

G. Reading restrictive for nonrestrictive (or positive)

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Restrictive means limited to some portion less than all: “*They are good people*” (their relatives are not good). Nonrestrictive means all the group—at least generally—is characterized that way: “*They are good people* (I am not talking about anybody else here, and, yes, I am aware of the rotter that abandoned his family years ago).” Both statements indicate what the speaker means, not what is true or what else he knows about other people or about any exceptions to his point.

(a) Restrictive statements in English are signaled by stressing the word that contrasts with an alternative. Reading scripture calls for putting stress when and where contrasts are meant and not emphasizing words where no contrast is evident. (b) Restrictive statements in written English sometimes have special punctuation to signal that fact. Nonrestrictive adjectives and prepositional phrases are not set off in commas, but nonrestrictive clauses have commas around them. The point is illustrated by the difference a comma makes in the following statement: “*Young people should pay attention to adults (,) who know what young people are up against.*” With the comma the implication is that adults—at least in general—know what young people are up against; so young people should listen to them. Without the comma a young person is instructed to pay attention to those adults that do know what young people are up against—with the implication that some do not, so they may be disregarded at this point.

The restrictive-nonrestrictive variable relates to the legal mindset applied to hermeneutics. This impulse in exegesis shows up as a tendency to read statements restrictively rather than positively, representatively, or as generalities; hence, there is a mentality of taking affirmations as necessities, silence as prohibition, and example as precedent. A statement does not necessarily exhaust all possibilities by naming the possibilities it does name.

People read statements more restrictively than they hear them—probably because the spoken language can make clearer whether a contrast is intended. Spoken language is also delivered more quickly; so other comments can add clarification. Furthermore, people have been poring over the biblical text for hundreds of years. Under those conditions they look for more than they would in passing comments in casual conversation. Reading statements as contrastive is one way of looking for more precise information in them.

**Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 do not necessarily give the only exception to the impropriety of divorce and remarriage just because they mention adultery as an exception to the prohibition on divorce.

**Matthew 6:2, 5, 16: “*They have their reward*” or “*They have their reward*.” The first could fit with a conditional immortality concept—the only good that bad people get is in this life. The second reading suggests that one of these days they are going to get what is coming to them.

**Mark 16:16 says that those who believe and are baptized will be saved; but in the opposite situation it says only that those who disbelieve will be condemned. What about unbaptized believers, paedobaptists, or affusionists in the eyes of adult immersionists? Such situations are foreign to the text.

**In John 9:24 the Pharisees tell the parents of the man born blind to give glory to God because they know Jesus was a sinner. Quite obviously, they meant God in contrast to

giving glory to Jesus for healing the man's blindness. Otherwise, they would be telling the man to be glad Jesus was a sinner!

**In John 10:16a interpreters have contrasted fold and flock and applied it as a defense of denominations. In doing so, they omit the rest of what Jesus says, "*I must bring them, too, so they can become one flock.*" Jesus is evidently referring to Jews and Gentiles rather than a situation not yet come.

**"Simon saw that by the laying on of the *apostles'* [Peter and John's] hands the Holy Spirit was being given" (Acts 8:18). Does *apostles* contrast with *Philip*, or does the statement intend no stress on *apostles*? The last verb of the statement could be either progressive past ("was being given"), as translated here, or as characteristic past ("was given"). The verse does not necessarily indicate that only an apostle could "dispense" supernatural gifts regardless of what is true about that point. "Minimum affirmation" calls for choosing the less precise meaning (see elsewhere in these notes).

**Romans 1:27: "*The natural use of the woman*" means in contrast to men with men, not between natural and unnatural (use of the woman). It is an example of a nonrestrictive adjective, one that does not contrast. The meaning is that they have departed the use of the woman, which is natural order, and had homosexual relations, which is unnatural. The oral reading of the text should emphasize *woman*, not *natural*.

**Romans 2:4: "*The goodness of God leads you to repentance,*" read with the implication that God does not bring calamities on people to foster repentance. A person should note, however, the reason for evil in Genesis 3 and Paul's comment in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 as well as Proverbs 3:5ff. as used in Hebrews 12. The Romans passage means that we should read the delay of judgment (cp. 2 Peter 3) as God's giving people a chance to change, which illustrates goodness on his part. That is a different thing from saying that the calamities he brings would not be examples of goodness.

