

The preacher is encouraged to do whatever helps to give attention to syntactical details in this regard. Certainly time constraints are a reality. The time available, the type of text, the length of text, and the kind of message to be preached may impact the procedures that need to be followed. Our focus is on basic syntactical analysis and word studies. This study needs to be done with a sensitivity to broader contextual concerns, including the type of literature being studied. Broad macrostructures within the literature, as well as the basic sentence and paragraph syntax, need to be recognized. Different types of texts will call for special treatment in keeping with the distinctives of the genre represented.

Simply *reading and rereading* the text in the original language, interlinears, and/or different translations will often get the preacher a long way down the discovery road. It may be helpful to summarize the essential thoughts within each paragraph, if not each sentence. The biblical text can be written or typed with wide margins so that the preacher can make comments and summary statements for easy reading and reference. "Visualizing" the text with its sections and relationships can be very helpful. Besides summarizing main thoughts, it will be helpful to identify movements between paragraphs and even sentences. Try to get a feel for the text. Read it out loud to listen to the flow of words and structure. Such reading will force you to "hear" the text and make choices concerning how the text needs to be read in general, as well as how it should be read in the pulpit. Issues for further study will arise.

Ask structural questions that force you to assess the relationships between paragraph and paragraph, sentence and sentence, and even words within sentences. Identify key connecting words. Clarify the main thoughts that are being connected together. Then, if practical and helpful to you, label as many words, phrases, and clauses as possible. You may even want to label grammatically so that you recognize the role that certain words, phrases, or clauses serve. Such labeling or other practical activities help the preacher attend to what is written without assuming anything. The aim here is to think in terms of what the specific details of the text contribute to the meaning of the text as a whole.

Making a simple indented *outline* or a diagram of the text can help display the basic roles and relationships evident in the words of the text. Seeking to present the text in this fashion is just another way to make sure we are thinking at all, and thinking specifically about the specifics of the text. There are numerous ways this

Romans 12:1-2

I beseech you therefore, brethren

by the mercies of God,

that you present your bodies a sacrifice,

living

holy,

acceptable to God,

which is your reasonable service.

And do not be conformed

to this world,

but be transformed

by the renewing of your mind,

that you may prove what is that will of God.

good

and acceptable

and perfect

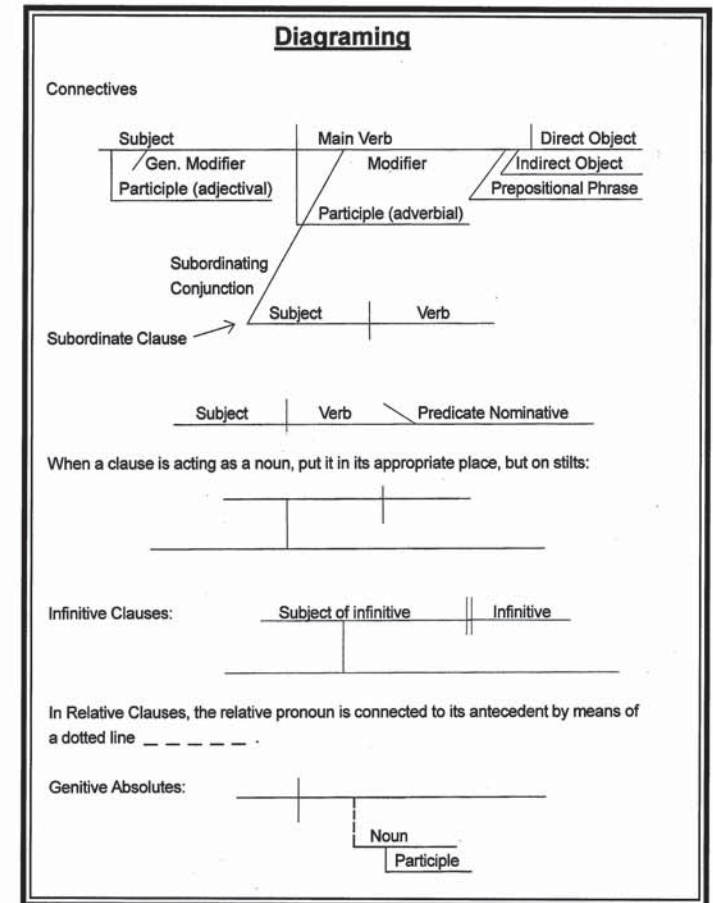
can be done, but we offer here a simple indented outline of Romans 12:1-2.

We have placed the main clause, "I beseech you . . .," furthest to the left. This indicates that it is the primary clause. These two verses are a direct personal exhortation on the part of the apostle. This text is, in fact, a direct exhortation in the light of what has been said already (Rom. 1-11). The next line of indentation indicates the main aspects of the exhortation expressed in the main actions/verbs that are called for (that you *present*, *do not be conformed*, *be transformed*). The next movement in the indentation indicates key descriptive phrases that relate significantly to the action called for (v. 1, "which is your reasonable service"), (v. 2, "that you may prove . . ."). The other distinctive elements in the outline show modifying phrases or words. Such an outline helps you *isolate* and *relate* words in the text.

Any sort of rewriting of the text, outlining, or diagramming will help the preacher to look again at the text, which in and of itself is helpful. "Major," "minor," and "modifying" categories can be applied, recognizing that nothing is unimportant or arbitrary in the text. Key sentences will stand out more, as will key clauses or phrases. Certain words will be displayed as especially crucial to an understanding of the whole. And just as important, the roles and relationships within the text will be viewed in the process. If the preacher can basically accomplish this by a careful reading and rereading of the text, that's great. But we mention this practice or procedure as a tool (or an option) to view the details carefully.

More sophisticated diagramming can help the preacher isolate and relate with more technical precision.¹³ The key element to diagramming is to diagram in a way that helps you "see" the text and define the details. The elements of the text that are hardest to define and relate are obviously the ones that you struggle with. Such diagramming and labeling will test your knowledge of grammar as well as the flow of words in the text.¹⁴

A careful assessment of the details of the text within its syntactical shape helps the preacher understand the text on and in its own terms. You are not imposing meaning, structure, and theology; rather, you are discovering meaning and structure along the route towards the theology or doctrine to be preached. At the same time, the preacher wants to avoid a "bits and pieces" sermon, a sermon that uses some textual specifics but misses the point of the text and the flow of thought. All sermons have to be



selective in the presentation of textual specifics, but the selection process should be appropriate to the text. What dominates the text should come through loud and clear in the message, whereas subordinate and supportive phrases, clauses, and thoughts should be viewed accordingly. The preacher will gain much by viewing the text as "a whole with significant parts." Such a perspective aids in the recognition of the primary or dominant theme(s) in the text and how they are expressed. Discerning the major "what" of the text and the related "hows" will help in the assessment of the "why" of the text as well. We recognize, though,