matter between Paul and a man, Philemon, who hosts a church in his home.

Pre-understanding

Paul is writing from prison (Phlm 1). The letter goes to Philemon first (Phlm 1, 4), whom Paul considered a co-worker (Phlm 1) or a partner (Phlm 17). Since Philemon's love had been a refreshment to God's people (Phlm 7), it seems possible that a benefactor-type relationship was involved.

The letter is an appeal for kindness to Onesimus (Phlm 10). Onesimus was a slave (Phlm 16), who it seems had run away (Phlm 15), and subsequently been converted (Phlm 9, 16). Paul was directly instrumental in Onesimus' conversion (Phlm 9). When the runaway had a change of heart before God, he had a changed life before men as well. Onesimus had been beneficial to Paul while in prison (Phlm 11, 13), and Paul, in turn had grown exceedingly fond of Onesimus (Phlm 12).

The most explicit part of his request is in Phlm 17–18. Paul asks Philemon to grant welcome and forgiveness to Onesimus. Based on Phlm 13, 17–18, I gather that Paul wants Philemon to forgive and accept Onesimus back into the household. Even better would be for Onesimus to be released to serve Paul as he had been doing before Paul returned him with Tychicus to Colosse. So O'Brien, "The apostle was confident that his friend would respond in a godly manner and believed that he 'will do even more than I ask' (21). These words are tantalizing but as we read between the lines we conclude that the 'more' of which Paul speaks is Philemon's willingness to return Onesimus to Paul for the service of the gospel (21)."⁵² The echo of Phlm 7 in Phlm 17 shows that Paul thought of his request as a part of gospel ministry partnership.

⁵²Introduction to Philemon, New Bible Commentary.

Outline

1. Paul greets Philemon and his associates (Phlm 1–3).
2. Paul reports his thanksgiving and prayers regarding Philemon (Phlm 4–7).
 - 2.1. Paul thanks God for his Christ-centered faith and indiscriminate love (Phlm 4–5).
 - 2.2. Paul prays that their partnership in the faith would be fruitful (Phlm 6).
 - 2.3. Paul commends Philemon for his kind, generous love (Phlm 7).
3. Paul makes his request of Philemon (Phlm 8–22).
 - 3.1. Paul introduces his request without making demands (Phlm 10–12).
 - 3.2. Paul submits his wishes to Philemon’s consent (Phlm 13–14).
 - 3.3. Paul presents a picture of the new relationship (Phlm 15–17).
 - 3.4. Paul offers to repay any loss on Onesimus’ account (Phlm 18–19).
 - 3.5. Paul closes his requests and asks for lodging (Phlm 20–22).
4. Paul passes on greetings and closes the letter (Phlm 23–25).

Text

¹ Παῦλος δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφὸς Φιλήμονι τῷ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ ἡμῶν ² καὶ Ἀπφία τῇ ἀδελφῇ καὶ Ἀρχίππῳ τῷ συστρατιώτῃ ἡμῶν καὶ τῇ κατ’ οἶκόν σου ἐκκλησίᾳ,⁵³ ³ χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

⁴ Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου πάντοτε μνείαν σου ποιούμενος ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου, ⁵ ἀκούων σου τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν πίστιν, ἣν ἔχεις πρὸς τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν καὶ εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους, ⁶ ὅπως ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεώς σου ἐνεργῆς γένηται ἐν ἐπιγνώσει παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ τοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν εἰς Χριστόν.⁵⁴ ⁷ χαρὰν γὰρ πολλὴν ἔσχον

⁵³The Byz and thus RP has τη αγαπητη, but the mss evidence for the NA28 text is better. The Byz reading, according to Metzger, matches the previous verse and is therefore more likely to be secondary.

⁵⁴NA28 agrees with Alexandrinus against Papyrus 61, Sinaiticus and the Byz which have εν υμιν. Since the latter reading retains the most recent person, it is more likely to have been the product of smoothing than vice versa.

