CHIASMUS IN PAULINE WRITINGS?

The Significance of the Micro-Chiasm for Exegesis.

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INTRODUCTION

How did Paul write? Can scholars of the Word of God know that Paul used many writing strategies while penning portions of the New Testament? In order to answer these and other questions, biblical interpretation must include an examination of the literary structures available to an author. While one understands that the biblical author controls the content, the interpreter must also understand that the author controls the structure within a given passage or corpus. It follows that form complements meaning.

One of the strategies Paul used to write the Scriptures is the literary structure known as chiasmus. The study of chiasmus in the New Testament has often been underrated and gone unnoticed.1 On the other hand, it has also been overused and too easily accepted without caution. Consequently New Testament scholars have disagreed as to the definition, characterization, and evaluative criteria. Other scholars, such as Blass-Debrunner, state that chiasmus in the NT is questionable.2 Moisés Silva on the other hand states, “It would be a mistake, however, to deny the presence of chiastic structure in many biblical passages or to ignore its value for exegesis.”3 John Breck states, “ Structural

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2 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. There is not a lot of evidence as to the opposition of chiasmus. Debrunner seems to be the most quoted by NT scholars as they interact with chiasms.

analysis of New Testament texts has proven beyond any doubt that most if not all of their authors. . . relied heavily on chiasmus to produce their literary work.” John Welch adds,

Chiasmus is indeed a prevalent literary form appearing significantly in many parts of the New Testament. The necessary consequence of this is that interpreters and critics of the New Testament can no longer confidently proceed without some awareness of chiasmus as a basic aspect of the literary structure of the texts of the New Testament. Therefore Thomson’s claim that chiasmus has a legitimate place in New Testament analysis seems appropriate.

The claim of this paper is that the literary structure known as chiasmus is a valid literary structure used by Paul and can be a valuable tool in the hands of the exegete. The chiasmus points the exegete to the pivotal theme.

This paper will discuss the definition of chiasmus. The purpose and functions of chiastic structures will also be included. Next, this study will then examine the evaluative criteria of chiastic structures that has been noted and established by several scholars. Most scholars propose criteria to validate macro-chiasms. It will be necessary to propose criteria for micro-chiasms. Therefore, upon completion of this discussion, this author will propose additional criteria.

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7 This smaller chiasm is called a “micro-chiasm.” This kind of chiasm consists of a few verses or a brief passage, as opposed to a “macro-chiasm” which consists of paragraph-length passages and up to an entire book.
The second half of this study will include one example of chiasmus in Pauline writings. This passage, Ephesians 2:8, 9, will be analyzed contextually, chiastically, and theologically. This study is limited to the Pauline corpus and to micro-chiasms.

**Definition of Chiasmus**

The term chiasmus is used today to refer to the basic pattern of the elements ABB’A’ within a passage. A chiasmus is a literary structure in which the elements are deliberately arranged by the author in parallel units which repeat similar concepts in inverted order for the purpose of clarifying the meaning or directing attention to a central theme. The two predominant characteristics that make up this definition are inverted parallelism or a reversing of order of the elements and a balanced symmetry constructed about a central idea or pivotal theme.8

**Inverted parallelism**

The shortest chiasm consists of two lines. In a chiasm, the second line is inverted. While the parallelism is maintained, the author inverts the elements of the second line. Nils Lund observes that this inversion can be of “identical terms, but more often of similar ideas.”9 An element in a chiastic structure may be a single word, a short phrase, a complete sentence, or a longer literary passage. This inversion of the elements in the second half of the literary unit is shown in figure 1 below.

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The interior may consist of either two complementary elements (e.g., B, B’) or a single element (e.g., C). The exterior consists of pairs of complementary elements forming a composite meaning (e.g., A, A’). This pattern is derived from the Greek letter chi (χ). “In other words, the corresponding elements in the two halves cross-over (in the form of a chi), with the result that those repeated in the second part of the passage are repeated in the reverse order of their initial mention.”

The following example illustrates inverted parallelism between the elements (e.g., A and A’) and (e.g., B and B’). New Testament scholars organize the elements in the following manner. (see figure 2 below).

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This example shows that element (A) the prepositional phrase ε'ν α’ρχη precedes the subject ‘ο λόγος. The word order is inverted in element (A’). The subject ούτος precedes the prepositional phrase ε'ν α’ρχη. The inversion of the word order in elements (B and B’) is evident. The subject ‘ο λόγος precedes the predicate πρός τόν θεόν. The word order is inverted in element (B’). The predicate θεός precedes the subject ‘ο λόγος.