**When Romans 12:6-8 says, "... prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of our faith . . ." does it mean that people should concentrate on what they are doing and not try to do everything else, too? On the contrary, if it is a positive statement, Paul means to encourage people to use their gift as devotedly as their faith leads them to do.

**That speaking in languages is for a sign to unbelievers (1 Corinthians 14:22) does not necessarily mean that is all they can be for; they might have edification value (14:26) as well as evidential force that confirms faith already present. Tongues may be primarily, particularly, distinctively for evidential purposes without eliminating other uses as well. So, 14:22 does not show that speakers should use speaking in languages exclusively in evangelism rather than also in teaching and worship.

**Ephesians 1:10; Philippians 2:10-11; and Colossians 1:19-21 intend to stress the word *Christ* rather than *all*, because the point in each passage is to show that in Christ—instead of in someone else—lies the salvation of all who are saved. Otherwise, the passage becomes a text for universalism. (See *What the Bible Says About Salvation*, pp. 119-22.)

**Some of non-instrument issues stem from reading passages restrictively that others read non-restrictively. Speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs need not give an exhaustive, hence, restrictive list (Ephesians 5:20-21).

**In Colossians 3:18 Paul tells wives to defer to their "husbands, as is fitting in the Lord." Putting a comma after *husband* means that submitting is the fitting thing to do. Leaving the comma tells wives to defer in matters that are fitting to submit to in the Lord.

The contrast is with not respecting husbands in this way. On other grounds, Christians know not to submit to anyone in doing what is wrong to do.

**The Second Great Commandment (Leviticus 19:18) did not mean *neighbor* in a restrictive fashion. (a) Luke 10:25-37 (Parable of the Good Samaritan) reflects the attempt to take *neighbor* in contrast to *non-Jew*. (b) Matthew 5:43-48 eliminates taking *neighbor* in contrast to *personal enemy*. The stress, however, should fall on *love* rather than on *neighbor*, so the contrast lies with *hate* (Leviticus 19:17). The other person, whoever it is, is labeled “neighbor” to reinforce a proper attitude toward other people. *Neighbor* is used positively, not contrastively. It would not take a commandment to get people to love those who love them; that happens automatically. “*Love your friends*” is almost redundant. 2 Samuel 12:11 shows that *neighbor* does not have to mean friend: God says, “*I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he will lie with them in the sight of this sun.*”

**Reading the various quotations of Psalm 110:4 in the Book of Hebrews needs to place stress on *forever* in 7:17, *swear* in 7:21, and *are* in 5:6.

**1 Timothy 2:8 + 9 might be taken to contrast only men praying, with women adorning themselves in modest apparel.

**The ERA movement calls for taking all third-person masculine pronouns in English as male (vs. female). *His* contrasts with *her* even when no contrast is meant. The same applies to the morpheme *-man* so that *chairman* changes to *chairperson* (what of *penmanship* to *penpersonship*?). Historically, *man* means “mankind” when set in opposition to God, animal, or thing; it means male human in distinction from woman. The use of the *man-* element in compounds has likewise carried a non-differentiating value. As in Greek, Hebrew, Latin, *he* “took preference” in mixed or ambiguous situations. Since English does not have a gender-neutral third singular pronoun, the restrictive use of *he* creates awkward substitutes like “him or her,” alternating *his* and *hers* in the same paragraph, using *they* as singular reference, or changing the person from third to second or first. “Inclusive language” spills over into God-references as well, a matter that gets into theological considerations.

**“*The disciple that Jesus loved*” is not restrictive in contrast to disciples Jesus did not love or loved less. The expression may reach back into the time of Jesus’ ministry in contrast to current leaders who had not been with Jesus. Jesus’ love may also be what impressed him most, since he was earlier a “son of thunder” (Mark 3:17). The writer’s practice may be a literary device for keeping his name out of the narrative for humility’s sake.