

# Englishman's Greek

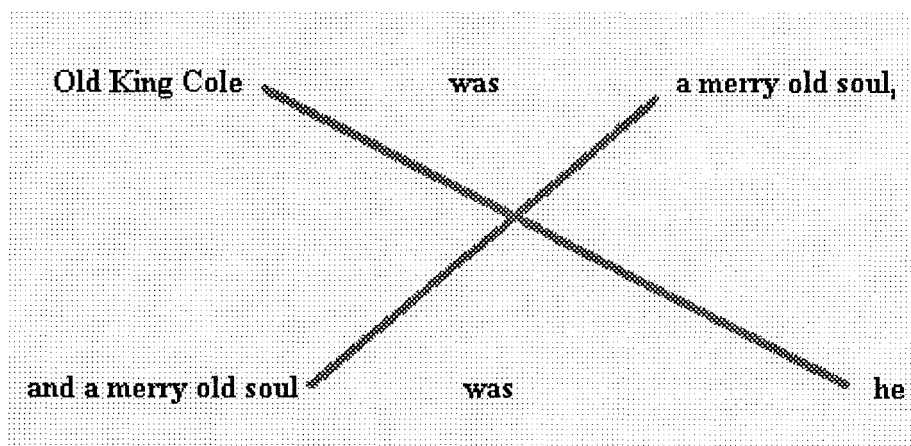
## Chapter 9

### CHIASMUS OR INVERSE PARALLELISM

Chiasmus is that literary form in which ideas that have been presented in order (A, B, C, . . .) correspond to ideas that later occur in reverse order (. . .C, B, A). Matthew 13:15 might serve as an example:

- A     For this people's heart is become gross
- B     and their ears are dull of hearing,
- C     and their eyes they have closed
- C     lest at any time they should see with their eyes
- B     and hear with their ears
- A     and should understand with their heart

In its simplest four member form, this structural device generates a crisscross pattern resembling the Greek letter **chi** (X), from which the term "chiasmus" is derived (similar to our English letter X).



The same can be laid out in a way that shows its inverse parallelism:

**A Old King Cole was**  
                           **B A merry old soul**  
                           **B A merry old soul**  
**A Was he**

The chiasmic structural pattern is extremely common in ancient literature, especially in Semitic literature. Hebrew was a Semitic language and New Testament Greek often reflects the Hebrew idiom. Thus we find frequent examples of chiasmus in the Bible. Inverse parallelism is a literary form so distinct from the "norms" of communication in Western culture that students of the Bible are prone to totally overlook the phenomenon when it is present.

[Note: Technically the plural form of chiasmus is chiasmi but I prefer to call it either chiasmus or inverted parallelism]

Let us consider the following examples of chiasmus from the Bible:

1) Philemon 5. At first glance it may appear that the last two phrases both are descriptive of "faith": Thy faith which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus and [thy faith which thou hast] toward all saints. However these phrases do not mean this at all. The Bible never tells us to put our faith in fellow believers. You can love them, but don't trust anyone but God! See also Colossians 1:4 which was probably written on the same day as the letter to Philemon.

An understanding of the chiasmic structure of Philemon 5 makes clear the meaning of the passage:

**A. love**  
                           **B. faith**  
                           **B. toward the Lord Jesus**  
**A. toward all saints**

Put the "A's" together and put the "B's" together. Philemon's love was toward all the saints and his faith was toward the Lord Jesus (as in Colossians 1:4).

2) 3 John 11

**A evil**  
                           **B good**  
                           **B good**  
**A evil**

Compare also 1 John 2:18 (last time and antichrist) and 3:14 (death, love, love, death). Are you

starting to recognize chiasmus?

