

## **SECTION 21**

### **Doing Greek Word Studies**

## GREEK FOR THE REST OF US: WHAT ARE WORD STUDIES?

William D. Mounce (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003)  
Chapter 24, pg. 198-215.

<b>SECTION ONE: CHOOSE THE ENGLISH WORD.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>SECTION TWO: IDENTIFY THE GREEK WORD.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>SECTION THREE: DISCOVER THE SEMANTIC RANGE.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>SECTION FOUR: CONTEXT.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>SECTION FIVE: SEPTUAGINT.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>SECTION SIX: COGNATES.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>SECTION SEVEN: COMMON MISTAKES.....</b>	<b>4</b>

**Introduction**-In this chapter, Mounce covers simple procedures and techniques to help do effective word studies in the Bible. He also gives helpful tips on what resources to use and how to avoid translation mistakes.

Words have a “semantic range.” “Semantic” refers to a word’s meaning; “semantic range” refers to the range of possible meanings a word possesses. Mounce points out that everyday words can have a large range of meaning, such as the word “run” (i.e., I scored six runs today. My computer runs fast. He runs his mouth. Could you run that by me again?). In describing this concept, Mounce refers to the range of meaning as the word’s “bundle of meanings,” since a word rarely possesses only one meaning.

In the Greek language, the semantic range of some words is very large. Take the preposition *εν* for example. It can be translated to mean one of the following: in, to, with, among, or by. Rarely can one word in one language correspond exactly to another word in another language, especially in its semantic range. The question raised is how do we translate the Bible when we do not have English words that correspond exactly to the Greek? We have to interpret. All translation is interpretive. One example of interpretation is found in translating 1 Timothy 6:13-14. The word *παραγγελλω* can be translated “charge” (RSV), “command” (NLT), and “urge” (NKJV).

If a person wants to know what Paul meant by the word “charge”, he or she cannot look up the English word “charge” because it does not give the full meaning of *παραγγελλω*. One has to discover the full meaning of the Greek word behind the English and learn its semantic range. To do this involves a four step process: decide what word to study, identify the Greek word, discover its semantic range, and look for something in the context that helps determine what the biblical author meant by this word in this particular verse.

## SECTION ONE: CHOOSE THE ENGLISH WORD

- I. Oftentimes, it is difficult to determine which word or words should be researched within a given text. How do we decide what words are most significant, for we cannot research every word because we will run out of time and probably become bored. Mounce gives four suggestions on what words to pick.
- A. Look for *repeated* words
    - 1. This normally indicates a recurring theme, and perhaps the central theme in the passage. This includes the use of synonyms.
  - B. Look for *theological* terms.
    - 1. This will be more obvious in teaching passages (e.g., in Paul) than in narrative (e.g., in the Gospels).
  - C. Sometimes the verse will “hang” on a word, which contains the central meaning of the sentence. Without this “hanging” word, the sentence will not make sense. In Romans 10:9, the “hanging” word is “Lord.”
  - D. When comparing translations, you may find a significant word that is translated *differently* among the different translations.

## SECTION TWO: IDENTIFY THE GREEK WORD

- II. This section simply explains how to look up a word in an exhaustive concordance to find its meaning. Mounce recommends the NIV *Exhaustive Concordance*.

## SECTION THREE: DISCOVER ITS SEMANTIC RANGE

- III. As stated before, to discover the full meaning of the word, we must find its “semantic range.” The word that Mounce uses throughout this section is κυριος, which means “Lord.” Mounce points us to a simple process to follow.
- A. Find the word in the NIV *Exhaustive Concordance* and notice its wide range of meaning. For Lord, it might mean “sir” or “master”, even to the idea of “majesty.”
  - B. If using the *The Strongest Strong's*, you can look the word up in the *Greek Dictionary-Index*. Here we see that the word κυριος is the name of God in the Old Testament.
  - C. You can also look at other translations to see how they translated the word. The word for “Lord” will not vary much, but other words will greatly.
  - D. Another tool is “Englishman’s Concordance.” The most recent is titled *The Greek-English Concordance to the New Testament*. With this, you can see every place in the New Testament where the word occurs. The beauty of this concordance is that it will show you all the words that are closely related to the word you are looking up; therefore, regardless of the translation, you will find all the uses of the word you are researching.
  - E. If you want to learn more about the semantic range, you can always go to a Greek lexicon. The standard one is *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*.

- F. There are specific books that help you see the semantic range of the word and will tell you more about the word, especially its usage throughout the Bible and other ancient writings. Mounce's favorite choice is Verlyn D. Verbrugge's *The NIV Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Words*. While the discussion in this book is excellent, it is generally too advanced for most people at the "baby Greek" level. Geoffrey W. Bromiley's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume* is much better for those at the "baby Greek" level.
- G. Commentaries can be very helpful in discussing a word's meaning.
- H. If the word is an important theological term, it may be discussed in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter A. Elwell. Mounce thinks this is a marvelous book and everyone should own it.

