

Finer Grounds

How to Study the Bible Lesson 9: Word Study

This is probably one of the more daunting lessons. Please stick with me and don't get discouraged. Don't feel like you have to memorize everything, think of this chapter as a guide you can reference as needed. I did want to include it though, because I feel that this is one of the most neglected areas of Bible study and it is also one that is sometimes so vital to our understanding of the text. As I stated earlier in the book, the Bible was not originally written in English. We have sections in Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic. In order to do a word study you do not have to be fluent in these languages, you simply need to learn how to use the tools that are available to you. It is important to do word studies because sometimes the meaning of a word cannot fully be expressed in the English language. Also, the meaning of the word in English may have changed somewhat since your translation was published. Engaging in word studies will give you a much more full understanding of a text.

When it comes to word studies all words are not created equal. You could spend so much time going through every single word in the text that you don't have time to study anything else! Use common sense when deciding which word to study. For instance you don't need to look up every occurrence of "the" or "and." Pay attention to words that are affecting the text. Here are some examples of words to study.

- **Proper nouns**-Sometimes names of people or places will have meaning that plays a special part in the text; be sure to familiarize yourself with these.

- **Nouns**-Especially if a noun is the subject of the sentence we need to understand exactly what is being referred to.
- **Verbs**-Understanding the actions that are taking place in a verse are fundamental to comprehension sometimes. We will look more closely at verbs later in the chapter.
- **Keywords**-Anytime a keyword from the book is used in the verse you are analyzing you should be sure to know the full meaning.

Our example in this chapter is going to be Romans 1:16-17:

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith."

Remember we don't need to look up every single word; we want to choose carefully which words are vital to the understanding of the verses. Here is an example of the words I might choose to study:

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith."

You may choose to study more or fewer words in the verse depending on how much time you have to spend.

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You will also notice that I did not select any words in the quotation at the end to study. This is because this is a quotation from the Old Testament, which was penned in Hebrew. If you'd like to discover more information on these words you will need to discover where the quotation originated (a good cross reference or notes in your Bible can tell you this). Then you will need to do the word study in the Hebrew language.

Now that we have decided which words we will look into, it is time to define the words. There are many sources you can use to find the original language definition of these words. The easiest one in my opinion is www.blueletterbible.org. Because of this, I will be giving you step-by-step instructions from this site.

Step-by-step guide:

- Go to www.blueletterbible.org
- In the "Bible/Dictionary Search" box type the verse you'd like to study
- Make sure KJV is selected in the "Version" box in order to be able to use all available features, then click "Search"
- You will now see a list of verses: the one you typed and all surrounding verses. Find your verse. You will notice six boxes to the side of each verse that say "K," "C," "L," "I," "V," and "D." Click on "C." This will bring you to the Lexicon/Concordance for the verse you selected.
- At this point you should be looking at a chart with the English word, Strong's number, root form, and a tense button (if applicable). Click on the Strong's number for the word you'd like to study.
- You will now see a definition based on the Biblical usage, Vine's Dictionary (if it's a Greek word), and Thayer's or Gesenius's

lexicon (depending on the original language.)

Now we will look up the words we chose in the first section to get a better understanding of how they are used.

Romans 1:16-17:

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith."

- Ashamed: to be ashamed
- Gospel: glad tidings of salvation through Christ
- Power: power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature
- Salvation: deliverance from molestation of enemies
- Believes: to place confidence in or trust
- Righteousness: the character or quality of being right or just
- Revealed: to uncover or lay open what has been veiled or covered up
- Faith: conviction, assurance or guarantee

While some of these definitions were obvious some can tell us about the verse that we may not have known before. For instance the word power means "power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature." This tells us that the gospel itself has an inherent power all its own. Also, if you paid attention to the actual Greek word, dynamis, you may have noticed it looks a lot like our word dynamite. It is, in fact, where we get the word dynamite from (the connection can be confirmed by simply looking in the Merriam-Webster dictionary). We can determine from this the sheer magnitude of the power Paul is referring to here.

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This section may seem like a grammar lesson... that's because it is. Stick with me though; understanding how verbs are used in the Greek language is vital to understanding what they mean. Don't feel like you have to memorize all of the material I list here. Use this chapter as a reference. The more you reference it, the easier it will become. You will be happy to know that you don't have to be able to read Greek to know the tense of a Greek verb. There are many sources that tell us exactly what we need to know without having to learn Greek. I will go through a step-by-step guide on how to determine this information at the end of the section, but first we need to know what information we are looking for and what it means. When you are looking at tense, it is good to keep in mind that each of these different tenses will be denoted by a different ending to the same word.

- *Present Tense: Continuous action*
 - ❖ Sally is studying her Bible.
 - ❖ As the branch cannot bear fruit unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. —John 15:4b
 - ❖ If anyone does not abide in Me. —John 15:6
- *Imperfect Tense: Continuous action, usually in the past*
 - ❖ Sally was studying her Bible.
 - ❖ If you were of the world, the world would love its own. —John 15:19a
- *Perfect Tense: Single action in the past with results continuing into the present*
 - ❖ Sally is being transformed by having studied her Bible.
 - ❖ You already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. —John 15:3
 - ❖ Just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. —John 15:10

- *Pluperfect Tense: Single action in the past with continuing results in the past*
 - ❖ Sally was transformed because she had studied her Bible.
 - ❖ For the Jews had already agreed. —John 9:22
- *Aorist Tense: Single action that occurs without regard to its duration (usually in the past)*
 - ❖ Sally studied her Bible.
 - ❖ Abide in Me, and I in you. —John 15:4a
- *Future Tense: Single action that will occur in the future*
 - ❖ Sally will be studying her Bible.
 - ❖ It will be done for you. —John 15:7
 - ❖ So prove to be My disciples. —John 15:8

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- At this point you should be looking at a chart with the English word, Strong's number, root form, and a tense button (if a verb). Decide which verb you'd like to look up and click on the "tense" button.
- Once you click the "tense" button you will see the tense, voice and mood of the verb. We want to determine the tense. If you click on

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the tense it will tell you more about that particular tense or you can refer to the above chart to determine more about the verb.

Let's return to our example verses, Romans 1:16-17:

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith."

First, we want to identify which of the words we looked up are verbs: ashamed, believes and revealed. Next, we should determine the tense and decide what that tells us about the verb.

- *Ashamed: Present tense-This tells us that Paul is continuously unashamed of the gospel. It is not just a statement of what he is feeling at the moment.*
- *Believes: Present tense-This implies that the person who is believing must be in a state of continuous belief in order to maintain salvation.*
- *Revealed: Present tense-This indicates that the righteousness of God is continuously being revealed to everyone with faith.*

Chapter 8: Homework

Exercise 1:

Read Matthew 16:13-16:20.

Identify which key words you would like to define. Write them and their definitions here.

Are there any definitions that help illuminate the meaning of this passage or add depth to it?

Now determine the tense of any verbs you defined and explain what that means to the verb.

Based on the keywords and the verbs you looked up, describe in your own words what this passage means.

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Exercise 2:

Read James 1:12-18

Choose and define any important words.

Determine the tense of the verbs used and describe the meaning of the word based on the tense.

List any insights you gained from defining the words and determining the tense of the verbs that might help you better understand the passage.

Exercise 3:

Read through 1 John. Choose a pericope and define keywords and verb tenses. Then write about which of these helped you understand the meaning of the passage.

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