καὶ παράκλησιν ἐπὶ τῆ ἀγάπῃ σου, ὅτι τὰ σπλάγχνα τῶν ἀγίων ἀναπέπαιται διὰ σοῦ, ἀδελφέ.

⁸ Διὸ πολλὴν ἐν Χριστῷ παρρησίαν ἔχων ἐπιτάσσει σοὶ τὸ ἀνηκόν ⁹ διὰ τὴν ἀγάπην μᾶλλον παρακαλῶ, τοιοῦτος ὢν ὡς Παῦλος πρεσβύτης νυνὶ δὲ καὶ δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ · ¹⁰ παρακαλῶ σε περὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου, ὃν ἐγέννησα ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς, Ὀνήσιμον, ¹¹ τὸν ποτέ σοι ἄχρηστον νυνὶ δὲ [καὶ] σοὶ καὶ ἐμοὶ εὐχρηστον, ¹² ὃν ἀνέπεμψά σοι, αὐτόν, τοῦτ' ἔστιν τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα⁵⁵ · ¹³ ὃν ἐγὼ ἐβουλόμην πρὸς ἐμαυτὸν κατέχειν, ἵνα ὑπὲρ σοῦ μοι διακονῆ ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, ¹⁴ χωρὶς δὲ τῆς σῆς γνώμης οὐδὲν ἠθέλησα ποιῆσαι, ἵνα μὴ ὡς κατὰ ἀνάγκην τὸ ἀγαθὸν σου ἦ ἀλλὰ κατὰ ἐκούσιον.

¹⁵ Τάχα γὰρ διὰ τοῦτο ἐχωρίσθη πρὸς ὥραν, ἵνα αἰώνιον αὐτὸν ἀπέχῃς, ¹⁶ οὐκέτι ὡς δοῦλον ἀλλ' ὑπὲρ δοῦλον, ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν, μάλιστα ἐμοί, πόσω δὲ μᾶλλον σοὶ καὶ ἐν σαρκὶ καὶ ἐν κυρίῳ. ¹⁷ εἰ οὖν με ἔχεις κοινωνόν, προσλαβοῦ αὐτόν ὡς ἐμέ. ¹⁸ εἰ δέ τι ἠδίκησέν σε ἢ ὀφείλει, τοῦτο ἐμοὶ ἐλλόγα. ¹⁹ ἐγὼ Παῦλος ἔγραψα τῆ ἐμῇ χειρὶ, ἐγὼ ἀποτίσω · ἵνα μὴ λέγω σοὶ ὅτι καὶ σεαυτὸν μοι προσοφείλεις. ²⁰ ναὶ ἀδελφέ, ἐγὼ σου ὀναίμην ἐν κυρίῳ · ἀνάπαυσόν μου τὰ σπλάγχνα ἐν Χριστῷ. ²¹ Πεποιθὼς τῆ ὑπακοῆ σου ἔγραψά σοι, εἰδὼς ὅτι καὶ ὑπὲρ ἃ λέγω ποιήσεις. ²² ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἐτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν · ἐλπίζω γὰρ ὅτι διὰ τῶν προσευχῶν ὑμῶν χαρισθήσομαι ὑμῖν.

²³ Ἀσπάζεται σε Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ συναιχμάλωτός μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ²⁴ Μάρκος, Ἀρίσταρχος, Δημᾶς, Λουκᾶς, οἱ συνεργοί μου.

²⁵ Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν.⁵⁶

⁵⁵"Scribal amelioration" explains the addition of προσλαβου and σου in various places in this verse, according to Metzger. The NA28 text is the roughest reading and therefore more likely to be original, and it is sufficiently supported by Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus.

⁵⁶Alexandrinus and the Byz among others support the addition of ημων after κυρίου. However, the shorter reading is preferred and the support for the shorter reading is solid. As with Colossians, the letter is closed with an αμην as well as several words of subscription in many, especially late, mss. Since this is a known scribal practice, the probability is high that these are not original.

