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A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF COLOSSIANS 2:16–3:17

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A discourse analysis of Colossians 2:16–3:17 has led to three conclusions. First, this section forms a discourse unit (specifically, hortatory discourse with embedded expository discourse). Second, the structural framework is a chiasmus. Its functions are to provide the structural rubric around which the argument develops and to provide cohesion which holds the book together. And third, the argument of this section builds to a climax, identified with the imperative, "Put on" (3:12). Specific text-based features (change in tense and person associated with the imperatives, change in word order, and use/nonuse of the vocative) point to these conclusions.

* * *

INTRODUCTION

Jan de Waard and Eugene Nida note that translation is essentially interpretation.[1] Translators, and by extension, interpreters, should not only be concerned about content, but concern should also extend to rhetorical impact and appeal and to rhetorical structure and meaning. Translators/interpreters must recognize patterns of selection and arrangement. Such concerns go beyond sentence level syntax, in that rhetorical structures are normally large patterns and less rigidly rule-governed. These structures are features of discourse.[2]

The focus of this paper is the discourse structure of Colossians 2:16–3:17. The structural framework is a chiasmus which serves a dual purpose. The chiasmus provides the cohesion which holds the book together. And it provides the structural rubric around which the argument of Colossians 2:16–3:17 develops to a climax.

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[1] I would like to thank Robert Longacre and Daniel Wallace for their critical comments. The content of this paper, however, is the author's responsibility.

[2] Jan de Waard and Eugene A. Nida, *From One Language to Another* (Nashville: Nelson, 1987) 40, 79. 80.

Before outlining the chiastic structure, the method which under-
lies this paper is summarized. The basis for the claims is discourse
grammar.[3]

METHODOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

In a paper entitled, "Why We Need a Vertical Revolution in
Linguistics," Robert Longacre outlines features of language for which
sentence level grammars are unable to account.[4] Discourse grammar-
ians claim that sentence level grammars are unable to describe informa-
tion structure, and therefore, are unable to fully account for the
dynamics of language.[5] Part of the problem is that English speakers are
generally unaware of discourse features.[6]

Information structure consists of several levels. For the purposes
of this paper, two levels are outlined. The first level is main-line verbs
of discourse. The second level is discourse peak.

Main-line Verbs of Discourse

Not all information is of equal value. Some information is salient
and carries the discourse forward to its climax, while other information
is supportive. This distinction is marked by a specific tense-aspect-
mood. Salient information is marked by a main-line verb while suppor-
tive information is marked by verbs which progressively depart from
the main-line. Longacre explains:

[3]One should not equate discourse grammar with structuralism, though some overlap
might exist. Daniel Patte illustrates the latter ("Method for a Structural Exegesis of
Didactic Discourse: Analysis of I Thessalonians," *Semeia* 26 [1983] 85–129). For a
critique of structuralism, see Bill Stancil, "Structuralism and New Testament Studies,"
SWJT 22 (1980) 41–59. Longacre's discourse grammar is independent of (European)
structuralism (personal communication).

[4]Robert Longacre, "Why We Need a Vertical Revolution in Linguistics," *The Fifth
LACUS Forum* (Columbia, SC: Hornbeam, 1978) 247–70.

[5]Take, for example, the work of Henk van Riemsdijk and Edwin Williams. Their
research focus are sentences. At the same time they recognize limitations to such a
research program. They concede, "In principle it could turn out that it is impossible to
characterize sentences in and of themselves without reference to their roles in various
conversations" (*Introduction to the Theory of Grammar* [Cambridge: MIT, 1986] 184).

[6]James Gee notes that "English is particularly impoverished in discourse particles
and other formal discourse markers" ("Units in the Production of Narrative Discourse,"
Discourse Processes 9 [1983] 392). This puts speakers of English at a disadvantage
vis-à-vis discourse analysis, in that we are unaware of such features and consequently fail
to search for them in language analysis. Discourse analysts such as Longacre correct this
disadvantage. Their exposure to languages makes them aware of language dynamics in
general and discourse strategies in particular.

Discourse grammarians are coming to recognize more and more that in telling a story in any language, one particular tense is favored as the carrier of the backbone or story-line of the story while other tenses serve to present the background, supportive, and predictive material in the story.[7]

To illustrate these distinctions, note Longacre's discussion of Hebrew narrative and hortatory discourse. Each discourse type has its own constellation of verb forms (what Longacre calls salience scheme). Chart 1 illustrates Hebrew narrative, while Chart 2 illustrates Hebrew hortatory discourse.[8]

The preterite (*waw*-consecutive) marks the main-line in Hebrew narrative, a chain of (necessary verb-initial clauses). Supportive information is scalar, moving from action (Band 2), to static verbs (Band 4), to irrealis (Band 5).

