

## 2 THESSALONIANS 1:3-10: A STUDY IN SENTENCE STRUCTURE

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We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren, even as it is meet, for that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the love of each one of you all toward one another aboundeth; so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions which ye endure; which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God; to the end that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: if so be that it is a righteous thing with God to recompense affliction to them that afflict you, and to you that are afflicted rest with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus: who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at in all them that believed (because our testimony unto you was believed) in that day (2 Thess 1:3-10, ASV).

Communication between human beings is a complex and at times a bewildering process to understand and be understood clearly. The differences between written and oral expression become very clear to one who attempts to carry on a courtship by mail in lieu of seeing the beloved in person. The technical student of Scripture has even more burdens placed on him from the language and historical setting to the theological implications. The exegete brings so much baggage with him that no matter how innocently it is acquired it nevertheless inhibits a clear and precise understanding of Scripture.

The use of punctuation marks may seem a small part of exegetical study. Since the earliest texts of the NT have virtually no punctuation, we are virtually entirely at the mercy of the editors. Not that this is all bad, for the judicious use of keen scholarship and practical good judgment have combined to make an excellent Greek text for the modern reader whether he chooses Nestle's edition or *UBSGNT*. When one comes to a controversial text there is often some vagueness that contributes to the misunderstanding. Usually, however, the battle rages about the meaning of the words, the grammar and other facets of the context. It is not usual to appeal to the punctuation, for we generally look past this to the "more important" data. Providing one takes proper safeguards to avoid eisegesis, a fresh examination of punctuation and sentence structure should not be disregarded. 2 Thess 1:3-10 has some problems that may be cleared up by a look at the punctuation. It has not been carefully examined as to its sentence structure by any work in print that I have examined. Most of us are too taken up with the words used and the concepts expressed to examine the division of thought units.

The common critical Greek editions, along with *KJV* and *ASV*, have one long sentence from v 3 through v 10. While it is to be admitted that there is an approx-

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imate identity of subject matter, it is most unsatisfactory to make no sentence divisions here. It would appear that there are several difficulties that make the structure somewhat obscure: (1) There is a lack of conjunctions at crucial junctures. Few of the twelve used in this passage clearly aid us to indicate the major thought or a primary subordinate idea. (2) There is a lack of finite verbs, and it is difficult to find the key idea by finding the leading verb. In v 3 *opheilomen* is soon left behind in Paul's burst of thought. The next finite verb does not occur until v 9. (3) The varied use of infinitives must be carefully examined or one completely loses his way. Finally, (4) the connection of the prepositional phrases *en tē apokalypsei* of v 7b and *en tē hēmera ekeinē* of v 10 are difficult. Placing them properly will help to unravel the difficulty of this text.

It is hoped that by the examination of punctuation the way to resolving some of the questions we all ask of this passage will be eased.

Punctuation is basically a problem for the written medium of communication. When we speak we have gestures, voice inflection, pauses, facial expressions, and nonverbal as well as verbal feedback to guide our efforts to make meaningful communication. But in writing, the lack, misplacement or ignoring of punctuation marks may result in disastrous misunderstanding of any given written work. The statement that "woman without her man is but an animal" sheds light on the author's view of man's ability to meet the weaker woman's need. Punctuation, however, makes a great difference: "Woman! Without her, man is but an animal." Now the shoe is on the other foot, punctuation completely changing the previous statement. A misplaced comma led to the following puzzling law on the books of one of our states: "No hotel, restaurant, dining room or kitchen shall be used as a sleeping or dressing room by an employee or other person."<sup>1</sup> If hotel rooms cannot be rented for either dressing or sleeping, there remains little use for them. But of course the law intended to forbid the use of restaurant dining rooms or kitchens for such purposes if they happened to be in a hotel. Another law required that "every railroad corporation shall provide a uniform, hat or cap, and a distinguishing badge" for every employee.<sup>2</sup> This is not a case of misplaced punctuation so much as unclear construction. Submission to two different English departments of colleges led to two different interpretations. One said that uniform, headgear and badge are intended. The other said only two items are included: Either a uniform or headgear on the one hand and a badge on the other would be required.<sup>3</sup>

