

Interpretation - Observing the Words and Grammar

I. This is an *introduction* to words and grammar

Tonight we are going to introduce two topics that really could *each* be a whole course on their own. You could have a whole course on English Grammar, or a whole course on the meaning of words. So we aren't going to cover everything, this is just a brief introduction to these topics. An introduction may open up awareness of a topic or give opportunity to learn more about a topic.

One thing I want all of us to understand is that we have multiple levels of students in the room, and that's great. Some are experts in English Grammar, some have never heard of it. If all of this is brand new to you, we don't expect everyone to know everything about grammar in 20 minutes! This may be the most difficult topic for Lead School. We're all just learning together, and some of these concepts you will pick up over time. Let's just make progress.

II. Text and context

As we keep investigating how to study the Bible, we are narrowing down to the specific words in a passage and what they mean. We started with Melodic Line and how we want to understand an author's purpose for a whole book first. Then we looked at context to understand how what is around a passage informs its meaning, we looked at the structure of a text and how that helps us understand an author's flow of thought, and now we come to the actual text itself. The text itself is where the meaning is found. And the text is made up of words and grammar.

Language is a system of symbols that communicate meaning. If I say 'cat', everyone has a concept of a cat in their mind. Or if I say 'table', it's a group of sounds I make with my mouth, but everyone has a concept in their mind of what a table is. That's the beauty of language, we have a common understanding of what a group of sounds mean. But then if we put an 's' at the end of 'cat', that means more than one cat. That's grammar. Words and grammar are the symbols that communicate meaning.

You may have heard the saying, "Context is king." Well, I disagree. Actually, context is *queen*. Like a good wife, she helps make sure the king doesn't get out of control! But really, words are king and grammar rules. Words and grammar are what govern the meaning of a sentence.

For example, it doesn't matter what the context is, the following sentence has meaning: Jesus of Nazareth, who was born by Mary in Bethlehem, is truly God, the one through whom God created the universe. Context could actually show us that this sentence was being said by Satan, or it could show us it was being said sarcastically, but it can't completely change the meaning.

Words and grammar contain the meaning of the text. If you have no words, you have no meaning no matter what the context! Words and grammar are the symbols that contain the meaning of a text. Context limits and clarifies that meaning from being ambiguous or misunderstood. But context can't make words and grammar mean something out of nothing. Context can only refine and limit the meaning that is already there with the words and grammar.

Example: "I went to the bank." The context could be, "I ran out of money." The context could be, "I was getting tired swimming." Or it could be, "I put on my mask and pulled out my gun." In the first and third examples, despite the context being radically different, the meaning of the sentence is actually the same!

So the meaning of the text comes from the meaning of words and grammar and how they combine together in a sentence.

III. How Words work

A. Who defines words?

So the first part of the text are the words. Words have meaning. We don't make up the meaning of words, otherwise communication couldn't happen. The meaning of a word is the shared understanding among a group of native speakers of a language. When enough people use a word to mean something, it communicates that concept when people use it. For example, the word 'chips' means something different in the US and England. We know what 'chips' means to us, but in England, 'chips' are the word they use for french fries. So the meaning of a word is not defined by a dictionary, but it is how people use words.

We could also look at how word meanings change over time. My favorite example is the word 'nice.' We all know what it means. But it used to mean 'foolish or stupid.' That's a really different meaning, isn't it?!

B. Words have a range of meaning(s)

One of the most important concepts about words to understand is that words have a range of meaning. Think of words as having circles of meaning. If you draw two circles for two words, their meaning could overlap. One word may have a small circle, meaning it has a small range of meaning, and other words have a large circle, meaning it has a large range of meaning.

This is important to understand because when you see a word in English, you may assume it has all the same meanings as the underlying Greek or Hebrew word, whereas in reality, the underlying word **cannot** mean some of the senses of the English word that is translating it or visa-versa. There is never a one-to-one correspondence between any two words in any languages. That's not how language works. Most words have multiple definitions.

