A Holistic Approach to the Argument Structure of Romans 6

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0. Introduction

The position of many discourse linguists, including myself, is that the segmentation of a text into paragraphs and sections is determined by semantic or pragmatic factors, rather than by the presence of particular cohesive features. Thus, Tomlin claims that “episodes are defined ultimately by the sustaining of attention on a particular paragraph level theme...” while Beekman and Callow assert:

The basic criterion [for delineating a unit] is that a section or a paragraph deals with one theme. If the theme changes, then a new unit has started... what gives a section or paragraph its overall coherence as a semantic unit is the fact that one subject matter is being dealt with.

Such considerations led Reboul and Moeschler to conclude that Longacre and other proponents of the Tagmemic model were wrong to claim that paragraphs belong to the same grammatical hierarchy as sentences and clauses. “Nous rejetons l’hypothèse selon laquelle le DISCOURS serait une unité linguistique au même titre que la phrase”.

Although segmentation into paragraphs and sections is not determined by reference to cohesive features found in the text, proposed boundaries should not be in conflict with such features. For example, they should be consistent with the “constraints” on interpretation imposed by connectives such as γάρ, δέ, οὖν, ἦ, οὖτως, καί, μηδέ and ἄλλα. They should also be consistent with the presence in the context of any rhetorical questions, as well as parallelisms, chiastic and inclusio structures, and instances of back-reference.

I start, then, with a brief discussion of the boundaries and paragraph breaks proposed for Romans 6 by commentators and translations. I then discuss relevant cohesive features of the text and the extent to which they support the different divisions. I conclude with a flow chart of the argumentation of Romans 6 which seeks to give due weight to each of the cohesive devices discussed.

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1 A shorter form of this paper was presented at the International Conference of the Society of Biblical Literature held in London, England in July 2011.
2 For the purposes of this paper, a section is a “grouping of paragraphs that deal with the same theme” (Levinsohn, Stephen H., Discourse Features of New Testament Greek: A Coursebook on the Information Structure of New Testament Greek, 2nd edition [Dallas: SIL International, 2000], 295).
3 Tomlin, R. S., Coherence and Grounding in Discourse (Philadelphia: Benjamins, 1987), 458.
4 Beekman, John, and John C. Callow, Translating the Word of God (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1974), 279.
7 See Levinsohn, Discourse Features, §17.2, for discussion of eleven cohesive features that may be cited as supporting evidence for a paragraph or section boundary. “Back-reference involves reference to the preceding paragraph or paragraphs or to a point or points within preceding paragraphs. Back-reference often occurs at the beginning of a new paragraph.” (Neeley, L.L., A discourse analysis of Hebrews. Occasional Papers in Translation and Textlinguistics 3-4 [1987] 19)
1. Segmentations of Romans 6 on Thematic Grounds

There is general agreement among commentators that Romans 6.1 begins a new thematic unit, and that 6.23 ends a thematic unit or sub-unit (for those commentators who judge that the thematic unit continues to 7.6). A majority of commentators divide the chapter into two parts between 6.14 and 6.15.

Thus, Moo treats chapter 6 as a thematic whole with the title, “FREEDOM FROM BONDAGE TO SIN” and divides it into two sub-sections: “‘Dead to Sin’ through Union with Christ (6.1–14)” and “Freed from Sin’s Power to Serve Righteousness (6.15–23)”.

Morris also treats 6.1-14 as a unity (“Shall We Continue to Sin That Grace May Abound?”), though his next thematic unit extends to 7.6 (“Shall We Sin Because We Are under Grace, Not Law?”), with 6.15-23 (“We Are Not Slaves”) as a sub-unit.

A minority of commentators prefer to divide Romans 6 between 11 and 12 (e.g., Fitzmeyer, Murray). Prof. Sang-Hoon Kim entitles 6.1-11, “Dead to Sin”.

Nestle-Aland (27th edition revised) inserts a paragraph break in the Greek text only at 6.12. In contrast, editions edited by the United Bible Societies have an additional paragraph break at 15.

Most modern English versions have titles at 6.1, 6.15 and 7.1, with additional paragraph breaks at a variety of places. The most common breaks are at 6.5, 6.12 and 6.20, though a number of versions also have one at 6.8. Two versions add a break at 6.19. NIV is unusual in beginning a new paragraph at 6.11, instead of 6.12. NET, for its part, begins a new paragraph at 6.21, instead of 6.20.