Nigel Turner's observation about Paul's style in general is clearly illustrated by the passage we are discussing:

Paul's periods are rarely finished off neatly, a fault which Abel ascribes to forgetfulness as to how the period began, rather than to disdain of grammatical rules; Paul allows himself to be drawn along on the wings of his thought in sharp bursts, resulting in parentheses and discords, while the particles and participles are brought in to weave over gaps in diction.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>A. Marchwardt and F. Cassidy, *Scribner Handbook of English* (New York: Scribner's, 1960) 261.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>N. Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek: Style* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1976) 86.

Apparently we are here dealing with one of Paul's impulsive elaborations of thought, which are somewhat diverse from his opening implication. Verses 3-5 and 10-12 mainly deal with the virtues of the saints at Thessalonica, while vv 6-9 deal with God's acts. The verses dealing mainly with the saints have a current perspective, while those referring to God deal with eschatological events. There seems to be nothing contradictory in this, but the structure does leave one gasping for grammatical oxygen. This factor, combined with the obvious difficulty of understanding eschatological truth apart from our theological systems that we invariably bring to the topic, makes a problem of several dimensions. One of the answers posed by scholars has been to suggest a textual alteration.<sup>5</sup> However, the lack of ancient documents to support such a contention makes it tenuous at best. If other solutions commend themselves, there is little justification for textual alteration.

Punctuation serves the noble purposes of clarity, emphasis, and facility in reading.<sup>6</sup> In our current Greek texts the editors have placed such marks as they believed would aid the readers, but they are not original from the authors. While it is not impossible that the autographa had some punctuation marks, there is no certain textual evidence to support such a contention. The period and semicolon were invented by Aristophanes in about the third century before Christ. The literary papyri are the first pieces of Greek literature to use punctuation regularly.<sup>7</sup> Blass, Debrunner and Funk remind us as follows:

It is certain that the authors of the New Testament could have used punctuation just as other people did at that time, not only in MSS, but sometimes also in letters and documents. However, whether the New Testament books were punctuated no one knows, and it is unknown, moreover, where and how they were punctuated, since no authentic traditions have been handed down. Modern editors are compelled to provide their own punctuation and hence their own interpretation.<sup>8</sup>

It is well accepted that punctuation marks are in fact very clear indications of the author's intended meaning. In the case of the Greek NT it is the editors' interpretations that are indicated. Moulton and Howard indicate:

It is simply in essence a form of commentary; and the modern editor is on every page compelled to choose between alternative punctuations, involving different interpretations, where the only ancient authority is that of patristic comments or early versions. Since these go back to periods considerably antedating our best uncials, they have naturally the weight in many cases of a primitive tradition, which no wise exegete would ignore. But as little would he consent to be bound hand and foot by interpretations which do not depend on the autographs, and may be no more than guesses by readers who were not by any means better qualified

<sup>5</sup>This alteration is suggested by some to take the form of complete omission of the section 1:3-10. Others are less radical in their approach. J. Moffatt, *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1912) 81-82, discusses the problem as do W. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966) 185-186, and D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1970) 569-575. In general, although many different and some very radical solutions have been posed, today the traditional view of the integrity of the text is generally conceded.

<sup>6</sup>F. Manchester, *College English Essentials* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1954) 298.

<sup>7</sup>J. H. Moulton and W. Howard, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek: Accidence and Word Formation* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1929) 46.

<sup>8</sup>BDF 10.

from all sides than ourselves. When therefore we use an extremely careful edition like that of WH, where punctuation in the text and in the margin are constantly determining the meaning for us, we must always be careful to realize our freedom to take our own line on sufficient reason.<sup>9</sup>

Robertson agrees in principle: "It is the privilege of each New Testament student to make his own punctuation."<sup>10</sup> However, one must not change at a whim of either doctrine or grammatical difficulty. Caution must be exercised, as Howard indicated. His concluding words are: "Our arguments must be exegetical, and the traditional punctuation seen in WH will count for little."<sup>11</sup>

It is apparent that the consensus is supportive of independent decisions, if they are carefully weighed and exegetically justified. The efforts to supply clarity by punctuation variations is seen in virtually every modern translation in English. The following chart will indicate the lack of consensus in the punctuation of the passage in question.