Translation

¹Paul a prisoner of Christ Jesus and Timothy a brother to Philemon our beloved coworker ²and Apphia a sister, and Archippus our fellow-soldier and the church associated with your house. ³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

⁴I thank my God always making mention of you during my prayers ⁵because I have heard of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all God's holy people ⁶so that the fellowship of your faith become effective by knowledge of every goodness of what is ours in Christ. ⁷For great joy and encouragement they have had from your love because the hearts of God's holy people have been refreshed through you brother.

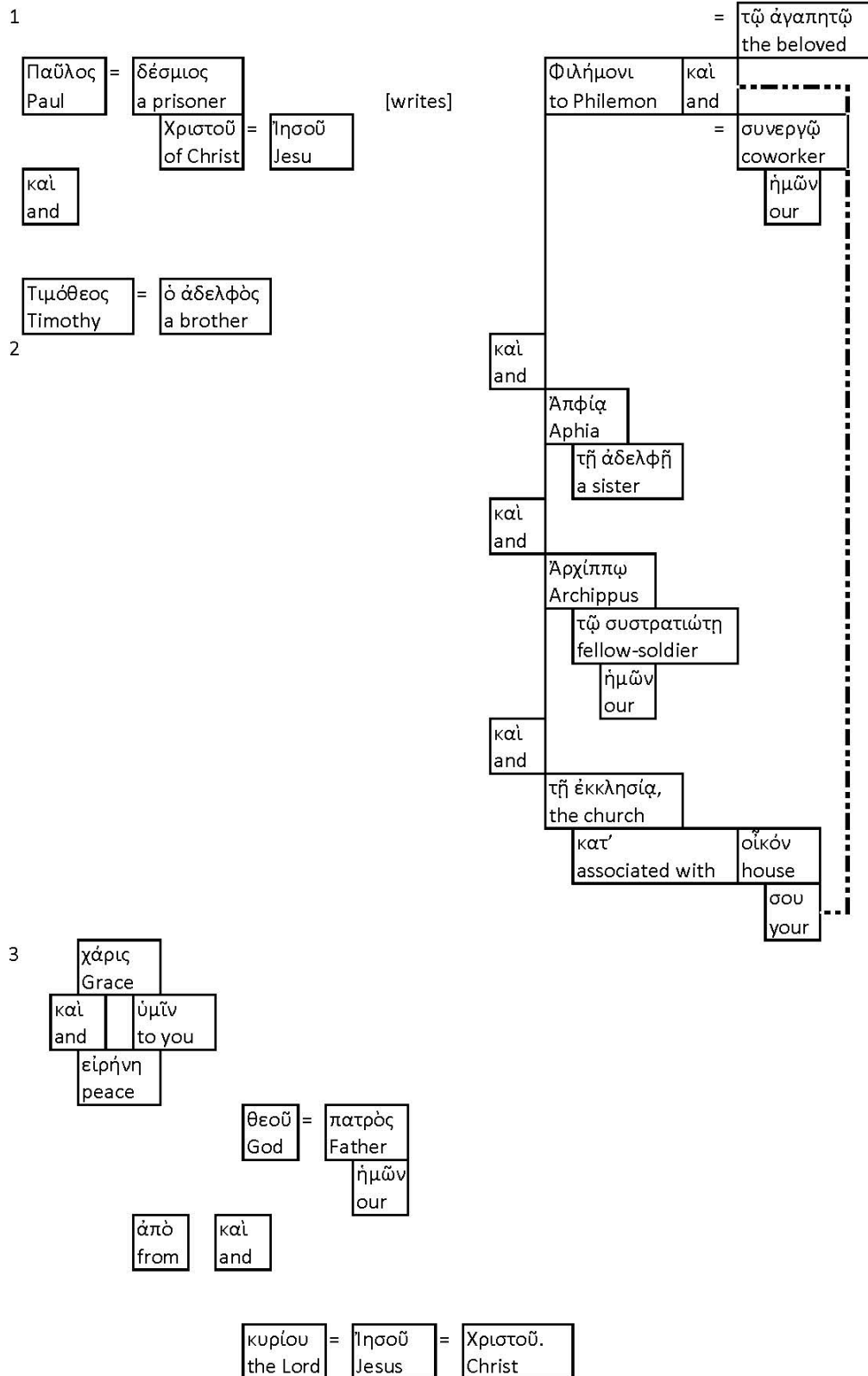
⁸That is why, having great boldness in Christ to order you to your duty—on ⁹account of love I encourage instead—such a man as Paul the elder, but now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—¹⁰I encourage you concerning my own child whom I have fathered in prison, Onesimus. ¹¹He was once a useless person to you but now to you also and to me, he is useful ¹²whom I sent again to you—him this one is my heart ¹³whom I desired to keep him with me, so that by you he may have ministry to me in bonds because of the gospel. ¹⁴But I wanted to do nothing without your approval lest your goodness would be as by constraint but now it will be voluntary instead.

