MINING GOD'S WORD

How to Study the Bible

A

RIVERSTONE INSTITUTE

COURSE

HOMEWORK REVIEW

At your tables:

- Review your homework from last week.
- Based on your work, how does the New Testament use the term "fellow worker"?

THREE PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETATION

1. Historical Interpretation
2. Contextual Interpretation
3. Canonical Interpretation

TEN STRATEGIES FOR STUDYING THE TEXT

1. Phrasing ("Sentence Flow")
2. Record your observations.
3. Discern the main point.
4. Ask interpretive questions.
5. Check the cross-references.
6. Paraphrase the logic.
7. Examine a particular word.
8.
9.
10.

THE "ROOT" FALLACY

"A word means whatever its root words mean."

English example: Pineapple ≠ an apple from a pine tree.

- Simply knowing that the word is a combination of "pine" and "apple" doesn't help us define it any better.

THE "ROOT" FALLACY

Greek example: "church."

- The Greek word is *ekklēsia.* The roots of this word are the preposition *ek*, which mean "from, out of," and the verb *kaleō,* which means "to call."

- Some people argue that this means that the church is, by definition, "those who are called out" (i.e. "of the world," "from sin," and so forth).

- This is probably not the case. In Greek *ekklēsia* means "assembly" and from there it became used more specifically for the church, but we should not assume that the word communicates something about the church being "called out" because of it.

- While this may be true of the church theologically, but it is not because that's what the word means. It is because there are other passages that teach it.

THE "TECHNICAL MEANING" FALLACY

In this mistake, we believe that an author always intends a very specific theological nuance by the word that is used, rather than possibly using words as synonyms or for stylistic or literary reasons.

THE "TECHNICAL MEANING" FALLACY

Example: Greek has at least three words that are translated in English as "love." Often, two of them are said to have very different nuances:

- *agapaō* = supreme, selfless love, God's love
- *phileō* = simple, brotherly love, human friendship

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Example: Greek has at least three words that are translated in English as "love." Often, two of them are said to have very different nuances:

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But this probably isn't true. These words may have some distinction in nuance, but it is more likely that they are close to synonymous. At the very least, there is a lot of overlap in their meanings and there probably isn't a deeply embedded theological lesson in why they are used differently.

ILLEGITIMATE TOTALITY TRANSFER
(THE "IT MEANS EVERYTHING AT ONCE" FALLACY)

In this mistake, we think that a word means everything it could possibly mean (its entire "range of meaning") all at once within a specific context.

Example: "fervent, zealous"

- The Greek word is *zeō.* It can mean both 1) "to boil with heat (used of water)" or 2) to be "zealous or fervent in spirit, to show complete commitment with enthusiasm."

- In Acts 18:25 it says that Apollos was "*zeō* in spirit." I took this to mean that he was so zealous that he could be compared to a boiling pot and I made this a big part of my lesson.

- But that was probably wrong. This is probably an idiom that just means "really zealous and fervent."

THE "ANACHRONISM" FALLACY

In this mistake, we assume that because a word has come to have a specific meaning later in time, it must also have had the same meaning when it was used in the Bible.

- Greek: *dynamis* means "power". This is one of the roots behind the English word *dynamite.*

- This is one of the roots of the English word *dynamite* (through the Swedish word *dynamit*).

- But in Greek, *dynamis* does not mean *dynamite,* or any other kind of explosive substance. It just means "power."

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7. Examine a particular word.
8. Compare different translations.
9.
10.

A CRASH COURSE IN TRANSLATIONS

- The Bible was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. All of our English Bibles are translations of these languages.

- There are different types of translation philosophies that shape how translators chose to translate the texts.

- Different translations have different purposes and philosophies. Read the translator's/editor's introduction to your Bible to see what their purpose and philosophy are.

A CRASH COURSE IN TRANSLATIONS

- Translations range from more to less literal.

- "Literal" does not necessarily mean "better," especially if a translations "literalness" obscures the meaning of the text.

- No translation is truly and entirely "literal" because no two languages are exactly the same.

Exodus 34:6

My "Literal" Translation	NASB	KJV	NIV	NLT
"Yahweh, Yahweh, a God compassionate and gracious, **long of nose**, and great in covenant mercy and faithfulness"	"The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, **slow to anger**, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth"	The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, **longsuffering**, and abundant in goodness and truth,	"The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, **slow to anger**, abounding in love and faithfulness"	Yahweh! The Lord! The God of compassion and mercy! I am **slow to anger** and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness."