<i>Edition</i>	<i>Number of Sentences</i>	<i>Beginning Sentences at Verse</i>							
<i>KJV, ASV, Greek texts</i>	one	3							
<i>Wuest, Expanded Trans.</i>	two	3				7			
<i>Moffatt</i>	three	3	4	5					
<i>Williams</i>		3		5		7			
<i>Amer. Trans., RSV</i>	four	3	4	5				9	
<i>NASB</i>		3		5	6				9
<i>F. F. Bruce, Paraph. Paul</i>	five	3	4	5	6			9	
<i>20th Cent.</i>		3	4	5				8b	9
<i>Weymouth</i>		3a3b		5				8b	9
<i>Living Bible</i>	six	3	4	5	7para		9	10b	
<i>Montgomery</i>		3	4	5	6			8b	9
<i>Knox, Cath. ed.</i>	seven	3a3b	4	5	6			9	10b
<i>NEB</i>		3a3b	4	5	6			8b	9
<i>NIV</i>	eight	3	4	5	6	7b	8	9	10b
<i>Phillips</i>	nine	3a3b		5a5b	7b	8	9	10	10b
<i>TEV</i>		3a3b	4a4b	5	6	7b		9	10b

Here are eighteen translations with such diversity on most points as to show both the difficulty of the problem and the honest efforts to give a clear translation. All do agree that a sentence should begin at v 3; 70% would begin another sentence at v 5; 65% at 9; 50% at v 4; 35% at 6; 25% at vv 3b, 8b and 10b. The various critical commentaries do not support such wide divergence or so many different sentences, but almost without exception they indicate that one long sentence is not adequate.

A student who is facile in the reading of Greek can translate from v 3 through v 5 or 6 without completely losing Paul's meaning, since the use of Greek particles and participles to smooth out otherwise rough and difficult constructions is fa-

<sup>9</sup>Moulton and Howard, *Grammar*, 48.

<sup>10</sup>A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 245.

<sup>11</sup>Moulton and Howard, *Grammar*, 48.

miliar to most of us. However, some place in the section from v 5 to 7 comprehension begins to break down. It certainly is true of me, and of every student I have attempted to lead through this passage, that sooner or later trying to read one complete sentence from vv 3 through 10 is impossible. It greatly simplifies matters if one begins a new sentence at least at v 6. It is even better if we begin one also at v 4. Now I realize that it is no problem to read vv 3 and 4 together, but when we look for another convenient unit that has some indication in the grammatical construction, it is difficult to stop before v 5 ends. Since v 4 opens with a *hōste* construction, we must look at Paul's use of that conjunction. In nearly half its attestations the Nestle editors chose to open a sentence with it (Rom. 7:4, 12; 13:2; 1 Cor 3:21; 4:5; 5:8; 7:38; 10:12; 11:27, 33; 14:22, 39; 15:58; 2 Cor 4:12; 5:16, 17; Gal 3:9, 24; 4:7, 16; Phil 2:12; 4:1; 1 Thess 4:18). None of these is precisely parallel in construction with our text since all use a finite verb instead of the infinitive. However, the infinitive is sufficiently flexible in use to allow it to function clearly even when a verb is absent. This would result in the text's being read as follows:

We ought to be giving thanks to God always for you, brothers, as it is right, because your faith is growing and the love of each one of you all is multiplying for one another. So that we ourselves boast about you among the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith during all your persecutions and troubles which you are enduring—a sure sign of the just appraisal of God<sup>12</sup>—to the end that you are fitted for the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering (vv 3-5).

