

# **BIB105 Biblical Hermeneutics**

## Unit 2c Observation: Paragraphs

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Hey, great to be with you again. If you remember last lesson, we talked about observing sentences and we had nine items that we looked for in a sentence to try to understand meaning. Things that were repeated, comparison, contrast, lists, etc. And so hopefully that was helpful in some of the opportunities you had to practice that. Today we're going to get into observing paragraphs and expand the sentences into a larger context here with paragraphs. I'm excited to go through this with you today, so let's get started.

If you haven't heard of Dr. Louis Agassiz, very famous scientist, there's a story that goes, he had a student that he was mentoring and he spent three entire days looking at the same fish. And after day one, he had a list of observations and Dr. Agassiz was like, "Look, look, look. What do you see? Keep looking." And so he came back the next day and then the next day. And the student later recalls that this was an extremely arduous process of observation. He wasn't allowed to use any other resources, just what he could see with his eyes and making observations of that same fish. But what he learned, though, through that process was one of the best entomological lessons that he could have, and that is the necessity of detailed observation, looking at details and looking at everything as much as possible. The better you do in this process of observation, the more accurate the interpretation. And then of course, that would make it easier for practical application. So let's keep that in mind as we move forward.

So the first thing you want to look at when you're examining a paragraph is to go from general to specific, or things that are general and specific. An author will give an overview statement followed by a specific example sometimes in Scripture. To exemplify what I'm talking about, generally speaking, if you're at a gathering and they're like, "Hey, dessert is on its way out," and they say, "One of our specific options is chocolate chip cookies," which is one of my personal favorites, which is why I included that in this particular example. But that's the idea. Generally speaking, you got dessert. Specifically, chocolate chip cookies. And so that is also evidence throughout Scripture. The authors themselves don't hide the meaning intentionally. They make it very clear in the words they use.

So we're going to have a chance to practice with Romans 12 and look at a couple of different sections here in Romans 12 written by the apostle Paul. And so we're going to look for the general statement that's given in Rom 12:1-2, and then the specific examples of how that general statement is carried out in day to day life in Rom 12: 9-13. So let's take a look and see how this works. So in Romans 12:1-2 and then 9-13, let's read. "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."

So what is the general statement then that we see here in verses 1 and 2? I've used the yellow highlighter to point that out for you. That is to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice to God, and we do that by not conforming to the pattern of this world, but allowing him to transform our minds because our actions are directly connected to what we're thinking about in our mind patterns. And so that's the general statement. So how do we live this out in a specific way? If we want to offer our bodies as living

sacrifice, then how do we do that on a day to day basis? And that's what Paul talks about here in Rom 12: 9 to 13. Be sincere in our love. Hate evil. Cling to good. Be devoted to each other in love. Honor others. Be zealous for God and his work. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Care for those in need. Be hospitable. So he gives a pretty specific list here of actions that we can start to incorporate into our life by the power of the Spirit, and that's part of that living sacrifice, that day to day being transformed by God and his word. So that's a good example of general and specific.

Next thing you want to look for. I lumped points two and three together, and that's questions and answers, and then dialogue. So Q&A, questions and answers, the use of questions happens throughout Scripture. Rhetorical questions specifically are used when the answer is assumed, to make a point. You may have heard someone joking with you "Is the pope Catholic?" Well, that's a rhetorical question because the obvious answer is yes. Yes, he is. So the rhetorical questions are used quite often in Scripture. And then dialogue, it's a conversation between individuals or a group. So we're going to look at an example here in Mark 2 between Jesus and the Pharisees and this ongoing dialogue between them and how each side uses questions to try to drive home the point that they're trying to make. And then we'll also observe the tone as well and the point. So let's take a look at this passage and work through it together and see what we can come up with.

Mark 2:13-28. "Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me,' Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?' On hearing this, Jesus said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'"

"Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, 'How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?' Jesus answered, 'How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast. No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.'"

