

## Interpretation - Observing the Structure

### I. The connection between form and function (structure and purpose)

Body analogy: There is a connection between the structure of our bones, and the corresponding function of that part of our body. There is a connection between the form of something and how it works.

In the same way, there is a connection between the form of a text and its function. The structure of a text reveals the purpose of the author.

#### i. Example: The Gospel of John - Believing the Jesus is the Christ and having life in Him

The purpose of the book of John is given in John 20:30-31, John wrote so his listeners would believe in Jesus and have life in Jesus' name. The structure of the gospel of John reveals this purpose. John 1 is the introduction to the Divine Word, the One who was with the Father and came and tabernacled among us. But then in chapters 2-12, John gives us a series of signs that point to the reality of who Jesus is. That structure is related to his purpose.

A. The Eternal Word became Flesh (John 1)

B. Seven Signs of who Jesus is (John 2-12)

1. Turning water into wine (John 2:1-11)

2. Healing the official's son (John 4:46-54)

3. Healing the lame man at the pool (John 5:1-15)

4. Feeding the five thousand (John 6:1-15)

5. Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee (John 6:16-24)

6. Healing the man born blind (John 9:1-41)

7. Raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-44)

C. The Divine Origin and Purpose of Jesus (John 13-17)

D. The Suffering and Glory of Jesus (John 18-20)

E. Epilogue: Restoration of Peter (John 21)

- ii. Example: Exodus - God making Himself known to dwell with His people
  - 1. The Exodus - God saves His people (Ex. 1-15)
  - 2. Mount Sinai - God marries His people (Ex. 16-24)
  - 3. The Tabernacle - God dwells with His people (Ex. 25-40)

## II. The structure is how the author organized his material for his purpose

The structure of a passage is how the author has organized their material. While some passages are more structured than others, we always want to understand the flow of thought of the author reflected in how he organized his writing. To find how a passage is organized we look to see if the passage can be broken down into sub-sections that are distinct from one another. That means that each sub-section of our passage will have a slightly different but related point to the other sub-sections.

### A. Each passage has parts and is a part

Not only does every passage in Scripture have a structure and purpose of its own, but also every passage is also part of the structure and purpose of whichever book of the Bible it is in. So we are always seeking to understand what parts make up our passage, but also how our passage fits into the larger section it is in.

This means that there are layers of purpose in each book of the Bible. There will be one overarching purpose to the book, but then also other sub-purposes that fit into the purpose of the whole book. We can compare how the finger has a purpose, but that purpose finds its function in relation to the purpose of the whole arm. And the arm finds its purpose in relationship to the body as a whole. To truly understand a passage you must understand the parts that make up the passage, but also how it is part of whatever section of Scripture it is in.

### B. Unique contribution

In other words, each section of a book has a unique point that also contributes to the overall point of the book. **We know that we have the proper structure of a passage when we see how each part offers a unique contribution to the passage it is in, being distinct from the other parts, yet still relating to them.**

Each passage of Scripture is there for a reason. It was included in it's book because it adds to the book's argument. Something would be missing from the book if any passage was missing. Our goal is to understand what unique contribution the passage is making to its book, and then ultimately to Scripture.

We know that we are discerning the proper structure when we see how each part offers a unique contribution to the section it is in, being distinct from the other parts, yet still relating to them.

As with any study of Scripture, read and reread your passage to seek to understand what the author is saying and how they organized it. Finding the structure of a passage can often be one of the most difficult aspects of interpreting a passage. But the more we practice looking for structure, the more skilled we become at seeing the author's flow of thought and how he is organizing his material.

C. Table Example: See how the parts relate to the whole

Luke 6:20-49 is Jesus' Sermon on the Plain. In the first part of the sermon (Luke 6:20-26) Jesus lays out the values necessary for His disciples. There is a shift in verse 27. What is the next section about and how does it build on 6:20-26?