The following table uses the symbol “¶” to indicate paragraph breaks in the version concerned, and the label ‘Title’ for the location of any section titles.

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8 The use of ἐν in 7.1 and of the conclusion marker τὸ στέφανον in 7.4 and 7.6 suggests that the unit that began at 6.15 indeed extends to 7.6.
12 Murray, John, The Epistle to the Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 226.
15 See, for example, Aland, Kurt, Matthew Black, Bruce M Metzer, and Allen Wikgren, The Greek New Testament (London: United Bible Societies, 1966), 544, which inserts the title “Slaves of Righteousness”.
Later in the paper, I evaluate some of the above paragraph breaks in the light of the cohesive features present in the text of Romans 6, especially the constraints on interpretation imposed by the connectives that have been used.

2. Inter-Sentential Connectives and Constraints on Interpretation

The following is my translation, with modifications, of Reboul and Moeschler’s definition of a connective:\textsuperscript{17}

A connective is a linguistic marker, drawn from a number of grammatical categories (co-ordinating conjunctions [e.g., ‘but’], subordinating conjunctions [e.g., ‘since’], adverbs [e.g., ‘thus’], adverbial expressions [e.g., ‘after all’]), which:

a) links a linguistic or discourse unit of any size to its context

b) gives instructions as to how to relate this unit to its context

c) constrains conclusions to be drawn on the basis of this discourse connection that might not have been drawn had it been absent.

Point a) of the above definition asserts that one cannot tell the size of the unit being linked from the connective itself. For example, \(\gamma\alpha\rho\) indicates that what follows strengthens the material that immediately precedes it (see further below). However, one cannot tell from the presence of \(\gamma\alpha\rho\) how far the strengthening material will extend.

Thus, \(\gamma\alpha\rho\) in Rom 6.23a (below) indicates that what follows strengthens 22d, but does not indicate how far this strengthening material will extend. In fact, the strengthening material comprises two clauses (compare 23b with 22d), but this is not indicated by \(\gamma\alpha\rho\).

\[
\begin{align*}
22d & \quad \text{τὸ δὲ τέλος ζωῆν αἰώνιον.} \\
23a & \quad \text{τὰ \(\gamma\alpha\rho\) ὀψώνια τῆς ἀμαρτίας θάνατος,} \\
23b & \quad \text{τὸ δὲ χαρίσμα τοῦ θεοῦ ζωῆν αἰώνιος ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν.}
\end{align*}
\]

\textsuperscript{17} Pragmatique, 77. See also Levinsohn, Stephen H., Self-Instruction Materials on Narrative Discourse Analysis (online at www.sil.org/~levinsonhs, 2010), §6.2. Reboul and Moeschler’s definition includes the adjective “pragmatic”, but I have omitted it as I am not trying here to distinguish ‘pragmatic’ connectives from other sorts of connectives.
Point b) of Reboul and Moeschler’s definition asserts that the presence of a connective guides or constrains the reader as to how to relate what follows to the context. Each connective places a different constraint on the way the material it introduces is to be related to the context.

Thus, in Rom 6.23, γάρ constrains what follows (the whole of the verse) to be interpreted as strengthening the immediately preceding material (22d). As such, it may be thought of as + strengthening.

In 6.23b, δέ constrains what follows to be interpreted as a distinct point that advances Paul’s argument. As such, it is + distinctive. In this instance, the advancement is from ‘The wages of sin is death’, which is a statement that serves as a “counterpoint” for the main assertion, to the main assertion itself (‘the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord’), which relates back to the reference to eternal life in 22d.

In 6.1 (Τί οὖν ἐρωῦμεν;), οὖν constrains what follows to be interpreted as a distinct point that advances Paul’s argument in an inferential way. It is + distinctive, + inferential. In 6.1, it introduces a distinct point that arises from the final verses of chapter 5. “This question is raised in response to Paul’s assertion in 5.20b that ‘where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more’.”