3) Romans 2:12-14

**A Gentiles (12a)**

**B Jews (12b)**

**B Jews (13)**

**A Gentiles (14)**

4) Isaiah 55:8-9

**A thoughts--thoughts**

**B ways--ways**

**B ways--ways**

**A thoughts--thoughts**

Compare also Isaiah 55:7-8 (way, thoughts, thoughts, ways)

5) John 1:1-2. Sometimes John seems to repeat himself unnecessarily, and in this passage, John 1:2 might seem needlessly redundant. But notice the symmetrical literary structure (look at these verses in your Interlinear Greek-English New Testament):

**A In beginning**

**B was**

**C the Word**

**D and the Word**

**E was**

**F with God**

**F and God**

**E was**

**D the Word**

**C the same (referring to "the Word")**

**B was**

**A in beginning with God**

6) Matthew 7:6. The verb "rend" in this verse means "to tear, to tear in pieces." In the Arndt & Gingrich Lexicon the meaning given for this word is "of rabid animals tearing in pieces with their teeth." Albert Barnes, in his commentary on Matthew, believes that this is an example of **introverted parallelism** or chiasmus. In other words, according to this view, it is the dogs that do the rending and the swine that do the trampling. See also the Expositors' Greek Testament and Edward Robinson in his Greek Lexicon, two additional sources which support this understanding of the passage. Thus we would have this structure:

- A dogs**  
**B swine**  
**B trample under their feet**  
**A turn again and tear you**

Many commentators, however, believe that the verb "rend" describes the swine (Lenski, Hendriksen, Lange, etc.). For example, A. T. Robinson and M. R. Vincent both feel the term is used to describe wild boars who could rend with their tusks those who have angered them.

The chiasmus view, nevertheless, is possible for these reasons: 1) "Tearing in pieces" would be a fitting description of what dogs could do with their teeth. 2) It seems less likely that dogs would be mentioned without anything said about what the dogs might do. 3) It's possible that many commentators would naturally overlook the phenomenon of inverse parallelism.

7) Acts 20:32. God is the One who gives an inheritance. God's Word is what builds you up. Thus we have this structure:

- A I commend you to God**
- B. [I command you] to the Word of His grace**
- B. Which is able to build you up.**
- A. To give you an inheritance [God is the One who gives this]**

## PROBLEM PASSAGES

This writer has found two examples in the New Testament where chiasmus might supply the key needed to unlock some very difficult problem passages:

### 1 TIMOTHY 2:15

Dr. Homer Kent, in his book *The Pastoral Epistles*, has listed four views that have been suggested for this problem passage! What makes the verse especially intriguing is the amazing shift in pronouns from "she" to "they." Who does "she" refer to and what will "she" be saved from? What seems at first glance to be a very awkward construction, is actually a beautifully symmetrical structure as seen in the following chiastic analysis:

- A Christian women--plural (verses 9-10)**
- B the Christian woman--singular (verses 11-12)**
- Paul then gives two reasons why a woman is not to exercise authority over a man. One reason is from creation (v.13) and the other reason is from the fall (v.14).
- B she--singular (verse 15a--referring back to the Christian woman in verses 11-12)**
- A they--plural (verse 15b)--referring back to Christian women mentioned in verses 9-10**

If this is indeed an example of chiasmus, then the pronoun "she" in verse 15 does not refer to Eve (who is mentioned in verses 13 and 14), but rather to the Christian woman (the singular used in a generic sense, to refer to Christian women in general, who are the ones Paul is writing these verses to). What then does the verse mean?

### What is Meant By Childbearing?

The noun "childbearing" is found only here in 1 Timothy 2:15, but the verb also occurs in the New Testament in only one place, namely 1 Timothy 5:14. Thus, 1 Timothy 5:14-15 gives us a hint as to the meaning of the noun in our problem passage. Paul exhorted the young women to marry, **bear children** and to assume their proper place in the home, lest they should give occasion to **the adversary**. Paul was grieved because many had already been deceived by Satan (1 Tim. 5:15). Young women who do not assume their God-given place in the home could easily turn aside unto Satan.

### What is Meant By "She Shall Be Saved"?

Most often in the New Testament this verb is used in a soteriological sense as in Acts 16:31: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved (from hell and eternal damnation)." But here in 1 Timothy 2:15 Paul is talking to women in the church who are already assumed to be Christians and thus they are already saved. But even in English the word "save" can be used in many different ways. Sin and eternal condemnation are not the only things that a person needs to be saved from. A similar non-soteriological use of this verb is found in the very next chapter of 1 Timothy (4:16). In chapter 4:1 Timothy is warned about Satanic doctrine and deceiving spirits. He is told in 1 Timothy 4:16 how to protect himself from such Satanic deception. By living a pure life and by teaching pure doctrine, Timothy would save himself and his people from being deceived by doctrines of demons. Certainly Paul was not telling Timothy to save himself in the usual sense of that term because Timothy was already saved (from eternal condemnation) and Paul referred to Timothy as "his genuine child in the faith" (1:2). Thus, if Timothy and his congregation needed to be saved from Satanic deception, then it is not too difficult to understand that the Christian women mentioned in chapter 2 needed to be saved from the same thing, especially in view of 1 Timothy 5:14-15.

