

The Greek Phrase πολλῶ μᾶλλον (How Much More):  
How it Functions Logically in a Persuasive Chain of Reasoning,  
and How Paul Uses it in Rom. 5:6-10  
A Draft by J. Webb Mealy 2/7/2017

Let's study this inductively. That is, let's see how the figure of speech works in actual examples, then make some generalizations.

Prov. 15:11 Sheol and Abaddon are open before the LORD: **how much more, then**, the hearts of human beings! (ESV) ἄδης καὶ ἀπώλεια φανερά παρὰ τῷ κυρίῳ  
**πῶς οὐχὶ καὶ αἱ καρδίαι τῶν ἀνθρώπων** (LXX)

The author of the proverb is making a *comparison*, in which the first item of the comparison is agreed to be true, and, since the first item is true, the idea is that *by comparison to the first item*, the second item is all the more obviously true. One common form of this argument goes like this (by argument I mean an instance of persuasive reasoning): If A is true, then *all the more* B is true, or, If A is true, then how much more must B be true! So the proverb is saying, the entire dark underworld, to its very depths, is open to God's view, *how much more* are human hearts be open to God's view! In Western argumentation, a closely related form of reasoning is called *a fortiori*, which is defined by Merriam Webster's online dictionary as "with greater reason or more convincing force—used in drawing a conclusion that is inferred to be even more certain than another."

Prov. 19:7 All the relatives of a poor man hate him—**how much more** do his friends run away from him! (ESV)

This proverb is saying that it only stands to reason that friends disappear when a person gets down on their luck—after all, even relatives, who probably have at least some sense of family obligation, treat a poor person as though they have a highly contagious disease. Once again this is reasoning by comparison. If this first thing is the case, it stands to reason that the second thing will be all the more the case.

Prov. 21:27 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; **how much more** when he brings it with evil intent! (ESV)

If any sacrifice is unacceptable to God if it is brought by a person living a wicked life in general, even when no specific evil motive stands behind the sacrifice, it stands to reason that it will be *all the more* unacceptable if the person brings it with some sort of specific bad intention.

Mt. 6:29-30 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not **much**

**more** clothe you, O you of little faith? εἰ δὲ τὸν χόρτον τοῦ ἀγροῦ σήμερον ὄντα καὶ αὔριον εἰς κλίβανον βαλλόμενον ὁ θεὸς οὕτως ἀμφιέννυσιν οὐ **πολλῶ μᾶλλον** ὑμᾶς ὀλιγόπιστοι (GNT)

Jesus is using the *how much more* argument to persuade people that they should put faith in God. If, he argues, God gives beautiful clothing to the humble wildflowers, which spring up and die down within a matter of days, *how much more* will God be happy to make sure human beings, created in the image of God, have the clothing they need. Abstractly, the reasoning goes like this: If this first thing is the case, and indeed it is, then comparing this first thing to this other thing ought to make it obvious that this other thing is *all the more* the case.

Rom. 5:15 But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. (ESV) ἀλλ' οὐχ ὡς τὸ παράπτωμα οὕτως καὶ τὸ χάρισμα εἰ γὰρ τῷ τοῦ ἑνὸς παραπτώματι οἱ πολλοὶ ἀπέθανον **πολλῶ μᾶλλον** ἢ χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἡ δωρεὰ ἐν χάριτι τῇ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς τοὺς πολλοὺς ἐπερίσσευσεν (GNT)

Paul's implicit premises here are (1) that God, the giver of life, is stronger than death, (2) that God's grace is stronger than human sin and failing, and (3) that Jesus Christ is stronger than Adam. Thus, he argues, if Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden had such negative power as to cause mortality to befall all of humanity, *how much more* power does the gift of God given to humanity through Jesus Christ have to bring life to humanity. Once again, in loose form, the argument is *if A is true, then, if you compare A with B, how much more must B be true*. **The persuasive force of the argument depends on making a comparison between A and B so that B seems all the more sure to be true when looked at in light of A.**

Now let's look at some extra-biblical examples:<sup>1</sup>

Josephus, *The Jewish War*, book 3 section 361

If, therefore, I avoid death from the sword of the Romans, I am truly worthy to be killed by my own sword, and my own hand; but if they admit of mercy, and would spare their enemy, **how much more** ought we to have mercy upon ourselves, and to spare ourselves?

