

Syntactical and Discourse Analysis: Some Dis-Assembly Required

Supplemental Materials

The materials below give practice in syntactical analysis and discourse analysis. *Syntactical* analysis focuses primarily on individual (isolated) sentences and clauses. *Discourse* analysis is concerned with how larger segments of a text, composed of clauses, sentences and paragraphs, up to an entire book, are designed and interconnected.

The best way to use these exercises is to attempt your own analyses of the selected texts before studying the analyses offered here (which, it need hardly be said, are themselves subject to criticism and revision!). Doing your own analyses first will enable you to think more creatively and to interact more effectively with these examples, and with each other in discussing them.

Section one presents for study an analysis (with notes) of the syntax and discourse structure of Philemon 8-16. It is presupposed that Philemon 8-16 constitutes a well-defined, coherent paragraph, namely, that it starts and stops at places appropriate to the overall structure of the entire book. In §4.3.1, the textbook gives some attention to defining this paragraph; see if you can find further justification for making the “cuts” at these points, or for making them elsewhere. Both the NASB and Greek texts are used.

Sections two to five provide “bare” syntactical displays for pericopes drawn from each of the four main New Testament genres: Matthew 16:24-28; Acts 1:9-14; Romans 3:27-31; and Revelation 12:1-6. By “bare” I mean lacking accompanying arrows or brackets to indicate my own analysis. Only the way the elements of the text have been arranged on the page hints at that. A few explanatory notes are attached for each display.

Decide first whether these texts are properly defined as separate units. Then add arrows and brackets to the display in order to clarify what goes with what. Feel free to change a display in any way you like. This will not be possible from the PDF-formatted files provided here, but you can make your own display either by writing the text out by hand, or by manipulating it on a PC, especially if you have an electronic Bible program.

Section six uses Philippians 2:1-2 to demonstrate how occasionally the grammatically prominent element in a syntactical analysis (the “main clause”) does not represent the *semantically prominent* message the author wants to convey; that “main message” may be buried in a grammatically subordinate position. Try analyzing the grammatical structure on your own (NASB or Greek text, or both) and identifying the grammatical and semantic “heads” before comparing my suggestions.

