

CHAPTER 9  
PROPOSITIONAL RELATIONS  
ANALYZING THE RELATIONS BETWEEN PROPOSITIONS

Speech, whether spoken or written, comprises layers of units, from the smallest to the larger units. At each level, these units are connected to the other nearby units in meaningful ways. This is true when we're talking of the syllables, prefixes, and endings that make up words and their grammatical forms. It's true at the phrase and clause level, or at the sentence level, which can be diagrammed in the traditional sentence diagramming. And that ability to connect continues up through paragraph, pericope, and book level. This chapter will set out ways of labeling and organizing these this relational tree.

**Introduction**

Just as morphological analysis can label a word so that we might label ἐξουσία note only as a *common noun*, or even as a *femine noun* (i.e., ἐξουσία), but because of the final -v we would label this noun as *feminine, singular, accusative*. That, along with how it functioned in a phrase, would provide some ability to diagram its syntactical relationships. Once we move away from syntax to referential relationships, we get a bit more flexibility; however, we also begin to access the *meaning* of a text. When we look at the first two clauses of Mark 1:27, we see a cause-effect relationship.<sup>1</sup>

And they were all amazed,	<i>Cause</i>
so that they questioned among themselves.	<i>Effect</i>

That same cause-effect relationship could be expressed just as well in different grammatical structures.

They questioned among themselves,	<i>Effect</i>
for they were all amazed.	<i>Cause</i>

They were all amazed,	<i>Cause</i>
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1. Example from Vern S Poythress, "Propositional Relations," in *The New Testament Student and His Field*, NT Student (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1982), 161.

Therefore they questioned among themselves                      *Effect*

Even without explicit relational markers like “so,” “for,” or “therefore,” the reader might still observe that the two clauses have a cause-effect relationship.

These relations are also hierarchical.<sup>2</sup> Poythress follows Beek-Callow in speaking of three main levels of the hierarchy: *concepts* (e.g., “they,” or “amazed”), *propositions* (e.g., “they were all amazed”), and *paragraphs* (e.g., Mark 1:27).<sup>3</sup> We can not only label the relation between two propositions like the first two clauses of Mark 1:27; we can also use pretty much the same referential labels to identify the relationship of increasingly larger sections of a connected discourse, gradually building up a branching root structure for the whole discourse.

The system I am using is a mix the work done by Poythress with some material from Beekman and Callow.<sup>4</sup>

### *What is a “Proposition”?*

A proposition is the most basic meaningful unit of thought within a hierarchy of units. It’s the smallest unit that says something about something; therefore, it generally has a *subject* (i.e., it is *about* something) and a *predicate* (i.e., it says something about the subject). For example, look at Mark 9:26a.

After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out.

“It came out” is a proposition: It’s *about something*, namely the subject “it” (i.e., the evil spirit); and it *says something*, namely, it predicates that “it came out.” But “crying out” is also a proposition: It has a predicate, “crying out,” even though it has no explicit subject given. But this is a regular practice in English with clauses after the verb + *ing*. The construction as a whole furnishes an implicit subject, namely, “it.” So too with “convulsing him terribly.” So we might break this down to the following propositions:

2. Poythress, “Propositional Relations,” 161; citing Kenneth Lee Pike and Evelyn G. Pike, *Grammatical Analysis*, 1st ed. (Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1977), 3, which has been revised Kenneth Lee Pike and Evelyn G. Pike, *Grammatical Analysis*, rev. ed., Summer Institute of Linguistics Publications in Linguistics (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1982).