The second example illustrates an inversion of the elements around one central element (e.g., C) rather than two interior elements (B and B’) as shown in figure 2.
The word order is also evident. In (A) the participle ἐγεννημένος precedes the prepositional phrase ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ and in (A') the prepositional phrase ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ precedes the participle γεγένηται. In (B) the direct object ἀμαρτιάν precedes the verb ποιεῖ and in (B') the verb δύναται precedes the direct object (complimentary infinitive) ἀμαρτάνειν.\footnote{11}

The proponents of inverted parallelism consider this the major component in order to have a valid chiasmus. Lund states, “A literary figure, or principle, which consists of ‘a placing crosswise’ of words in a sentence. . . . the term is used to designate an inversion of the order of words or phrases.”\footnote{12}

\footnote{11} The discussion of the chiasm in 1 John 3:9 illustrates Lund’s point that inversion can consist of similar ideas, see “p. 3 n. 9” Though (B and B’) contain similar concepts, the grammatical construction is not identical. (B) contains a verb and a noun direct object, whereas (B’) contains a verb and a complimentary infinitive. Here, 1 John illustrates synonymous parallelism.

Myers (“The Place of Romans,” 176-77) illustrates the chiastic structure of Romans 10:9, 10. He points out the synonymous parallelism that each of the elements (A and A’) and (B and B’) possess. The structure is as follows:

A. ὅτι εἰ'άν ὀμολογήσης ε'ν τῷ στόματι σου Κύριον Ἰησοῦν

B. καὶ πιστεύσης ε'ν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου ὅτι ὁ θεός αὐτόν ἤγειρεν ἐκ νεκρῶν σωθήσῃ

B'. καρδία γὰρ πιστεύεται εἰς δικαίωσύνην

A'. στόματι δὲ ὀμολογεῖται εἰς σωτηρίαν

In his discussion of this passage, Myers explains that the above arrangement reveals an inversion of words in the elements as well as an inversion of the elements themselves. In element (A) the word ὀμολογήσης (‘confess’) precedes στόματι (‘mouth’) and in element (A’) στόματι precedes the word ὀμολογεῖται. The same construction also occurs in elements (B and B’). In element (B) the word πιστεύσης (‘believe’) precedes καρδία (‘heart’) and in element (B’) καρδία precedes πιστεύεται.

This is an example of synonymous parallelism because similar, in this case identical, inverted elements occur within the chiastic structure.

While Lund’s discussion of inversion is important, Breck suggests that the definition is incomplete. The exegete must also recognize the central idea or pivotal theme. He writes, “Inverted parallelism is often described as chiastic, but this is a misnomer insofar as it is missing a central “pivot” or focal point.” Classical scholars define chiasmus in terms of structure. Some NT scholars, however, have extended the discussion of chiasmus to include pivotal theme or central idea as part of the definition.

**Pivotal Theme**

The ancients used chiasmus for a variety of reasons. To communicate clearly apart from the modern conventions of punctuation, paragraphing and typography, etc. classical Greek writers structured their compositions much more carefully.

Breck and Thomson classify three purposes of chiasmus that deserve brief attention in order to appreciate its literary importance. First, chiasmus was used as an art form. When the flexibility of word order was a method used by the author, chiasmus lent beauty and variety to the particular passage. Breck appropriately states that the aesthetic value of the chiasmus should not be underestimated. Second, chiasmus acted as a mnemonic strategy. The ancients learned by rote memory and the structure of the chiasmus, with its parallelism and repetition centered on a main theme, facilitated this process. This was a benefit to the ancients due to a lack of pencil and paper. Last, chiasmus was used to help structure one section of material from another. Chiasmus can

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14 Welch, (Chiasmus in Antiquity, 251) explains that Homer uses chiasmus to arrange his words in an ornamental form. This structure serves to enhance the poetic beauty.

15 Breck, *The Shape*, 60.
serve to divide a portion of text from the undifferentiated text around it. Thomson explains, “since, if the reader has already encountered ABC, the occurrence of C’B’A’ will indicate the completion of the unit. A corollary to this is that chiasmus also serves to unify material within a section, thus making that section stand out.”

Some NT scholars suggest that the interpreter of the New Testament must recognize balance and inversion, but must also recognize pivotal theme. This paper will discuss Ephesians 2:8, 9 as a micro-chiasm. The discussion will show that Paul used this common structure to emphasize the main thought of the passage. Set in the larger context, the chiasmus contributes to the theological development of the paragraph.

Pivotal theme or central idea carries the main thought of the author. It is the focus of meaning around which the other parallel lines are constructed. The structure of chiasmus accentuates this central idea with its formation of the two exterior complementary elements (e.g., A and A’) and its two interior elements (e.g., B and B’). The interior elements can act as the pivotal theme or they can point to a single central theme (e.g., C).