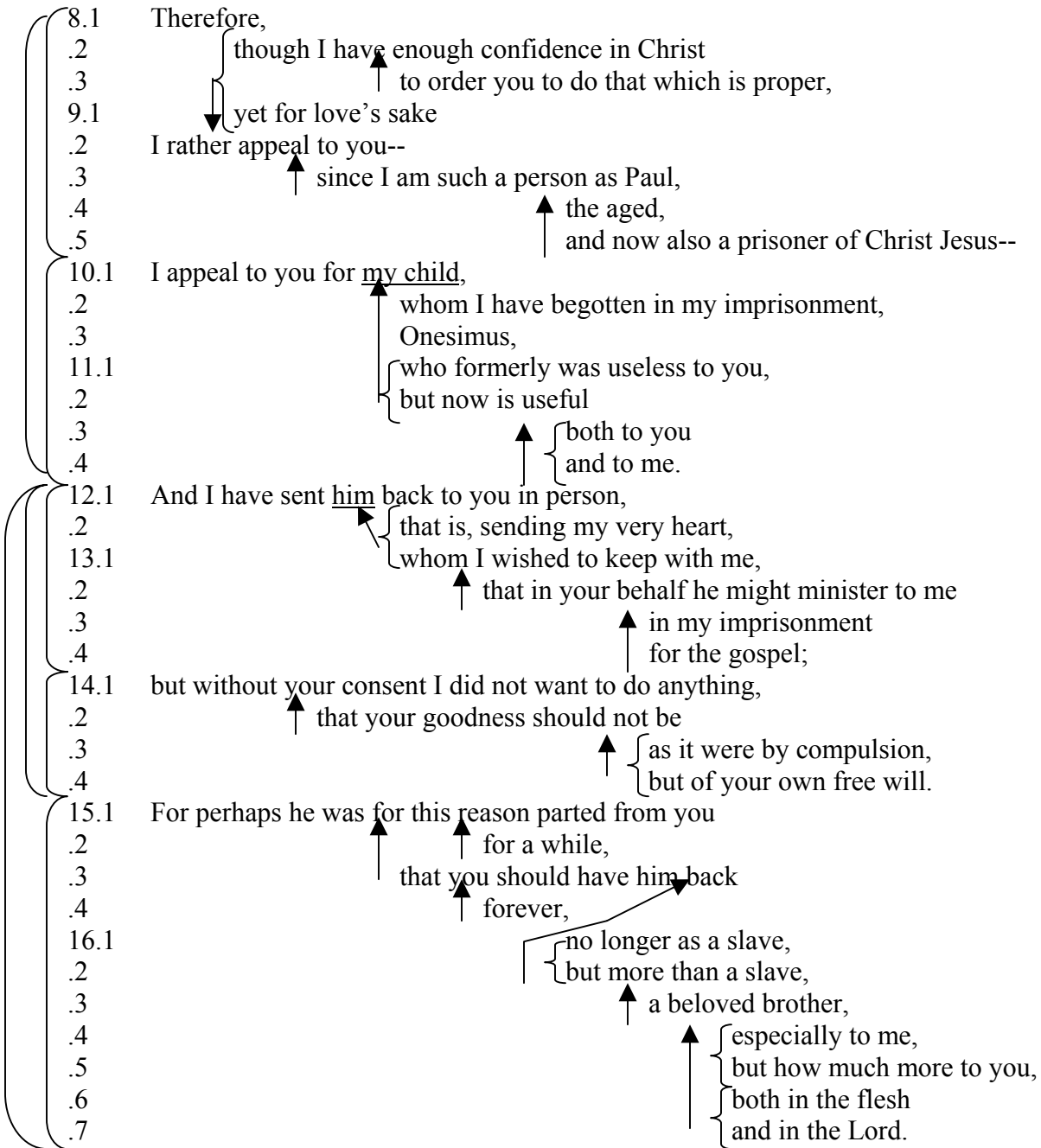
Section seven illustrates the way a single complex sentence can embody several levels of “embedded” simple sentences. Luke 7:39 contains at least eight simple “sentences,” of

which some have been plugged (embedded) into others on four levels to form the final complicated result. Walls of stones can be quite creatively put together.