This is why translations will translate a given Hebrew or Greek word differently than each other, and also translations may not always use the same English translation for the same word. Because words have a range of meaning, in one context a certain English word may best communicate one aspect of the word's meaning, but in another context another word may best communicate it. So we are always trying to understand the meaning of a word in context.

i. Example: Spanish mañana vs tomorrow/morning

The Spanish word mañana can mean tomorrow or morning. If you want to say tomorrow morning, it's "mañana por la mañana."

ii. Example: Spanish agua vs water

If there was an agua fresca on the counter, and I said in English, can you get me some water, an English speaker would say, "There is no water here." That juice *contains* water, but it *isn't* water. In Spanish, you have *kinds* of water. The meaning of *agua* is broader than the meaning of *water*.

iii. Example: Greek *diathēkē* vs will/covenant

Hebrews 9:15-17

*Therefore he is the mediator of a new **covenant**, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first **covenant**. For where a **will** is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a **will** takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.*

C. How is the word being used and limited in its current context?

While words have a range of meaning, the given context limits the meaning to one of the meanings in context. Words **don't mean everything** they can mean in each occurrence. Rather, in context **one** of the meanings will be intended by the author and make sense. You usually want to start with the first and most basic meaning, and work down through to the more obscure meanings until one fits. You should definitely look at all the meanings in case one of the more specific meanings is a perfect fit with your context.

We don't just pick our favorite,

D. What are the possible different meanings of this word and how are they related?

i. Does a word have totally unrelated meanings?

1.) river bank 2.) a bank where you get money. These two meanings are totally unrelated. The word doesn't mean both at once.

How could you misconstrue the following sentence if you didn't understand how words have different meanings? "Jesus gave them permission. And coming out, the unclean spirits entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep **bank** into the sea, about two thousand of them; and they were drowned in the sea. (Mark 5:13)"

- ii. Is one of the meanings derived from the other?
 - a. Is one of the meanings a figurative meaning based on a literal meaning?
 - b. Usually the various word meanings are related

aphiēmi - literally, "to send away"

- 1. **to dismiss or release someone or something from a place or one's presence**
 - a. with personal object *let go, send away*
 - b. with impersonal object *give up, emit*
 - c. in a legal sense *divorce*
- 2. **to release from legal or moral obligation or consequence, cancel, remit, pardon**
- 3. **to move away, with implication of causing a separation, leave, depart from**
- 4. to have something continue or remain in a place. **Leave standing/lying**
- 5. to convey a sense of distancing through an allowable margin of freedom, **leave it to someone to do something, let, let go, allow, tolerate**

- E. The Oxford English dictionary has 396 definitions for 'run' which is the 2nd most in the dictionary

run (Verb <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/run>)

- 1. (vertebrates) To move swiftly.
 - a. To move forward quickly upon two feet by alternately making a short jump off either foot.
Run, Sarah, run!
 - b. To go at a fast pace, to move quickly.
*The horse **ran** the length of the track. I have been **running** all over the building looking for him. Sorry, I've got to **run**; my house is on fire.*
 - c. To cause to move quickly; to make move lightly.
*Every day I **run** my dog across the field and back. I'll just **run** the vacuum cleaner over the carpet. **Run** your fingers through my hair. Can you **run** these data through the program for me and tell me whether it gives an error?*
 - d. To compete in a race.
*The horse will **run** the Preakness next year. I'm not ready to **run** a marathon.*
 - e. (soccer) To carry a football down the field.
 - f. To flee away from a danger or towards help.
*Whenever things get tough, she cuts and **runs**. When he's broke, he **runs** to me for money.*
- 2. (fluids) To flow.
 - a. (figuratively) To move or spread quickly.
*There's a strange story **running** around the neighborhood. The flu is **running** through my daughter's kindergarten.*

- b. Of a liquid, to flow.
*The river **runs** through the forest. There's blood **running** down your leg.*
- c. Of an object, to have a liquid flowing from it.
*Your nose is **running**. Why is the hose still **running**? My cup **runneth** over.*
- d. To make a liquid flow; to make liquid flow from an object.
*You'll have to **run** the water a while before it gets hot. **Run** the tap until the water gets hot.*
- e. To become liquid; to melt.
- f. To leak or spread in an undesirable fashion; to bleed (especially used of dye or paint).
*He discovered during washing that the red rug **ran** on his white sheet, staining it pink.*
- g. (figuratively) To go through without stopping, usually illegally.
***run** a red light or stop sign; **run** a blockade*
- 3. (social) To carry out an activity.
 - a. To control or manage, be in charge of.
*My uncle **ran** a corner store for forty years. She **runs** the fundraising. My parents think they **run** my life.*
 - b. To be a candidate in an election.
*I have decided to **run** for governor of California. We're trying to find somebody to **run** against him next year.*
 - c. To make run in a race or an election.
*He **ran** his best horse in the Derby. The Green Party is **running** twenty candidates in this election.*
 - d. To smuggle illegal goods.
*to **run** guns; to **run** rum*
- 4. To extend or persist, statically or dynamically, through space or time.
 - a. To extend in space or through a range (often with a measure phrase).
*The border **runs** for 3000 miles. The leash **runs** along a wire. The grain of the wood **runs** to the right on this table. It **ran** in quality from excellent to substandard.*
 - b. To extend in time, to last, to continue (usually with a measure phrase).
*The sale will **run** for ten days. The contract **runs** through 2008. The meeting **ran** late. The book **runs** 655 pages. The speech **runs** as follows: ...*
 - c. To make something extend in space.
*I need to **run** this wire along the wall.*
 - d. Of a machine, including computer programs, to be operating or working normally.
*My car stopped **running**. That computer **runs** twenty-four hours a day. Buses don't **run** here on Sunday.*
 - e. To make a machine operate.
*You can **run** the dishwasher now. Don't **run** the engine so fast.*