Band 1 Storyline	1. Preterite
Band 2 Backgrounded Actions	2.1 Perfect 2.2 Noun + Perfect
Band 3 Backgrounded Activities	3.1 *hinnen* + participle 3.2 Participle 3.3 Noun + participle
Band 4 Setting	4.1 Preterite of *haya*, "be" 4.2 Perfect of *haya*, "be" 4.3 Nominal clause (verbless) 4.4 Existential clause with *yesh*
Band 5 Irrealis	5. Negation of verb clause

Chart 1
Hebrew Verb Rank Scheme for Narrative Discourse
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Note the differences between narrative and hortatory discourse (see Chart 2). Preterite marks main-line of narrative while the main-line of hortatory discourse is the imperative. Supportive information is also scalar.

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[7]Robert Longacre, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns) 64.
[8]Longacre, *Joseph*, 81, 121.

Band 1	1.1 Imperative (2pl)
Primary line of	1.2 Cohortative (1pl)
Exhortation	1.3 Jussive (3pl)
Band 2	2.1 'al + jussive/imperfect
Secondary line	2.2 Modal imperfect
of exhortation	
Band 3	3.1 waw-(consecutive) perfect
Results/consequences	3.2 lo'/pen + imperfect
(Motivation)	3.3 (Future) perfect
Band 4	4.1 Perfect (of past events)
Setting (or problem)	4.2 Participles
	4.3 Nominal clauses

Chart 2
Hebrew Verb Rank Scheme for Hortatory Discourse
Used with permission

Identification of main-line verbs is important. First, main-line verbs are textual clues as to salient versus supportive information. Main-line verbs carry the discourse forward. Second, main-line versus supportive verbs serve to identify paragraph structure.[9] Third, altering the main-line can mark discourse peak or climax (see next section). And fourth, abstraction of macrostructure is related to verb ranking. Macrostructure is essentially the overall plan or design of a discourse.[10]

Discourse Peak

The second level of information relative to this paper is discourse peak. The assumption here is that a discourse "is going somewhere in terms of its inner drive and development."[11] There is movement toward a conclusion. An interpreter's goal, then, is to retrace an author's progression of thought (being conscious of the main-line), a progression which builds to the conclusion or discourse peak. In narrative, for example, peak may be maximum tension (climax) or a crucial event that provides a resolution to a plot (*denouement*). The peak of hortatory discourse is the most effective attempt to change behavior. Longacre calls this progression the profile of a text, i.e., linguistic reflexes of mounting and declining tension.[12]

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[9] For a complete discussion, see Longacre, *Joseph*, 83–118.

[10] Longacre, *Joseph*, 42. See also Teun van Dijk, *Text and Context* (London: Longmans, 1977).

[11] Robert Longacre, "Discourse Peak as Zone of Turbulence," *Beyond the Sentence* (Ed. J. Wirth; Ann Arbor: Karoma, 1985) 84.

[12] Robert Longacre, "A Spectrum and Profile Approach to Discourse Analysis," *Text* 1 (1981) 337.

Longacre describes discourse peak as a "zone of turbulence in otherwise placid flow of discourse."[13] Changes from the "routine" within a discourse serve as cues to mark the progression of a discourse. Longacre explains that languages possess a number of possible strategies to mark discourse peak. These strategies vary across languages. Essentially the regular flow of the discourse is altered at peak. A given discourse may employ one or several strategies. Such strategies may include rhetorical underlying (e.g., paraphrase), change in word order, discourse peak particle, change of tense-aspect-mood, change of sentence length, al.[14] The underlying assumption is that variation is not random nor arbitrary.[15]

The identification of discourse peak is important. Longacre explains:

> The importance of the identification of peak is that it enables us to get at the overall grammar of the discourse. If we can identify a discourse peak, then we can identify pre-peak and post-peak sections. These, plus special beginning and ending sections, give us a surface grammar of discourse that is not dissimilar from the recognition of subject, verb, and object on the clause level in a language. The verb as a central constituent of the clause can be compared with the peak as a central constituent of the discourse.[16]

A critical part of understanding a discourse (or a section of a discourse), then, is the identification of the conclusion or discourse peak. This paper will illustrate the importance of this concept in terms of Colossians 2:16–3:17.

Summary

The method which underlies the interpretive conclusions of this paper is discourse grammar as developed by Robert Longacre. The

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[13]Longacre, "A Spectrum and Profile," 351.

[14]Longacre, "Discourse Peak as Zone of Turbulence," 84–86; "A Spectrum and Profile," 349–51.

[15]Longacre, *Joseph*, xiii.

