

SOUTHEASTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT:
AN INTRODUCTION WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS

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I. Introduction

Discourse analysis is a discipline that seeks to apply the insights gained from modern linguistics to the study of human communication. With reference to biblical studies, it has been applied in a variety of different ways with a variety of results. Despite the great diversity of terminology and methodology, discourse analysis has the potential to be of great help to the student of Scripture by filling in some of the holes of traditional hermeneutics. This paper will explore the discipline as it is applied to the New Testament, presenting the reader with its basic contours, a method of analyzing discourses, and a demonstration of that method by briefly sketching its application to the book of Colossians.

II. Definition

Discourse analysis has been variously defined. To start with the broadest definition (and work down to something more specific), Jeffrey T. Reed says that discourse analysis “at its broadest level refers to the study and interpretation of both spoken and written communication of humans.”¹ He says that it is “analysis that takes seriously the role of the speaker, the text and the listener in the communicative event.”² Thinking about communication in light of these three elements (also referred to here as “sender,” “message,” and “receiver,”) illuminates the one

¹ Jeffrey T. Reed, “Discourse Analysis as a New Testament Hermeneutic: A Retrospective and Prospective Appraisal,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39/2 (June 1996), 224. The older term was “textlinguistics” and was distinguished from discourse analysis by focusing specifically on written texts. While discourse analysis as a linguistic field is involved in the study of spoken and written language, in the context of biblical studies it is restricted to written texts.

² *Ibid.*, 225.

major characteristic of the discipline, namely concern for the roles of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics in human language.³

To take the last category first, any act of communication by definition involves a situation external to the message that serves as the context for it. This is the facet of language use that falls under the domain of *pragmatics*.⁴ It involves the relationship between the sender and the receiver, the pool of shared knowledge that the sender and receiver have, the things going on in the referential world outside the text that prompted the message, etc. In addition, the pragmatic dimension includes what the human author is *attempting to do by means of the message*.⁵ The sender may attempt to motivate, command, deceive, inform, etc., but there is always a human situation in the background that determines a message's purpose and function. This concern for pragmatics in discourse analysis even descends down to a concern for how particular devices in a language function to create a “pragmatic effect” in terms of helping the reader follow the flow of thought or identify significant elements of the discourse.⁶

While the human situation motivates an interest in pragmatics, the nature of language as the medium of communication motivates an interest in syntax and semantics. As Beekman, Callow, and Kopeseć point out, language consists of a “form-meaning composite.”⁷ The actual message from the sender to the receiver consists of the thoughts of the sender which are encoded

³ Stanley E. Porter, “Discourse Analysis and New Testament Studies: An Introductory Survey,” in *Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek*, Stanley E. Porter and D. A. Carson, eds. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 113 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 18.

⁴ Gillian Brown and George Yule, *Discourse Analysis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 26; Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach* (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 7.

⁵ John Beekman, John Callow, and Michael Kopeseć, *The Semantic Structure of Written Communication* (Dallas: SIL, 5th revision, 1981), 58. This is the domain of “Speech Act Theory.”

⁶ Steven Runge discusses this in his section “semantic meaning versus pragmatic effect” (Steven Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010), 7).

⁷ Beekman, Callow, and Kopeseć, *Semantic Structure*, 6–7.

in actual language which gives perceptible form to the thoughts of the sender.⁸ The receiver must then decode the message in order to try and understand the thoughts of the sender. *Syntax* has to do with how the elements of a language are arranged to form the clauses, phrases, and sentences of which the actual form of the message is constructed.⁹ *Semantics* has to do with “the conveyance of meaning through the forms of the language.”¹⁰

In addition to the focus on syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, the concern with human communication leads to a second, more narrow characteristic of the discipline, namely that “[a]bove all, the emphasis of discourse analysis is upon language as it is used.”¹¹ That is to say, in contrast with traditional grammar study which is largely prescriptive and concerned with “correct usage” of language, discourse analysis is concerned with the descriptive analysis of actual human communications.¹²

This emphasis on the descriptive analysis of actual human communications may in fact be related to what Reed calls “the most distinguishing, if not best known, feature of the theory,” the analysis of human communication on linguistic levels above the sentence level.¹³ Traditional grammar, with its prescriptive approach that emphasizes grammar in the abstract, tends to analyze language up to the sentence level because the sentence is seen to be the highest level at

⁸ “Thought can only be shared with others by giving it perceptual shape. This is what sound does—not just any sound, but sound that is phonologically, lexically, and grammatically structured.” (Beekman, Callow, and Kopeseck, *Semantic Structure*, 8). They would include the written language under this description as well.

⁹ Porter, “Introductory Survey,” 18, cf. Chapter 4 of David Alan Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek: A Survey of Basic Concepts and Applications*, Second ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995).

¹⁰ Porter, “Introductory Survey,” 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Cf. Brown and Yule, *Discourse Analysis*, 20–21, where they describe their methodology in terms of purposefully using real communications and not sentences constructed by themselves in the abstract as the proper data for DA.

¹³ Reed, “New Testament Hermeneutic,” 231. I write that it “*may* in fact be related” for the following reason: while I am not aware of any direct evidence of a connection, it seems intuitive that when actual communication is studied, new features of language become apparent that are not present in language in the abstract. It would be like comparing the potential uses of various building supplies in a warehouse to those same materials as they are actually used in a constructed building. The parts as they actually function in the building would have features that are not apparent when studying the parts in abstraction.

which the grammatical features can be analyzed. Cotterell and Turner helpfully explain the logic of discourse analysis on this point:

There does not seem to be any good reason why one should be able to analyze the structural relationships of the two nuclear sentences in 'Give him a pay rise because he has worked hard for it!' and yet expect an utterance of the form 'Give him a rise! He has worked hard for it!' to resist such clarification. In the first instance the two simple sentences are admittedly linked syntactically, while in the latter they are not, but the same semantic relation holds for both.¹⁴

This logic has led practitioners of discourse analysis to focus on the importance of meaning as it is found above the sentence level. David Alan Black writes that “whereas traditional grammar tended to focus on the rules a language uses to form units such as phrases, clauses, and sentences (i.e., 'microstructures'), textlinguistics concentrates on larger units of language such as paragraphs, sections, and entire texts (i.e., 'macrostructures') [which] stand in a hierarchical and sequential relation to each other.”¹⁵

The result of a focus on the macrostructures of a discourse is both a “top-down” and a “bottom-up” interpretation of a text, which means that rather than expecting that the text is interpreted *exclusively* by adding together the details to discover the meaning of the discourse (a bottom-up reading), there is an understanding that the meaning of the whole discourse also constrains the interpretation of the parts (a top-down reading). The result is an approach that moves in both directions, discerning the whole from the parts and the parts from the whole.¹⁶

¹⁴ Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 203.