In order to illustrate the function of the interior elements, examples are given here. John 1:1, 2 presents two interior elements (B and B’) that function as the pivotal theme. The chiastic pattern is as follows: (A) ε’ν α’ρχή ἦν ὁ λόγος, (B) καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, (B’) καὶ θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος, and (A’) οὕτως ἦν ε’ν α’ρχή πρὸς τὸν θεόν. (see figure 4). The central elements of (B and B’) illustrate that the word was with God.

16 Thomson, Chiasmus, 35.
Fig. 4. Chiastic structure of John 1:1, 2

A. εν α’ρχή ἦν ὁ λόγος
   B. καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρός τὸν θεόν
   B.’ καὶ θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος
A.’ οὕτως ἦν εν α’ρχή πρός τὸν θεόν

Dan Wallace discusses the anarthrous noun θεός. He argues that John places θεός at the head of the sentence to emphasize that the Word possesses a given quality.¹⁷ The chiastic structure shows that (B’) defines that quality in relationship to God the Father (B).

1 John illustrates that a chiasm can point the exegete to a single interior element (e.g., C) as the central theme. (A) πᾶς ὁ γεγενημένος ε’κ τοῦ θεοῦ, (B) ἀμαρτιάν οὐ ποιεῖ, (C) ὅτι σπέρμα αὐτοῦ ε’ν αὐτῷ μενεῖ, (B’) καὶ οὐ δυνάται ἀμαρτάνειν, and (A’) ὅτι ε’κ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται.

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The central element (C) affirms that the seed of God dwells in those who are born of God.\(^{18}\)

In summary the definition of chiasmus varies among scholars. This discussion however suggests that the definition must include inversion of elements and the identification of a symmetrical placement of these elements around a pivotal theme.

Breck states, “Authentic chiasmus produces balanced statements, in direct, inverted or antithetical parallelism, constructed symmetrically about a central idea.”\(^{19}\) Thomson also agrees. “A working definition of chiasmus. . . is the text exhibiting bilateral symmetry of four or more elements about a central axis, which may itself lie between two elements, or be a unique central element.”\(^{20}\)

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\(^{18}\) Breck, *The Shape*, 36.

\(^{19}\) Ibid. 18.

\(^{20}\) Thomson, *Chiasmus*, 25-26. This statement is illustrated in figure 1. Myers (“The Place of Romans 5,” 135) suggests that the structure calls attention to the middle term(s).
Purpose of Chiasmus

Chiasmus in the New Testament plays an important role as a literary device to organize information. The use of chiasmus can give cohesion to a passage or even to an entire book. The emphasis placed within the center of the chiasmus is both valid and necessary to properly understand its contents. Although not all chiasms have a direct theological/doctrinal emphasis, they may simply be used for a point of attention to the reader.

Whether the author uses chiasmus or any other literary structure, he uses it for a specific purpose. Simply put, chiasmus serves to focus the reader’s attention on the core of the author’s message. The repetition or completion of elements in an inverted order around a central theme gives clarity and uniqueness to the meaning of a verse, paragraph, or book. Thomson states, “form enhances content, with the corollary that a valid chiasmus will not fragment an argument.”

Ronald Man places great value on the purpose of chiasmus. He proposes three purposes for chiasmus within biblical writings. He states that chiasmus could be implemented to highlight the emphasis of a passage, clarify meaning of a passage, or serve as the purpose of a whole book.

The purpose of chiasmus begs a discussion concerning the discipline of hermeneutics. Craig Smith notes, “Breck is so convinced of the significance of chiasm in the New Testament that he calls the device a ‘key to the Scriptures.’ He argues that

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21 Thomson, *Chiasmus*, 221.

recognition of the figure makes it possible to discern the authorial intent of passages which may well have been misunderstood by those who failed to recognize their chiastic structure." But how must an interpreter understand the purpose/use of chiasmus? Did the author intend to use chiasmus? The biblical author can use the literary style that best fits his purpose for the verse or paragraph or book. The chiasmus structure is there for a reason. It must be of interest to the exegete. Smith notes, “If an author has gone to some trouble to say something a particular way, failure to note that will likely result in a failure to understand precisely what the author intended to communicate.” The fact that it has been written as part of God’s inspired word (2 Tim. 3:16), guarantees that what was written was indeed intended by the Author/author.

In summary, the use of chiasmus may vary from author to author and from work to work. Only a careful analysis of the author’s use of a chiasmus in a given context can reveal the role that chiasmus plays. The main purpose of chiasmus is to convey meaning through literary forms.