[16]Longacre, *Joseph*, 97. Paul Ricoeur's comment about the conclusion of a story is relative here. He writes: "To follow a story is to move forward in the midst of contingencies and peripeteai under the guidance of an expectation that finds its fulfillment in the 'conclusion' of the story. This conclusion is not logically implied by some previous premises. It gives the story an 'end point,' which, in turn, furnishes the *point of view* from which the story can be perceived as forming a whole. To understand the story is to understand *how and why* the successive episodes led to this conclusion, which far from being foreseeable, must finally be acceptable, as congruent with the episodes brought together by the story" (emphasis mine; *Time and Narrative* [3 vols; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984–86] 1:66, 67). This comment is part of Ricoeur's discussion of emplotment. Essentially, emplotment is a way to describe the organization

goal of this method is to identify the information structure of a discourse. For the purpose of this paper, two levels were introduced, main-line verbs and discourse peak. An application of this method to Colossians 2:16–17 follows.

DISCOURSE STRUCTURE OF COLOSSIANS 2:16–3:17

A discourse analysis of Colossians 2:16–3:17 (hereafter central section) suggests that this portion of Colossians is hortatory discourse with embedded exposition. The structural framework is a simple chiasmus. It provides the cohesion that holds the book together, and it provides the rubric in which the central section progresses to its discourse peak or climax.

Before outlining the chiasmus, I shall first define and illustrate this structure within the broader context of NT interpretation.

Definition

As commonly accepted chiasmus is inverted parallelism.[17] The interior consists of either a single element (e.g., C) or two complementary elements (e.g., B B'). The exterior consists of pairs of complementary elements forming a composite meaning (e.g., A A'). These are illustrated in Figure 1.

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A   B          A   B
                   C
B'  A'         B'  A'
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FIGURE 1. Chiastic Structures

Colossians 1:2 is an example of a simple chiasmus. The interior elements are "saints" and "faithful brethren." The exterior elements are two prepositional phrases, "in Colossea" and "in Christ."[18] Note the following figure.

```
A   in Colossae
    B   saints
    B'  faithful brethren
A'  in Christ
```
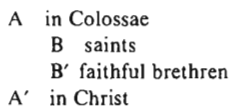
FIGURE 2. Chiastic Structure of Colossians 1:2

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of a discourse, a concept which parallels Longacre's macrostructure. Because of emplotment an interpreter is able to "follow" a discourse from its beginning to the climax (*Time and Narrative*, 1:64–70).

   [17]de Waard and Nida, *From One Language to Another*, 112–20.

   [18]The English translation is "to the saints in Colossea and to the faithful brethren in Christ" (author's translation). The chiasmus is lost in the English.

Chiasmus and NT Interpretation

Blass-Debrunner note that the identification of chiasmus in the NT is controversial.[19] Though chiastic structures are more readily associated with the OT,[20] NT studies have begun to recognize their presence and potential for interpretation.[21] Some have taken a progressive position.[22]

Several have identified chiastic structures over larger sections of text. M. Philip Scott, for example, suggests that a chiasmus is a key to interpreting Mark's Gospel.[23] George Rice identifies a chiasmus as the central section of Hebrews.[24] More germane to this paper, Steven M. Baugh suggests that the hymn of Colossians 1:15–20 is a chiasmus.[25]

Identification of Chiastic Structure

A chiasmus marks the central section of Colossians (see Figure 3). The chiasmus provides the cohesion which ties together the two halves of the book and provides the rubric around which the argument of the central section develops to a climax. I will now summarize my interpretation (alternative positions are cited in the notes).

First, 2:16–3:17 is taken as a unit.[26] The basis for this interpretation is the shift of tense-aspect-mood and word order (see Figure 3). The

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[19]F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Ed. Robert Funk; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961) 252.

[20]de Waard and Nida, *From One Language to Another*, 112–20.

[21]Ronald Man, "The Value of Chiasm for New Testament Interpretation," *BSac* 141:146–57.

[22]John Welch suggests that the issue is no longer whether chiasmus exists, but rather contends that research should focus upon (1) frequency of occurrence and (2) the structure's significance for exegesis (*Chiasmus in Antiquity* [Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981] 9). John Breck suggests that an intimate connection exists between rhetorical form and thematic context ("Biblical Chiasmus: Exploring Structure for Meaning," *BTB* 17 [1987] 70–74.

[23]M. Philip Scott, "Chiastic Structure: A Key to the Interpretation of Mark's Gospel." *BTB* 15 (1985) 17–26.

[24]George Rice, "The Chiastic Structure of the Central Section of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *AUSemS* 19 (1981) 243–46.