I. Syntactical and Discourse Analysis: Philemon 8-16

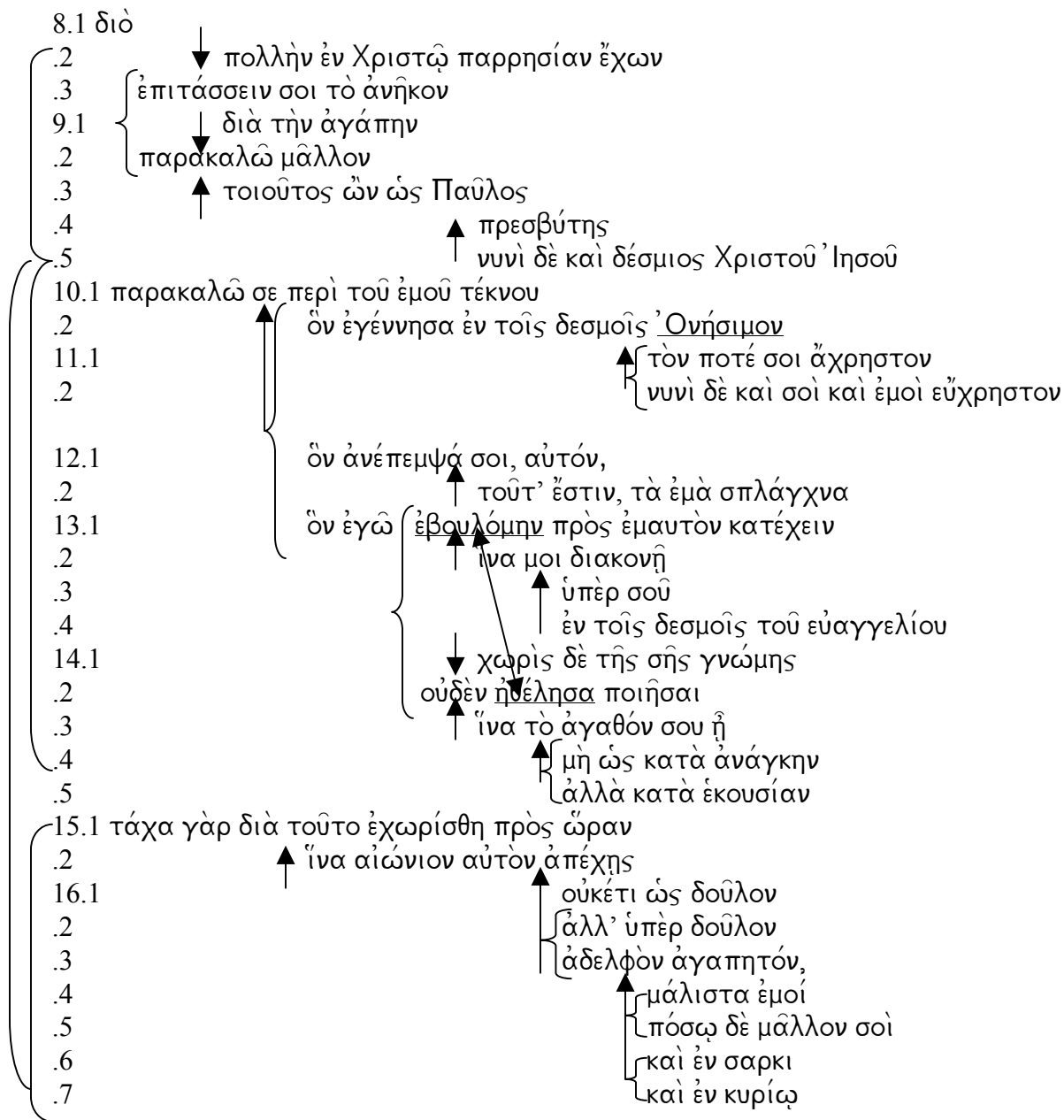
Study the following English and Greek syntactical analyses of Philemon 8-16 and the accompanying notes. Better yet, analyze the Greek or the NASB yourself *before* you study the following; it will enhance your understanding of the process (mine may be “wrong”!). The point is twofold: (a) to see how *sentences are structured*, and (b) to see how sentences interconnect with each other, that is, how *discourse is structured*.

NASB



Notes:

1. The passage breaks into two parts, one in which Paul describes his appeal to Philemon and the other in which he explains the rationale for it.
2. The first of these parts is itself made up of two parts, one (Philem 8-9) in which Paul frames his appeal to Philemon with appropriate, but apparently unnecessary, deference. The second part (Philem 10-11) identifies the subject of the appeal, the runaway slave Onesimus. Both halves of this first section of the text focus on the word “appeal” (v. 9, v. 10).
3. Pointed left-hand brackets (8.2-9.1, 11.1-2, etc.) draw attention to items paired because of their special (and usually) contrasting relationship with each other.
4. The second half of the pericope, providing the “rationale” for the appeal, also falls into two parts (vv. 12-14 and vv. 15-16), and the first of them does likewise. Verses 12-14 describe Paul’s reasons for making his (virtually unstated) request, verse 14 acting the part of protesting Paul’s reluctance to take Philemon for granted in accomplishing his goals.
5. Then, in verses 15-16, Paul explains why Philemon ought to look favorably on the “request” nonetheless. Onesimus’ change of situation makes all the difference in the world.
6. With verses 17-21 or 22, Paul moves to a new level of his argument (note the word “then” in v. 17). What is it about, and how does it relate to verses 8-16?



