

# Hermeneutics

## Week 5 – Word Studies

### I. The Need for Word Studies

#### 1. Separation in History, Culture, and Language.

A. “Because contemporary students of Scripture are worlds apart in geography, time, and language, there exists the possibility of the meaning being lost in translation. It is not just variations in translation theory and objectives that make modern translations differ; it is also the genuine differences among translators as to the most likely meaning of words in specific contexts.”<sup>1</sup>

i. “The translation of a host language (in this case Greek) into a receptor language (here English) is not without its difficulties. This is often encountered early on by students who find that a single Greek term takes an entire phrase in translation for the same idea to be intelligible to the modern reader.”<sup>2</sup>

B. Certain words can make or break an argument. Does it mean what you are claiming it means, or does it mean something else? Sometimes, entire arguments fail because a word is misunderstood.

#### 2. We have often only come to understand words through context clues or hearing them used, and are often less informed regarding a full use of a word’s possible meanings.

A. Thus, we may struggle in the context of language changing over time. Even just the English language.

i. For example, Billiards. Just kidding.

ii. I have a friend who is overwhelmingly smart but also misuses a lot of words because he has an obscured view of the word’s meaning. Occasionally, we have contentions regarding whether or not he is saying what he thinks he is saying.

### II. The Wrong Way to do Word Study

#### 1. English Only Fallacy

A. Almost no language has an exact equivalence of words.

B. Frankly, Greek or Hebrew words may use several different English words.

i. The Hebrew word *Hesed* has been translated in the King James as...

ii. mercy (149x), kindness (40x), lovingkindness (30x), goodness (12x), kindly (5x), merciful (4x), favour (3x), good (1x), goodness (1x), pity (1x), reproach (1x), wicked thing (1x).

C. And different Hebrew or Greek words can be translated into the same English word.

i. Kairos and Chronos - time

ii. Agape, Phileto, eros, storge - love

<sup>1</sup> Craig L. Blomberg and Jennifer Foutz Markley, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 117.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

**2. Root Fallacy**

**A.** One of the more common fallacies is the notion that the real meaning of a word is found in its original root (i.e., in the etymology of the word)<sup>3</sup>

**i.** The problem is that not all words can be clearly broken into their singular root word to get their meaning, for example, butterfly is not functionally broken down as coming from butter and fly.

**ii.** On the other end of that when a prefix or suffix is added to a word that is basically what occurs. For example, one could focus on the word unable, indiscriminate, or renew.

**iii.** It is true that a word's individual parts *may* accurately portray its meaning, but only if the context supports such a meaning. Give context priority over etymology, and you will be on solid ground<sup>4</sup>

- Etymology becomes more important when we are trying to understand the meaning of words that are used only once in Scripture (we refer to such words as *hapax legomena*). You will find this to be the case more in the Hebrew Old Testament than in the Greek New Testament.

**3. Time-Frame Fallacy**

**A.** The most well-known example given about this is the Dynamis example.

**B.** In Greek, Dynamis is often translated as power, but some people skip the usage of it contextually and reference a powerful modern-day similar word, namely dynamite.

**i.** Now, dynamite is an explosive device that can expend a lot of energy, giving power for destruction, but God's power is not well equated to dynamite.

**ii.** This is not an understanding that the ancient readers would or could have understood this to mean, thus it is not how they meant it.

**4. Overload Fallacy**

**A.** Most words can mean several different things. The overload fallacy is the idea that a word will include all of those meanings every time it is used.<sup>5</sup>

**5. Word-count Fallacy**

**A.** The word-count fallacy is a mistake we make when we insist that a word must have the same meaning every time it occurs<sup>6</sup>

**B.** Word meanings are determined by context, not word counts.<sup>7</sup>

**6. Word as Concept Fallacy**

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<sup>3</sup> J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, Fourth Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 167.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.,168.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.,169.