¹⁵ David Alan Black, “The Discourse Structure of Philippians: A Study in Textlinguistics,” *Novum Testamentum* 37 (1995), 18.

¹⁶ Matthew McDill describes his methodology in an excellent paper on DA: “. . . this proposed method begins from the bottom levels of the discourse and moves to the top, which takes up the majority of the analysis. Then the direction is reversed and the discourse is analyzed from the top down, allowing the discourse theme and structure to govern the interpretation of the smaller units.” (Matthew D. McDill, “Methods in New Testament Discourse Analysis,” <http://static.squarespace.com/static/519b889fe4b01af80eda43d8/519b90c7e4b05d60bfd9fc4/519b90c9e4b05d60bdfda06a/1265888976000/NEW-TESTAMENT-DIS-COURSE-ANALYSIS.pdf?format=original> accessed 7/5/14., 10).

This focus on the larger level of discourse provides a crucial help to the interpretive process, and promises to be one of the most profitable aspects of discourse analysis.¹⁷

Having worked from the general concern with the “study and interpretation of both spoken and written communication of humans” down through some of the specific characteristics of discourse analysis (namely concern for syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, and the analysis of communication above the sentence level), a more specific definition for discourse analysis as it is practiced in the study of the New Testament can now be stipulated. George H. Guthrie provides one that captures the idea: “discourse analysis may be defined as 'a process of investigation by which one examines the form and function of all the parts and levels of a written discourse, with the aim of better understanding both the parts and the whole of that discourse.’”¹⁸

III. Characteristics of Discourse

If the goal of discourse analysis is to examine or study discourse, it is important to define what is meant by “discourse.” A helpful definition is found in Cotterell and Turner: “The term 'discourse' is used generally for . . . any coherent stretch of language.”¹⁹ This emphasizes that a discourse is characterized primarily by being a whole communication act that hangs together. Reed emphasizes that it is not the length of the stretch of language that constitutes a discourse, but to some degree the fact that it is considered to be a complete communication by language users: “a complete discourse might involve a twenty-volume history of the world or a one-word exchange between a parent and child . . . Speakers and listeners determine when a communicative event

¹⁷ Actually, good interpreters interpret this way anyway, even if the process is not called “discourse analysis.”

¹⁸ George H. Guthrie, “Discourse Analysis,” in *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, David Alan Black and David S. Dockery, eds. (Nashville: B&H, 2001), 255.

¹⁹ Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics*, 230.

begins and when it ends.”²⁰

In addition to the primary characteristic of being a complete communication act that hangs together, discourses have some other characteristics that allow them to be studied above the sentence level. The first is that they are characterized by thematic grouping. This thematic grouping is the result of what Dooley and Levinsohn call “chunking.”²¹ The basic idea is that the mind cannot process and store an infinite amount of information, and so it groups together items that are related into a unit in order to help the mind to understand and store it. These groups are related to one another by a theme, and that theme is what ties them all together.

When an author has made one grouping and begins another, the second group will have a distinct theme that allows the second group of information to “hang together.” This results in a thematic discontinuity, or a “boundary” between the two units, which just means that the two groups remain distinct on the basis of their content.²² In narratives this will be expressed in terms of continuity or discontinuity of time, place, participants, and kinds of events.²³ In non-narrative genres it will be expressed in terms of a continuity or discontinuity in the situation, participants and topics, and kinds of actions discussed in the discourse.²⁴ Changes in one or more of these dimensions, combined with certain surface structure features may indicate a change in theme and thereby alert the reader to a boundary in the discourse.

Based on this idea of thematic grouping, another characteristic of discourse is that it is organized into hierarchies.²⁵ Once several groups of information have been produced, these

²⁰ Reed, “New Testament Hermeneutic,” 225.

²¹ Robert A. Dooley and Stephen H. Levinsohn, *Analyzing Discourse: A Manual of Basic Concepts* (Dallas: SIL, 2001), 36. Beekman, Callow, and Kopeseck refer to this as the “packaging principle” (*Semantic Structure*, 14).

²² Dooley and Levinsohn, *Analyzing Discourse*, 37.

²³ Stephen H. Levinsohn, *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: SIL, 2000), 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁵ Beekman, Callow, and Kopeseck, *Semantic Structure*, 15.

groups themselves will be grouped together according to thematic continuities that unite them into a higher level unit. This process is repeated as often as necessary, resulting in levels of groupings nestled together like Russian dolls: sentences group into paragraphs, paragraphs group into sections, sections group into divisions, and divisions group into parts, with the highest group constituting the discourse itself.²⁶ This means that despite the linear nature of language, the resulting discourse is less like a chain with links that are each connected to the previous one in a linear sequence, and more like a single building that can be viewed as a group of rooms constructed from a group of walls constructed from a group of bricks, etc.

Language at every level of the discourse hierarchy also shares in at least three characteristics: coherence, cohesion, and prominence. While coherence is part of what defines a discourse as a whole, it is also a characteristic of each level within the discourse hierarchy. Coherence is the “hanging-togetherness” of a text or a unit. Dooley and Levinsohn say that “A text is said to be coherent if, for a certain hearer on a certain hearing, he or she is able to fit its different elements into a single overall mental representation.”²⁷ They stress that this coherence is a matter of “conceptual unity.”²⁸ In other words, a text or a unit of a text is coherent if all of its parts are able to be fit together as a whole in the mind of the reader.²⁹

Another characteristic that is closely related to coherence is cohesion. *Cohesion* is defined by Dooley and Levinsohn as “the use of linguistic means to signal coherence.”³⁰ It is the

²⁶ The names of these divisions come from Beekman, Callow, and Kopesec, *Semantic Structure*, 131. For narrative, the terminology is as follows: the paragraphs group into episodes, episodes into scenes, and scenes into acts (133).