"One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grain fields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?' He answered, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.' Then he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'"

So I highlighted in the blue the questions that the Pharisees and others ask Christ, and then in the yellow are the questions that Jesus asks in response. And we see some of these interactions, at least coming from the Pharisees, were very accusatory in their tone. You see the negative tone there in Mar 2:16 of

tax collectors and the sinners. They couldn't even acknowledge who these people specifically were. They just lumped them as sinners. And it seems like those who came to him asking about John's disciples and fasting, the tone seemed to be sincere. But then, of course, in Mar 2:24, you see the Pharisees' tone definitely a little more aggressive, accusatory, "Why are you doing what's unlawful on the Sabbath?" thinking that they had Jesus. But Jesus was the master of using rhetorical questions and other questions to give an answer. And you see this rhetorical question in Mar 2:19 about the guests of the groom. Of course, they wouldn't be fasting while the groom was with them. That's a time to celebrate. That's a time to plan and to look forward to the wedding. And so, of course, they're not going to be fasting and being in mourning during that time.

And then, of course, he reveals a little bit of ignorance on the Pharisees' side in a story that they well knew but had completely ignored, and that was the story of David eating the showbread. And then, of course, the big picture there was the Sabbath was made for man and that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. And so we see a lot going on in the questions and answers here. I think we've even seen that in our own life. Sometimes it's not necessarily what's being said, but the tone in which it's being said can make all the difference in the world. I think we capture that in Mark 2 with some of the tones between the different parties involved.

The fourth and fifth things that you're looking for, you're looking at purpose and result statements. These are phrases or sentences that describe the reason, the result, or the consequence of some action. And then number five is means by which something is accomplished. And we're going to look at two examples here in Scripture of these purpose, result statements and means. And one of them we're going to take from John 15 with that great teaching on the vine and the branches. So let's take a look at John 15:16, which is kind of the end of that section. And Jesus says here, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you."

So again, a reminder. A purpose or result statement. These are phrases or sentences that describe the reason, the result, or the consequence of some action. So what do we see here? Jesus had just worked through the metaphor of the vineyard and how we need to be intimately connected to him in order to bear fruit. He chose us and appointed us the task of going and bearing fruit for him here on this earth. So it's a great passage and we see that you're either connected to him and you're bearing fruit or you're not. And if you're not connected to him, he even says those branches are gathered up and essentially gotten rid of. They're not having a purpose as it relates to bearing fruit for my kingdom.

In Psalm 119:9, real simple passage. We're going to look at the topic of means by which something is accomplished. So let's take a look at verse 9. "How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word." And so the entire 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm extolls God's word and all of its blessings. In Psa 119:9, though, the psalmist shows that a young person can effectively battle the temptations of youth by living according to God's word. It begins with a knowledge of his word but goes a step further by committing that knowledge to a lifestyle. So it's not just having head knowledge, which Psalm 119 has plenty of times in which we meditate and dwell and think on God's word, but the next step is how you effectively implement that, going from knowledge to wisdom, the action part of living according to God's word, living in obedience to it. And that's how you can keep you way pure. So those are just a couple of examples of purpose, result statements and means.

Next, we're going to look at conditional clauses. And a conditional clause is a clause that presents the conditions whereby some action, consequence, reality, or result will happen. And so 1 John 1:6, we see the condition that's given if we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in darkness, and then here's the result or consequence: "We lie and do not live out the truth." So one of the trigger words, if you will, that tips off that this is a conditional clause is if. These classic if-then statements are great ways to discover a conditional clause or to recognize a conditional clause. And so, again, we see in 1 John 1:6 that if we're saying we have fellowship with God but yet we're doing the opposite, we're liars. We're not living out the truth. So obviously, there would be consequences for that.