### Paraphrase of 1 Timothy 2:15

"Notwithstanding she (the Christian woman, the singular used generically in the general sense of all Christian women) shall be saved from Satanic deception through **childbearing** (that is, through assuming her rightful place as a mother and wife in the home and by submitting to the authority and headship of her husband even as Eve failed to do), if **they** ("they" refers to Christian women in general and the third class conditional indicates that Christian women may or may not continue in these things, but if they do, then they will be saved from Satanic deception) continue in faith (rightly responding to God's Word, including 1 Timothy 2:9-15) and love (being willing to sacrifice themselves for the welfare of their husband and their children) and holiness (being set apart as godly women unto the Lord) with sobriety (good-judgment, giving careful thought to what they should wear and how they should live as Christian women).

### ACTS 2:38

**"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).**

This passage has become one of the favorite verses of those who teach baptismal regeneration. When it comes to having sins forgiven, what must a person do? The Bible teaches that it is faith and repentance that brings about forgiveness. Repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. You can't have true repentance without having true faith. You can't have true faith without having true repentance. They go together.

Faith (which would include repentance), not baptism, is essential for the forgiveness of sins. This is clearly seen in Peter's very next sermon, found in Acts 3:19—"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." Notice that in this verse Peter says nothing about water baptism. If water baptism is essential for the forgiveness of sins, why did Peter say nothing about this in Acts 3:19? If water baptism is essential for forgiveness of sins, why did Peter say nothing about this in Acts 10:43 ("To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name **whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission (forgiveness) of sins**"). If water baptism is an essential part of the preaching of salvation, then why does Luke 24:46-47 mention repentance and the remission (forgiveness) of sins but say nothing about water baptism? Even in the days of John the Baptist, it was repentance that was for the remission of sins, not water baptism (see Mark 1:4). John's baptism was an outward demonstration to show publicly that repentance had already taken place.

Forgiveness is received at the point of repentance/faith, not at the point of water baptism. Those who are not forgiven should not be baptized. They are yet in their sins. One simple parenthesis helps us to understand what Acts 2:38 is really saying, "Then Peter said unto them, Repent (and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ) **for** the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

The real question centers on the meaning of the preposition εἰς (translated "for" in the KJV). It is possible to show examples where εἰς can mean "because of" (Matthew 12:41--"at") or "on the basis of" or "with reference to," and all of these are certainly grammatically possible. However, it seems more natural and more probable that in Acts 2:38 this preposition indicates purpose or result. Peter was preaching to unsaved Jews who were guilty of crucifying Christ. They desperately needed the forgiveness of sins (as we all do). Peter was telling them what they must do **in order to** have forgiveness (see Acts 2:37---"What shall we do?").

The translations seem to support this meaning. The KJV, NASB, Amplified, NEB, RSV all give the rendering "for." The Revised Version has "unto." The NIV has "so that your sins will be forgiven" (although in later editions this was changed to "for"). You can see how a person believing in baptismal regeneration could easily use all of these translations to support his view.

The lexicons seem to support this meaning. Arndt & Gingrich say that the preposition here denotes purpose ("in order to") and they render the phrase: "for forgiveness of sins, so that sins might be forgiven." Thayer has a similar rendering "to obtain the forgiveness of sins" (his discussion under *baptizo*). Thus those who believe that a man is saved by water baptism would gladly appeal to these authorities.

Acts 3:19 seems to support this meaning. This is the very next sermon that Peter gives, and again he tells the Jews what they must do to have forgiveness. We would expect that what Peter told the Jews in Acts 3 would be similar to what he told them in Acts 2. In both cases he was preaching to unsaved Jews under similar circumstances. In Acts 3:19 once again the preposition εἰς is used, and the KJV translates it "**so that** your sins might be blotted out." Of course, those who teach baptismal regeneration do not make much of this verse because water baptism is not even mentioned.