- A. We fall prey to the word-concept fallacy when we assume that once we have studied one word, we have studied an entire concept<sup>8</sup>
  - B. A concept is bigger than any one word<sup>9</sup>
    - i. For instance, the word Ekklesia, which is often translated as " church."
      - 1) Other words or phrases to look at to help give a fuller meaning to the concept would be household of faith, assembly, body of Christ, and temple of the Holy Spirit.
    - ii. For instance, sozo, which is often translated as " save, would not holistically cover the concept of salvation."
      - 1) That would include words like imputation, propitiation, atonement, redemption, substitution, justification, righteousness, faith, sin, and more.
7. Selective Evidence Fallacy
- A. When we cite just the evidence that supports our favored interpretation or when we dismiss evidence that seems to argue against our view, we commit the selective-evidence fallacy<sup>10</sup>
  - B. When we purposely leave out evidence that does not help our viewpoint, or when evidence is mishandled, it hurts credibility.

### III. The Right Way to do a Word Study

1. The process consists of three steps: (1) choosing your words, (2) determining what the word *could* mean, and (3) determining what the word *does* mean in context.<sup>11</sup>
2. How to Identify which words are worth studying
  - A. Look for *words that are important, theological, or crucial to the passage*<sup>12</sup>
    - † **Romans 3:24-25** – *Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:<sup>25</sup> Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;*
  - B. Look for *repeated words*.
    - † **2 Cor. 1:3-6** – *Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;<sup>4</sup> Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.<sup>5</sup> For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.<sup>6</sup> And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation,*

<sup>8</sup> Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 168.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 169.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.,170.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

*which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.*

- C. Look for *figures of speech*.<sup>13</sup>  
 † **Acts 9:5** – *And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*
- D. Look for *words that are unclear, puzzling, or difficult*<sup>14</sup>
- i. These would include things that are unfamiliar.
  - ii. Who among us in normal life often encounters words such as “phylacteries,” “minas,” or “millstone”?<sup>15</sup>
- E. Words that are translated differently in other translations.
- i. Using multiple English translations of a chosen passage will alert the interpreter to words that deserve in-depth analysis.
  - ii. Where the translations cannot decide on a single English word to render a given Greek word, students should consider additional analysis<sup>16</sup>
- F. Verbs or Verbal’s are also good to look at.
3. Determine the Semantic Range of a word
- A. For example, the word “contend” in Jude three means contend or fight.
- i. It is used only 1 time in the king James so there are not a wide variety of meanings to address through scripture.
  - ii. There also is not a Septuagint usage of this word. Thus, it cannot be gathered clearly in regard to biblical usage.
    - 1) The Etymology in this world is helpful because it is only used once in scripture.
    - 2) It is a mixing of Epi a preposition, with 8 possible meanings when used in connection with words (the best fitting is addition, accumulation, or increase.
    - 3) And agonizomai, meaning to struggle, strive, fight or contend, or labor
    - 4) Thus, the wording would seem to imply contending more earnestly.
  - iii. Historically, it has been used by different people before and after the writer of Jude (Found on the Step Bible)
    - 1) Liddell – Scott- and Jones Lexicon notes three particular different kinds of usages from the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.
    - 2) The first being physical meaning contend with (τινί) or continuing to attack as used in the 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> century Plutarchus Biographus et Philosuphus “Fabius Maximus” 23, Or the fourth century B.C Aeschines Orator “Epistulae” 2.2.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Blomberg and Markley, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis*, 124.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 125.

- 3) The second one being verbal contention, with *dative of things*, **contend in**, εὐνοία (Good will); **contend for**, τῇ πίστει (the Faith) [NT]: **lay stress on**, ἐ. τῷ λόγῳ (By The Word) used in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D for several people including Galenus Medicus, Plutarchus Biographicus et Philosophus, Aristides Rhetor, and Sextus empiricus Philosophus
  - 4) Finally to contend again, in Games 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> Century Philostratus Sophistia and 4<sup>th</sup> century by Libanius Sophista
  - 5) Thus, it is clear with the given options that the Word to contend is given, it does not seem to indicate the first meaning as the physical altercation, nor does it fit the third, but the second, in combination with the dative of things, we see the correct understanding is to contend verbally for the faith.
4. Determining what does a word mean in context
    - A. Look up the possible definitions
    - B. Go to each passage and see how they are used.
    - C. And look at the words and context regarding how this word is used.

### Bibliography

Blomberg, Craig L. and Jennifer Foutz Markley. *[A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis](#)*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010.

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