Josephus is saying, if suicide is the recommended course if one flees battle out of cowardice, how much more is suicide *not* the recommended course if one has fought valiantly and has lost, and the enemy (the Romans) has had the mercy to let you live! That may be a somewhat confusing argument for a non-soldier, but the form of the argument stands. Two things are compared, and confidence in the truth of the

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<sup>1</sup> You can consult the Perseus Online Database of Ancient Greek Texts ([http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/searchresults?phrase=how%20much%20more&target=en&all\\_words=&page=1&exclude\\_words=&collections=Perseus:collection:Greco-Roman&search=Search&any\\_words](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/searchresults?phrase=how%20much%20more&target=en&all_words=&page=1&exclude_words=&collections=Perseus:collection:Greco-Roman&search=Search&any_words)) if you wish to check the primary sources for yourself. This database is the source for the extrabiblical materials I have included.

first (at least in the common worldview of the author and intended readers) is argued to lead to even greater confidence in the truth of the second. It's to be noted that there is no guarantee, simply because this form is used, that it will be perceived as valid or persuasive. It's one way among others of trying to make a persuasive argument, and it can be done well or ineptly.

Appian, *Punic Wars* 7.42. If fear, anxiety, and doubt oppress those who have hitherto been victorious, **how much more**, he said, must these feelings weigh upon the vanquished. εἰ δ' ἔστι καὶ τοῖς νικήσασιν ἐπὶ τῷ μέλλοντι φόβος ἢ δέος ἢ ἀμφιβολία, **πόσω ταῦτα** τοῖς νενικημένοις **πλεονάζειν** ἀνάγκη.

The thought is: If the stress and anxiety of war weighs heavily on the winners of a war, *how much more so* must stress and anxiety oppress the losers? The Italian general Scipio is trying to bolster the courage and nerve of his soldiers, who are outnumbered by the invading army of Hannibal. He tells them, a little bit ironically, you may be stressed now, despite the fact that you have been victorious in the past. But just think of the stress you'll experience if you lose this war of invasion. Surely the second kind of stress is worse than the first. So get out there and fight your hardest!

### Bringing Our Results to the Contested Text, Rom. 5:9-10

The key thing we've learned is that the *how much more* figure of speech has the aim of persuading the audience of the truth of proposition B by comparing it proposition A, which is assumed or agreed to be true, and applying the reasoning, *Proposition A is true, and therefore all the more so proposition B must be true*. This reasoning can be framed as a rhetorical question: *If proposition A is true, how much more true must proposition B be?*

I'm going to offer a basic exegesis of the section Rom. 5:6-10, which contains our contested text (5:9-10), commenting on the text piece by piece. Here first, however, is the whole section:

Rom. 5:6-10

<sup>6</sup>You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup>But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup>Since we have now been justified by his blood, **how much more** shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! <sup>10</sup>For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, **how much more**, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! (NIV)

<sup>6</sup>ἔτι γὰρ Χριστὸς ὄντων ἡμῶν ἀσθενῶν ἔτι κατὰ καιρὸν ὑπὲρ ἀσεβῶν ἀπέθανεν. <sup>7</sup>μόλις γὰρ ὑπὲρ δικαίου τις ἀποθανεῖται ὑπὲρ γὰρ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ τάχα τις καὶ τολμᾷ ἀποθανεῖν. <sup>8</sup>συνίστησιν δὲ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἀγάπην εἰς ἡμᾶς ὁ θεὸς ὅτι ἔτι ἁμαρτωλῶν ὄντων ἡμῶν Χριστὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἀπέθανεν. <sup>9</sup>**πολλῷ οὖν μᾶλλον** δικαιοθέντες νῦν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ σωθησόμεθα δι' αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῆς ὀργῆς. <sup>10</sup>εἰ γὰρ ἐχθροὶ ὄντες

κατηλλάγημεν τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ **πολλῷ μᾶλλον**  
καταλλαγέντες σωθησόμεθα ἐν τῇ ζωῇ αὐτοῦ (GNT)

## Commentary

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

<sup>6</sup>ἔτι γὰρ **Χριστὸς** ὄντων ἡμῶν ἀσθενῶν ἔτι κατὰ καιρὸν ὑπὲρ ἀσεβῶν ἀπέθανεν.