[25]Steven M. Baugh, "The Poetic Form of Colossians 1:15–20," *West Th J* 47 (1985) 227–44. See also Robert K. Farrell, "The Structure and Theology of Luke's Central Section," *Trin J* 7ns (1986) 33–54.

[26]There are several alternatives in the literature. Edward Lohse, for example, makes a major break between 2:23 and 3:1. He suggests that the former section is instructional, while the latter is hortatory. The conjunction οὖν "therefore" marks the transition between sections (*Colossians and Philemon* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971] 132). See also Eduard Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982) 171; N. W. Meyer, *The Epistles to the Philippians and Colossians and to Philemon* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1985) 372, 372; Werner Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982) 217; J. L. Houlden, *Paul's Letter from Prison* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977) 201; Curtis Vaughan,

central section of Colossians is hortatory discourse (see discussion below) and is set off from the earlier expository section by the conjunction οὖν "therefore" in 2:16.[27]

Paragraph Elements	Tense-Aspect-Mood	Word Order
A (2:16-19)		
(1) Let no man, therefore, judge you (2:16)	Pres. 3rd singular	S-O-V
(2) Let no man condemn you (2:18)	Pres. 3rd singular	S-O-V
B (2:20-23)		
If you have died with Christ (2:20)	Mitigated imper.-Rhetorical question	
(1) which are meant for destruction (2:21)		
(2) which is a matter (2:23)		
B' (3:1-4)		
If you have been raised with Christ (3:1)		
(1) seek things above (3:1)	Pres. 2nd plural	(S)-0-V
(2) think on things above (3:2)	Pres. 2nd plural	(S)-0-V
A' (3:5-17)		
(1) Put to death, therefore (3:5)	Aorist 2nd plural	V-(S)-O
(a) But now you also put off (3:8)	Aorist 2nd plural	V-S-O
(b) Do not lie (3:9)	Pres. 2nd plural	V
(2) Put on therefore, as elect of God (3:12)	Aorist 2nd plural	V-S-0
(a) Let the peace of God rule (3:15)	Pres. 3rd singular	S-V
(b) Let the word of God dwell (3:16)	Pres. 3rd singular	S-V

FIGURE 3. A Discourse Layout of Colossians 2:16-3:17

Colossians and Philemon (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) 89; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1970) 560; Everett Harrison, *Colossians: Christ All-Sufficient* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971) 17, 74; and Homer Kent, *Treasures of Wisdom* (Winona Lake: BMH, 1978) 25.

Peter O'Brien offers a second position. A major break is made in 3:4. The former section is doctrinal, while the latter is practical. The conjunction οὖν marks the transition (*Colossians and Philemon* [Waco: Word, 1982] 174). See also Robert Gromacki, *Stand Perfect in Wisdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981) 131; D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (3 vols; Chicago: Moody, 1977) 233; and E. Simpson and F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians and the Colossians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 174, 175.

[27] George Cannon makes a major break at 2:16 and 2:17. The *Haustafel* (3:18-4:1) is set off from 3:17. The basis for these conclusions is an epistolary analysis of Colossians (*The Use of Traditional Materials in Colossians* [Macon: Mercer University Press, 1983] 156, 157). See also Ralph Martin, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973) 89; and T. K. Abbott, *Epistle to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (ICC; Edinburg: T. and T. Clark, 1985) lxi.

More specifically note that the central section begins with two imperatives, both present tense 3rd person singular. Word order is subject-object-verb. Subsequent imperatives deviate along either or both parameters (e.g., subsequent imperatives are 2nd person plural, there is a shift to the aorist tense and word order changes to verb-subject-object). The final two imperatives, however, return to the original form (i.e., present tense 3rd singular). It is at these two locations in the central section that the TENSION of the argument is lowest. I return to discuss tension below. At this point it is enough to suggest that the imperatives in A and A' mark the on-set and the terminus of the central section, forming an envelope structure.

Second, A (2:16–19) and A' (3:5–17) are the exterior elements of the chiasmus (see Figure 3). Recall that the imperatives of A and A' (specifically 2a and 2b) form an envelope structure. One should not conclude, however, that these imperatives balance each other to the exclusion of the other imperatives in A' (specially 1a and 1b). Rather I take A and the *whole* of A' to balance each other as the exterior elements because both A and A' are *hortatory* discourse. This stands over against B and B' which are *expository* discourse.

The two features which characterize hortatory discourse—agent orientation and non-chronological linkage—are present in A and A', suggesting why these sections are hortatory discourse. With regard to the former feature, note that the imperatives in A and A' are not embedded (cf. B and B'; see below). The expectation of A and A' is that believers (i.e., agents) will behave in a certain manner. Behavior, not exposition (of a topic), is the focus.