²⁷ Dooley and Levinsohn, *Analyzing Discourse*, 23. Beekman, Callow, and Kopesec use the term “unity” to express this characteristic (*Semantic Structure*, 20).

²⁸ Dooley and Levinsohn, *Analyzing Discourse*, 32.

²⁹ Some texts are more coherent than others. Someone who struggles to maintain coherence in their thoughts, whether through laziness or mental illness, would not produce communication characterized by coherence.

³⁰ Dooley and Levinsohn, *Analyzing Discourse*, 27.

way that language is used to show the reader where and how the information should be grouped. Richard A. Young refers to cohesion as the way parts of a discourse are “connected or woven together.”³¹ There are syntactical devices used in every language to signal thematic groupings of information into sentences, paragraphs, sections, etc.

Finally, *prominence* is “simply making one or more parts of a unit more important than the other parts.”³² Reed refers to this when he says that “language may be used to set apart (i.e. to disassociate) certain entities from other entities in the discourse.”³³ This is a necessary characteristic of language without which communication is not possible. A statement by Robert E. Longacre that is often quoted says that “If all parts of a discourse are equally prominent, total unintelligibility results. The result is like being presented with a piece of black construction paper and being told, 'This is a picture of black camels crossing black sands at midnight.'”³⁴ Again, this is a characteristic at every level of the hierarchy. There is something in every sentence, paragraph, section, etc. that is more important than other things, and this is usually related to the theme of that unit.

An understanding of the basic characteristics of human language and how it functions forms an important foundation for discourse analysis. However, despite the fact that many of these concepts are widely agreed upon, there is still a diversity of approaches within discourse analysis. It is these approaches that will be discussed next.

³¹ Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek*, 254.

³² Beekman, Callow, and Kopesec, *Semantic Structure*, 24.

³³ Reed, “New Testament Hermeneutic,” 239.

³⁴ From Robert E. Longacre, “Discourse Peak as Zone of Turbulence,” *Beyond the Sentence: Discourse and Sentential Form*, J. R. Wirth, ed. (Ann Arbor: Karoma, 1985), 83; quoted in Reed, “New Testament Hermeneutic,” 239.

IV. The Diversity of Approaches to Discourse Analysis

There is so much diversity among those who practice discourse analysis that in a collection of essays on discourse analysis Stanley E. Porter commented that “there was no agreed upon method of discourse analysis and everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”³⁵ Nevertheless, there are some very well represented schools of thought that should be noted. The following summary is drawn from another essay by Porter from the same volume. The essay is from 1995, but there are few, if any other scholarly works that give such a clear lay of the land as far as the various approaches go.³⁶

The first school of thought Porter mentions is the North American school, which is represented especially by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), whose main concern is in Bible translation.³⁷ This approach to DA is a result of the influence of linguists such as Eugene A. Nida, Johannes P. Louw, Kenneth Pike (who pioneered the tagmemic approach), and Robert E. Longacre (who further developed the tagmemic approach). The heavy emphasis on the hierarchical nature of language is one feature that characterizes the North American approach.

One methodology that is derived from the North American school is the Semantic Structure Analysis (SSA), which was worked out in detail by Beekman, Callow, and Kopeseć in *The Semantic Structure of Written Communication*.³⁸ This method, building on the tagmemic emphasis on hierarchies, is based on Noam Chomsky's theory of Transformational-Generative Grammar with its distinction between deep structure and surface structure. They propose to

³⁵ Stanley E. Porter, “How Can Biblical Discourse Be Analyzed?: A Response to Several Attempts,” in *Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek*, Stanley E. Porter and D. A. Carson, eds. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 113 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 107.

³⁶ Porter, “Introductory Survey,” 24–34.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 24–27.

³⁸ John Beekman, John Callow, and Michael Kopeseć, *The Semantic Structure of Written Communication* (Dallas: SIL, 5th revision, 1981).

reduce the whole syntactical surface structure of a text down to deep-structure semantic propositions, and then analyze the relationships between these propositions with the intention of being able to display the “semantic structure” of a discourse.

More recently, the North American school has developed a focus on a functionalist approach to Greek grammar by focusing on how particular Greek syntactical constructions function on the discourse level. This is represented especially in Stephen H. Levinsohn's *Discourse Features of the Greek New Testament* and on a related but more popular level in Steven E. Runge's *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament*.³⁹

The second school Porter mentions is the English and Australian school.⁴⁰ This is the model Porter himself, as well as his student, Jeffrey T. Reed, have used in an adapted form for New Testament Studies. The major scholars associated with this school of thought are J. R. Firth (considered by Porter the one who “inspired” the school), M. A. K. Halliday, and R. Hasan.

Porter states the heart of this school as follows:

The basis of Halliday's model of language is that language is seen as a social semiotic consisting of networks of systems, that is, interconnected groupings of sometimes simultaneous and sometimes subsequent choices that establish the meaningful components of language. Regarding discourse, Halliday and Hasan delimit four categories of structure: experiential, interpersonal, logical and textual (logical is the least well-defined), each consisting of a number of networks of choices that are realized in the phenomena of the language.⁴¹

While Porter says that it is “by far the most integrative of the four [schools] discussed here,” he complains that it is not widely used in New Testament studies because it demands a complete reworking of one's theoretical framework, and many are not sure whether the effort this requires

³⁹ Stephen H. Levinsohn, *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: SIL, 2000); Steven Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010).