Notes:

1. The main clause of verses 8-9 is the single word παρακαλῶ “I urge” in 9.2, but because of its contrastive parallel with ἐπιτάσσειν “to command” in 8.2, I have forgone bringing 9.2 out to the left margin in order to highlight the parallel.
2. The διό “therefore” in 8.1 connects verses 4-7 to what follows. J. Banker (*A Semantic Structure Analysis of Philemon* [Dallas: SIL, 1990]) sees this as a connection between evidence (vv. 4-7) and conclusion (vv. 8-11). For him these two paragraphs together form the introductory section (4-11) in the main division (body) of the letter. Thus, he separates off verses 12-21 from 4-11. But by doing so he disrupts the run of three ὃν “whom” clauses in verses 10-13. Banker recognizes the awkwardness of this (p. 8) and

attributes it to the dual function of a passage like verses 8-11 and to the inability of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) semantic structure analysis system—or any other known analytical system—to handle such situations. For him the question is whether verses 8-11 relate more closely to 4-7 or to 12-16; he believes 12-16 cannot be made to relate closely to 4-7 as it would have to do if it were connected directly to 8-11. In the end, on semantic grounds rather than grammatical he chooses to make a higher level cut between 8-11 and 12-16 than between 4-7 and 8-11. I am not yet convinced this is necessary. For now, I view 8-16 as a coherent unit.

3. Grammatically, line 14.2 is an independent clause and would normally be brought out to the left margin. But like the case in 9.2, it parallels its main verb with one in a subordinate clause—here ἠθέλησα “I [did not] want” in 14.2 with ἐβουλόμην “I preferred” in 13.1—and again I forgo the usual arrangement in order to highlight the parallel. This works well anyway, since the δέ in 14.1 signals a contrast between 13 and 14, which are then still subordinate (grammatically) to 10.1.
4. Lines 15.1-2 form a new, independent clause along with its support, but they reflect each other in a chiasmic pattern: ἐχωρίσθη corresponding with ἀπέχη and πρὸς ὥραν corresponding with αἰώνιον.
5. Altogether, as it seems to me anyway, verses 8-16 build on the artfully acknowledged goodness of Philemon (vv. 4-7) and present the new situation with Onesimus. These two factors, Philemon’s good heart and Onesimus’ altered condition, lead to the appeal Paul makes in verses 17-21. This is what we can call the external, “*macrostructural*” setting of Philemon 8-16. Internally (“*microstructurally*”) verses 8-16 set up the culmination in verses 17-21 by Paul’s forbearing both to command Philemon to accept Onesimus, on the one hand, and to keep Onesimus to himself, on the other. The whole incident may have come about to change the relationship between Philemon and Onesimus forever.
6. With verses 17-21 or 22, Paul moves to a new level of his argument (note the word οὖν “therefore” in v. 17). What is it about, and how does it relate to verses 8-16?

Note: The two-part summarization of the passage (note 5) in terms of its internal logic and content and its external contribution to the overall argument of the context will be emphasized in chapter six.

II. Matthew 16:24-28

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples,
 “If any want to become my followers,
let them
 deny themselves
 and
 take up their cross
 and
 follow me.

²⁵ For
those who want to save their life will lose it,
and
those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

²⁶ For
what will it profit them
 if they
 gain the whole world
 but
 forfeit their life?

Or
what will they give in return for their life?

²⁷ For
the Son of Man is to come
 with his angels
 in the glory of his Father,

and
then he will repay everyone for what has been done.

²⁸ Truly I tell you,
there are some standing here
 who will not taste death
 before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

Notes on Matthew 16:24-28

1. (v. 24) In narrative, I place “orienters” like “he said” on a separate line. Technically the quotation following “he said” is the direct object of “said,” but there is little point in making this distinction in the analysis.
2. (v. 24b) Just how detailed the analysis needs to be is a matter of personal taste. Ordinarily I would not break out each individual word, but I have done it here just to illustrate the principle of “coordinated” relationships.
3. (v. 25) The conjunction “for” introducing this verse (and others) is a higher-level relationship marker. It indicates that the cluster (a sentence, a paragraph, etc.) that it introduces functions as a rationale for the cluster preceding it (usually). But indenting each one at the “next” level would force the diagram off the page, unless we turned it to landscape view. The higher-level connections can be better indicated in the far left margin.

III. Acts 1:9-14

⁹ When he had said this,
as they were watching,
he was lifted up,
and
a cloud took him out of their sight.

¹⁰ While
he was going
and
they were gazing up toward heaven,
suddenly two men in white robes stood by them.

