

## General Rules for Greek Accents<sup>1</sup>

### I. Syllables in Greek

A. A Greek word has as many syllables as it has vowels and diphthongs:

ἀλήθεια = ἄ-λή-θει-α, thus four syllables

B. A syllable is said to be *long* if it contains a long vowel or diphthong, but *short* if it contains a short vowel or a diphthong at its very end.

1. ε and ο are always *short*.

2. η and ω are always *long*.

3. α, ι, υ are sometimes *long*, sometimes *short*.

4. Diphthongs are *long* (including the “improper” diphthongs α, η, ω) except for final (i.e., coming at the very end of the word) οι and αι, which are treated as *short* in most all words. (The exception is in the optative mood.)

C. In terms of accentuation, only the last three syllables of a Greek word are relevant.

1. The last syllable is called the *ultima*.

2. The syllable coming before the *ultima* is the *penult*.

3. The syllable coming before the *penult* is the *antepenult*.

### II. General Rules of Accent

A. A word may be accented only on one of its last three syllables.

B. A word may have only one accent (exception: if the word is followed by an enclitic).

C. Acute, Circumflex, Grave

1. The acute accent may stand on only one of the last three syllables of a word.

2. A circumflex accent may stand on only one of the last two syllables of a word.

3. The grave accent may stand only on the last syllable of a word.

D. Acute, Circumflex, Grave, and *long* or *short* syllables

1. The acute accent may stand on either a *long* or a *short* syllable

2. The circumflex accent may stand only on a *long* syllable.

3. The grave accent may stand on either a long or a short syllable.

E. The primary thing governing accents is the length of the *ultima* syllable.

1. If the *ultima* is *short*:

a. The antepenult, if accented, may have only the acute accent:

ἄνθρωπος ἀπόστολος λυόμεθα λυόμεθα πνεύματος

b. The penult, if accented, *must* have the circumflex if it is itself *long*, but the acute if it is itself *short*:

ζῆλος μῶμος πράγμα πνεῦμα δοῦλος νόμος θέμα

c. The *short* ultima may itself have an acute accent, provided that a mark of punctuation or

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from Eugene Van Ness Goetchius, *The Language of the New Testament* (Scribner, 1965), p. 319. For a full explanation of accents in Koine Greek, see the full Appendix 1, pp. 317–28.

an enclitic immediately follows; if a word other than an enclitic follows immediately, the acute is changed to a grave (note, however, that the interrogative τίς, τί always retains the acute):

υῖός; υῖὸς θεοῦ; υῖοί; υῖοὶ θεοῦ; τίς δύναται αὐτοῦ ἀκούειν;

2. If the ultima is *long*:

a. The antepenult cannot have an accent

b. the penult, if accented, may have only the acute:

δούλους νόμου προφήτης

c. The long ultima may itself have either the circumflex or the acute; if it has the acute, this is changed to a grave (as described above in E.1.c)

υῖούς υῖούς θεοῦ