⁴⁰ Porter, “Introductory Survey,” 27–30.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 27–28.

will have a significant payoff in the end.⁴²

The third school that Porter mentions is the Continental European approach represented by the Scandinavian school.⁴³ He considers this school to be “by far the least cohesive, and the most far ranging.”⁴⁴ The names mentioned in connection with this school are R. de Beaugrande and T. A. van Dijk, as well as several others. Porter says that this school focuses on syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, although he wishes they were more integrated as he says that “since the various facets are treated independently, it has not yet been established how these various elements coincide.”⁴⁵

The fourth school discussed by Porter is the South African school.⁴⁶ This school is represented especially by J. P. Louw. Louw's method is colon analysis, which consists of making the colon (a syntactical structure represented by a subject and predicate and any dependent elements) the smallest unit of meaning and the basic building blocks from which the meaning of the text is analyzed.⁴⁷ Porter says that while this approach has been very popular, he has questions about whether it is rigorous and objective enough.⁴⁸

From the above discussion, it is easy to see that discourse analysis is a broad field with the potential for both confusion and cross-pollinization. There is a wealth (or perhaps a flood) of resources and methods for the practice of discourse analysis which represent many competing voices. The individual student must therefore attempt to draw upon these resources to formulate a method that serves their particular needs. The remaining part of the paper will turn to a

⁴² Porter, “Introductory Survey,” 29.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 30–32.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 32–34.

⁴⁷ See J. P. Louw, *Semantics of New Testament Greek* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1982), 91–158.

⁴⁸ Porter, “Introductory Survey,” 33–34.

proposed application of discourse analysis concepts, first in terms of a methodology, and then in a demonstration of the method on the book of Colossians.

V. A Method of Discourse Analysis

As stated above, there are a number of methods and methodologies available to the student of discourse analysis. The following is my attempt to develop an approach. It draws heavily on George H. Guthrie, David Alan Black, Richard A. Young, Stephen H. Levinsohn, Matthew D. McDill, J. P. Louw's colon analysis, and SIL's SSA model. The basic structure of the method is modeled after Guthrie's method in which one moves “back and forth between the micro- and macrolevels of the discourse, engaging in exegesis both on and above the sentence and paragraph levels.”⁴⁹

One of the assumptions in this method is that there is increasing accuracy with every sweep from part to whole and back. The first two steps are conducted on a general level—in order to grant a provisional understanding of both the parts and whole on the basis of which steps three and four can be carried out on a more rigorous and detailed level.⁵⁰ The following is a brief outline of the process, which will then be explained below:⁵¹

1. Basic reading of the whole text (microstructure)
2. Identify tentative unit boundaries (macrostructure)

⁴⁹ Guthrie, “Discourse Analysis,” 260. Furthermore, the method described here follows the basic pattern of Guthrie's method with five steps in which the micro- and macrolevel are examined, beginning with the microlevel and moving up to the macrolevel and back two times. Though I am following his overall approach, the details at each level of analysis may be different.

⁵⁰ This concept is inspired by Grant Osborne's “hermeneutical spiral.” Osborne speaks of a movement from text to context in which we are “spiraling nearer and nearer to the text's intended meaning as [we] refine [our] hypotheses and allow the text to continue to challenge and correct those alternative interpretations . . .” (Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991], 6). This is the same concept that needs to happen as we move from the parts to the whole of a discourse.

⁵¹ In reality, the process seems to be a bit more organic than it is presented here as the steps are not always so clear-cut and sequential. However, this gives a sense of the basic progression of the method.

3. Colon analysis (microstructure)
4. Analyze relations between cola, paragraphs, sections, etc. (macrostructure)
5. Exegete and exposit units (microstructure)

1. Basic Reading of the Whole Text (Microstructure)

The first step in this method is to give the text a basic reading. This is labeled as a “microstructure” study because it begins with the actual data of the text (since that is the only access we have to the macrostructures).⁵² The point is to understand the basic flow of the text, with the goal of getting a general sense of the contents. This is done through reading and rereading the text several times. After a few lighter passes, the analyst works through with a little more detail. This is the time to gain a basic familiarity with the text, including looking up any unfamiliar words or word-forms, looking at major text-critical issues, and taking note of situational features that are evident in the text.

2. Identify Tentative Unit Boundaries (Macrostructure)

The next step is to analyze the text to look for clues as to the location of unit boundaries. This step is really a continuation of the previous one, except it should culminate in being able to identify the major boundaries of the text on a tentative, preliminary level.⁵³ This is done by observing the basic features of the text. It may also be helpful at this preliminary stage to

⁵² McDill, “Methods,” 8.

⁵³ There are a couple reasons why I have placed this step here. First, in Young's method of SSA (*Intermediate New Testament Greek*, 274–277), the second step after listing the propositions is to group them on the basis of their relations. I found it extremely difficult to analyze the relationships between propositions without any reference to the macrostructures of the discourse. This seems to work contrary to the theoretical framework of discourse analysis, which says that we are constantly processing both bottom-up and top-down at the same time. In other words, an approach that seeks to hold off making any judgments about the boundaries until all the parts have been analyzed will be hampered in analyzing those very parts. Second, following the previous principle, it seems more appropriate in light of how we actually understand language, to expect that there should be a series of oscillations from bottom-to-top-to-bottom, each of which gives a progressively clearer picture, rather than to attempt to end up with an entirely accurate picture with just one two movements (bottom-up and top-down).

compare how the passage has been divided in the various Greek New Testaments, translations, and commentaries with a view to looking for places where there is broad agreement or disagreement regarding unit boundaries.

3. Colon Analysis (Microstructure)

The third step in this method involves a detailed analysis of the syntactical features through colon analysis. The tentative divisions from the previous step provide some sense of the basic outline of the book so that the detailed study of the microstructure is done in the context of the whole discourse. As per the methodology of J. P. Louw, the text is analyzed according to the cola.⁵⁴ These cola are “the basic unit” used in the analysis of the text.⁵⁵ They consist of a subject and predicate and any dependent or subordinate additions to either of those elements. Any subject and predicate that is independent or coordinate to the colon as a whole is a distinct colon, even if it is grammatically part of the same sentence. In this step the cola are analyzed to identify the main thought as well as the function of all its parts and additions.

This step involves a more detailed study of the text than the first step, including at this point any difficult syntactical constructions, significant words, background information, and text-critical issues that impact exegesis. At the end of this process, the main idea of each colon should be stated.

4. Analyze Relations between Cola, Paragraphs, Sections, etc. (Macrostructure)

After the previous step, the main thoughts of the discourse should be clearly identified. The next step is to analyze the relations between the units. In step two, a tentative set of divisions was

⁵⁴ Louw, *Semantics*, 91–158.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

obtained in order to facilitate detailed study. In step four, part of analyzing the relationships between the units is conducting a more detailed study to more accurately understanding the overall structure. This means looking to determine the thematic groupings and boundaries of the units.

