

An Introduction to "Diagramming" (Using 3 John as an Example)

Our goal is to see the relationships between the various words and phrases in the text, so that we can better understand what John is saying. Within each paragraph, I have tried to arrange *parallel* thoughts in columns (or indented, as in an outline), so that their parallel nature can be visually observed. In this translation of 3 John, words in *italics* were added for clarity. (They may be implied by the context, but they are not directly stated in the original New Testament Greek.) In the diagram, words in [brackets] are not part of the translation, but are added to help show the flow of thought.

This method is better suited for some people, than for others. A person who is able to think analytically may do better than someone who can't. If you decide to try diagramming, you may wish to start with short passages which have a rather obvious structure. Even the book of Proverbs might be a good place to start. Many of the sayings are only two lines long, and it should be relatively easy to spot relationships between different phrases in a sentence - parallel thoughts, contrasts, statements that build upon previous statements, etc.

In your diagram, you may want to underline (or capitalize) recurring thoughts or concepts, to make them stand out. (Here in 3 John, words such as *brother*, *friend*, *walking/living in the truth*, etc., might be some of your choices. *) If you were to use different color markers, to visually represent different relationships between words and phrases (such as "cause and effect," "if-then" statements, "both-and" statements, contrasts, prepositional phrases that all modify the same word, etc.), your chart could become quite colorful - and if done carefully, quite instructive. (If you *aren't* careful, it could become quite messy and confusing!)

You may wish to leave empty spaces between sections. You will probably fill them up if you decide to write notes about your observations.

Though not absolutely necessary, you may benefit from comparing different translations of the same passage. A more "word-for-word" translation may be easier for spotting parallel words, but a more "meaning-for-meaning" translation may be easier for understanding the flow-of-thought. (My translation of 3 John is not quite word-for-word, but I tried to get close to it.) If you compare translations and see a difference, try to find out *why*; for it might give you some insights into the passage or into the nature of the words. (Some words have a range of possible meanings.) Even if you don't understand the reasons for differences between translations, you will be able to see that the *over-all* message is still the same! If you're looking for recurring words, remember that the same Greek (or Hebrew) word may be translated different ways in the English language - and different translations may help you see that.

Remember that this is not an "inspired" technique; it is only a guide. Since there are often several different *legitimate* ways to accurately translate something from one language to another (and still convey the same message), you may get slightly different diagrams when you use different translations - but you will still end with the same basic message. Even if, in some instances, you are unsure about which phrase modifies which other phrase (resulting in uncertainty about some small detail in the sentence), it won't have a major effect on the over-all message. Besides, your understanding of God's Word isn't based on the interpretation of some specific phrase here or there, but on the over-all, well substantiated message of God's Word.

* Note: In my 3 John example, I did not highlight the word "brother." My purpose was to illustrate the technique, and yet leave room for you to make further observations.