¹¹ They said,
“Men of Galilee,
why do you stand looking up toward heaven?
This Jesus, /.../ will come
/who has been taken up from you into heaven,/ in the same way
as you saw him go into heaven.”

¹² Then they returned
to Jerusalem
from the mount called Olivet,
which is near Jerusalem,
a sabbath day’s journey away.

¹³ When they had entered the city,
they went to the room upstairs
where they were staying,

Peter,
and John,
and James,
and Andrew,
Philip
and Thomas,
Bartholomew
and Matthew,
James son of Alphaeus,
and Simon the Zealot,
and Judas son of James.

¹⁴ All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer,
together with
certain women,
including Mary the mother of Jesus,
as well as
his brothers.

Notes on Acts 1:9-14

1. (v. 11) I have placed the vocative “Men of Galilee” on a separate line, since it has no syntactical function in the sentence, but only serves to open the speech.
2. (v. 11) If it is convenient to extract something from its textual position in order to highlight it, or for some other reason, I place a marker /.../ to show where it belongs and I put the displaced fragment in // to show what should be “replaced.” The point of this is to respect the word order, which often has its own significance, but which can sometimes get in the way of this kind of syntactical analysis.

IV. Romans 3:27-31

²⁷ Then what becomes of boasting?

It is excluded.

By what law?

By that of works?

No, but by the law of faith.

²⁸ For

we hold that a person is justified

by faith

apart from works prescribed by the law.

²⁹ Or

is God the God of Jews only?

Is he not the God of Gentiles also?

Yes, of Gentiles also,

³⁰ since

God is one;

and

he will justify

the circumcised

on the ground of faith

and

the uncircumcised

through that same faith.

³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith?

By no means!

On the contrary, we uphold the law.

Notes on Romans 3:27-31

1. (v. 27) I prefer to lay out diatribe and other uses of rhetorical questions, and their answers, on separate lines in order to see them clearly. However, it helps to remember that a diatribal question-answer complex is simply a rhetorical way of saying something which could be said much more simply. In verse 27, for example, Paul is simply saying that boasting is excluded by the law of faith.

2. (v. 28) As in Matthew 16:25, the conjunction “for” connects the following structure to the preceding one as a rationale, a reason. In other words, Romans 3:27-28 could be rewritten like this: “The law of faith excludes boasting, *because* a person is justified by faith, apart from works of the law.” Paul’s use of diatribe for saying this, however, lends it greater rhetorical effect.

3. (v. 30) Here we have to decide how to resolve an ambiguity in the syntax. Is the statement “and he will justify the circumcised” coordinated with “God is one,” under *since* as part of the reason for saying that God is the God of the gentiles? Or should it be taken as coordinated with the diatribal statement “God is the God of the gentiles”? If the latter (as I have taken it here), it probably functions as the logical *consequence* of his being the Gentiles’ God.

V. Revelation 12:1-6

¹ A great portent appeared in heaven:

a woman
clothed with the sun,
with the moon under her feet,
and
on her head a crown of twelve stars.

² She

was pregnant
and
was crying out
in birthpangs,
in the agony of giving birth.

³ Then another portent appeared in heaven:

a great red dragon,
with
seven heads
and
ten horns,
and
seven diadems on his heads.

⁴ His tail

swept down a third of the stars of heaven
and
threw them to the earth.

Then the dragon stood before the woman

who was about to bear a child,
so that he might devour her child
as soon as it was born.

⁵ And she gave birth to a son, a male child,

who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron.

But her child was

snatched away
and
taken
to God
and
to his throne;

⁶ and the woman fled into the wilderness,

where she has a place prepared by God,
so that /.../ she can be nourished

/there/

for one thousand two hundred sixty days.

Note on Revelation 12:1-6

(v. 2) Even though verse 2 provides further description of the woman (cf. v. 1), because it is framed as an independent statement, I bring it out to the left margin. This protects the integrity of the text *as it is*, before we move on to reconsider the semantic shape of the message. In that next step, we can recognize that verse 2 is very likely a continuation of verse 1b.