As mentioned above in section III., information is grouped together on the basis of thematic continuity. At this step, there are several features of the text that the analyst is paying attention to. First, there is the genre of the text.⁵⁶ A change in genre can often signal a unit boundary. Within the genre of narrative, there are also the dimensions of time, place, kind of action, and participants.⁵⁷ Within non-narrative genres there are the dimensions of situation, reference, and action.⁵⁸ Changes to these dimensions, especially several at once, may indicate a unit boundary.

These thematic elements can be identified by several grammatical devices. Young speaks of these devices as “clues,” and classes them into three groups: referential clues, organizational clues, and relational clues.⁵⁹ “*Referential clues*,” or “spans” are terms that describe an aspect of continuity in the text. Young lists four different kinds of spans: grammatical spans are continuities of particular grammatical features such as person and number, tense and voice. Lexical spans are continuities of “a word or related words.”⁶⁰ Informational spans are continuities of “participants, concepts, events, setting, or the like.”⁶¹ Teleological spans are continuities of purpose. This includes informative, persuasive, and emotive purposes, etc.

⁵⁶ George H. Guthrie, “Cohesion Shifts and Stitches in Philippians,” in *Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek*, Stanley E. Porter and D. A. Carson, eds. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 113 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 39.

⁵⁷ Levinsohn, *Discourse Features*, 3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁹ Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek*, 252–253.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 252.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Organizational clues include special structures such as inclusio, chiasm, and parallelism.⁶² *Relational clues* include grammatical devices that tie units together such as “conjunctions, participles, prepositional phrases, relative clauses, appositional elements, and the like.”⁶³ These features are used by the author to “form a dependency chain” connecting the various parts to the theme of the unit.⁶⁴ In addition to indications of thematic continuity, there are also devices that are used to mark boundaries at both the beginning and end of a unit.⁶⁵

Another helpful indicator of boundaries is what Stephen Levinsohn calls “points of departure.”⁶⁶ He says that these are “an element that is placed at the beginning of a clause or sentence with a dual function: 1. It provides a starting point for the communication; and 2. It ‘cohesively anchors the subsequent clause(s) to something which is already in the context.’”⁶⁷ He views these as particularly helpful indicators of boundaries because they indicate that the author felt a need to orient the following material, something that is unnecessary in the middle of thematic continuity.⁶⁸

The first step in analyzing the relationships between the discourse units is to analyze the cola to determine how they relate to one another to form paragraphs. Once the paragraph units have been discerned, the process should be repeated on the paragraph level in order to see how the paragraphs relate to one another to form sections. This process should be repeated until the

⁶² Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek*, 252.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ See *Ibid.*, 253–254. He discusses “initial markers” such as orienters, vocatives, topic statements, conjunctions, and new settings, and “final markers” such as doxologies, summaries, and tail-head links.

⁶⁶ Levinsohn, *Discourse Features*, 7ff.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 271ff. While these can be a helpful indicator of discourse boundaries, Levinsohn also warns that “constituents may be placed at the beginning of a sentence for other reasons, too. In particular, they may be placed there to *focus* on them or to *emphasize* them . . .” (p. 16). So not every element placed at the beginning of the sentence or clause is a point of departure. For determining whether a pre-verbal element is a point of departure or not, see pp. 16, 40–42.

theme of the book can be discerned.

A two pronged approach may be useful at this point. On the one hand, the cola structures should be studied for clues from the surface structure as to where and how the units are formed. On the other hand, a modified semantic structural analysis can be carried out with reference to the main thoughts that were listed as a result of the colon analysis of the previous step (as opposed to reducing the text to propositions).⁶⁹ This modified SSA can help the analyst discern some of the higher level semantic features of the text.

5. Exegete and Exposit Units (Microstructure)

Once the relations between the various units of the discourse have been analyzed, the theme and structure of the book should be evident. The analyst can then exegete and exposit the passage on the basis of the discourse structure.⁷⁰

VI. A Sketch of a Discourse Analysis Approach to the Book of Colossians

This last section will provide a glimpse into how this methodology would play out in a full discourse analysis of the book of Colossians. Due to the constraints of this paper it will not be a detailed discourse analysis of the book, but simply sketch out what an exegesis of Colossians might look like on the basis of this methodology, demonstrating each step of the process to illustrate the method presented and its potential usefulness.

⁶⁹ See Young, "Intermediate New Testament Greek," 274–277; Beekman, Callow, and Kopeseck, *Semantic Structure*. Because it is conducted on the basis of the main thoughts of the cola, rather than beginning at the level of the propositions, it is not as detailed as a full SSA. However, this also avoids the somewhat problematic aspect of SSA, namely the subjective nature of the back-translation into propositions, while retaining the helpful emphasis on the relationships between the various units and the hierarchical nature of the discourse.

⁷⁰ McDill, "Methods," 11–12.

1. Basic Reading of Colossians

A basic reading of Colossians is fairly straightforward. The grammar is not too difficult, and there are no major textual variants (i.e. none that rise to the significance of Mark 16:9–20, John 7:53–8:11, or 1 John 5:8 in terms of either size or importance). There are a number of hapax legomena, especially in 2:14–23 (for example, χειρόγραφον [2:14], προσηλώσας [2:14], ἐμβατεύων [2:18], δογματίζεσθε [2:20], etc.). Syntactically, there are a number of Paul's characteristic extended sentences including 1:9–20, 1:24–29, and 2:8–15, etc.⁷¹

Some basic situational features include the author (primarily Paul, though written with Timothy; cf. 1:1), and the recipients (the church in Colossae, 1:1). Paul is in prison (4:18, cf. 1:24, 2:1). The Colossians had first heard the gospel from Epaphras (1:7). Paul is writing to warn them to stand firm in Christ and not be swayed by false teaching (2:6–23). While Paul did not start the church, there seems to be a common network of relationships (1:7, 4:7–17).