Here's another example of some conditional clauses. And again, you see the if-then statements. Or the then is actually implied here. But look at Deu 28:1. "If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on the earth." Deu 28:15, "However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you." So what are the conditions that are being placed upon Israel? That they follow all of his commands. But the results are very clear. If they live in obedience, then the Lord is going to establish Israel and they will be above the other nations. But if they don't, if they disobey and follow idols, then the curses that are addressed in this chapter will come and fall upon them and they will face discipline from God. And we see that throughout their history, from the time of Moses all the way up to the time of Christ. Israel was back and forth. Times they were following Deu 28:1 and they were living in obedience, and then times that they were in Deu 28:15 and we see the consequences of the discipline that God brought upon them to get their attention.

Point number seven as we're looking at paragraphs are actions of people and actions of God. So compare responsibilities and actions of people to God's actions. An example we're going to look at here is from Eph 5:1-2. So what is being asked of God's people, and then what's Christ's role as we see in these two verses? So the two verses go, "Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." So what's being asked of God's people? We are to follow Christ's example which is a way of love and sacrifice. And what's Christ's role? Well, just as Christ sacrificed himself for us, we can sacrifice for others and their spiritual benefit, which is a fragrant aroma to God. So we can follow Jesus' example here by loving others, sacrificing for others for the benefit of the gospel, and showing them the true hope which is salvation through Christ.

A couple other points remaining here. One of them is emotional terms. The Bible is primarily a book about relationships: our relationship with God as well as our relationship with other people. And so emotions are an important element in relationships. And so, what are some words or phrases that have emotional overtones or feelings? We're going to look at an example here by the apostle Paul in Galatians 4. And just listen to the language that's used, and then we'll look at some of the specifics. Gal 4:12-15. "I plead with you, brothers and sisters, become like me, for I became like you. You did me no wrong. As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you, and even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. Where, then, is your blessing of me now? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?"

So some really strong, passionate language here by the apostle Paul in Galatians 4. Notice that he uses the word “plead” and he calls them brothers and sisters of that really close, tight relationship. So what are some other things that we see here? Well, if you look at the context in the rest of Galatians 4, we see that the believers were starting to turn back to the Mosaic Law, turning back to the old way of doing things and turning away from the law of grace in Christ. And this honestly stunned Paul. He was affected tremendously by this and he is passionately appealing to their spiritual sensibilities and talking about their past relationship with him, pleading if there’s anything there that they still care about, like “Please listen to me.” He’s begging them not to go back to the old way and hoping his relationship with them and the love relationship they have as brothers and sisters, that that will have some kind of positive impact in them maybe changing their mind and returning back to the path that God wants for them.

The ninth point here is tone. This will be closely related to what we just talked about with emotional terms. Once you noted the emotional terms and phrases, what is the overall tone of the passage? Is it one of anger? Is it scolding? Is it sorrowful, joyful, dispassionate, explanation? And so we’re going to look at Lamentations 3:1-6. And what do you think the tone is by Jeremiah the prophet? “I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of the Lord’s wrath. He has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light; indeed, he has turned his hand against me again and again, all day long. He has made my skin and my flesh grow old and has broken my bones. He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and hardship. He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead.”

And so you see the torment of Jeremiah’s heart as he’s watching the nation of Israel. To look at the context, rejects his warnings and pretty much running straight into destruction, as God had promised that if they didn’t repent, they were going to be captured and destroyed by another nation. And that’s exactly what happened. They were captured by the Babylonians and taken into another country. And so Jeremiah is seeing this and he’s feeling that the judgment is about ready to unfold from God. And you see that there’s some anger there, there’s frustration, and there’s definitely...you feel loneliness. You see just he’s really struggling with this. And as any of us would, as we see God’s hand working around us and in the lives of others and in our own life, it can torment us.

So that kind of wraps things up as it relates to just some of the basic tools on observing paragraphs. And so now we’ve put together...we’ve observed sentences. We’ve also looked at paragraphs. And the next lesson we’re going to get into is talking about the historical, cultural context of a passage or of a person and some of the tools and the questions we need to ask as we start to paint that big picture and how everything fits together and trying to understand the meaning of a verse.