Logical progression is also evident. In A' (3:5–17), for example, the imperative, "Put your members to death" (3:5), is followed by a causal prepositional phrase, "because of which (δι' ἃ) the wrath of God is come" (3:6). The prepositional phrase provides the MOTIVATION to obey the imperative. Note also the aorist participles which follow the imperative, "do not lie to one another" (3:9): "since you have put off ('απεκδυσαμένοι) the old man . . . (3:9) [and] since you have put on (ἐνδυσαμένοι) the new man" (3:10).[28]

The logical progression in A (2:16–19) is not as pronounced. Nonetheless the fact that the imperatives carry the reader forward through this paragraph suggests that A is also hortatory discourse. Here also believers (i.e., agents) are expected to behave in a certain manner. The lack of tension in A is further explained below.

And third, B (2:20–23) and B' (3:1–4) are the two central elements of the chiasmus (see Figure 3). Note that B and B' are introduced with

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[28]Whether one understands these aorist participles as causal or as attending circumstances following the imperative is not important here. In either case, both carry a logical progression of thought.

conditional clauses.[29] 2:20 reads, "If (εἰ) you have died with Christ from the elements of the world, why then, while living in the world, are you subject to ordinances?" (author's translation). 3:1 reads, "If (εἰ), therefore, you have died with Christ, seek things above" (author's translation). Also both sections refer to the earlier doctrinal exposition. B (2:20–23) refers back to 2:11, 12 and B' (3:1–4) refers back to 2:13.

Note also that the apodosis of both conditional sentences are imperatives (2:20, 3:1). The rhetorical question of 2:20 is a mitigated imperative (i.e., "you should not be subject to ordinances"). But at the same time these imperatives are embedded within expository discourse. Recall that the imperatives of A and A' are not embedded.

The *expository* nature of the central elements is more evident in B. The imperative of 2:20 is both mitigated and embedded within the conditional sentence. Note also that following the conditional sentence the elements are explained (i.e., "which are meant for destruction [2:21] and which is a matter . . . " [2:23]). The progression is logical (non-chronological) but the focus is on a topic (non-agent orientation). Recall that A and A' also shared logical progression but the purpose seemed quite different. In B and B' the logical progression is a consequence of *explaining* a topic, while in A and A' the logical progression is used to provide *motivation* for believers to behave in a certain manner. Consequently, the focus of B and B' is a *topic* while the focus of A and A' is *behavior*.

Though B' (3:1–4) begins with a conditional sentence, its expository character is not as clear. In B' the imperatives are not mitigated, but are typical 2nd person plural. The first, however, is embedded within the conditional sentence. These (and the other imperatives) are discussed below. At this time it is sufficient to say that a transition to discourse peak domain occurs in this section.

In summary it was suggested that the central section of Colossians is a chiasmus. Evidence was offered to suggest that 2:16–3:17 is a unit, that 2:16–19 (A) and 3:5–17 (A') balance each other as the exterior elements, and that 2:20–23 (B) and 3:1–4 (B') balance each other as the

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[29]It is at this point in the passage that the dynamic of interpretation becomes apparent. The interpreter must explain the semantics of the first class condition at the sentence level and the parallel sequence of the conditions at the discourse level. Typically, a discussion of the conditions is limited to sentence level. Gromacki, for example, notes that these are first class conditions, where the protasis is assumed to be true (*Stand Perfect in Wisdom*, 123). Kent notes that the conditional sentences are not intended to cause doubt, and are, therefore, translated, "since" (*Treasures of Wisdom*, 104). The problem with this explanation is that it overlooks possible larger discourse patterns. Recognition of the chiasmus provides a possible explanation as to why the conditional sentences appear in a balanced sequence and in this specific location in the text.

central elements.[30] The basis for this interpretation was that A and A′ are *hortatory* discourse and that B and B′ are *expository* discourse. I shall now turn to discuss the progression of thought through the chiasmus. This will clear up several issues left unanswered.

Progression of Argument

Discourse progresses to a climax or discourse peak. Main-line verbs carry the text forward, while specific text features mark discourse peak. It is proposed that the central section of Colossians is hortatory discourse with embedded exposition. The basis for this conclusion is the identification of discourse peak. The imperatives carry the argument forward. Changes in tense-aspect-mood and word order and use of the vocatives mark the progression that leads to the discourse peak.[31]

In his discussion of Hebrew hortatory discourse, Longacre suggests that imperatives (2nd pl), cohortatives (1st pl) and jussives (3rd pl) are

[30]The chiasmus can account for an additional feature of the text, the distribution of οὖν. It was noted above that the conjunction οὖν is that basis upon which interpreters mark major breaks in the text (see note 27). The distribution of οὖν complements the interpretation proposed in this paper. Although οὖν introduces B′ and A′, it does not occur in B (note that there is a textual variant, but the evidence overwhelmingly favors its absence).