2. Identifying Tentative Unit Boundaries

There are a number of places where some tentative unit boundaries can be made. Some of the boundaries are fairly clear and most likely will remain through the final process. Some of the boundaries are more tentative, and some are still unclear. Many of the higher level divisions are still unclear at this point.

The basic flow of the book is as follows:

- I. 1:1–2: Greeting
- II. 1:3–4:6: Body
 - A. 1:3–12: Thanksgiving and prayer
 - B. 1:13–23: God rescued believers, reconciling them to himself through Christ, the preeminent One.
 - C. 1:24–2:5: Paul's desire that the Colossians know about his suffering in service to the

⁷¹ As it is punctuated in the Greek text.

- church, in order that they might be encouraged and understand the greatness of Christ, and thereby avoid being deceived.
- D. 2:6–15: Paul charges the Colossians to continue to grow in the faith and beware of people who try to deceive through human wisdom. On the contrary, they have all they need in Christ.
 - E. 2:16–23: Since they died with Christ, they should not be taken in by worldly spirituality.
 - F. 3:1–4:6: Since they were raised with Christ, they should seek the things above (i.e., live out of the resources of the gospel)
 - 1. 3:1–4: Main charge: seek the things above
 - 2. 3:5–11: put to death the sinful deeds of the flesh
 - 3. 3:12–17: live as those chosen, loved and forgiven by God
 - 4. 3:18–4:1: Instructions for Christian living in particular callings
 - 5. 4:2–6: continue in prayer, live wisely, and speak graciously to those outside
- III. 4:7–18: Closing greetings

Now that the general flow of the book has been tentatively identified, the analysis moves from the general overview into a more detailed study.

3. Colon Analysis (Microstructure): Col. 2:6–15

The cola in this letter, as with many of Paul's letters, can be very long, with a tendency to branch off from topic to topic as he progresses. When the colon contains a long string of dependent clauses, the statement sentence should reflect the central concerns of the colon. Usually it will be related to the original subject and predicate construction. Consider the following example from Col. 2:6–15.⁷²

This section represents two cola (2:6–7, 2:8–15). The main ideas are in bold: “walk in Him” (ἐν αὐτῷ περιπατεῖτε), and “beware that no one takes you captive” (Βλέπετε μή τις ὑμᾶς ἔσται ὁ συλαγωγῶν). These represent two sides of Paul's exhortation, and in light of the situational context and the tentative outline, seem to represent the central burden of the letter to the Colossians.

⁷² This has been constructed with occasional reference to John Callow, *A Semantic Structure Analysis of Colossians*, ed. By Michael F. Kopesec (Dallas: SIL, 1983), 130–150.

οὖν περιπατεῖτε ἐν αὐτῷ

- Ὡς παρελάβετε τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον
- καθὼς ἐδιδάχθητε, περισσεύοντες ἐν εὐχαριστία
- ἐρριζωμένοι
- καὶ
- ἐποικοδομούμενοι ἐν αὐτῷ
- καὶ
- βεβαιούμενοι τῇ πίστει

Βλέπετε μή 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·
- πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος κατοικεῖ ἐν αὐτῷ σωματικῶς
- καὶ ἐστὲ πεπληρωμένοι ἐν αὐτῷ ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας
- ἐν ᾧ καὶ περιετμήθητε
 - περιτομῇ ἀχειροποιήτῳ
 - ἐν τῇ ἀπεκδύσει τοῦ σώματος τῆς σαρκός
 - ἐν τῇ περιτομῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ
- συνταφέντες αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βαπτισμῷ
 - ἐν ᾧ καὶ συνηγέρθητε
 - διὰ τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ
 - τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν
- καὶ συνεζωοποίησεν ὑμᾶς σὺν αὐτῷ
 - ὑμᾶς νεκροὺς ὄντας [ἐν] τοῖς παραπτώμασιν
 - καὶ τῇ ἀκροβυστίᾳ τῆς σαρκὸς ὑμῶν
 - χαρισάμενος ἡμῖν πάντα τὰ παραπτώματα
 - ἐξαλείψας τὸ καθ' ἡμῶν χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν
 - ὃ ἦν ὑπεναντίον ἡμῖν
 - καὶ αὐτὸ ἤρκεν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου
 - προσηλώσας αὐτὸ
 - τῷ σταυρῷ·
 - ἐδειγμάτισεν ἐν παρρησίᾳ
 - ἀπεκδυσάμενος τὰς ἀρχὰς
 - καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας
 - θριαμβεύσας αὐτοὺς ἐν αὐτῷ

The first colon, ἐν αὐτῷ περιπατεῖτε, has a number of additions. Paul gives the grounds for his exhortation (Ὡς οὖν παρελάβετε τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον), and three participles that give the manner in which they are to walk in Christ (ἐρριζωμένοι, ἐποικοδομούμενοι, and βεβαιούμενοι). He adds a fourth component of manner in the form of the subordinate clause “καθὼς ἐδιδάχθητε,” which he clarifies again by a participial clause of manner (περισσεύοντες ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ). The sense of this colon might be paraphrased in the following way:

Since you have claimed Christ Jesus as Lord, live your life in union with Him. A life like this should be firmly rooted and growing in Him, and established in the faith. You were taught to live this way, after all, and to thank God abundantly.

The second colon has as its main idea “Βλέπετε.” It then has a content clause expressing the thing they were to beware of (μή τις ὑμᾶς ἔσται ὁ συλαγωγῶν) which has its own modifiers establishing the way in which Paul feared someone might try to “take them captive.” Paul then explains why they should not be taken in by these people through a series of three subordinate clauses that are conjoined to function as a unit: they already have everything they need in Christ —namely, the fullness of divinity dwells in Christ (ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς), they are “filled up” (spiritually) in Him (ἐστὲ ἐν αὐτῷ πεπληρωμένοι), and they have been spiritually raised from the dead (συνεζωοποίησεν ὑμᾶς σὺν αὐτῷ).⁷³

The latter two clauses are expanded significantly. Paul explains being “filled up” (spiritually) in Him (ἐστὲ ἐν αὐτῷ πεπληρωμένοι) in terms of circumcision of the heart, as evidenced by their baptism which signified their union with Christ's death and resurrection through faith. He explains being spiritually raised from the dead (συνεζωοποίησεν ὑμᾶς σὺν αὐτῷ) in terms of forgiveness of sins through Christ's atoning death, in which Christ triumphed over the spiritual forces of wickedness. The second colon could be summarized as follows:

⁷³ John Callow, *Colossians*, 139.