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24 Ibid., 4

25 This raises the fundamental hermeneutical issue of authorial intent. The writer of this paper holds the view that the Author’s intent was not different nor did it contain a fuller meaning than what the author recorded. Although God allowed for a difference in style among authors, they were still guided by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:19-21), so that what was written was exactly what God wanted written.
Criteria of Chiasmus

Aside from defining chiasmus, establishing criteria is the most problematic area for the defenders of the legitimacy of the literary structure. Several scholars have proposed criteria of their own, but skeptics of this literary structure have found them inadequate in one way or another. For example, Stanley E. Porter and Jeffrey T. Reed analyzed five scholars’ criteria and came to the conclusion that they are all unsatisfactory. Their criticism seems to be concerned with the criteria for the macro-chiasm. However, despite their dissatisfaction with these criteria, Porter himself uses D. J. Clark’s criteria in order to solve an exegetical problem in Ephesians 5. This presents a potential problem. Porter is applying Clark’s macro-chiasm criteria to a micro-chiasm without assessing whether or not such a use is warranted. Are the criteria suggested to define a macro-chiasm also valid for micro-chiasms?

Several scholars have attempted to delineate objective criteria for identifying chiasmus. The following section surveys these proposals with the goal of establishing the current consensus in this area. Smith correctly notes, “without a well-developed set of criteria and categories by which to evaluate each proposal of chiasm, chiastic analysis

Therefore, the literary style known as chiasmus is protected by and through the inspiration of the Scriptures.

26 Smith (“The Leaning Tower,” 4) agrees. “The lack of a clearly defined and supported set of criteria against which a proposal may be evaluated has been one of the most glaring weaknesses of chiastic studies to date.”


remains a hit-and-miss proposition, subject both to overly enthusiastic application and
to overly skeptical dismissal.”29

Current study of chiasmus in the New Testament seems to rely on Lund’s work as
a foundation. While creating criteria, several scholars use Lund’s seven laws of chiastic
structures. They are: (1) the center is always the turning point between the thought of the
first and second sets of elements, (2) the thought of the center is shifted or an antithetical
idea is introduced, (3) identical elements are distributed in such a fashion that they occur
in the extremes of the chiastic structure, (4) the ideas found in the center may recur in
another part of the chiastic structure such as the extremes, (5) a tendency for certain terms
to gravitate toward different parts of the chiastic structure, (6) larger units are introduced
and concluded by frame-passages, and (7) there is a mixture of chiastic and alternating
lines within one and the same unit.30

Welch’s collection of essays in his book titled Chiasmus in Antiquity, attributes
most of his work to Lund. Welch states that evidence of chiasmus is not entirely objective
and quantifiable. Therefore his primary concern is the macro-chiastic structure because
the longer passages are more defensible chiastically.31 However, Welch does agree that a
certain criteria must be present. They are repetition, balance of elements, inversion, and
the focus or shift at the center.32 For Welch chiastic patterns are to be expected because

30 Lund, Chiasmus, 40-41.
31 Welch, Chiasmus, 13.
32 Ibid., 13.
of their presence in the writings of the ancients. This he feels gives validity to chiasmus in the New Testament.

D. J. Clark proposes five criteria for identifying macro-chiasms. This criteria includes content (elements within the chiastic structure have similar content), form or structure (the form of the structure is either identical or very similar in its wording), language (catchwords and grammatical forms), setting (a more focused kind of content including place and time), and theology (which can mean almost anything). Clark’s criteria are applied only to the narratives (e.g. Gospels). This criterion would need to be analyzed when thinking through a non-narrative passage.

Craig Blomberg proposes nine criteria for macro-chiasmus. The criteria is summarized as follows: (1) there must be a problem in perceiving the text as it is written, therefore the chiastic structure may be more straightforward, (2) there must be clear examples of parallelism between the two halves of the proposed chiasmus, (3) grammatical and conceptual parallelism should characterize the elements in the chiasm, (4) the parallelism should contain central or dominant terminology, (5) the parallelism should include words and ideas not regularly found elsewhere in the passage, (6) multiple sets of elements (ABCDD’C’B’A’, etc.) are desirable rather than the simple ABB’A’ pattern, (7) the outline of the chiasmus should not break natural boundaries that would normally be there regardless of the literary structure an interpreter uses, (8) the center of the chiasmus should be a passage that is of theological or ethical significance, and (9) ruptures in the outline of the chiasmus that requires an argument in order to prove the

validity of the chiasmus will pose a potential problem. Blomberg proposes that few chiasms meet all the above criteria. He notes however, that this does not negate the legitimacy of a given chiasmus.