This makes a nice unit that is understandable and simple. But one certainly appreciates the questions the Greek editors faced along with the various translators and exegetes. Most of the questions seem to center on the precise endings of the units of thought. It is a problem that more than likely cannot be solved with any assurance. It is obvious that v 5 begins a transition to a new thought, and some 70% of our surveyed translations thought a new sentence ought to begin there. Further, the clause *endeigma tēs dikaias kriseōs tou Theou* does make the use of dashes to set it off advisable. Several expositors also make a break here, dividing the paragraph into vv 3-4; 5-10 and 11-12.<sup>13</sup> Others either are not sure or think divisions are uncalled for, for they simply comment on the passage and make no reference to divisions.<sup>14</sup>

There are several reasons for opening a new sentence at v 6 that may aid in clarifying the meaning. It is apparent to all that both vv 5 and 6 deal with the same topic, but I believe that the better place for a new sentence is v 6, not v 5.

<sup>12</sup>The construction should be understood as an objective genitive. This lies behind the readers' power to suffer persecutions, not some idea that they are justly being judged by God. Hendricksen maintains that it is the fortitude that they have supplied to them by God so that they can suffer with patience (W. Hendricksen, *I and II Thessalonians* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1955] 156). This seems totally inadequate, even though it is the well-nigh universal opinion of the expositors. If one understands this as meaning that their ability to suffer the trouble with strength is an indication of their proper assessment of God—that is, that God will ultimately bring them to their reward—it is this that gives them fortitude in suffering.

<sup>13</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Minneapolis: Wartburg, 1946); H. Alford, *The Greek Testament: Galatians—Philemon* (Chicago: Moody, 1968).

<sup>14</sup>J. Frame, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians* (New York: Scribner's, 1912); J. Moffatt, *The Expositor's Greek Testament: Thessalonians—James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961); G. Lunemann, *Critical and Exegetical Hand-book to the Epistles to the Thessalonians* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1889).

First, it seems that v 5 is a better ending for the previous statement than it is an opening of the next. Second, if one decides not to begin a sentence with v 6, then the next place seems to be v 9. Waiting until then would tend to leave the complexity and confusion without resolution. Third, the conjunction *eiper* is a subordinating one, used six times in the NT, all by Paul. It is used with *kai gar* to open a sentence in 1 Cor 8:5, and several translators open sentences with it in Rom 8:9, 17. Finally, the transition to the next thought is slightly stronger in v 6 than it is in v 5. One might avoid all tension by beginning a new sentence both in v 5 and v 6, but this tends to make too many breaks and is grammatically questionable from the standpoint of Greek.

If a new sentence begins in v 6, we must consider where to end it and start another. There is great variety at this point in the translations. Two would begin another at v 7. This is grammatically impossible and greatly obscures the sense of the original. Whether or not one decides to begin a sentence at v 6, the grammatical construction beginning with *eiper* demands that both "trouble" in v 6 and "rest" in v 7 are objects of the infinitive "to repay" in v 6. Any solution that would obscure this relationship is to be rejected. Indications that a new thought begins at v 7b do exist, and there appear to be no such definite grammatical prohibitions as with the previous proposal. Three of the surveyed translations make this decision (*TEV*, Phillips and *NIV*). The biggest obstacle to this division seems to be the connection of *en tē apokalypsei* with the *antapodounai* of v 6. However, this does not demand that they both be in the same sentence. Further, it remains to be proved that the primary reference of this prepositional phrase is at v 6. It might better be taken with what follows, the *tithousin* of v 9. Morris notes that the literary structure would connect it with what follows. This does not make the phrase totally unrelated with the preceding; it just recognizes the forward motion of the thought. Morris observes: "The section which begins 'at the revelation' and goes on to the end of v. 10 is of such a rhythmical character that a number of commentators have felt that it is a psalm of some sort."<sup>15</sup> If one sees the concept expressed in v 6 as a proverb or general principle, "God is always just in recompense," then it would be better to take any temporal reference that follows with the subsequent explanations than as immediate modifiers in the same sentence with the aphorism.