It seems reasonable that the οὖν of 2:16 and 3:1 join A and B′ with the preceding expository section of Colossians. Recall that B′ makes a back reference to 2:13. it also seems reasonable to suggest that the οὖν of 3:5 joins B′ and A′. Since believers have been raised with Christ, they have a new life and consequently should put to death their members (3:5) and put on godly character (3:12). The logic, then, is that the theoretical exposition (B′) proceeds the consequences of that theological truth (A′). That logical progression, however, is inverted vis-à-vis A and B. In terms of A and B, the consequences of the theological truth (A) precede the theological implication (B). Therefore, if my analysis is correct that A and B are inverted because of the chiasmus, one would expect οὖν to be absent at 2:20. This interpretation is summarized as follows.

A (*oun:* br) Theological implication (2:16–19)

   B Theological exposition (2:20–23)

   B′ (*oun:* br) Theological exposition (3:1–4)

A′ (*oun*) Theological implication (3:5–17)

where br means back reference to earlier position of Colossians.

FIGURE 6. Logical Development of the Central Section

[31]The progression that leads to the discourse peak is a statement based upon Ricoeur's notion of emplotment. At this point the reader should note that the focus of his discussion is narrative. The concept has been borrowed in this paper with the assumption that hortatory discourse, like narrative, is going somewhere. A progressive research program will further validate the expandability of the notion, emplotment, across non-narrative discourse types.

unranked (see Chart 2 above). Each form of imperative marks the main-line (or primary line of exhortation). Longacre explains that the basis to choose from one of the above forms is the sociological context. For example, if a speaker is sociologically dominant, then the imperative is used (e.g., Joseph [incognito] speaks to his brothers in Gen 42:14–16 in the imperative).[32]

The imperatives of the central section are interpreted differently. It seems clear that the author maintains an authoritative position throughout Colossians. There does not appear to be a sociological basis for variation. Rather the imperatives carry the exhortation forward, marking the progression to the discourse peak. This interpretation can account for changes in tense-aspect-mood, changes in word order and the use of the vocatives.[33]

The imperatives in A (2:16–19) are present tense 3rd singular. Word order is subject-object-verb. Recall that A is hortatory discourse though it lacks the tension characteristic of A' (3:5–17). This lack of tension suggests that A is PRE-PEAK. The underlying claim is that at peak, tension is highest.[34]

Recall that B' (3:1–4) balances B in that both are expository discourse. The expository character of B' is not obvious. The imperatives are typical present tense 2nd plural. The first imperative is embedded within the conditional sentence, while the second is not.

It is in B' that a transition occurs. The shift from 3rd person to 2nd person imperatives increases the tension. The author moves from a mild exhortation in A to a firm command in B'. The fact that the second command, "Think on things above" (3:2), is not embedded, marks the transition from expository to hortatory discourse. Again

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[32]Longacre, *Joseph*, 119–23.

[33]Ricoeur argues that emplotment (or the organization of events) means that an event in a story receives a definition from its contribution to the plot's development. It follows that a story "must organize [the events] into an intelligent whole, of a sort such that we can always ask what is the 'thought' of this story. In short, emplotment is the operation that draws a configuration out of a simple succession" (*Time and Narrative*, 1:65). This means that content selection or exclusion is controlled by the "thought" or the macrostructure. Longacre further explains this relationship: "Macrostructure analysis attempts to make explicit how the overall plan and global purpose of a story exercises a selective control on the incidents that are included and the relative elaboration of detail that characterize the presentation of each incident" (*Joseph*, 42). Part of the interpretive process, then, is to account for the text features (e.g., tense change) and content. It is necessary to relate the details of the text to its general ideas or argument (Longacre, *Joseph*, x). To account for these, then, provides a reasonable basis to claim that the interpreter has a viable understanding of a given discourse.

[34]Longacre's comment about the relationship between peak and tension is helpful. He writes, "In describing a text we can draw its profile once we identify its peak(s) [note that the discourse as a whole has a peak and that individual episodes or sections can have a peak]. The profile attempts to represent diagrammatically the rising and falling tension of the text with the beginning, peak, and end as reference" (*Joseph*, 19).

tension increases. At the same time note that the word order remains object-verb. The subject is understood, a characteristic of unmarked (i.e., regular) imperatives. The fact that the word order remains constant suggests that B' is also part of PRE-PEAK (the fact that B is embedded exposition suggests that B is part of PRE-PEAK).