The problem with both Clark and Blomberg is that their criteria are for the identification of macro-chiasms. The macro-chiasm is also based on the structure and form of the text, which is often dependent upon the exegete. In addition the criteria raise issues that are related to matters inherent in interpreting larger portions of text (e.g. identification of paragraph boundaries). The exegete may identify a chiasmus that is incongruent with the larger literary unit. This is unfortunate because these proposed chiasms might not be appropriate given the textual breaks, whether grammatically or syntactically. Given this potential problem, some may respond that the identification of a macro-chiasm is subjective. More work is necessary.

Last, Thomson gives six criteria to identify a chiasmus. His criteria include (1) a shift at or near the center of the chiasmus. This shift can consist of a change in ideas or even of the person of a verb. (2) A frame passage at the beginning or end of the chiasm which serves as a springboard into and out of the chiasmus without actually being part of the chiasmus. (3) The chiasmus should contain directly parallel elements. (4) Identical ideas that may occur at the center and extremes of a passage should also be present in a chiasmus. (5) The elements of the chiasmus are balanced, in that they are approximately the same lengths. (6) The center contains the focus of the author’s thought. To validate a

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35 It is not clear whether Thomson’s criteria are for macro or micro-chiasm. However, each example throughout his book is a macro-chiasm.
chiasmus, he offers three requirements. These include that the chiasmus will be in the text as it is, the elements will be in inverted order, and the chiasmus will begin and end at a reasonable point.\footnote{Thomson, *Chiasmus*, 27-29. He is also unclear as to what constitutes a reasonable point in beginning and ending a chiasmus.}

Of the proposals summarized above, Thomson’s appears to be the most adequate for two reasons. First, Thomson discusses Pauline material. Additional work will need to show that the criteria are adequate to identify and validate chiasms outside of Paul. And second, the criteria are appropriate for micro-chiasmus.

This paper proposes six criteria by which an exegete can identify and validate a micro-chiasmus in Paul. These six criteria for a valid micro-chiasmus will be illustrated in Ephesians 2:8, 9 to follow later in this paper.

The basis for the criteria is scholarly New Testament consensus. While this author’s criterion is based on the criterion of Ian Thomson, other scholars have proposed similar criteria. For instance, Nils Lund’s seven laws for identifying a chiasmus are the foundation for Thomson’s criterion. Thomson however omits three and reworks the remaining four. John Breck’s criterion includes an inversion of the elements with balanced statements around a pivotal theme. John Welch’s criterion also seems reasonable. However, the author of this paper does not support his basis for this criterion. As for Clark and Blomberg, their criteria is for the identification of macro-chiasms that do not apply to this paper. In order to identify a chiasmus, the following six criteria must be met. The first three deal with the parallel elements of the structure, while the last three deal with the structure as a whole as it appears in a given text. First, an inversion of
elements (words, phrases, or sentences) must be present. They do not have to be identical in their wording (although that is certainly acceptable) and can be either synonymous/similar, antithetical, or synthetic.\(^{37}\) Second, these elements must be balanced in their length. That is, each element must be approximately the same length.\(^ {38}\) Third, the center of the chiasm often reveals the author’s main thought. The center of the chiasm gives cohesion to the chiasmus structure and helps to develop the thought of the entire passage. Fourth, the text should be used as it stands because the re-arranging of the order of elements can nullify the identification of chiasmus. Fifth, the chiasmus must begin and end at natural textual boundaries. Last, the chiasmus must fit inside of the contextual structure of the passage.

In summary, scholars recognize that a chiasmus has two basic characteristics: the inversion of elements around a pivotal theme. At the same time, there is not a consensus among New Testament scholars as to the identification of micro-chiasmus. And yet, the discussion of Ephesians 2:8, 9 will show the importance of a micro-chiasmus for New Testament exegesis. Chiasmus is not just another device scholars use to import their interpretation into a passage of Scripture. It is a valid and important tool that the exegete must consider.

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\(^{37}\) The wording of the elements within chiasmus is often similar, or even exact. It can also be antithetical, which means that the second element is in direct opposition to the first. Finally, the elements can also be synthetic. This is when the second element completes the thought of the first.

\(^{38}\) There can be some exception to this criterion however, but explanation will be required.
EPHESIANS 2:8, 9

The following example is found within Pauline writings. It is classified as a micro-chiasmus because of its size (one to three verses). The criteria for a micro-chiasmus will be used in order to establish grounds for the validity of the chiasmus in Ephesians 2:8, 9. The discussion will include an analysis of the relationship of the chiasmus and the context.39

These two verses are at the end of a paragraph (2:1-10) in which Paul is explaining the before and after picture of the believer. This paragraph illustrates the personal reconciliation between the Christian and Christ. Klyne Snodgrass states that this is the “most effective summary we have of the Pauline doctrine of salvation by grace through faith.”40

Context of 2:1-7

To begin this paragraph, Paul reminds the Ephesian Christians of the change that had been effected in their lives. The contrast in the first section of this paragraph is that they were spiritually dead (verses 1-3) but due to God’s great mercy and love they are now alive (verses 4-7).