Beginning with "during the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven," where do we end the sentence? The majority of the translations we surveyed have begun a new sentence at v 9 (65%), and five of these also began a sentence at v 8b. However, there is little grammatical indication from the Greek that a sentence break is advisable until the *hoti* of v 10b. The *NIV*, which divides it into several sentences between vv 7b and 10b, results in the style and force of the original being dissipated and a misleading supply of finite verbs not in the original. Since it is not difficult to understand a sentence that begins with v 7b and continues through v 10a, and since this will keep one much closer to the Greek text, this is the better choice.

This leaves us with the explanation of the difficult phrase *en tē hēmera ekeinē* of v 10. Many expositors relate this to *hotan elthē* as a temporal complement, reading it as follows: "Whenever he shall come. . . at that day." Morris recognizes that this does not solve the problem, remarking with typical understatement

<sup>15</sup>L. Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959) 204.

ment that the phrase is “not particularly easy to fit into the structure of the sentence.”<sup>16</sup> While he is forced to understand them as parenthetical, he informs us that some men “have suggested excision, and others emendation.”<sup>17</sup> Lenski finds fault with the premise that there is a temporal relation here. He supports his contention by the fact that the phrase in question is very definite. He sees the connection, “whenever he shall come. . . at that day,” to be unacceptable.<sup>18</sup> It would appear to be remarkably simple to solve the problem by the sentence structure I suggest, making this translation:

Because our witness was believed by you concerning that day, we also pray for you regarding this, that our God might count you worthy of the calling and fill up every desire of goodness and work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus might be glorified among you and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ (vv 10b-12).

Two problems with this solution are its novelty (no published support for this punctuation came to my attention) and its requirement for the understanding of the preposition *en* in the key phrase of v 10b. I would not allow the novelty aspect to slow me overmuch, since most who comment on the problem indicate its difficulty and have little satisfaction with their position and no apparent consensus with others.

Understanding prepositions is often a matter of deciding between a rather broad and vague meaning and one more precise. The more precise definitions give great satisfaction as they reinforce those simple definitions we learned in our early Greek lessons. In the case of *en*, however, with its varied NT uses, vagueness is more often encountered than most other prepositions. Moulton calls it the “maid of all work,” and it became so broad and vague that it has disappeared in modern Greek. It is usually seen as temporal here, parallel with *en tē apokalypsei* in v 7b. Lenski gives a fine insight:

This *en* is not the temporal “at” but the connective *en*: “in connection with.” We have it in Rom. 2:16: the accusing and excusing of pagan consciences is “in connection with” the coming judgment day; these actions would not at all take place if that day were not expected. See the same *en* in I Thess. 5:23: God keeps us *now*, this keeping is ever as “in connection with” the Parousia and certainly not “at.”<sup>19</sup>

As with so many questions of meaning, usage must decide. In this case the broader meaning allows a simpler sentence structure and much easier understanding. When placed alongside the other opinions this one is at least no weaker, and it may be stronger.

Our changes now considered as a whole read as follows:

We ought to be giving thanks to God always for you, brothers, as it is right, because your faith is growing and the love of each one of you all is multiplying for one another. So that we ourselves boast about you among the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith during all your persecutions and troubles which you are enduring—sure sign of the just appraisal of God—to the end that you are fitted for the

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Lenski, *Interpretation*, 391.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. Since indeed it is a just matter with God to repay trouble to those troubling you and (to repay) rest with us to you who are being troubled. During the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with angels of his power in flaming fire, while he gives vengeance to those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus, such as these shall undergo punishment, eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his strength, when he shall come to be glorified among his holy ones and to be marvelled at by all who believe. Because our witness was believed by you concerning that day, we also pray always for you with reference to this, that our God might count you worthy of the calling and fill up every desire of goodness and work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus might be glorified among you and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this writer's view, these proposed changes in punctuation both simplify and clarify the meaning of the passage, which otherwise may be very difficult to understand.