In 6.3 (ὁ ἀγνοεῖτε ὅτι, ὅσοι ἐβαπτίσθησιν εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, εἰς τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθησιν;), ὅ constrains what follows to be interpreted as + alternative. “Or points to the alternative to what he has just been saying. If his readers do not understand what it means to die to sin, they do not understand what baptism means…”

In 6.11 (οὐτὸς καὶ ὑμεῖς λογίζεσθε ἐαυτοὺς [ἐν πονηρῷ] νεκροὶ μὲν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ ζῶντας δὲ τῷ θεῷ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦν), οὐτὸς constrains what follows to be interpreted as + comparative. It is followed by “adverbial” καί, which constrains the reader to look for a parallel between what follows and the context (it is + additive). This parallel is to be found in the first instance in 10 (ὅ γὰρ ἀπέθανεν, τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ ἀπέθανεν ἐφάπαξ δὲ ζῇ, ζῇ τῷ θεῷ), which is why many commentators and versions put 11 in the same overall point.

Further evidence for not recognising a paragraph break between 6.10 and 11 is the presence of οὖν in 12 (introducing a distinct point of Paul’s argument) and the inclusio formed by 2 and 11 (see below). I conclude that the NIV’s decision to begin a new paragraph at 6.11 is not consistent

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19 A counterpoint is a “contrasting … idea, used to set off the main element” (OED). See also Levinsohn, Stephen H., *Self-Instruction Materials on Non-Narrative Discourse Analysis* (online at www.sil.org/~levinsohns), §3.3.

20 Levinsohn, *Discourse Features*, §7.4.

21 Moo, *Romans*, 355.

22 Morris, *Romans*, 246.

23 BDAG, 432.

24 Most commentators and versions do not insert a paragraph break at 6.3 because the following material supplements the sentence that immediately precedes it (6.2). In contrast, a number of commentators (e.g., Moo, *Romans*, 410) consider that the material introduced by ἃ in 7.1 supplements 6.14, so it is treated as a separate unit.

25 οὐτὸς is also used in 6.19, within a sentence connected to the context by γάρ.


28 “You, in addition to Christ” (Morris, *Romans*, 256).
with the constraints on interpretation conveyed by the connectives and other cohesive features of the text.

In 6.13a (μηδὲ παριστάνετε τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν ὀπλα ἀδικίας τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ), μηδὲ also constrains the reader to look for a parallel between what follows and the context. It is + negative, + additive.29

Finally, in 6.13b (ἀλλὰ παραστήσατε ἑαυτοὺς τῷ θεῷ ὡσεὶ ἑκ νεκρὸν ζῶντας καὶ τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν ὀπλα δικαιοσύνης τῷ θεῷ), ἀλλὰ is + adversative, and is the default associative connective when a positive proposition follows negative material.30

3. Inclusios, Back-Reference and Parallelisms

This section addresses the difference between inclusios and back-reference,31 as this distinction impacts our interpretation of the significance of parallel statements.

Guthrie defines inclusio structures as “The bracketing of a pericope by making a statement at the beginning of the section, an approximation of which is repeated at the conclusion of the section”.32 Rom 6.11 may well form an inclusio with 6.2, as it repeats the concept of being dead to sin.33

In contrast, Rom 7.7 does not form an inclusio with 6.1, in spite of the repetition of Τί οὖν ἔροιμεν; This is because both rhetorical questions are judged to begin a section.34

Back-reference “involves reference to the preceding paragraph or paragraphs or to a point or points within preceding paragraphs. Back-reference often occurs at the beginning of a new paragraph.”35 Rom 6.15 (below) provides an instance of back-reference. The combination of the rhetorical question and οὖν may be cited as supporting evidence for the generally recognised boundary between 14 and 15, while the final clause of 15a repeats the information in 14b.

14b ὥς γάρ ἔστε ὑπὸ νόμον ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ χάριν.

15a Τί οὖν ἁμαρτήσωμεν, ὅτι οὐκ ἐσμέν ὑπὸ νόμον ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ χάριν;

It follows from the above examples that the repetition of information in contiguous sentences does not necessarily imply that they belong to the same thematic unit. In the case of 6.10-11, the presence of οὐτως καὶ constrains the reader to compare the two verses and find a parallel between them. In the case of 6.14-15, the presence of οὖν constrains the reader to interpret 15 as a distinct point, which is confirmed by the use of the rhetorical question. Kim’s association of 15 with 11-14 on the basis of the parallelism between 14b and 15 must therefore be rejected.36