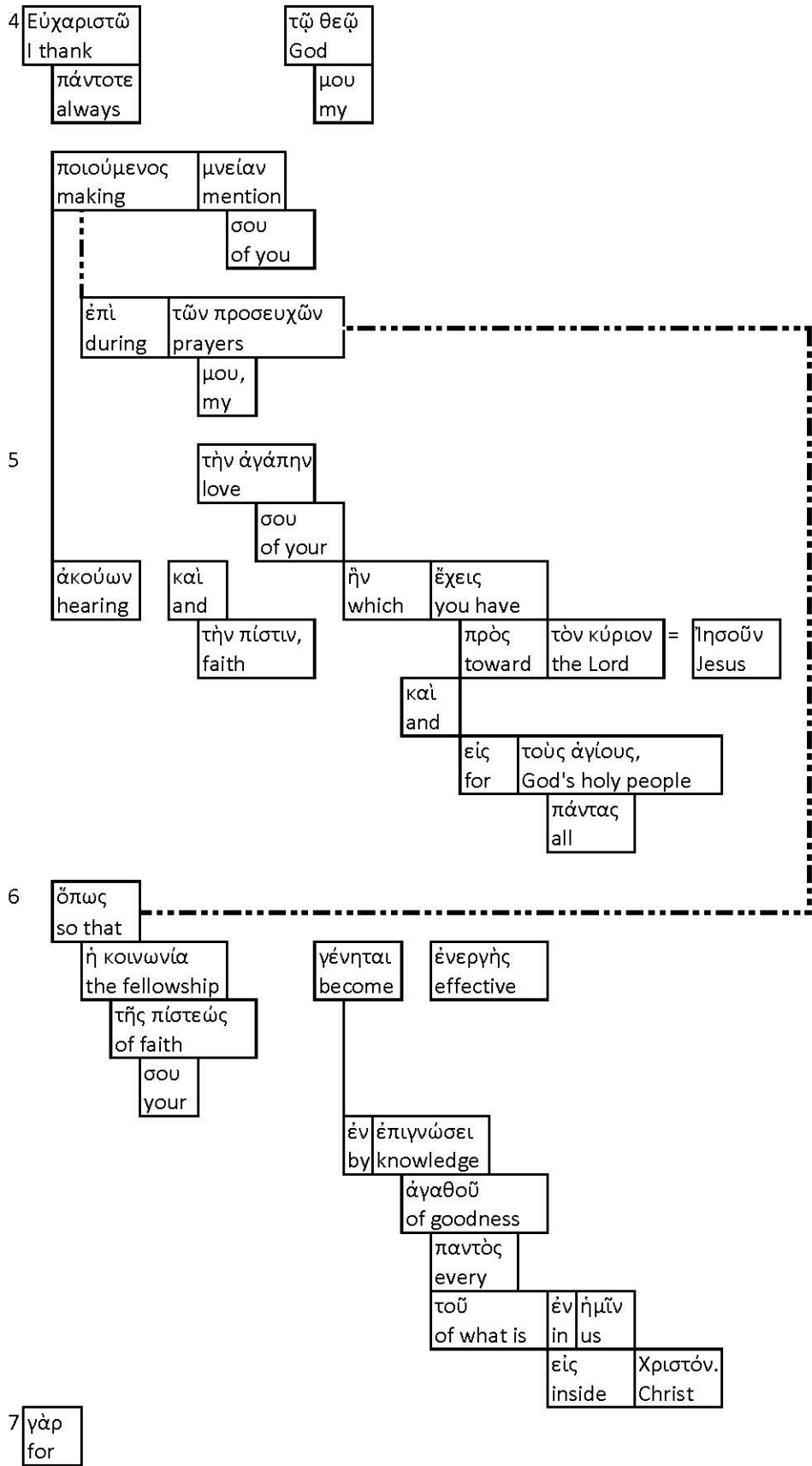
¹⁵For perhaps on account of this he was separated from you for an hour so that you may receive him in full for eternity—¹⁶no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you both in flesh and in spirit. ¹⁷Therefore if you count me as a partner, receive him as you receive me. ¹⁸If he has wronged you in any way, or if he owes you anything, charge this to my account. ¹⁹I Paul write with my own hand: I will repay—not to say that even you owe me your own self. ²⁰Yes, brother, I would receive this benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.

