

## 6

### Letters: Reading Someone Else's Mail

#### Supplementary Materials

This file contains exercises for two important processes emphasized in chapter 6: (a) drafting microstructure and macrostructure statements for a pericope and (b) reading the specific historical setting of a text from what the author says in it.

Section one uses Romans 6:5-11 as a sample text for *drawing up statements* of a pericope's internal logic and content (its microstructure) and its external context and place within the larger argument of that context (its macrostructure). These statements (mentioned in §6.4 of the textbook, paragraphs A, B and C), though subject to revision from time to time, function as guidance for the exegete in understanding the text and in communicating its significance to the community.

Section two tries looking through and beyond the text of 1 John 1:5—2:2 to the world behind it. What can we discern about John's actual circumstances from what he says in these eight verses?

Each section culminates in a suggestion for a Bible study or a sermon.

## **I. Developing Microstructural and Macrostructural Statements: Romans 6:5-11**

### ***A. Work Out a Syntactical Display***

Add whatever arrows and marginal clustering-brackets you think are appropriate for the syntactical analyses of Romans 6:5-11 NRSV, provided for you following these instructions. Then, study the corresponding analysis of the Greek text on the page after that. See if you agree with it. If you do not have Greek yet, you can still see the way the Greek display corresponds to the English. There will be some differences, of course, but you should be able to recognize the places where divisions are made and which parts are clustered together into units at various levels.

### ***B. Draw Conclusions from the Analysis and Summarize Them***

Once you have studied both these analyses, draw some conclusions. From the syntactical displays, work out a one- or two-sentence summary of the internal logic of the text (microstructure). Then, using the annotated outline in the accompanying PDF file, work out a similar short statement about the role played by this text in the larger context of Romans (macrostructure). Then return to this page and consider the statements offered in the next section, C, and compare yours with these.

### ***C. Write Statements for the Logic-Content and for the Argument-Context***

*Microstructure: "Logic and Content" of Romans 6:5-11.* Because we are identified with Christ in death and resurrection (as stated in v. 5, based on the argument from baptism in vv. 3-4), we may conclude both (a) that we are free from sin's power and (b) that we are destined for eternal life with Christ. This double blessing itself becomes then the grounds for our being exhorted to *consider* ourselves as dead to sin and alive to God, an exhortation amplified into specifics in verses 12-14.

*Macrostructure: "Argument and Context" of Romans 6:5-11.* Romans 6:5-11 forms the central developmental argument of 6:1-14, the main thrust of which is that those who have been baptized in and thus identified with Christ need not (cannot?) continue in sin. This passage forms the first part of a three-part argument that free grace is not an excuse for continuing in sin (cf. Rom 6:1, 15; 7:1). This then is part of a larger argument (6:1--8:30) that free grace, the gift of righteousness by faith, which Paul insists on in 3:21--5:21, is not out of line with the holiness required of God's people in the Law (cf. 6:1; 7:7; 8:1-4).

After you have compared your statements with these, proceed to section D.



Romans 6:5-11

5

εἰ γὰρ σύμφυτοι γεγόναμεν  
τῷ ὁμοιώματι τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ  
ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως ἐσόμεθα

6

τοῦτο γινώσκοντες  
ὅτι ὁ παλιὸς ἄνθρωπος συνεσταυρώθη  
ἵνα καταργηθῆ τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας  
τοῦ μηκέτι δουλεύειν ἡμᾶς τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ

7

ὁ γὰρ ἀποθανὼν δεδικαίωται ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας

8

/ . . /πιστεύσομεν ὅτι καὶ συζήσομεν αὐτῷ

/εἰ δὲ ἀπεθάνομεν σὺν Χριστῷ/

9

εἰδότες

/Χριστὸς ἐγερθεὶς ἐκ νεκρῶν/

ὅτι/ . . /οὐκέτι ἀποθνήσκει

[τοῦτό ἐστιν, ὅτι] θάνατος αὐτοῦ οὐκέτι κυριεύει

10

ὁ γὰρ ἀπέθανεν  
τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ ἀπέθανεν ἐφάπαξ

ὁ δὲ ζῆ

ζῆ τῷ θεῷ

11

οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς λογίζεσθε ἑαυτοὺς [εἶναι]

νεκροὺς μὲν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ

ζῶντας δὲ τῷ θεῷ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ

**D. Work Out a Theme and an Outline for a Bible Study on Romans 6:5-11**

Using both the summary statements and the microstructure of the passage, work out the theme and outline of a Bible study based on and *true to* the text of the pericope. Consider trying out one for yourself before comparing your conclusions with the suggestion offered below.