TYPES OF TRANSLATIONS

- Highly Literal: Try to match each Hebrew/Greek word with a suitable English word and maintain Hebrew/Greek word order without regard for English grammar rules.

- Modified Literal/Word-for-Word: Focus closely on words, often modifying Hebrew and Greek grammar just enough to make it acceptable in English.

- Idiomatic/Thought-For-Thought: Focus less on finding one English word to translate each original word, and do not attempt to reflect original literary style.

- Free/Paraphrase: Disregards basic translation principles in favor of restating the meaning of a text in the paraphraser's own English.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD TRANSLATION?

- Accurate: The main goal of Bible translation is to accurately reproduce the *meaning* (not necessarily the *form*) of the original language writings while being faithful to the original wording.

- Clear: A good Bible translation will seek to be just as clear to modern English readers as the original language writings were to the original readers.

- Natural: Bible translations ought to be in natural English as much as possible.

- Audience-Appropriate: Bible translations ought to take into account the audience and reading level of the prospective readers.

WHY COMPARE TRANSLATIONS?

- Comparing translations will help you to see the range of meanings in both words and phrases.

- Comparing translations may not give the all the answers, but it will help you to as *the right questions*. It will point out to you key places where there are significant issues in meaning and interpretation.

- Comparing translations will help you to see where doing a word study might be especially helpful.

EXAMPLE: PHILIPPIANS 3:7-9

- Using the Translation Comparison sheet you got on your way in, read the different translations of Philippians 3:7-9.

- Based on the different translations, what potential interpretive issues do you find? Where would you want to focus your study? (e.g. Where might you want to do a word study?)

A FEW NOTES

- Every translation is an interpretation in some regard. Every translation makes interpretive choices about how best to translate a Hebrew/Greek word or phrase in English.

- "Word-for-Word" translations don't always do a better job of translating than mediating or "though-for-thought" translations.

EXAMPLE: GENESIS 30:3

My "Literal Translation"	NASB	KJV	ESV	CSB	NIV
And she said, "Behold my female salve Bilhah, go into her and she will bear upon my knees, **and I will be _built_ from her.**	She said, "Here is my maid Bilhah, go in to her that she may bear on my knees, **that through her I too may have children."**	And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, **that I may also have children by her.**	Then she said, "Here is my servant Bilhah; go in to her, so that she may give birth on my behalf, **that even I may have children through her."**	Then she said, "Here is my maid Bilhah. Go sleep with her, and she'll bear children for me **so that through her I too can _build_ a family."**	Then she said, "Here is Bilhah, my servant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me **and I too can _build_ a family through her."**

EXAMPLE: PROVERBS 16:27

My "Literal Translation"	NASB	KJV	ESV	CSB	NIV
A worthless man digs evil, **and upon his lips** are like scorching fire.	A worthless man digs up evil, **While his words** are like scorching fire.	An ungodly man diggeth up evil: **And in his lips** there is as a burning fire.	A worthless man plots evil, **and his speech** is like a scorching fire.	A worthless person digs up evil, **and his speech** is like a scorching fire.	A scoundrel plots evil, **and on their lips** it is like a scorching fire.

TWO ESPECIALLY HELPFUL TRANSLATIONS

- ## New English Translation (NET)
    - Available at http://lumina.bible.org.
    - Contains over 60,000 notes <u>just on translation decisions</u>.

Genesis 30:3—

She replied, "Here is my servant Bilhah! Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and I can have a family through her."[9]

[9] The idiom of "built up" here refers to having a family (see Gen 16:2, as well as Ruth 4:11 and BDB 125 s.v. ‫בָּנָה‬.)

TWO ESPECIALLY HELPFUL TRANSLATIONS

- Lexham English Bible
  - Available at http://biblegateway.com and on YouVersion.
  - Contains footnotes that try to explain when a phrase has been translated differently from its literal form:

Exodus 34:6—

And Yahweh passed over before him, and he proclaimed, "Yahweh, Yahweh, God *who is* compassionate and gracious, *slow to anger*,[a] and abounding with loyal love and faithfulness."

[a] Literally "long of nose"

HOMEWORK FOR 5/29

Required

- Workbook pp. 109-114
- *Dig Deeper*, pp. 77-82

Optional

- *Inductive Bible Study*, pp. 46-73

NEXT CLASS: TUESDAY 5/29/18