Two major shifts occur in A'. First, note that the imperatives shift from present to aorist tense.[35] And second, word order shifts from (subject)-object-verb to verb-subject-object.[36] It seems, then, that 3:5

[35]Typically the basis to distinguish between the aorist and the present imperative is as follows. The aorist imperative means "start to do X," while the present imperative means "continue to do X." McKay questions this understanding. Instead, he defines the aorist as "representing an activity as a total action, in its entirety without dwelling on its internal details," while the present "represents an activity as a process going on, with the focus on its progress or development." The aorist imperative, therefore, urges activity as a whole action, while the present imperative urges activity as an ongoing process. McKay cites the aorist imperative, "Put to death" (Col 3:5). He suggests that this is an example in which a specific complete action is to be performed ("Aspect in Imperatival Constructions in New Testament Greek," *Nov Test* 27 [1985] 203, 204, 207, 208).

Though McKay's paper is very helpful, this paper takes the discussion one step farther, that is a definition of tense vis-a-vis a higher level discourse concern. It is proposed that the shift from present tense to aorist tense and back to present tense go beyond a simple aspectual shift which McKay would propose. Rather changes in tense-aspect-mood mark the information structure. Figure 7 summarizes that structure vis-a-vis the imperatives.

Band 1	1.1 Aorist
Primary line of exhortation	1.2 Present (2pl)
	1.3 Present (3s)
Band 2	2.1 Embedded present (2pl)
Secondary line of exhortation	2.2 Mitigated imperative

FIGURE 7. Imperative Rank Scheme of the Central Section of Colossians

The scheme only reflects the information structure of the central section of Colossians. Band 1 imperatives carry higher levels of *tension*. It is suggested in this paper that the use of the vocative with the aorist tense marks the on-set of the domain of peak (3:5) and the discourse peak of the central section (3:12). Additional research will test this rank scheme's expandability to other portions of (NT) Greek hortatory discourse.

[36]Blass-Debrunner suggest that Greek word order tends to be verb-subject-object. They do observe, however, that this word order is characteristic of *narrative* (*Grammar of the New Testament*, 428; see also Harold Greenlee, *A Concise Exegetical Grammar of the New Testament Greek* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986] 38). This observation is quite important. This paper has suggested that the typical word order for imperatives in the central section of Colossians is subject-object-verb. The word order does shift to verb-subject-object at the on-set of peak domain. It is at this location that the tension begins to peak. One should not conclude, however, that this interpretation conflicts with the observations of Blass-Debrunner. The word order that they have observed is characteristic of *narrative* while the suggested word order in this paper is characteristic of *hortatory* discourse. Longacre writes that different features which characterize narrative will differ from those which characterize hortatory discourse ("Verticle Revolution in

marks the on-set of PEAK-DOMAIN. A set of text features—change in tense-aspect-mood and word order change—point to a shift in the argument as tension increases.

Even within the domain of peak, an additional feature is present, the use of the vocative. Note that the imperative, "Put to death" (3:5) is unmarked that is, the subject is understood (cf. the imperative in B'). Note, however, the imperative, "Put off" (3:8). The subject is overt, the plural pronoun ὑμεῖς "you" is present. This increases the tension.

The imperative "Put on" (3:12) marks the DISCOURSE PEAK of the central section. Note that the imperative is aorist and the word order is verb-subject-object. But at the same time the imperative is highly marked and stands apart from all the imperatives. The use of the *extended* vocative, "elect of God, saints and beloved," brings the tension to a climax. The text features of 3:12, taken as a set, mark this imperative as unique. Consequently, this imperative is taken as the final and most effective attempt to change the behavior of the readers.

The imperative, "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts" (3:15), marks POST-PEAK. Tension drops off as the author returns to use the present tense 3rd singular imperatives. Word order also returns to subject-verb (note that the verbs are intransitive).

Figure 4 illustrates the interpretation of the argument of the central section of Colossians as it progresses from pre-peak, to peak domain, to peak and to post-peak.

> Let no man judge you (2:16)
> Let no man condemn you (2:18)
> Mitigated imperative [rhetorical question] (2:20)
> Seek things above [embedded imperative] (3:1)
>   Think on things above (3:2)
>   Put to death (3:5)
>   But now *you* also put off (3:8)
>   Put on *as elect of God, saints and beloved* (3:12)
> Let the peace of God rule (3:15)
> Let the word of God dwell (3:16)

FIGURE 4. Tension and Argument Structure of the Central Section of Colossians

Function of the Chiasmus

Typically the central element(s) of a chiasmus is the emphatic focus.[37] Augustine Stock calls this the climactic centrality.[38] Ronald

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Linguistics," 247–70). This suggests that there are two areas which need additional attention: (1) the relationship between word order and discourse type and (2) the relationship between word order and information structure. It may no longer be advisable to discuss word order in terms of emphasis alone.