3. Poythress, “Propositional Relations,” 161.

4. Poythress, “Propositional Relations”; John Beekman and John Callow, *Translating the Word of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1974), 267–342. Poythress says this method was first developed by Robert Angelo Traina, *Methodical Bible Study: A New Approach to Hermeneutics* (Ridgefield Park, N.J.: [Distributed by] Biblical Seminary in New York, 1952), 49–55; updated Robert Angelo Traina, *Methodical Bible Study: A New Approach to Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Francis Asbury Press, 1985) Then it was modified and refined by others: Daniel P. Fuller, *The Inductive Method of Bible Study*, 3d ed. (Pasadena, Calif.: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1959), V-1—VII-11; John Beekman, “Propositions and Their Relations Within a Discourse,” *Notes on Translation* 37 (1970): 6–23; Joseph Evans Grimes, *The Thread of Discourse*, *Janua Linguarum* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975); D. Lee Ballard, Robert J. Conrad, and Robert E. Longacre, “The Deep and Surface Grammar of Interclausal Relations,” *Foundations of Language* 7 (1971): 70–118; Robert E. Longacre, *An Anatomy of Speech Notions*, PdR Press Publications in Tagmemics (Lisse: Peter de Ridder, 1976), 98–164.

After crying out and  
convulsing him terribly,  
it came out.

Generally a single proposition has only one main verb; that is, auxiliaries like “have,” “will,” and “should” are not counted. Of course, “have” or even “is” may also function at times as the main verb. For example, “I *have* a stereo” or “I *am* his friend” use them as main verbs; however, “I have *lost* my stereo” and “I am *getting acquainted with* his friend” use those only as auxiliaries. So too, in Greek and Hebrew, the copulative “is” is frequently omitted. Nonetheless, a clause with an *implicit* copulative “to be” still counts as a proposition. Other verbs can also be elided but still be clearly implied from the context. In these cases, the analytical process should supply the implicit verbs to make explicit the full proposition. For example, see Mark 14:1–2.

It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, for they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people.”

“Not during the feast” *represents* a whole proposition, though we must supply the implicit verb. The complete proposition then is, “*We must not kill him during the feast.*”

For similar reasons, we should take a special approach to rhetorical questions. Rhetorical questions do not expect an explicit answer; rather, they imply their own answer. For example, see Mark 13:2:

And Jesus said to him, Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

The disciples are not expected to answer either yes or no; obviously, they see the buildings. A rhetorical question frequently has “more punch” than the corresponding direct statement would; however, the two are roughly equivalent. Because the implied direct statement is often easier to process, it might help to convert the rhetorical question when labeling propositional relations. What Jesus meant is something like this: “*Take a look at these great buildings.*”

The first step in analyzing flow of thought is to break down a text into its constituent propositions. If you have a doubt about whether a certain complex is one proposition or two, then break it in two. You will always be able to tie the parts back together. Then copy the text into a column at the left-hand side of your paper, beginning a new line for each new proposition. From this, you can work your way toward a propositional outline of the whole text.

In dividing a text into propositions, and in doing the resulting outline, remember that your *primary* concern is the sequence and logical flow of the author’s thought. Grammar is secondary; however, it is largely by means of grammar that we uncover the flow of thought. So we will find ourselves returning again and again to

grammatical analysis to establish the flow of thought objectively. But let the grammar tell you not merely about structure, but also about what the author is *saying* and *meaning*.

*Rough Distinctions in Propositional Relations*

Beekman-Callow subdivide propositional relations into two basic categories, additive (or developmental) relations and associative (support) relations.<sup>5</sup> Under the developmental category they include the following

sequence	simultaneous
alternative	conversational exchanges

Under the support relations they include the following four subsets:<sup>6</sup>

1. Support by clarification using a proposition with *distinct* information
 

Manner	Comparison	Contrast
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2. Support by clarification using a proposition with *similar* information:
 

Equivalent	Generic-Specific	Amplification-Contraction/Summary
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3. Support by argument
 

Reason-Result	Condition-Consequence
Means-Result	Concession-Contraexpectation
Means-Purpose	Grounds-Conclusion
  
4. Support by orientation
 

Time	Location	Circumstance
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Poythress subdivides them differently, opting for three rough categories. (1) Relations of *dynamicity* speak in various ways of cause and effect. (2) Relations of *determinateness* (or definiteness) are connected because they share a common topic. (3) Relations *coherence* (co-occurrence) are connected because the two are connected in time, space, or circumstances. Poythress gives three examples:<sup>7</sup>

...they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them.	<i>Effect</i> <i>Cause</i> (Mark 6:48)
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Now John was clothed with camels's hair, and wore a leather belt around his waste.	<i>regarding John's clothing</i> <i>regarding John's clothing</i>
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And he went up on the mountain	<i>Antecedent</i>
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5. Beekman and Callow, *Translating*, 284.