D. The structure of the Sermon on the Plain

The Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20-49)

- I. The Kingdom Values of Jesus' Disciples (6:20-26)
  - A. Blessings for Living for God's kingdom (6:20-23)
  - B. Woes for Living for this world (6:24-26)
- II. Living out Kingdom Values results in Merciful Love (6:27-38)
  - A. The Command to Love our Enemies (6:27-31)
  - B. The Motivation to Love our Enemies (6:32-36)
  - C. The Obstacle to Loving our Enemies (6:37-38)
- III. The Importance of Living out Jesus' Words and Values (6:39-49)
  - A. Disciples Follow and become like their teacher (6:39-40)
  - B. Disciples Embody values personally first (6:41-42)
  - C. Disciples Bear fruit from the heart (6:43-45)
  - D. Disciples Hear and Act upon Jesus' Words (6:46-49)

The Sermon on the Plain shows the beauty of how Jesus' Kingdom values transform people to make them selfless through gospel motives, which fits into Luke's overall purpose for the book of defending and showing how beautiful Jesus', and then Peter's and Paul's kingdom-gospel is.

### III. How structure works: coherence and cohesion

An incoherent example: I love the book of Ephesians. Pages are full of words, ink on paper. Trees are smashed up to make paper. The Egyptians invented paper, but the book was invented by the Romans. You can also make paper airplanes, but I don't think the Romans did. The Romans are probably more known for their roads than their books though.

Coherence is when a text has a flow of thought and its **ideas connect**.

Coherence is the quality of a text that makes it **meaningful and relevant** to readers.

Cohesion is the **textual connections** that hold a passage together.

Cohesion is the actual **words and grammar** that tie texts together.

The concepts of coherence and cohesion are important for structure because when we are looking for the structure of a passage we are looking for what holds a text together. What is the coherent idea in this text? What is the flow of thought? If we come to a text with the assumption it is coherent, then we will be looking for what the main idea of a text is and what in that text shows that these verses go together.

### IV. The tools for finding structure: connections and changes

Two overarching tools to help us discern the structure of the text, connections and changes. Connections are elements in the text that tie verses together and unify them. Changes are elements in the text that separate texts. Looking for connections and changes helps us to discern when a number of sentences go together and are making a point together and when there is a shift and a new point is being developed.

#### A. Connections

- **Word** connections  
Repeated words or phrases
- **Thematic** connections  
Repeated ideas or themes
- **Logical** connections  
Logical arguments that connect verses together (note the conjunctions)
- **Structural** connections  
Bracketing, sandwich, etc.
- **Referential** connections  
Pronouns, substitution, ellipsis, "here, there, now, then," comparisons

**B. Changes****i. Changes from one passage to another**

- **Text type** or **genre** change  
Narrative, argument, poetry
- **Topic** change  
The ideas, theme, or argument changes
- **Tone** change  
Rebuke, encouragement, explanation, argument, exhortation, warning
- **Scene** change  
Time, place, characters
- **Speaker** change  
Narrator, direct address, dialog, quote
- **Grammatical** change  
Change of verb tense, verb person, etc.

**ii. Beginning and ending markers**

- **Introduction, conclusion, or summary statements**  
Sentences that summarize a section, cf. “Finally,” “So then”
- Transition **conjunctions**  
Therefore, for, but now, etc.
- **Time** or **speaker** identification  
“On the first day,” “At that time,” “After these things,” “Thus says the Lord,”  
“The Oracle of the Lord”
- **Parenthetical** or **background** statements  
“Now...”
- **Direct address**  
Vocative: “Brothers and sisters,”  
Interjection: “Behold,” “Look”

**C. Table Examples**

What connections and changes do you see in each of the following sections? How do these connections and changes help us understand what is distinct about each of these sections? How does each section in chapter 4 build on the previous section to develop the argument of chapter 4?

- Ephesians 4:1-6
- Ephesians 4:7-10
- Ephesians 4:11-16
- Ephesians 4:17-24

#### V. Discussion Questions

- Everyone give their one sentence summary of each section (4:1-6, 4:7-10, 4:11-16, 4:17-24), and graciously encourage one thing they did well, and one thing they could do better.
- How does each section build upon the previous section to develop Paul's purpose?