In 2:1 Paul defines the figure of spiritual death as the state of being lost or under the dominion of death.\textsuperscript{41} He uses παραπτώμασι ("trespasses")\textsuperscript{42} and ἁμρτιάς ("sins") forming a hendiadys to give a comprehensive account of the unbeliever’s sinful nature.\textsuperscript{43} The readers’ past expressed in this fashion explains that they had no spiritual life. Two relative clauses εν αἷς ποτε περιεπατήσατε (“wherein in time past ye walked,” v. 2) and εν οἷς καὶ ἡμεῖς πάντες α’νεστράφημεν ποτε (“among whom also we all had our conversation in times past,” v. 3) help to further explain Paul’s claim that unbelievers are dead.

The first relative clause εν αἷς ποτε περιεπατήσατε elaborates on the meaning of “dead in trespasses and sins” by explaining that their past lifestyle or conduct was inherently sinful.\textsuperscript{44} This lifestyle is then further explained by two κατὰ phrases κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τοῦτοῦ (“according to the course of this world”) and κατὰ τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ε’ξουσίας τοῦ α’έρος (“according to the prince of the power of the air”) in verse two. The two κατὰ clauses introduce the norm or standard by which the unbeliever lived.\textsuperscript{45} This norm or standard was a behavior that was directed by this present evil age


\textsuperscript{42} Παράπτωμα, ‘transgression, sin’ refers to what a person has done in transgressing the will and law of God (Louw and Nida §88.297).


\textsuperscript{44} Περιπατέω denotes ethical conduct or a way of living (BDAG, 803).

and empowered by the evil ruler. The κατὰ phrases explain the two external influences that controlled and motivated their evil behavior.

The second relative clause ἐν σιχὶ καὶ ἡμεῖς πάντες αὐστραφμέν ποτε further explains the lifestyle αὐστραφμέν. Paul explains that they lived in conformity with the ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῆς σαρκὸς ἡμῶν (“the lusts of our flesh”). Their desires were motivated or produced by the flesh. It is here that Paul mentions “the description of the former life in terms of our fallen, self-centered human nature. In this context ‘flesh’ does not stand for a person’s physical existence, but humanity in its sinfulness and rebellion against God.” This former life was lived by the sinful desires that distorted the human mind. So much so, that the world order in which they lived in ignored God. This put them subject to God’s wrath.

In verses 4-7, Paul describes God’s action that brought life to those who were spiritually dead (verses 1-3). God acted on the Christian’s behalf simply because of his own gracious and merciful character. The stark contrast of being dead and obtaining life is found in the opening phrase of verse four ὁ δὲ θεὸς πλοῦσιος ὑν ἐν ἐλέει (“But God

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48 O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 162; Lincoln (*Ephesians*, 98) adds, “their desires dominated their lives and had to be fulfilled. Sin pervaded their whole person.”

49 Wallace (*Greek Grammar*, 101) states, “The point of the text, in light of 2:1-10, is not to describe humanity in terms of attributes (such as wrathful children), but to speak of the hopeless situation of those who were without Christ.”
who is rich in mercy”). It is because of his great mercy that Christians are saved. This is the circumstance or reason that those in verses 1-3 are brought to life. The motivation of this life is διὰ τὴν τολλὴν αʹγάπην αὐτοῦ (“for his great love”). Lincoln states, “God’s love is not conditional on the suitability of the objects of that love.”

Verses 5 and 6 explain both how Christians are saved and the benefits of that salvation. Paul states that Christians χάριτί εἰστε σεσωσμένοι (“are saved by grace”). God has given the gift of salvation to the people of verses 1-3 as undeserving sinners. The benefits of salvation for the believer are καὶ συνήγειρε καὶ συνεκάθισεν (“and hath raised us up together and made us sit”).

Verse 7 begins with an ἵνα clause that expresses the ultimate goal of God’s whole act of salvation. This goal is to display to others the richness of his grace through kindness.

In summary Paul is emphasizing the relationship between those that are spiritually dead and alive. It is this emphasis that is further verified in the chiasmus of 2:8, 9. The chiasmus points the exegete to the climax of the passage, “a gift of God.”

**Chiasm of 2:8, 9**

The reader interprets chiastic structures by recognizing the relationship between the pivotal theme and the outside elements. This means to interpret a chiastic structure, the interpreter must read from the inside out. First it is necessary to layout the structure.