Note first that Christ's agency is emphasized by his title, **Christ (Χριστὸς)**, being put up at the head of the sentence in Greek. A little more literally it would be, "**Christ**, while we were still weak, at the appointed moment [in history], died for the godless."

<sup>7</sup> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

<sup>7</sup>μόλις γὰρ ὑπὲρ δικαίου τις ἀποθανεῖται ὑπὲρ γὰρ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ τάχα τις καὶ τολμᾷ ἀποθανεῖν. <sup>8</sup>συνίστησιν δὲ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἀγάπην εἰς ἡμᾶς ὁ θεὸς ὅτι ἔτι ἀμαρτωλῶν ὄντων ἡμῶν Χριστὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἀπέθανεν.

The logic of this pair of sentences is very simple. Paul says that if you stretch your imagination, you might be able to imagine literally giving up your life to save the life of a worthy person. If that seems to be a daring and radical act of love, consider **how much greater** the love of God for us must be, since Christ died for us while we were totally unworthy, far from him, stuck in a state of sin! Without using the actual *how much more* form in so many words, Paul is employing its logic. He is implicitly saying: If it is an amazing display of selfless love to sacrifice your life to save the life of a worthy person, **how much more** amazing is God's and Christ's display of love towards us when Christ died for us when we did not deserve it! This thought leads into the next verse:

<sup>9</sup> **How much more, then**, having now been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from God's wrath! <sup>10</sup> After all, if we were reconciled to God when we were God's enemies through the death of his Son, **how much more**, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life! (my trans.)

<sup>9</sup>**πολλῷ οὖν μᾶλλον** δικαιωθέντες νῦν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ σωθησόμεθα δι' αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῆς ὀργῆς. <sup>10</sup>εἰ γὰρ ἐχθροὶ ὄντες κατηλλάγημεν τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ **πολλῷ μᾶλλον** καταλλαγέντες σωθησόμεθα ἐν τῇ ζωῇ αὐτοῦ.

Here we see two *explicit* **how much more** figures of speech which are linked to the previous sentences and are also linked to one another. Before we deal with how these **how much more** figures convey Paul's meaning, let's step back and talk for a second about the word "justified."

Paul refers to Christ's death for us using the metonymy of his blood, in the phrase "justified by his blood." How does Paul say God and Jesus achieved our "justification," which is to say, our right standing with God, through Jesus' death on our behalf? Paul doesn't say how this transaction was achieved in the immediate passage we are discussing, but when he writes Rom. 5:6-10 he is assuming the foundation he laid earlier in Romans 3:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Rom. 3:21-26)

Paul says here that God provided for our forgiveness, our acquitted status, and our reception into a status of right relationship with God through (1) *redemption*, which is to say, the paying of a price to free someone from a debt they cannot themselves pay, and (2) *propitiation*, which is to say, the provision of a gift that makes amends for a wrongdoing. As beings created in the image and likeness of God, we humans owe it to God to glorify him by being like him and by becoming the beings God made us to be. But we fall short, we sin, and thus we fail to glorify God (3:23). Jesus, by dying for us within the plan of his Father, pays our debts of obedience to God, and so presents to the Father, on our behalf, the amends that we could never make. This is his *propitiation* on our behalf. The Father accepts his obedience on our behalf, and we are gifted with the status of right standing with God. In addition, his death puts paid to any punishment we might deserve, up to and including the death penalty itself. In paying what we owed both positively (by standing for us in obedience) and negatively (by standing in for our punishment), Jesus provides a total amnesty from God that can only be received by faith, not by any achievement on our part at all.

Paul refers to Christ's death once more very briefly before our contested passage:

[Jesus] was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. (Rom. 4:25)

The only thing that this little piece adds is that Jesus was "delivered up" to be falsely persecuted, tried, and convicted by sinful men, as Isaiah prophesied in Isa. 53:7-8:

<sup>7</sup>He was oppressed and afflicted,  
yet he did not open his mouth;  
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,  
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,

so he did not open his mouth.

<sup>8</sup>By oppression and judgment he was taken away.

Now that we have seen the foundation that Paul has laid for the phrase “justified by his blood,” let’s return to look at our key passage (Rom. 5:9-10):

<sup>9</sup>**How much more, then**, having now been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from God’s wrath! <sup>10</sup> After all, if we were reconciled to God when we were God’s enemies through the death of his Son, **how much more**, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life!