VI. Philippians 2:1-2

¹ If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, ² make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

Εἴ τις οὖν παράκλησις ἐν Χριστῷ, εἴ τι παραμύθιον ἀγάπης, εἴ τις κοινωνία πνεύματος, εἴ τις σπλάγχνα καὶ οἰκτιρμοί, πληρώσατέ μου τὴν χαρὰν ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε, τὴν αὐτὴν ἀγάπην ἔχοντες, σύμψυχοι, τὸ ἓν φρονοῦντες.

If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ,
 if there is any consolation of love,
 if there is any fellowship of the Spirit,
 if any affection and compassion,
 make my joy complete

Grammatical head

by being of the same mind,

Semantic head

maintaining the same love,
 united in spirit,
 intent on one purpose.

Εἴ τις οὖν παράκλησις ἐν Χριστῷ
 εἴ τι παραμύθιον ἀγάπης
 εἴ τις κοινωνία πνεύματος
 εἴ τις σπλάγχνα καὶ οἰκτιρμοί

Grammatical head

πληρώσατέ μου τὴν χαρὰν

Semantic head

ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε
 τὴν αὐτὴν ἀγάπην ἔχοντες
 σύμψυχοι
 τὸ ἐν φρονούντες

VII. Luke 7:39

ἰδὼν δὲ ὁ Φαρισαῖος ὁ καλέσας αὐτὸν εἶπεν ἐν ἑαυτῷ λέγων οὗτος εἴ ἦν προφήτης, ἐγίνωσκεν ἂν τίς καὶ ποταπὴ ἢ γυνὴ ἣτις ἅπτεται αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἄμαρτωλός ἐστιν.

/δὲ/

ἰδὼν/.../
ὁ Φαρισαῖος /.../εἶπεν ἐν ἑαυτῷ
/ὁ καλέσας αὐτὸν/
λέγων
/εἴ ἦν προφήτης,/
οὗτος/.../ἐγίνωσκεν ἂν
τίς καὶ ποταπὴ ἢ γυνὴ
ἣτις ἅπτεται αὐτοῦ,
ὅτι
ἄμαρτωλός ἐστιν.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet he would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching him, that she is a sinner.”

Now

when the Pharisee /.../ **saw** this,
/who had **invited** him/
he **said** to himself,
“*If* this man **were** a prophet
he would **know**
who and what sort of person this woman **is**
who **is touching** him,
that she **is** a sinner.”

Note: In the analyses for both languages, I have **bolded** the verbs (or predicates) lying at the core of each clause (simple sentence) and *italicized* the conjunctions that introduce clauses and relate them to their environment. I have also underlined the two phrases (“the Pharisee” and “this woman”) that are further identified by relative clauses operating as adjectives (“who had invited Him” and “who is touching Him”).

For an unpacking of the complex levels of this sentence, see the next page.

Note how this complex sentence involves at least *eight sentences* . . .

1. The Pharisee saw [something]
2. The Pharisee had invited Jesus
3. The Pharisee said [something] to himself, saying...
4. This man [is] a prophet
5. He would know [something]
6. The woman is [someone] and [of a certain kind]
7. The woman is touching him
8. She is a sinner.

. . . and *four levels* of sentence-embedding:

Level 1 (the “main” sentence: Sentence 3):

“[At a certain moment], the [certain] Pharisee said [something] to himself.”

Level 2 (Sentences 1, 2, and 5 embedded in sentence 3):

The certain moment: “When the Pharisee saw [something]” (sentence 1; what he saw is specified in previous text, v. 38)

The Pharisee is identified as someone “who had invited Jesus” (sentence 2)

What he said: “[Under certain circumstances] this man would know [something]” (sentence 5)

Level 3 (Sentences 4, 6, and 8 embedded in sentence 5):

The (unfulfilled) circumstances: “If this man were a prophet” (sentence 4; implies that the Pharisee believes Jesus is not a prophet)

What the man (Jesus) would know (and obviously does not):

- a. “who and what sort the [certain] woman is” (sentence 6) and
- b. “that she is a sinner” (sentence 8)

Level 4 (Sentence 7 embedded in sentence 6):

The woman is identified as the one “who is touching him” (sentence 7)