29 Levinsohn, Discourse Features, addition to §6.3.
30 Levinsohn, Narrative, §6.4.2.
34 “[R]hetorical questions that occur at generally recognized boundaries are usually accompanied by a developmental conjunction (δὲ or οὖν)” (Levinsohn, Discourse Features, §17.2.6).
36 Kim, Triple Chiastic Structures, 3.
A similar argument applies to Kim’s association of 6.7 and 8 (below). Though both sentences contain a form of ἀποθνῄσκω, δέ constrains 8 to be interpreted as a distinct point, while the pre-nuclear conditional clause is a “point of departure involving renewal”, which, in combination with δέ, is often indicative of a new unit. The conditional clause of 8a is therefore interpreted as back-reference to the final assertion of the previous unit, at the beginning of a new unit.

7 ὁ γὰρ ἀποθανὼν δεδικαίωται ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας.
8 εἰ δὲ ἀπεθάνομεν σὺν Χριστῷ, πιστεύομεν οίκαι καὶ συζητοῦμεν αὐτῶ,

4. Flow-charts for Romans 6

This section seeks to represent the structure of the argument of Rom 6 by means of flow-charts. Arrows down the page represent places at which the argument advances to a distinct point. Backward-facing arrows represent places at which the argument is being strengthened by material introduced with γάρ. Material within a box forms part of the same point.

Level 1: The overall argumentation of Romans 6.1-7.6

The following flow-chart assumes that the parallel structures in 6.1 and 7.7 mark the beginning of high-level units and there is a thematic unity to 6.1-7.6. It further builds on the claims that ἦ in 7.1 relates back to 6.14, οὖν in 6.1 introduces a distinct point within Paul’s overall argument, and οὖν in 6.15 introduces a distinct point within 6.1-7.6 (sec. 3).

Level 2: The argumentation of Romans 6.1-14

The following flow-chart assumes that 6.1-11 form a thematic unit, and that οὖν in 12 introduces a distinct point within 1-14 (“Moving from thought to action”). Γάρ in 14 introduces material that strengthens the commands of 12-13.

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37 Kim, Triple Chiastic Structures, 2.
38 Levinsohn, Discourse Features, §2.3.
39 Moo, Romans, 381.
Level 3: The internal argumentation of Romans 6.1-11

The next flow-chart assumes that οὖν in 6.4 introduces a distinct point that follows inferentially from 3. Γάρ in 5 and 7 introduces material that strengthens what has just been stated. Δέ in 8 then introduces the next distinct point, while γάρ in 10 introduces material that strengthens that point. Οὖν καὶ constrains the reader to make a comparison with and draw a parallel between the exhortation of 11 and 10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6.1-2 ἃ 3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5-6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>οὖν</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-9</td>
<td>&lt;-γάρ-&lt; 11 -&gt;-οὖν καὶ-&gt; 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>δέ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The internal argumentation of Romans 6.15-23

Of particular note in the first flow-chart below is the function of οὖν in 6.21. RSV translates it ‘But’ and some commentators consider that it “is used here in a fairly rare adversative sense”. However, such a sense is not consistent with the inferential constraint that its presence imposes. Rather, it constrains 21 “to be processed as an inference that is to be drawn from” 20 and introduces a distinct point that continues to the end of 23. This is captured by treating 21-23 as a unit, and then presenting the internal argumentation of these verses in a separate flow-chart.

As for the other conjunctions that feature in the two charts, δέ introduces distinct points of the main argument at 6.17, 18 and 22, whereas it functions within a sentence at 17b, 22b, 22c and 23b. Γάρ in 19b, 20, 21b and 23 introduces material that strengthens what has just been stated.

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42 Charles Hodge (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1886], 209) considers that 6.19b refers to 18.
The internal argumentation of Rom 6.21-23 is as follows:

6.21a <--γάρ--> 21b

6.15  16
δέ  ↓
17a  δέ  17b
δέ  ↓
18  19a 43  19b  <--γάρ--> 20
γάρ --
ο/uni1F56ν  ↓
21-23

43 This paper does not address the issue of whether 6.19a relates to what has gone before (Sanday, William, and Arthur C. Headlam, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, The International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1895], 168-69), to what follows (Newman, Barbara M., and Eugene A. Nida, A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans [New York: Bible Societies, 1973], 123), or to both ("The sentence is a parenthetical explanation of why Paul is using slavery imagery to depict the Christian and so is related both to v. 18 ['you were enslaved'] and v. 19b ['slaves']"—Moo, Romans, 403).
5. Chiasm and Prominence in Romans 6.1-11