Watch out that you don't get taken captive by deceptive and unchristian human wisdom, because all the fullness of God lives in Christ, and you are spiritually complete in him (by which I mean that your hearts are circumcised spiritually, as signified by your baptism, which shows your union with Christ's death and resurrection by faith). Furthermore, you have been brought from spiritual death in sin to life with Christ, since He died to wipe away the accusations against you and triumph over the spiritual forces of wickedness.

The main idea of the two cola could be stated as the following: “live your life in union with Christ” (2:6–7), and “Watch out that you are not taken captive by human wisdom, because the fullness of God resides in Christ, and you have all the spiritual resources you need in union with Him” (2:8–15). In a full discourse analysis this process would be done for each of the cola of the book in preparation for the next step.

4. Analyze Relations between Cola, Paragraphs, Sections, etc. (Macrostructure)

Having conducted a colon analysis of the book, the next step is to analyze the relationships between the units. In terms of more broad divisions of the text, 1:1–2 form a clear opening to the letter both by being a standard genre device, as well as by the change from the third person address of Παῦλος and Τιμόθεος and τοῖς ἐν Κολοσσαῖς ἁγίοις in verses 1–2 to the first and second person addresses in verse 3 (“Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ . . . περὶ ὑμῶν”). The body consists of 1:3–4:9.

Within the body, there are several units that are discernible on the basis of referential spans of purpose and content. 1:3–12, represents Paul and Timothy's thanksgiving and prayer, and in this section the Colossians are a major participant (though the thanksgiving and prayer represent distinct subunits). Then in 1:12, part of Paul's prayer is that they would be characterized by giving thanks to the Father for salvation. At this point the work of God in salvation through Christ becomes dominant and the Colossians drop out in terms of reference.

Many commentators suggest that at this point (at either 1:13 or 1:14) Paul transitions to the main body of the letter because of the change in content.⁷⁴ However, this downplays the fact that syntactically God's deliverance is subordinate to the prayer for the Colossians. While it is true that there is a change in semantic content at this point, the transition to content about God the Father's deliverance in 1:13 and the Son in whom we have forgiveness of sins in 1:14 are both linked syntactically by relative pronouns.⁷⁵ This suggests that Paul did not want to create a sharp boundary at this point, but rather that he wanted to change the focus of the discourse subtly. In fact, in light of the key exhortation to live in union with Christ and beware of false teachers (2:6–8), perhaps this could be better explained as an attempt by Paul to front the basis for his appeal to them into the body opening in order to set the stage for his exhortation.

The Colossians are brought back into the picture in 1:21–23, where the work of Christ that is magnified in 1:13–20 (in what seems to be a quotation of some poetic or hymnic material) is applied to them personally.⁷⁶ That this is the case is likely in light of the repetition of the significant redemptive term “reconciled” (ἀποκαταλλάσσω) in 1:20 and 1:21.⁷⁷ This

⁷⁴ John Callow, *Colossians*, 31; J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon* (USA: Hendrickson, 1995), 126; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, Fourth ed. (Downers Grove: IVP, 1990), 582; but note that Kostenberger, Kellum and Quarles begin the body at 1:9 (Kostenberger, Andreas J., L. Scott Kellum and Charles L. Quarles. *The Cradle, the Cross and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* [Nashville: B&H, 2009], 610).

⁷⁵ “ὅς ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς . . . καὶ μετέστησεν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ υἱοῦ . . . ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν . . .” (1:13–14). Ernest R. Wendland suggests that the relative pronoun (ὅς) in 1:13 ought to be treated in a parallel manner to the relative pronouns in 1:15 and 1:18, thus indicating that it is not unusual for Paul to start a new unit with a relative pronoun. However, this ignores the fact that the relative pronouns in 1:15 and 1:18 seem to be functioning in a section of poetry. With regard to this phenomenon, Wallace says that “Most scholars now see hymn fragments here and there in the NT, such as Phil 2:6–11; Col 1:15–20; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:3–4; etc. Frequently, such texts begin with a relative clause that has been woven into the syntax of the surrounding prose discourse. Indeed, one of the standard features of Greek poetry is the introductory use of the relative pronoun” (Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 340–341). In light of this use of the relative pronoun, it seems better to view the relative pronoun in 1:13 as a normal use as opposed to the poetic uses found in 1:15 and 1:18 (Ernest R. Wendland, “Cohesion in Colossians: A Structural-Thematic Outline,” *Notes on Translation*, 6/3 [1992], 37).

⁷⁶ Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 340.

⁷⁷ Note the parallel emphasis on the fact that reconciliation is accomplished by means of Christ's death: “ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν, εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ” (vs 20), and

reconciliation is explained in the former passage as reconciliation of “all things,” but in the latter passage the focus shifts to the Colossians as a specific instance of those who had been reconciled.⁷⁸ In light of this tie with the previous section (1:13–20), 1:21–23 seems to be a connected unit that brings the body opening to a close.

A new section is begun in 1:24 that appears to represent the body proper of the letter. It is introduced by two particular devices: the first is an orienter of time (νῦν, used metaphorically here); the second is a transition in Paul's role from a relatively non-prominent participant in 1:23 to the main agent of the action in the beginning of 1:24 (χαίρω ἐν τοῖς παθήμασιν). Part of this transition includes the mention of Paul's role as a servant of the gospel in 1:23 (οὗ ἑγενόμην ἐγὼ Παῦλος διάκονος), which is picked up in 1:25, where Paul says that he has become a servant of the church (ἧς ἑγενόμην ἐγὼ διάκονος). This is then carried along to become a major theme of the unit.⁷⁹

This then begins a stretch of text that is autobiographical in nature in which Paul is a significant referent (1:24–2:5). The main verbs in this section speak of Paul's “rejoicing” (χαίρω; 1:24), “wanting” (Θέλω; 2:1), and “speaking” (λέγω; 2:4). In a word, Paul wants the Colossians to know about his suffering for the gospel so that their hearts will be encouraged to keep viewing Christ as the great treasure. He states that his purpose in saying these things (and by extension, his purpose for the letter as a whole) is that, despite the fact that he is not present with them, they

“ἀποκατήλλαξεν ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου” (vs 21).