6. Beekman and Callow, *Translating*, 290.

7. Poythress, "Propositional Relations," 162.

and called to him those whom he desired.

*Subsequent*

In the first example, an explicit “for” helps; and sometimes we’ll see other helpful terms, such as *so*, *so that*, *in order to*, *lest*, and so forth. In other cases we’re meant to infer the connection. In the second two examples, the connector is “and,” but the propositional relations differ, so we have to pay attention to the content of the propositions and not just rely on the connectors. We will use a mix of these two categories, slotting them into Poythress’s three classes: dynamicity, determinateness, and coherence.

### **Relations of Dynamity (cause-effect)**

These are generally the easiest to define, often because we do get explicit indications with terms like *so that*, *for*, *because*, *as a result*, and the like—but not always:

With authority he commands even the unclean spirits,  
and they obey him.

*Cause*

*Effect*

The explicit link between the two is “and,” but we can infer a cause-effect connection. What we infer is something like this:

With authority, he commands even the unclean spirit,  
as a result, they obey him.

The cause must be temporally prior to the effect, although the order may be reversed syntactically. For example, one one could just as well read,

The unclean spirits obeyed Jesus  
because he commanded with with authority

*Effect*

*Cause*

See the difference between those examples and Mark 1:9

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee  
and was baptized by John in the Jordan

*Antecedent*

*Subsequent*

In this case, we just have a statement about chronological progression. Jesus may well have come from Nazareth *in order to* be baptized (cf. Matt 3:13); however, Mark doesn’t imply that. We might infer some cause-effect relationship between Jesus’ arrival and his baptism, but we can’t say that Mark states it or even implies it. We should be cautious in our judgments in cases like these, and not over-interpret our labeling by inference where implication isn’t clear.

### **Relations of Determinateness (regarding ‘x’)**

Relations of determinateness are the cases where one proposition helps to define or limit another.

It was reported

*regarding a report*

that he was at home. *regarding a report* (Mark 2:1)

Sometimes this involves argument from one fact to another:

If you will,  
you can make me clean. *regarding a cleansing*  
*regarding a cleansing* (Mark 1:40)

David himself calls him Lord *regarding the Christ*  
so how is he his son? *regarding the Christ* (Mark 12:37)

Sometimes such an argument itself implies an underlying cause-effect relation. We might reformulate Mark 1:40 as follows:

Jesus' willingness [to heal the leper] *Cause*  
will *cause* the leper to become clean. *Effect*

And we might reformulate Mark 12:37

Christ is not simply David's son *as a result or effect* of this fact,  
David is led to call him Lord.

In those reformulations, the cause-effect relation was made explicit, and in those forms they would indeed be labeled cause-effect. But as Mark put them, that wasn't the case. Rather, the *argument* from one proposition to the other was the point being made. Poythress says,

In general, the essence of an argumentative type of propositional relation is not a cause-effect relation. Rather, one has to do with an argument from one proposition to another on a given topic. In relations of dynamicity, what is prominent is, if you will, a connecting "arrow" of movement from an earlier event (cause) to a later event (effect). An argument, however, may infer either event from the presence of the other, or may infer one of two simultaneous events or states from the presence of the other.<sup>8</sup>

### Relations of Coherence (co-occurrence)

Relations of coherence refer to "the occurrence of two events or maintenance of two states in the temporal or spatial vicinity of one another."<sup>9</sup>

And the unclean spirit,  
convulsing him *Co-occurrence*  
and crying out with a loud voice *Co-occurrence* (Mark 1:26)

Passing along by the Sea of Galilee *Co-occurrence*

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8. Poythress, "Propositional Relations," 165.