Although the observations of previous sections would require Kim to modify his analysis of Rom 6.12-15 and 6.16-23 as chiastic structures, his treatment of vv. 1-11 (below, including underlining) may still be plausible.44

A (1-2) Τί οὖν έρημενεν; ἐπιμένωμεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ, ἵνα ἢ χάρις πλεονάση; μή γένοντο, οὕτως ἐπέθενομεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ, πῶς ἔτι ξέμουεν ἐν αὐτῇ;

B (3-4) ἢ ἀνέρρηετο ὅτι, ὅσοι ἐβαπτίσθησαν εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, εἰς τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθησαν; οὐκ ἔπεσαν γόνον αὐτοῦ διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος εἰς τὸν θάνατον, ἵνα ὄσπερ ήψανθη Χριστὸς ἐκ νεκρῶν διὰ τῆς δόξης τοῦ πατρὸς, οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐν καυνότητι ζωῆς περιπατήσωμεν.

C (5) εἰ γάρ αὑμιστὸν γεγόναμεν τῷ ομολόγῳ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως ἐσόμεθα;

X (6) τούτῳ γενόμενοι τέσσαρες ἡμῶν ἀνθρώπων συνεταγμένη, ἵνα καταφέρῃ τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας, τοῦ ὑπεκάτου δουλεύειν ἡμᾶς τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ;

C’ (7-8) ὁ γὰρ ἀποθανόνων δευκαίοτα ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας, εἰ δὲ ἐπέθενομεν σὺν Χριστῷ, πιστεύομέντο καὶ συνέθεσεν αὐτῷ.

B’ (9-10) εἰδότες ὅτι Χριστὸς ἐγέρθη εἰς νεκρῶν οὐκέτι ἀποθανόμεθα, θάνατος αὐτοῦ οὐκέτι κυριεύει, ὁ γὰρ ἐπέθεντον, τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ ἐπέθεντον ἐφάπαξ· ὁ δὲ ζῆτο τοῦ θεοῦ,

A’ (11) οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς λογίζεσθε ἐαυτοὺς γεγονός μὲν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ ζῶντες δὲ τῷ θεῷ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

The question then arises as to which part of the chiastic structure is prominent. Clarke writes, “Most of the people that have studied the chiastic approach agree that the portion in the center usually contains the most important part of the chiasm”.45 However, one would not expect this to be the case when the center is introduced with γάρ, as such material is backgrounded in relation to the THESIS which it strengthens (Westfall labels γάρ “de-emphatic”).46 Instead, one would expect the edges to be prominent.

So, in Rom 6.1-11, γάρ introduces not only 10, but also 5-6 and 7, which are at the centre of the chiasm. As for the edges, rhetorical questions that are answered immediately by the author “are a slowing down device that highlights the answer”.47 So the question of 1 highlights the answer of 2. Furthermore, 11 contains a second person imperative (the first in the whole letter), which makes it more prominent than the indicative THESSES of the passage (4, 8-9).

Nevertheless, 6.6 begins with τοῦτο, which when used cataphorically, points forward to and highlights its referent; namely, the rest of the verse. This means that, although 6 is part of a sentence that strengthens the THESIS of 4 and so is backgrounded in relation to 4, its contents are highlighted background information.48

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44 Since many of the words that are underlined occur several times in the passage, it is difficult to decide whether Paul intended 6.1-11 to be perceived as a chiastic structure or not.


47 Levinsohn, Non-Narrative, §7.7.4.

48 It is not unusual for a post-nuclear participial clause to convey the most important information of the sentence (see Levinsohn, Discourse Features §11.1.2).
Conclusion
This paper has argued for a holistic approach to the argument structure of a passage such as Romans 6, which takes into account not only perceived changes of theme, but also a variety of cohesive features, including connectives, rhetorical questions and subordination. It has argued for the need to distinguish back-reference from *inclusios*, and for purported chiastic structures to be treated, not as a prime, but as one of the pieces in the jigsaw, which reveals the overall ‘picture’ only when all the pieces fit together naturally.