

## The Diagramming of 3 JOHN

# Background Comments

### ABOUT THIS TECHNIQUE

Our ultimate goal is to grow in our understanding of the Word of God, and in our application of it to our lives. Here, we are focusing on one specific technique, which involves writing out the Scriptures themselves - though much of what is said will also be applicable to other ways of studying the Word. Training yourself to *observe* things - which is the key to successful use of this technique - can be helpful in *many* areas of life.

*Learning* this technique won't necessarily be as exciting as *applying* it and making your own discoveries, but the "tedious" aspect of learning normally comes before the "exciting" aspect of applying what is learned. Admittedly, for some people, a different method of studying the Word will be better-suited to their gifts and abilities... and if you are one of those people, that's O.K., as long as whatever you do is consistent with the Bible.

This technique may be used for writing out the verses word-for-word, or for writing abridged summaries of what is being said. Here, our focus is on a study of 3 John, which illustrates an attempt to examine a passage *word-for-word*, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the passage. Though writing an abridged summary of a passage, or "mapping" the *flow of thought* through it, is a good method for getting a general overview of a passage, it should be tried only *after* you have become proficient at observing the relationships between words and sentences. Otherwise you may overlook important observations that could strongly influence the way you wrote your diagram.

For this 3 John study, I have included some application questions in a separate study, which were based on this analysis of third John. You might wish to use them in conjunction with learning the technique, so you can be applying the Word to your life as you go along (instead of waiting until your analysis is done). However, keep an open mind for other possible applications. There are probably many other ways you can apply what you learned to your life - ways that will often be personal (applicable just to you) and which I could not include in a general study of this passage.

- A link to the study guide questions = <http://journal33.org/other/html/3johnstg.html>

### ABOUT MY TRANSLATION

At the time I did this analysis of 3 John, I could not find any easy-to-understand, yet reasonably word-for-word ("literal") translation that was public domain. Since I planned to put the diagram on the internet, the copyright restrictions for most translations prohibited my use without paying royalties, since 3 John is an *entire* book of the Bible. So I made my own translation. For *personal* use, you could use any translation you wanted, and you would get similar results when you diagrammed the passage. You might get some differences in various minor details, but the overall message and application to your life would be the same.

In my translation, words which are supplied (for better clarity) are in italics. Any other formatting, such as bold type, capital letters or words in brackets, are part of the diagramming, and are added to emphasize

various aspects of the analysis, such as parallel concepts, relationships between phrases, etc. I have included dashed lines to indicate changes in the flow of thought (like paragraph breaks), or simply to group together sentences that seem to connect.

I have kept the word order exactly the way my translation has it, but in your own study you are free to make adjustments as necessary, if it will help you to better understand what is being said. (For example, sometimes a passage will have two phrases that modify a word that occurs *between* them, but in your outline, you may wish to place that word *before* those two phrases.)

## **VERSE REFERENCES**

Verse references are optional. They are not inspired and could be omitted. (They were invented centuries after the Bible was completed, to make it easier for locating specific sections of the Bible.) I included them here, so that it would be easier for me to explain various features in the analysis. (When I originally studied this passage, I did not use them.)

In some passages, verse references and chapter breaks can be distracting - especially when they seem to occur in the wrong places, such as in the middle of a thought or topic.

## **WHY YOUR DIAGRAM MIGHT LOOK SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT**

My diagram of 3 John is not complete - partly because what can be done with a computer keyboard is limited, and partly because I want to allow you to make some of your own observations. It also isn't the most "perfect" diagram possible - which means you can create something slightly different and it doesn't mean your evaluation is wrong. (You will still reach similar conclusions about what the verses say.)

If you were doing this outline by hand (rather than typing it with a monospace font, so that it would show up properly on a web page) you could use any other type of formatting that would help you better understand the relationships between the various parts of John's letter. You could include symbols; you could underline or circle significant or repeating phrases; you could use different colors of ink, or use some other method to highlight items of significance. Your goal is to do anything that would help you gain a better understanding of the passage - an understanding which would be the foundation for learning how to apply this passage to your life. Because of the limitations of this web page, I have the only begun this analysis, but you can expand it as much as you wish.

## **HOW TO DEAL WITH COMPLEX PASSAGES**

Sometimes the logical thought pattern in a passage may be quite complex, and you may have to break it up into sections, and connect them with arrows. This is especially true if the logical progression of thought is like a *chain* of thoughts or a complex flow-chart.

Good examples of this can be seen in some of Paul's writings. Sometimes what he says can be rather complex, with a whole string of arguments being developed, one after the other, from the original first statement. An extreme example of this is in Ephesians 1:3-14. Originally, this entire passage was one

sentence. Today, many people could hardly comprehend it as one sentence - much less analyze it in the way we are describing. But if we break it into paragraphs and smaller sentences, it becomes much more manageable and easier to understand. In diagramming such a passage, you could use the arrows to point out relationships between the end of one segment of a complex passage and the beginning of the next. (In the 3 John passage, verses 2-4 fit together as one unit, but I broke it into three parts, so that it could fit on the paper.)

If a passage is so complex that you are uncertain how to diagram it, you may write-out a couple alternatives. If you can't make up your mind as to the best choice, leave your conclusions "open-ended" and then focus on the rest of the passage. Our faith does not rest on a few passages of uncertain meaning, but on the whole of the Word of God. There will be plenty of other passages that *can* be understood, which will keep you on the "straight and narrow" way!

## HOW I BEGAN THE DIAGRAM OF 3 JOHN

When I began this analysis of 3 John, I first read the passage, in order to get an overview of what was being said. Then I looked closer at the different sections (groups of sentences that shared the same focus), and eventually at the individual sentences and phrases.

At this point, I began to work on developing the diagram. I first started with the individual sentences, or distinct "units" of thought, keeping them within their context. Many other features of the diagram - such as identifying recurring concepts, contrasts, etc. - would be done later, as I continued to study and think about what was being said in the passage.

Before my project was completed, I reviewed the diagram for accuracy and clarity, and then rewrote it. There is no harm in doing this, for rewriting the passage can help reinforce in one's mind what the passage is teaching. Sometimes I may rewrite a diagram, because I have to *expand* it to make room for additional observations I have made about the text.

## WHAT DO YOU DO AFTERWARDS?

That is up to you. After I diagrammed 3 John, I wrote some study and application questions (available at: <http://journal33.org/other/html/3johnstg.html>), which I (and others) could use to aid in my application of this passage.