[37] Welch, *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, 10.

[38] Augustine Stock, "Chiastic Awareness and Education in Antiquity," *BTB* 4 (1984) 23.

Man expands upon this and further explains the possible usages of the chiasmus. He suggests that a chiasmus might point to the following: emphasis of a passage (Luke 1:6–25), the point of a passage (John 1:1–18) or the purpose of a book (Luke 10:25–18:18).[39]

The chiasmus proposed in this paper, however, seems to have a different function. The central elements of the chiasmus (2:20–3:4) do not mark the emphatic focus of the central section (i.e., discourse peak). Rather, as noted above, both B (2:20–24) and B' (3:1–4) make a back reference to the earlier exposition (1:9ff). B specifically refers back to 2:11, 12 and B' refers back to 2:13. This back reference, then, provides the cohesion which ties the expository section of Colossians (1:9ff) to the hortatory section or the central section of Colossians (2:16–3:17). Discourse peak is not identified with the central elements, but is identified with the imperative "Put on" (3:12) in A'. Figure 5 summarizes this interpretation.
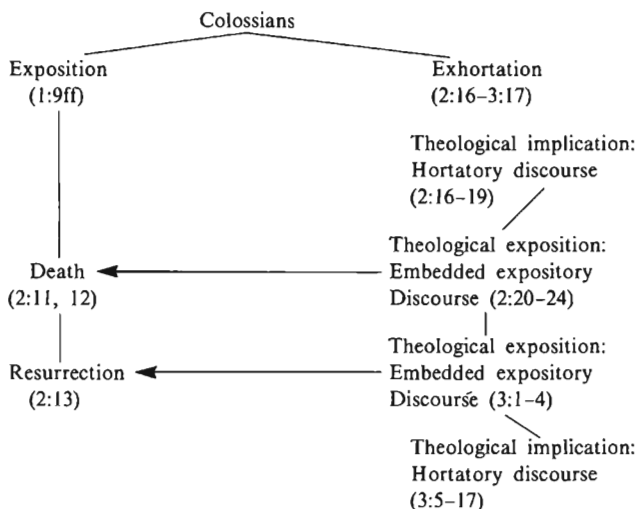

FIGURE 5. Cohesion of the Book of Colossians

Summary

In summary, this paper proposed that a chiastic structure marks the central section of Colossians. 2:16–3:17 forms a unit. A simple chiasmus serves as the structural rubric. A (2:16–19) and A' (3:5–17) balance each other as the external elements. Each are taken as hortatory discourse. B (2:20–23) and B' (3:1–4) balance each other as the central elements. Each are taken as expository discourse.

[39]Man, "The Value of Chiasm," 146–57.

The central section of Colossians is hortatory discourse with embedded exposition. The imperatives mark the main-line which carries the argument forward. Specific changes in tense-aspect-mood and word order and the use of the vocative serve to mark pre-peak, peak domain, peak and post-peak. The imperative, "Put on, therefore, as elect of God, saints, beloved, . . . " (3:12), is identified as discourse peak.

IMPLICATIONS

Several implications follow from this study. The first implication is the potential value discourse grammar has for the interpretation of the NT. The value of such a research program is that the interpreter is provided with a method by which one can ask different types of questions and by which one can address those questions. Such questions might include, what are the text-based features that point to the discourse peak? How do the text features mark the progression to that peak? How is a given section of text to be divided? What are the text-based features that point to that conclusion? What is the main point of a given section of text? How does the identification of peak contribute to understand that main point?

The second implication is the matter of evidence and argumentation. This study showed that a number of grammatical changes occurred in the central section of Colossians—tense-aspect-mood, word order changes and the use versus non-use of the vocative. In turn a set of interpretive conclusions were offered to account for those text-based features. This should not imply that this set of conclusions are the final answer. This paper simply provides an interpretation that can account for these features. It seems to follow, however, that an alternative interpretation must also be able to account for the same features.

And the third implication is the value of identifying discourse types. More specifically, the basis for positing a chiasmus as the structural framework for the central section is the identification of discourse types. Recall that the exterior elements are hortatory discourse while the interior elements are expository discourse. Typically, however, a chiasmus is identified by content. An implied consequence is that the parallel content must be of relatively equal length (i.e., number of words). Constructing a chiasmus in such a manner would call into question the proposed chiasmus of this paper, for A and A' are not of relatively equal length (A' is about twice the length). However, if it is possible to posit a chiasmus based upon discourse types, length may no longer be an a priori factor of evaluation.