#### SECTION FOUR: CONTEXT

- IV. In determining the particular meaning of a word in a certain verse, context is very important. Context will often give clues to what the author intended. For discovering the proper context, Mounce uses a diagram of eight circles with the inner most circle being the word itself, the second is the verse, the third is the paragraph, the fourth is the book, the fifth is the books by the same author, the sixth is the New Testament, the seventh is the Bible, and the eighth is extra-biblical sources. In using this diagram, one begins with the verse to find the meaning. If there isn't anything in the verse, move on to the paragraph, and so on. Note that the further you go out from the center, the less assuredness you have that you are defining the word properly. Mounce gives examples of each of the circles.
  - A. *Verse*-In 1 Thessalonians 4:3, the verse helps us realize that God's *will* is for believers to be sanctified.
  - B. *Paragraph*-In 1 Timothy 2:14-15, one may wonder what "saved" means. Is it a spiritual salvation or a physical safety? The context points to a spiritual salvation.
  - C. *Book*- At the end of a list of sins, Paul states in 1 Timothy 1:10 that these are "contrary to *sound* doctrine." What is *sound* doctrine? Most translations miss the fact that the word is a medical metaphor meaning "healthy," and that it contrasts with the heresy being spread in Ephesus, which Paul elsewhere describes as sick and morbid (1 Tim. 6:4), infectious abrasions (1 Tim. 6:5) spreading like gangrene (2 Tim. 2:17). *Sound* doctrine is that which is opposed to the false teaching.
  - D. *New Testament*-In Romans 4:2-3, Paul states that Abraham was not justified by works but by faith; therefore, what does it mean to be justified? James 2:21-24 expands on the meaning of justification and gives us a fuller picture of what Paul meant when discussing justification. Paul is discussing how justification is granted; James is discussing how justification is shown to have occurred.
  - E. *Bible*-In Acts 4:8, we read the Peter was *filled* with the Holy Spirit, but previously in Acts 2:4, Luke already stated that this had happened. How can this be explained? The Old Testament book of Judges gives us insight on this topic. In Judges, the word *filled* is used when the Holy Spirit possesses a person in a powerful yet temporary way. While the Holy Spirit comes in his fullness at a believer's conversion, Luke uses the terminology of Judges to describe a work of the Holy Spirit in which he grips

a person in a special way to enable them to say or do something special. Let us remember, as you continue out to the outer circles of context, be very cautious.

- F. *Word Study on "Lord"*-Using the system in place let us research and determine what Paul meant when he called Jesus "Lord" in Romans 10:9.
1. *Verse*-The connection between the confession and belief in Jesus' resurrection suggests "Lord" means more than "sir."
  2. *Paragraph*-Verse twelve states that Jesus is "Lord of all," asserting his universal lordship.
  3. *Book*-In Romans 1:4, Paul states that Jesus "was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord," connecting Jesus' Lordship with his resurrection as in 10:9 and with his identification as the Son of God.
  4. *New Testament*-Many other verses expand upon the lordship of Jesus including Phil. 2:10-11 and 1 Cor. 12:3.

## SECTION FIVE: SEPTUAGINT

- V. In detailed word studies, you will often see writers referring to the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. When the Septuagint was translated, the translators chose a Greek word for each of these Hebrew words. When defining Greek words in the New Testament, it is the word's background in the Old Testament via the Septuagint that is the most important background in defining the Greek word, not its general usage in the first century.

## SECTION SIX: COGNATES

- VI. A cognate is a word that is related to another and actually shares the same root. In English, the words "prince" and "princess" share the same root. Some cognates have similar meanings; however, at other times there are nuance differences between cognates so they will not have the same meaning. It is best to stick to the lexical forms when possible.

## SECTION SEVEN: COMMON MISTAKES

- VII. Let us example three examples of common mistakes committed in doing word studies.
- A. *Anachronism*-It is always a bad habit to define Greek words using an English word derived from that Greek word. One example occurs when someone talks about the "power" of God, and adds that the word for "power" is δυναμις (from which we get dynamite). It is totally backwards then to state that God's power is dynamite. God's power is never pictured in Scripture as something that blows rocks apart.
  - B. *Etymological Fallacy*-"Etymology" refers to how the word was originally created; however, the etymology, the pieces that were originally used to make up the word, does not define the word today. For example, a "butterfly" is not an animal made of butter that can fly. This type of mistake does occur when people translate words from the Bible. One of the most well known mistakes occurs with the word μετανοεω,

meaning to “repent.” “Meta” implies changing and “nous” refers to the mind; therefore, the word must mean to change one’s mind. Wrong! Mounce argues that “repent” does not only mean to change one’s mind, but also to change one’s behavior. This fuller meaning of repent is given when drawing from the entire Bible’s concept of repentance, especially from the background of conversion in the Old Testament. Mounce points out that *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* makes this mistake. With that said, there are examples that a word carries the meaning of its parts, especially when a preposition exist. The word εἰσερχομαι, meaning, “to go into,” is made up of two parts, εἰς, meaning “into” and ερχομαι, meaning, “to go.” Connected to the etymological fallacy is the fact that words change their meaning over the years. What a word meant when it was first created may be at best irrelevant today. A word’s meaning today is seen in how it is used today, not in how it used to be used. Here are three examples

1. *Hussy* is from the Middle English word *huswife*, meaning *housewife*.
2. *Enthusiasm* meant to be inspired or possessed by a god.
3. *Nice* originally meant *foolish* in the Middle English.

Words have a range of meaning, but that range is not determined by the parts that made up the word or even by how it was used 1,000 years earlier.

- C. *A Few Other Errors*-Do not put too much weight on a word, thinking that the word, all by itself, is full of meaning. Focus your study on the larger unit, hesitating to place too much emphasis on an individual word. Tied to this fact is that theological concepts are larger than one word.