⁷⁸ This is indicated by a “point of departure” that indicates a change of topic: “Καὶ ὑμεῖς...” (“and you...”).

⁷⁹ Runge discusses a device called “tail-head linkage” in *Discourse Grammar*, 163–177. He says that a tail-head linkage “involves the repetition of some action from one clause at the beginning of the next clause, often as a circumstantial participial clause” (163). Beekman, Callow, and Kopeseck define the device a little more broadly as “information at the end of one paragraph repeated near the beginning of the next paragraph . . .” (*Semantic Structure*, 116). Paul's repeated mention that he became a servant of the gospel/the church in 1:23 and 1:25 doesn't qualify as tail-head linkage under Runge's definition because it is not repeated in the next clause. However there does seem to be some connection established by the repetition that helps him to transition between the two units.

would not be led away by false teaching. This has two pragmatic effects: first, it introduces the conflict (the potential of being deceived by persuasive speech; 2:4). Second, it supports the next section (in which he actually makes the exhortation) by indicating a personal investment in their not being deceived and by stating his purpose of preventing them from being deceived.

The rest of the body of the letter is characterized by continuity of content in terms of referents (the Colossians become prominent again, implied in the imperatives) and “kind of communication” (primarily exhortation). It breaks down as follows: the main exhortation is presented both positively and negatively: live in union with Christ (2:6–7) and beware of false teaching (2:8).⁸⁰ In 2:9–15, the grounds for the main exhortation is given in terms of the fact that they have experienced subjectively the benefits of the salvation described objectively in 1:12–23, specifically in terms of being joined to Christ in His death and resurrection.

This then becomes the basis for a series of exhortations given in 2:16–4:6. In 2:16–23 Paul exhorts them to refuse to submit to man-made religion because we have died with Christ to this sinful world with its useless “spirituality.” 3:1–4 then exhorts on the basis of their union with Christ's death and resurrection that they should “seek the things above, where Christ is” rather than the things that are on earth.⁸¹ This includes killing off remaining sinful ways of living in our lives (3:5–11), and clothing ourselves with ways of living that flow from our relationship with God through Christ (3:12–17). Furthermore, there are specific ways that this is lived out in the context of particular callings (3:18–4:1).

Finally, Paul wraps up the body of the letter (4:2–9). He gives a few more general

⁸⁰ As shown above in the colon analysis, the two cola are independent, related by asyndeton. However, they appear to be equally prominent as alternates in light of the way the preceding material (1:24–2:5) coheres and the following material (2:9–15) seems to be related as the grounds for the exhortation (as well as the rest of the body of the letter).

⁸¹ Both 2:16–23 and 3:1–4 are introduced with the conjunction “οὐν,” which indicates development of thought from previous material (Levinsohn, *Discourse Features*, 126).

instructions about the Christian way of living, including a request for prayer that he would be able to speak about Christ clearly (4:2–6). At 4:7 the focus shifts from the content of Paul's letter to more personal information that is related to the circumstances of the sending of the letter (“Tychicus will inform you of everything that is happening with me . . .”). This represents the closing of the body of the letter, and is transitional in nature as Paul begins to wind down. He then closes the letter as a whole from 4:10–18, as is evidenced by the final instructions and greetings.

In light of the previous sketch of some of the discourse features of Colossians, the following outline can be proposed:⁸²

- I. Letter Opening (1:1–2): Paul and Timothy to the Colossians
- II. Letter Body (1:3–4:6)
 - A. Body Opening (1:3–23)
 - 1. Thanksgiving (1:3–8)
 - 2. Prayer (1:9–12)
 - 3. Fronted basis for the exhortation: the supremacy of Christ in salvation, which is a gift from God (1:13–23)
 - a. Rhetorical appeal: the greatness of Christ's person and work expressed in hymn (1:15–20)
 - b. The reconciliation to God accomplished by Christ had been applied to the Colossians (1:21–23)
 - B. Body Proper (1:24–4:1): Exhortation to live in union with Christ and guard against false teaching
 - 1. Paul's desire that they would not be deceived (1:24–2:5)
 - 2. Exhortation proper: live in union with Christ and beware of false teaching (2:6–8)
 - 3. Basis for the exhortation: union with Christ's person and work (2:9–15)
 - 4. Concrete specific applications of the exhortation (2:16–4:1)
 - a. Having died with Christ to the world, refuse to submit to its spirituality (2:16–23)
 - b. Having been raised with Christ, live the heavenly life (3:1–4:1)
 - i. Seek the things above (3:1–4)
 - ii. Put to death sinful living (3:5–11)
 - iii. Clothe yourselves with gospel living (3:12–17)

⁸² Some of the terminology and formatting of this outline is based on Black, “Discourse Structure of Philippians,” 43–44.

- iv. Do this in your particular callings (3:18–4:1)
- C. Body Closing (4:2–9)
 - 1. General instructions and request for prayer (4:2–6)
 - 2. Tychicus and Onesimus sent with news (4:7–9)
- III. Letter Closing (4:10–18): greetings and final instructions

5. Exegete and Exposit Units (Microstructure)

Finally the analysis from the previous step can be used to provide the context for the exposition of the particular units of the book. The main controlling thought for Paul in Colossians may tentatively be expressed as follows: Live in union with Christ and guard against false teaching in light of the sufficiency of the person and work of Christ. The various parts can now be taught and applied on the basis of this controlling thought and in light of the discourse structure of the book.

VII. Conclusion

As this short study has shown, discourse analysis, though beset with a great diversity of approaches and methods, has the potential to be a great benefit in the study and interpretation of the New Testament. The focus on analysis of a discourse above the sentence level, and conducted with reference to the meaning and function of both the whole and parts, can be a great use to the student of the New Testament. The brief sketch of the discourse of the book of Colossians, though tentative in nature, hopefully demonstrates the usefulness of discourse analysis, at least as far as it is represented by the methodology described in this paper.

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