The chiasmus of Ephesians 2:8, 9 has a typical ABCB’A’ pattern. The structure is as follows:

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50 Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 100.
The chiasmus has an inversion of elements that include both synthetic and synonymous parallelism. Elements (A) and (A’) illustrate synthetic parallelism. Element (A) τῇ γὰρ χάριτι ε’στε σεσωσμένοι διὰ τῆς πίστεως (“by grace and through faith”) is complimented or completed by (A’) ἵνα μὴ τις καυχήσηται (“lest any man should boast”). Salvation is by grace so that no one will boast. Elements (B) and (B’) illustrate synonymous parallelism. (B) καὶ τὸῦτο οὐ’κ ε’ξ ὑμῶν (“and that not of yourselves”) and (B’) οὐ’κ ε’ξ ἐργῶν (“not of works”) essentially mean the same thing. Both elements contain the negative particle οὐ’κ and a genitive of source (B) ε’ξ ὑμῶν and (B’) ε’ξ ἐργῶν. The central element is (C) θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον (“it is the gift of God”).

The pivotal theme of the chiasmus is element (C) θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον around which Paul builds the inverted elements. This points the exegete to the main theme of the paragraph (2:1-10). From this pivotal theme, the structure of the elements is discussed in order to show how one is to interpret the chiasmus.
Salvation is God’s gift (C: pivotal theme).\(^{51}\) In opposition to this, Paul contrasts the Ephesians in (B) and (B’). Elements (B) and (B’) are the interior complementary elements that are synonymously constructed around element (C). He states that salvation is not from the Ephesians (B) nor is it from their works (B’). Since salvation is God’s gift, it only follows that the source of salvation cannot be found in the Ephesians.

Salvation is God’s gift (C: pivotal theme) and the source of that gift is not found in the Ephesians (B) and (B’). Paul builds upon this thought of BCB’ with (A) and (A’). Elements (A) and (A’) are the exterior complementary elements that are synthetically constructed around elements (B) and (B’). The basis for salvation must be God’s grace (A), since the source is not the Ephesians themselves (B) and (B’). Because salvation is based on God’s grace (A), no one will boast (A’).

Salvation only comes from God because it is his gift to give. It is not from us, element (B) καὶ τὸῦτο οὐκ εἰς ὑμῶν (“and that not of yourselves”)\(^{52}\) rather it is element (A) τῇ γὰρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσωμένοι διὰ τῆς πίστεως (“by grace and through faith”). The Ephesian people cannot be the source for their salvation because of their condition described in verses 1-3. The condition of the Ephesians is pure wickedness. Therefore, leaving Paul with the explanation that the source is not us καὶ τὸῦτο οὐκ εἰς ὑμῶν,\(^{53}\)

\(^{51}\) Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 81. Although Wallace does not classify this particular genitive, the author of this paper is classifying θεοῦ as a possessive genitive. Therefore giving an alternative translation of “it is the gift belonging to God,” or “it is the gift possessed by God.”

\(^{52}\) O’Brien (*The Letter to the Ephesians*, 175) states, “In order to stress that salvation is by God’s grace alone and through faith, Paul adds these two balancing negative statements.”

\(^{53}\) This author is taking this genitive εἰς ὑμῶν as a genitive of source. Due to the negative particle οὐ, this illustrates that salvation is not from a human source (see Wallace, 109).
rather it is God’s gift. Therefore the means by which one is saved is τῇ γὰρ χάριτι ἐστε σωσμένοι διὰ τῆς πίστεως (“by grace and through faith”).

The basis or purpose by which salvation is God’s gift is stated in (B’) and (A’). Lincoln states that “it is simply that Paul wants them to have an absolutely clear understanding of their privileged position as recipients of a salvation that is totally God’s gracious work.”54 His purpose in providing salvation is not based on human effort οὐκ ἔξεργων, therefore it excludes boasting ἵνα μὴ τις καυχήσηται. This is especially true because the lifestyle περιπατήσατε and ανεστράφησέν (verses 1-3) is characterized by the influences of the world and the devil and flesh respectively.

Verse 10 concludes the paragraph by stating the purpose of salvation is that the Ephesians would do good works. The Christian is now able to do good works because he is a new creation αὐτοῦ γὰρ εἶσμεν ποίημα κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰσοῦ ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἁγαθοῖς (“for we are his workmanship created unto Christ Jesus unto good works”). This is in direct contrast to the works discussed in verse 9 because those were of man and not God. Good works is not the source of salvation. The works of man in verse 9 were while he was under the influence of the world (v. 2, 3). Yet, the works spoken of in verse 10 are the result of salvation (vv. 4-7).