9. Poythress, "Propositional Relations," 165.

he saw Simon and Andrew

*Co-occurrence* (Mark 1:16)

There may be other connections, whether dynamic or determinate; however, in these cases, the author is making the point that the two propositions share an environment in space, time, or circumstance.

### Dynamicity

Poythress's class propositional relations expressing dynamicity comprises mostly what Beekman-Callow classify as support by argument. Poythress includes the following: engagementpurpose, means-end, reason-result, condition-consequence, stimulus-response, and concession contraexpectation. These are all cause-effect relations, although sometimes the effect is not definite, but rather desired or expected, or even *not* expected.

#### *Engagement-Purpose [Eng-Pur]*

This dynamic uses *means* or *engagement* for the "cause" side of the relation.<sup>10</sup> This speaks of action taken to achieve a desired result but without stating whether the action took place or not. The emphasis is on *intention* rather than achievement. In Hebrew, this formulation might employ  $\text{לְעֵלֶּה}$ , or just the preposition  $\text{לְ}$  with an infinitive construct. Greek employs  $\text{ἵνα, εἰς} + \text{articular infinitive}$ , or the genitive infinitive. In English, a test for this relation is to see if you can link the two by prefixing "in order to" or "in order that" to the *purpose* proposition. Some examples follow:

You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! (Mark 7:9)	<i>Eng</i> <i>Pur</i>
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I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts (Col 4:8)	<i>Eng</i> <i>Pur</i> <i>Pur</i>
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For judgment I came into this world that those who do not see may see and those who see may become blind (John 9:39)	<i>Eng (generic)</i> <i>Pur (generic)</i> <i>Pur (specific)</i> <i>Pur (specific)</i>
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It's also possible to express *negative* purpose. The KJV used the word "lest" to signal *negative* purpose, which modern translations express with something like "in order not to," "so that he/you may not," and so forth, as in the following examples:

I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the wild beasts multiply against you. (Exod 23:29)	<i>Eng</i> <i>Pur</i> <i>Pur</i>
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10. Beekman-Callow uses *means* and Poythress uses *engagement* for the "cause" side of the dynamic (Beekman and Callow, *Translating*, 302–03; Poythress, "Propositional Relations," 170–71).

Watch and pray	<i>Eng</i>
that you may not enter into temptation. (Mark 14:38)	<i>Pur (negative)</i>

As a hint of how these relations can compile into more complex relations, see the following example from Mark 3:2. We see two levels of means-purpose linkage. We have the relation between the first two propositions:

And they watched Jesus	<i>Eng</i>
to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath	<i>Pur</i>

In addition, we have the relation between those first two propositions taken as a whole and the last proposition:

They watched Jesus to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath  $\leftarrow$  *Mns/Pur*  $\rightarrow$  so that they might accuse him.

#### *Means-End [Mns-End]*

This dynamic uses *means* for the “cause” side and *result* or *end* for the “result” side of it.<sup>11</sup> The *means-result* dynamic must be distinguished both from the *means-purpose*, which we have just discussed, and from the *reason-result*, which is the next dynamic to be discussed. The *means-result* is like the *means-purpose*, but in this case the effect is not only an *intended* effect but also an *actual* effect reported or at least implied to have taken place. Moreover, the report of the effect must be in the immediate context, not inferred from outside the context; we’re looking at the relation of the propositions in context, not at wider truth claims of an entire discourse—to say nothing of the wider declarations of Scripture.

And the *means-result* can be distinguished from *reason-result* (see below); the difference between them is in the “cause” proposition: the *means-result* gives the means “how”; the *reason-result* gives the reason “why.” Some examples follow:

By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin	<i>Mns</i>
he condemned sin in the flesh (Rom 8:3)	<i>End</i>

We know that our old self was crucified with him	<i>Mns</i>
in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing	<i>End</i>
so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. (Rom 6:6)	<i>End</i>

Once again, the dynamic compiles into a more complex form:

We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing  $\leftarrow$  *Mns/Rst*  $\rightarrow$  so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

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11. Poythress uses *means-end* and Beekman-Callow uses *means-result* (Poythress, “Propositional Relations,” 172–73; Beekman and Callow, *Translating*, 301–02).