The first phrase, “How much more, then,” connects—both by the *how much more* form and also by the word “then” or “therefore,” Gr. οὖν—back with the previous statement in v. 8: “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us!” Remembering the way in which the *how much more* form works, let’s break it down.

Paul says, consider that God proved his amazing love for us when his Son Jesus died for us in our *unworthy state* of sin and alienation. Consider also that he has brought us into a state of *right relationship* with him through Christ’s death on the cross. If we have been saved from *our past sin and alienation* by the love of God through Christ’s death, **how much more** will we, as those who are justified, be saved from *God’s future wrath* in the coming day of judgment! After all (Gr. γάρ), if *Christ’s death* has achieved not only our forgiveness but also our *reconciliation to God*, **how much more** will we, the reconciled ones, be saved from the destruction that will come upon the godless, and be granted everlasting life through *Christ’s life* at the coming judgment!

So there are three comparisons operating here, with three conclusions:

1. A person would have to be very loving to dare to die for a worthy person. This being so, how much more loving than that is God, who, through Christ, died for us, when we were not worthy (vv. 6-8)!
2. Christ has proven his and his Father’s love for us by shedding his blood to bring us into right standing with his Father, who is the Judge of All (we have been “justified by his blood”). This being so, how much more is it the case that we will be saved through Christ from the wrath of God which will someday come upon the godless world (v. 9; cf. 2:1-11)!
3. Christ granted us legal right standing with God by dying for us, but beyond this *forensic* justification, his death has also drawn us from a state of being enemies towards God to being really and actually reconciled to God (cf. Zech. 12:10-13:1; Col. 1:21-23; 2 Cor. 5:17-21). This being so, how much more will we who are really and actually reconciled with God by Christ’s death be saved by being drawn into his resurrection life in the coming judgment (v. 10; see Paul’s thorough development of this in Rom. 8:1-24)!

## Checking Our Work

In exegeting the contested text, some commentators have proposed that the words πολλῶ (much) and μᾶλλον (more) in the phrase πολλῶ οὖν μᾶλλον function more or less as an emphazier, thus:

God demonstrates his own love for us in the fact that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. Therefore it is very much true that we who have now been justified by his blood will be saved through him from the wrath to come.

The second sentence here is being read as a causal statement: Because we have been justified by Christ's blood (cause), therefore we will be saved through him from the wrath to come (effect).

There are a number of indications that this is not what Paul is saying. First, none of our other examples of the πολλῶ μᾶλλον or *how much more* form have as their second element a causal or logical statement. Each of them has the form of a straight assertion. This suggests that we ought to read the whole second portion of Paul's πολλῶ μᾶλλον form as a straight assertion, thus:

God demonstrates his own love for us in the fact that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. How much more, then, will we, now justified by his blood, be saved through him from the wrath to come.

There are two contrasts between the two statements. The first looks to Christ's saving action in the past, and emphasizes our sinfulness at that time. The second looks to Christ's saving action in the future, and emphasizes our right standing in the present. In view of these two contrasts, one can paraphrase, giving full and proper weight to the πολλῶ μᾶλλον form,

God demonstrates his own love for us in the fact that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. How much more, then, will we who are now justified by his blood be saved through him from the wrath to come.

, so that we are to read the word οὖν (therefore, thus) the logical relationship between the sentences before and after it is a relationship of logical causation.

Robert Wiesner puts it this way: "Paul's...thought is, 'We know that Christ died for us when we were sinners (v. 8). This displayed God's unconditional love for us. How much more can we be assured that we will be spared God's wrath, because we have been justified by his life giving death.'"

This reading misses the contrast between the

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disappoint **us**. Because God's love is diffused in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to **us**; if indeed when we were sick **Christ died** in time **for** the sake of **us**, who were sinful. Indeed, one will scarcely die **for** a righteous man. Perhaps one does even dare to die **for** a good man. But God shows his love **for us**; because it was when we were still **sinners** that **Christ died for us**. All the more then, being justified now by his blood, shall we be saved from the anger to come. **For** if when we were enemies we were reconciled through the death of his son, all the more, now reconciled, shall we be saved by his life; not only that, but exulting in God through our Lord Jesus **Christ**, through whom we have now got this reconciliation.