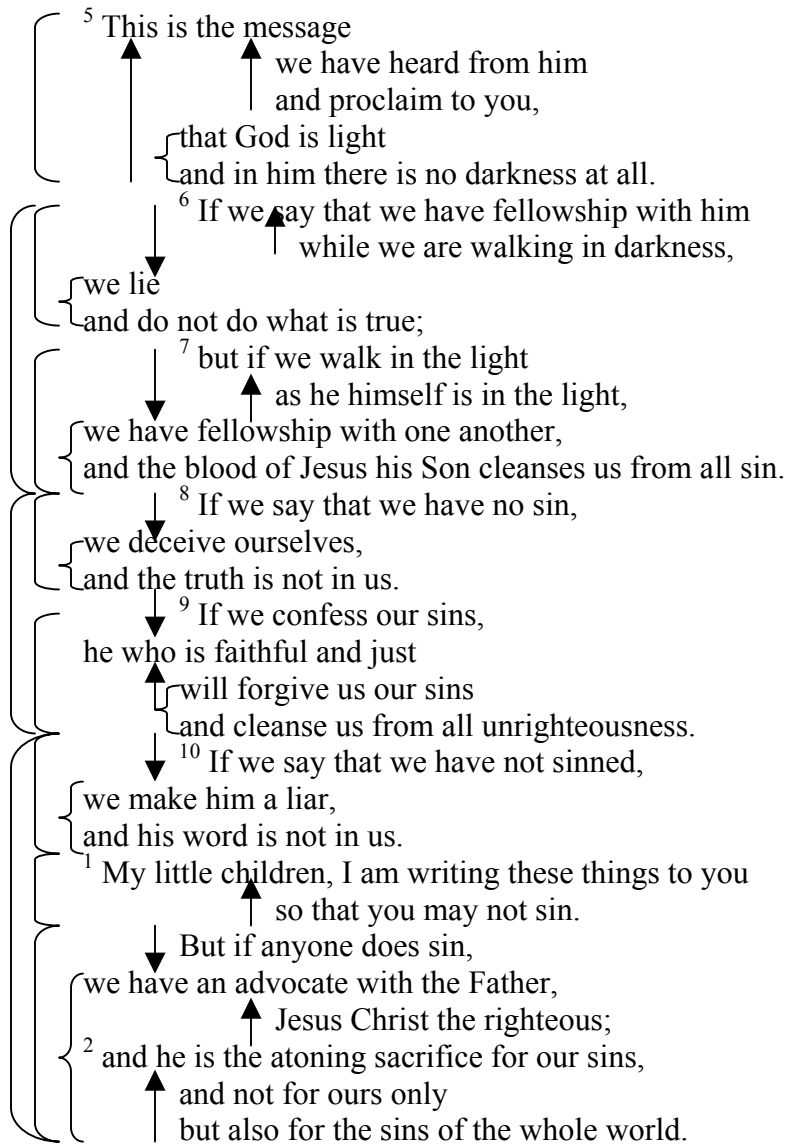
“How to Be What We Are”  
Romans 6:5-11

- A. Realize that identity with Christ in death is identity with *Christ*, in *all* his experience.
- B. This means that we are both:
  - 1. Free from sin: we are dead
  - 2. Free from death: we have already died, and have passed on to resurrection life, over which death has no power or authority.
- C. This state of affairs is both already in effect, here and now, and yet is also still to come (note the future tenses in vv. 5, 8).
- D. We may “realize” the future by “considering” ourselves already there, which in fact we are (v. 11).
- E. Conclusion (looking forward to vv. 12-14): Freedom from sin is not freedom from temptation to sin or from the desire to sin, but from the *necessity* of sinning.