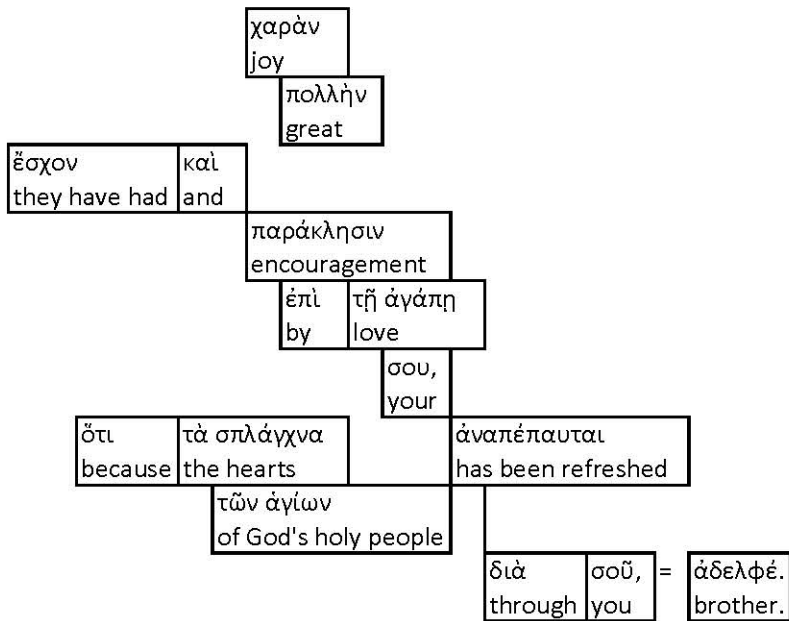
²¹Persuaded of your obedience I write to you knowing that even above what I say you will do. ²² But at the same time also make a guestroom ready for me. For I

hope that through your prayers, I shall be handed over into custody your
²³Epaphras greets you. ²⁴(As do) Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my
coworkers. ²⁵The grace of Lord Jesus Christ with your spirits.