Even though *means-result* deals not merely with intent but also with accomplishment of that intent, Beekman-Callow notes that the *means* is often implied rather than stated or stated figuratively.

...the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. (Acts 21:19)	<i>End</i> <i>Mns</i>
making peace by the blood of his cross (Col 1:20)	<i>End</i> <i>Mns</i>
he saved us... by the washing of regeneration and by the renewal of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5)	<i>End</i> <i>Mns</i> <i>Mns</i>
...through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Rom 15:4)	<i>Mns</i> <i>End</i>

It's interesting to note that examples can be read differently even by skilled interpreters. For example, Beekman-Callow read Mark 7:9 as *means-purpose*, whereas Poythress reads it as *means-result*.<sup>12</sup> Wrestling with an issue like this will take you a long ways toward doing better close reading of Scripture, and thus toward solid exegesis—even if you can't make up your mind whether Beekman-Callow or Poythress have it right.

#### *Reason-Result [Rsn-Rst]*

This dynamic connects a cause (reason) with an *actual* result, but with no indication that the effect was intended as was the case with *purpose-result*. Hebrew will sometimes employ עַל־כֵּן, לְכֵן, or the preposition לְ with the infinitive construct to indicate the reason-result relation. Greek frequently uses ὥστε, οὖν, διὰ τοῦτο, and διό to indicate a reason-result sequence with the reason coming first; and γάρ sometimes indicates the sequence when the result comes first. In English, the result is often stated first and connected to what follows with the word “because” or “for.” Also look for connectors like “therefore,” “inasmuch,” “wherefore,” “so that,” and so forth. Examples follow, with and without explicit markers of the relation:

And he marveled because of their unbelief (Mark 6:6)	<i>Rst</i> <i>Rsn</i>
You do not have, because you do not ask. (Jas 4:2)	<i>Rst</i> <i>Rsn</i>
Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him (Mark 1:41)	<i>Rsn</i> <i>Rst</i>

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12. Beekman and Callow, *Translating*, 302.

There arose a great storm on the sea, *Rsn*  
 so that the boat was swamped by the waves (Matt 8:24) *Rst*

You can test for the presence of the reason-result relation by checking whether the label “as a result” can fairly be inserted just before the result proposition:

They were all amazed, *Rsn*  
 [as a result] they questioned among themselves. (Mark 1:27) *Rst*

And they were astonished at his teaching, *Rst*  
 for he taught them as one who had authority (Mark 1:22) *Rsn*

The surface structure of this could be reversed to fit the reason-result order, so that “as a result” would fit:

He taught them as one who had authority *Rsn*  
 [with the result that] they were astonished at his teaching. *Rst*

#### *Stimulus-Response [Stm-Rsp]*

This is a classification supplied by Poythress, and he refers it to Beekman-Callow’s conversation Exchanges classification. Beekman classifies it under his “additive” category because “one speaker ‘adds’ to what the other speaker said, and so on.”<sup>13</sup> I think Poythress has a clearer label and a clearer classification when he includes it as a special kind of reason-result; however, Poythress does note that in this “the causal connection is felt to be a weak one.”<sup>14</sup> The Hebrew and Greek really don’t provide any explicit markers for this, since we might get the coordinating conjunction (ו or και) or some adverb such as וְאָז or τότε (then). But you can test for the presence of this by checking to see if “in response” fits before what you intend to identify as the response part of the relation. He gives the following examples:

He commands even the unclean spirits, *Stm*  
 and they obey him. (Mark 1:27) *Rsp*

He... began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, *Stm*  
 and everyone marveled. (Mark 5:20) *Rsp*

Poythress identifies question-answer and command-execution as special instances of stimulus-response.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Concession-Contraexpectation [Ccs-Cex]*

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13. Beekman and Callow, *Translating*, 292.

14. Poythress, “Propositional Relations,” 174.

15. Poythress, “Propositional Relations,” 175.

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