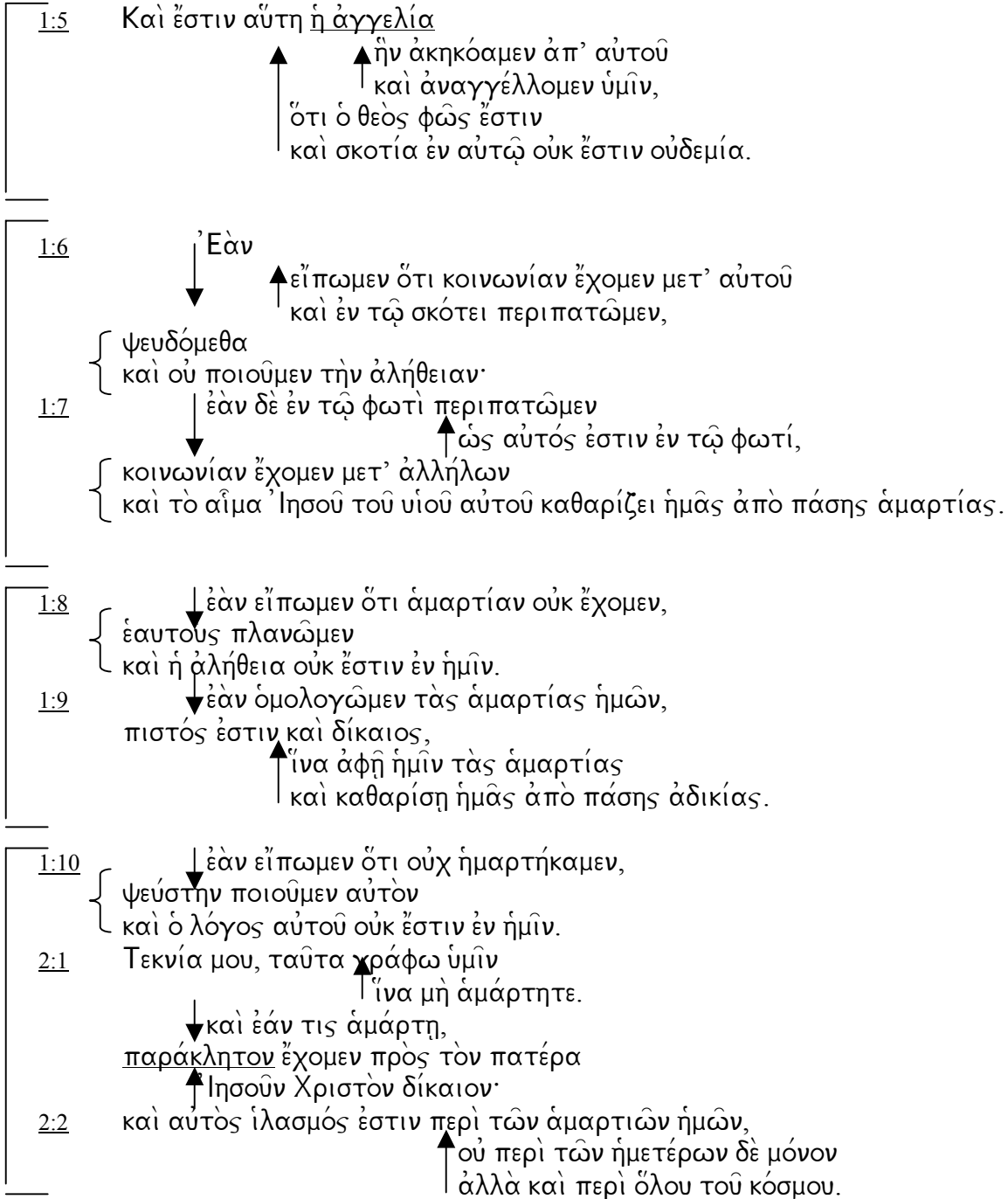
## II. Discerning the “Occasion”: 1 John 1:5--2:2

Study either or both of the following two structural analyses of this text. As you work through the text, try second-guessing what the author is talking about in his actual historical context. Read his text as in a mirror. Then proceed to the suggestions offered on the pages following the structural displays.