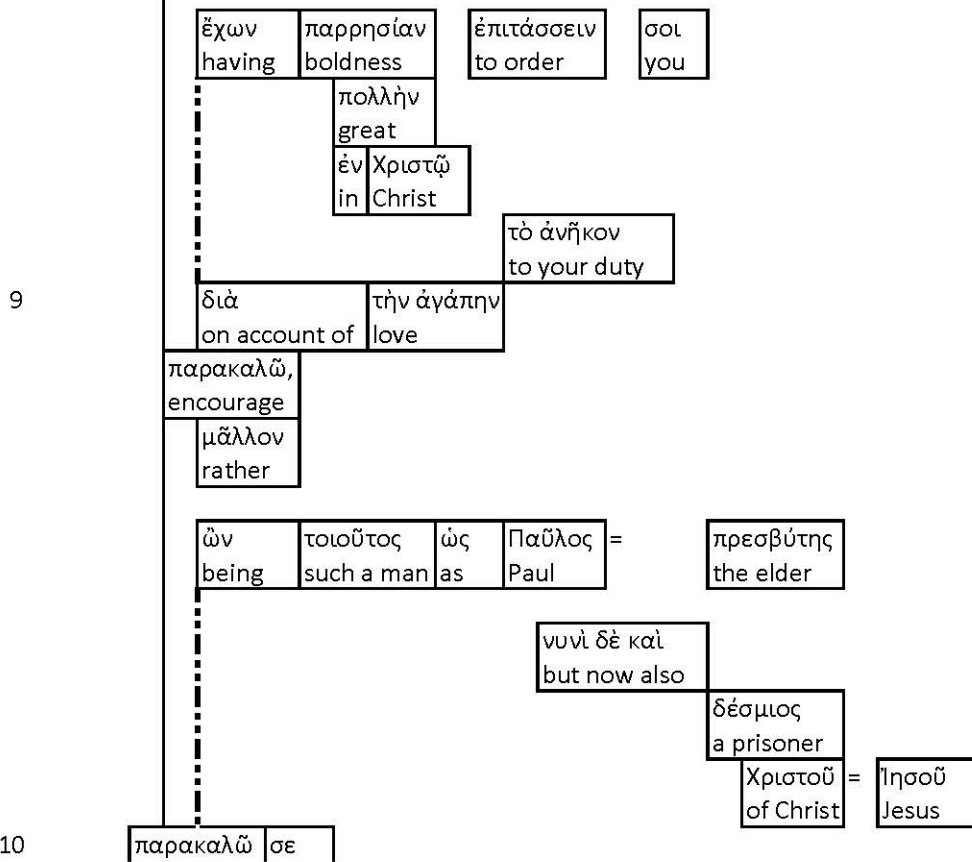
Diagram







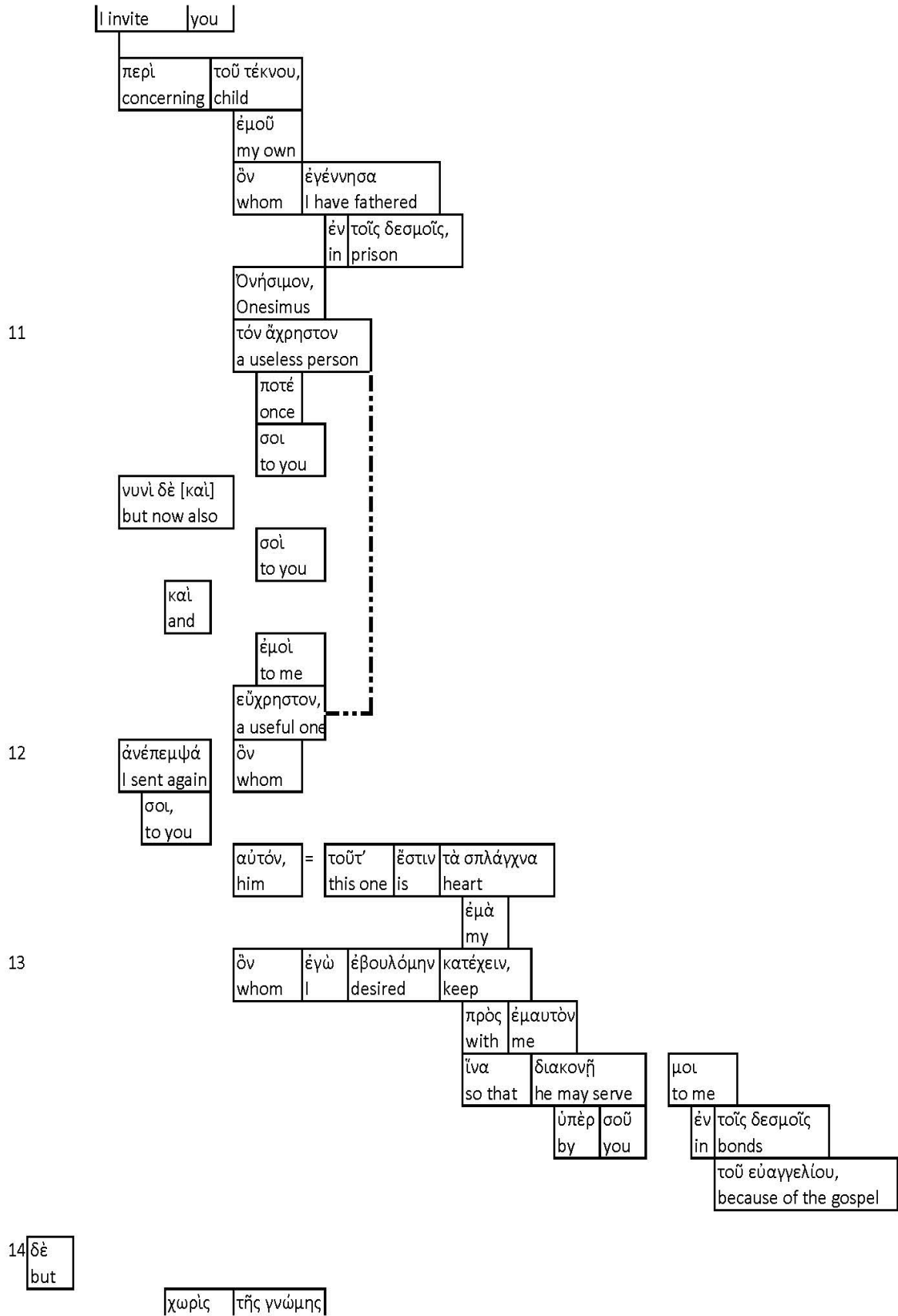
8 Διὸ
That is why

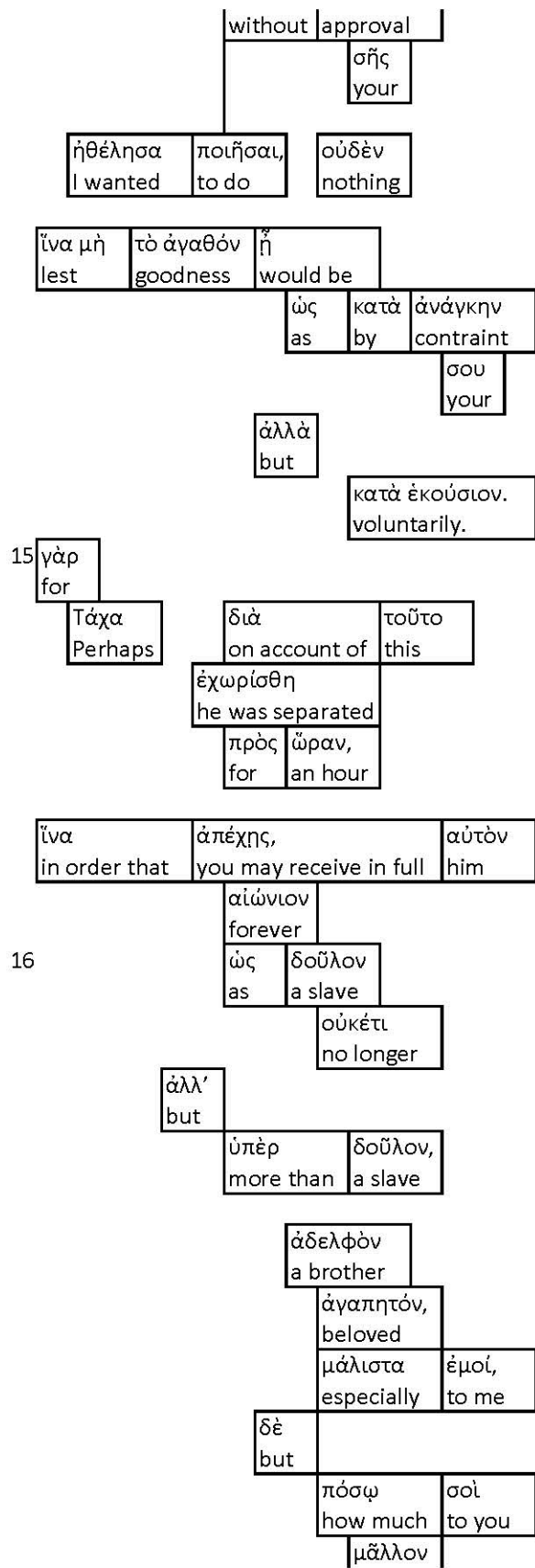


10

1

3





more

καὶ
and
ἐν σαρκί
in flesh
καὶ
also
ἐν κυρίῳ.
in the Lord

17 οὖν therefore

εἰ ἔχεις	με	κοινωνόν,
if you have	me	as a partner
προσλαβοῦ	αὐτόν	
receive	him	
ὡς ἐμέ.		
as me		

18 δέ but

εἰ ἠδίκησέν	σε	τι
if he has wronged	you	in anything
ἢ		
or		
ὀφείλει,		
owes		
ἐλλόγα.	τοῦτο	ἐμοί
charge to account	this	my

19 ἐγὼ = Παῦλος I Paul

ἔγραψα	τῇ χειρί,
write	with hand
ἐμῇ	
my own	

ἐγὼ	ἀποτίσω	
I	will make restitution	