The reason for the Christian being a new creation is so that he might walk in these good works ἵνα αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν (“that we should walk in them”). This also is in direct contrast to (vv. 1-3). The unbeliever did not have the ability to live a lifestyle of good works because of his sinful condition. However, due to God’s gift (C: pivotal

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54 Lincoln, Ephesians, 113.
theme), the Ephesian Christian is now able to live this lifestyle. Therefore, showing that the ultimate purpose of this paragraph is to focus on God’s gift.\textsuperscript{55}

**Chiasm Criteria**

Six criteria were introduced to validate a chiasmus: inversion of elements, balanced length of elements, central idea/pivotal theme, elements are in exact order from the text, the chiasm begins and ends at proper textual boundaries, and the chiasm fits inside the contextual structure. The criteria will show that the criteria are met for Ephesians 2:8, 9.

The first criterion has been demonstrated previously through the discussion of Ephesians 2:8, 9. The inversion occurs synthetically in elements (A) and (A’) and also synonymously in (B) and (B’). The second criterion is also met. Although (A) and (A’) are not balanced in length, this is not a significant reason to abort the presence of the chiastic structure.

The third criterion, the pivotal theme, is illustrated in element (C) \(\thetaεού\ τὸ δώρον\) ("it is the gift of God"). It is evident that Paul’s main theme is that salvation is God’s gift. This is in response (vv. 4-7) to the ‘bleak picture’ of sinful man (vv. 1-3). Man left to his own way will not choose God, but his own selfish desires (v. 2, 3). Therefore, it must be a gift.

The final three criteria deal with the structural content of the chiasmus. The elements of the chiasmus are arranged as they are found in the Greek text, satisfying the fourth criterion. The chiasmus of 2:8, 9 follows proper textual boundaries (criterion 5).

\textsuperscript{55} It is intriguing to consider the possibility that the two \(\textsc{iva}\) clauses in verses 7 and 10 could serve as 2 additional elements of the chiasmus. Additional work is necessary to validate this proposal.
Not only is the chiasmus self-contained, but it also does not arbitrarily fit into the larger grammatical structure of the adjacent verses. Instead the chiasmus fits naturally between two ἰνα clauses (v. 7 and v. 10) which bracket the chiasmus (vv. 8, 9). These two ἰνα clauses in verses 7 and 10 contribute to the significance of God’s gift (C: pivotal theme). God saved us so that the Christian is a display of his kindness (v. 7) and God also saved us so that the Christian has the ability to do good works for him. The chiastic structure not only sets within proper textual boundaries, but it also naturally fits within Paul’s flow of thought throughout the paragraph (criterion 6). Theologically, the means of repetition function as the way to bind the paragraph together. O’Brien explains,

The sections are linked by means of repetitions: ‘dead through tresspasses’ (vv. 1, 5) connects vv. 1-3 with vv. 4-7, while ‘by grace you have been saved’ (vv. 5, 8) links the middle section (vv. 4-7) with the summarizing conclusion (vv. 8-10). The verb ‘live/walk’ speaks of the pre-Christian way of life in v. 2 and of Christian living at v. 10, and thus it functions as an inclusio or envelope to bind the paragraph together as a unit.56

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper demonstrates two important facts about the literary structure known as chiasmus. First, the identification of chiasmus is not an arbitrary structure. Most scholars agree that the claim that chiasmus is in the New Testament is both valid and substantial. Although the criterion of many scholars is not exactly the same, the fact they overlap lends credibility to the structure. The author of this paper proposes six criteria. The basis for the selection of these criteria is other New Testament scholarly consensus.

Second, the New Testament exegete should not dismiss the importance of the structure of the chiasmus for interpretation. Chiastic structures help to further validate the interpretation of the exegete. According to other NT scholars, the interpretation of Ephesians 2:8, 9 did not reveal any new interpretive information. However, it did provide further validation for the interpretation of Ephesians 2:8, 9. As demonstrated in the discussion of this chiasmus, there is a grammatical and structural basis for the interpretation. Therefore, it is the presence of this literary device that helps the interpreter to go beyond the lower elements of language (i.e. word studies, phrases, etc.) to come to a proper interpretation.

The recognition of the chiastic structure develops into two implications. First, the exegete must use other features of the text (i.e. larger context) in order to come to the proper interpretation. D. A. Carson suggests, “The heart of the issue is that semantics, meaning, is more than the meaning of words. It involves phrases, sentences, discourse, genre, and style.” 57 The interpretation of a passage is not to be based solely on word studies but also on the literary structures that are present. Silva also agrees by stating “that the formal feature of chiasmus contributes to the unity of a paragraph.”58

The other implication the paper suggests is that one must interpret chiastic structures from inside out. Exterior elements are developed around the central pivotal theme. As the exegete identifies the central pivotal theme, he then can see how the exterior elements compliment the main theme of the author.

58 Silva, God, Language and Scripture, 266.
WORKS CITED