1 John 1:5--2:2 NRSV



1 John 1:5—2:2



## Raw Data

1:5 The message “which *we* have heard” implies “rather than what *you* have heard”? Perhaps not, *since there is no special grammatical emphasis on “we”* (there is no ἡμεῖς [emphatic “we”]). This first statement is probably in agreement with the opponents, who would similarly teach that God is Light. But reiterated here perhaps to set up the “trap” in verse 6.

1:6 Were some people acting as described in verse 6a, people who would otherwise agree with verse 5? If so, verse 6 is *polemical*: presumably the expression “walking in darkness” means walking in opposition to God’s character (v. 5), and makes a lie any claim to be in fellowship with God while doing so (cf. 2:3-6).

1:7 Sketches the contrast to the scenario of verse 6: presumably the situation among John’s own people (or what he considers to be appropriate for them). Thus this “contrast” *functions somewhat like an exhortation*.

1:8 Reflects people who claim to have no sin and is likewise polemical. Is there some kind of equation between “truth” and “light”? (Cf. v. 7.)

1:9 Sketches the appropriate contrast again, once more making it function like an exhortation; both “exhortations” (vv. 7, 9) have attached benefits: fellowship, forgiveness, cleansing.

1:10 Is this a reiteration of verse 8? If so, why? What’s added? (The contradicting of God’s word [λόγος].) What word? Is there an allusion to some Scripture or Old Testament passage, such as Psalm 14:1-3, Ecclesiastes 7:20 (cf. Rom 3:10-18)? Or is it a reference to Christ as the Logos, as in John 1:1 and in 1 John 1:1? If so, then the opponents perhaps claim to have the Logos within them. In any case, the denial of one’s sin is contrary to God’s “word” and is proof of having no part in him.

2:1 Apparently the author seeks to avoid being misinterpreted as saying that sin is permissible (cf. Rom 6:1). The goal indeed is sinlessness, but if the goal is not reached (which it will not be), Christ is there for sinners. Note the repetition of Christ’s name “Jesus” (implying his fleshly humanity in contrast to the claims of the opposition?).

2:2 Implies some sort of limited atonement/“expiation” taught by the opponents? Note again that *Jesus* Christ is both the Advocate and the sacrificial offering for sin. “And also for the sins of the whole world” may combat an elitism on the part of the opponents.

## Preliminary Conclusions

1. There is a carefully designed structure, used three times: *If A, then X. But if B, then Y.*
2. The rhetoric apparently reflects a polemical situation. John’s opponents are claiming to know the God of light and to be without sin, but are in fact behaving in ways John



considers contrary to the light of God, contrary to the truth. The opponents also may be claiming to have a share in the Logos (as in John 1), although the addition of the word αὐτοῦ “his” (ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ “his word”) may push us in the direction of understanding here a verbal message, truth, instead of the person of Christ.

3. These characteristics of the opponents suggest gnosticizing or docetizing tendencies, which separate spirit and flesh from each other. The spirit is without sin; the flesh and its behavior have no significance for the life of the spirit, etc.

### **Possible homiletical results**

On this analysis of the passage, it looks like John provides two compelling grounds for two [implied] heavy exhortations. It is important to understand this in the context of John’s struggle against Gnostic or proto-Gnostic ideas threatening his churches. But for our present congregations, we may perhaps jump to a contemporary application, based on the text’s structure:

#### Facing a Compassionate Straight-Shooter

1. Ground 1: God is a straight-shooting God of openness, truth and light.
2. Exhortation 1: Intimacy with God and his people requires openness, truth and light.
3. Exhortation 2: God’s forgiveness is experienced with truthful and open confession.
4. Ground 2: God compassionately enables openness by providing the Advocate.