ἵνα μὴ	λέγω	σοι
lest	I say	to you

ὅτι	καὶ	προσοφείλεις.	σεαυτόν	μοι
that	even	you owe	yourself	to me

20 ναὶ ἀδελφέ, yes brother

ἐγὼ	ὄναίμην
I	would have this benefit
σου	
from you	
ἐν κυρίῳ	
in the Lord	
ἀνάπαυσόν	τὰ σπλάγχνα
Refresh	heart
μου	

21

		ἐν Χριστῷ.	my
		in Christ	
	Πεποιθῶς	τῇ ὑπακοῇ	
	Persuaded	of obedience	
		σου	
		your	
	ἔγραψά	σοι,	
	I write	to you	
	εἰδῶς	ὅτι	
	knowing	that	

	ποιήσεις.		
	you will do.		
	καί		
	even		
	ὑπὲρ	ἃ	λέγω
	above	what	I say

22

δὲ	ἅμα	καί
but	at the same time	also

ἐτοίμαζέ	μοι	ξενίαν
make ready	for me	a guestroom.

γὰρ	ἐλπίζω	ὅτι	χαρισθήσομαι
for	I hope	that	I shall be handed over into custody
		διὰ	τῶν προσευχῶν
		through	prayers
		ὑμῶν	
		your	
	ὑμῖν.		
	your		

23

Ἐπαφράς	ὁ συναιχμάλωτός	Ἀσπάζεται	σε
Eraphras	fellow prisoner	greet	you
	μου		
	my		

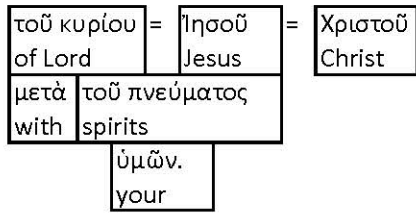
ἐν Χριστῷ	=	Ἰησοῦ,
in Christ		Jesus

24

Μάρκος,	
Mark,	
Ἀρίσταρχος,	οἱ συνεργοί
Aristarchus	coworkers
Δημάς,	μου.
Demas	my
Λουκάς,	
Luke	

25

Ἡ χάρις
The grace



Principle

What is the big idea of this text?

What are some enduring principles, theological truths or practical wisdom?

Application

How can we apply this text in a concrete way?