The grammarians also concede that the preposition may be translated "for the purpose of" or "in order that" (see Dana & Mantey, p. 104). Those such as A.T. Robinson and Julius Mantey who

render it "because of" or "on the basis of" do so primarily on the basis of theology, not grammar. They suggest a rare usage for the term in order to make the verse not teach baptismal regeneration. But are we really forced to depart from what seems to be the more natural and more common rendering?

Most commentators, regardless of the view they hold, understand the prepositional phrase ("for the remission of sins") as belonging with the verb "be baptized." It is possible, however, that the phrase is actually part of a chiasmus (inverted parallelism) and should be connected not with the command "Be baptized" but with the command "Repent." The verse contains two commands and two prepositional phrases which can be represented by the following chiasmus:

A	Repent
	B Be Baptized
	B In the Name of Jesus Christ
A	For the remission of sins

In English we would best represent this structure by using a parenthesis: "Repent (and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ) **for** (εἰς) the remission of sins." This is exactly what Acts 3:19 teaches (only Peter there omits the parenthesis). In Acts 3:19 Peter could have said, "Repent (and be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ) so that your sins may be blotted out!"

Indeed, the Bible consistently connects "repentance" with "the forgiveness of sins" (see Luke 24:47 where Peter received his commission; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 5:31). On the day of Pentecost the Jews would have understood this because the only baptism that they knew about was the baptism of John which was a baptism of repentance UNTO (εἰς) the remission of sins.

The strengths of the view which sees "for the remission of sins" as part of a chiasmus are as follows: 1) it is theologically sound and avoids the error of making water baptism a condition for forgiveness; 2) it harmonizes with the other passages which speak about repentance and the forgiveness of sins; 3) it understands the preposition εἰς in its most natural meaning (though other meanings are possible); 4) it agrees with the parallel passage of Acts 3:19; 5) it best suits the context of Acts 2:38 where Peter is offering forgiveness to Christ-rejecting Jews. Peter was **not** speaking "with reference to" or "because of" or "on the basis of" a forgiveness **which they did not yet have!** 6) it employs a figure of speech (chiasmus) that was not uncommon or unusual to the Semitic mind, though in English it may seem somewhat awkward.

**Stanley D. Toussaint** (The Book of Acts in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 359) gives several reasons why the parenthetical view is the correct view:

Several factors support this interpretation: (a) The verb makes a distinction between singular and plural verbs and nouns. The verb "repent" is plural ["repent ye"] and so is the pronoun "your" in the clause, "**so that your sins may be forgiven**" (lit., "unto the remission of your sins," (*eis aphesin ton hamartion humon*). Therefore the verb "repent" must go with the purpose of forgiveness of sins. On the other hand the imperative "be baptized" is singular, setting it off from the rest of the sentence. (b) This concept fits with Peter's proclamation in Acts 10:43 in which the same expression "sins may be forgiven" (*aphesis harmartion*) occurs. There it is granted on the basis of faith alone. (c) In Luke 24:47 and Acts 5:31 the same writer, Luke, indicates that repentance results in remission of sins.

For a detailed study refuting the erroneous doctrine of baptismal regeneration, see our paper entitled, **Does Water Baptism Save?**

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## 10 "MUSTS" IF I AM TO UNDERSTAND GOD'S WORD

1. **I must be born again.**

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.... Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (John 3:3,7).

The person who is not born again cannot understand God's Word:  
"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14).

2. **I must desire to know the truth as found in God's Word.**

"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

3. **I must desire to DO God's will.**

"Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me. If any man will do His will, He shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of Myself" (John 7:16-17).

4. **I must desire to GROW.**

"As newborn babes, DESIRE the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2).

5. **I must obey the truth that I already know.**

"If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:17).

6. **I must be a DOER of the Word and not a hearer only.**

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22).

7. **I must not only learn Christ's commandments but I must learn to observe (keep) His commandments.**

"Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:20).

8. **I must take heed not only to the doctrine but to MYSELF.**

"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Timothy 4:16 and see also Acts 20:28).

9. **I must understand that Bible study is hard work.**

"STUDY (be diligent, make every effort) to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

10. **I must realize that understanding is a gift from the Lord and thus I need to be right with the Lord and spiritually prepared and ready to receive understanding from Him.**

"Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things....Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls" (1 Timothy 2:7; James 1:21).