Table Discussion

What are wrong ways to use 'run'?

- You left the hose running
- Our supplies are running low
- Run that computer program

F. Table Discussion

What did you learn from your study of the word 'equip'?

G. Observations from homework word study on 'equip'

1. Doing a word study didn't completely revolutionize the meaning of equip. Equip is a decent translation. There are times a word study could completely change your understanding of a word, but that should be quite rare! We have good Bible translations!
2. But doing a word study does give a better understanding of what Paul meant. Paul is talking about restoring people to our original purpose, the purpose we were created for.
3. Note that not many of the other verses translate this word as equip. The dictionary doesn't list that definition either. It doesn't mean this word can't mean equip, but maybe it's not the primary idea...
4. Notice all the different ways this word is translated. The different translations for this word show it has a range of meaning.
5. Our words study does correct some possible misunderstandings of what Paul meant. This equipping isn't primarily or really just about giving people tools to do ministry. The English word 'equip' is related to equipment, so we might think Paul means here that the job of pastors is to give you the tools for ministry. That's not exactly wrong, but it's not exactly what Paul is saying either. Paul is saying that the job of pastor-teachers is to restore the saints to usefulness, so that we as people would live out our created purpose.

H. Questions to ask about word usage

- What are the different **definitions** of this word? Which one is meant in context?
- Is this word **repeated** multiple times 1) in this verse, 2) in this section, 3) in this book?
- Is this a **key word** in this section/book/the whole Bible?
- How is this word used by different **authors**?
- Is it **rare** in this book, but used here?
- Is this the **first use** of this word in this book, or the whole Bible?
Often an author will use the first use to define or illustrate the term.
- Are there other **synonyms** for this word used frequently in this passage/book?
How is this word different or the same than those words?

IV. How Grammar works

A. The sentence - a complete thought with a subject, verb, along with dependent clauses and modifiers

A sentence at its minimum has a subject and a verb. "Jesus wept" is a complete sentence. A sentence will then have other descriptors/modifiers that hang off of these main parts of the sentence. It's usually very helpful to find the main subject and verb of a sentence, and then see how all the other parts connect to these to understand what the sentence means.

B. The parts of speech

- noun - person, place, thing or idea (It can be the subject or object)
brother, love, God, cross, Israel, flesh, war, truth
 - pronoun - takes the place of a noun
he, she, it, they, himself, who
 - adjective - describes a noun
tall, smart, true, good, righteous
- verb - an action word or state of being (It can be main verb or dependent verb)
ran, spoke, thought, sing, is, exists
 - adverb - describes a verb ('ly' words)
quickly, gently, truly
 - preposition - a word that goes before and governs a noun (direction, time, place, manner)
in, over, through, on, by, on account of...
- conjunction - joins two sentences or phrases (parts of a sentence)
and, but, because, so that, therefore, in order that
- interjection - an independent remark, usually to express a feeling
Oh! Behold!

C. Breaking down a sentence

If you really want to understand the meaning of a sentence, it is helpful to identify the main subject and verb (and any objects) of the sentence, locate any dependent clauses, and find discover which word every phrase is modifying.

D. Table Discussion

What is the subject and main verb of the following sentence?

What part of speech is each word?

The tall man who was jogging died suddenly in the middle of the road because he didn't look left.

E. Table Discussion

Ephesians 2:13. Identify the main subject and verb of this sentence, and see if you can figure out what the other phrases are describing.

F. Summary Flow of Ephesians 4:11-16

He gave [gifted people]
to equip [saints for ministry]
for building up [the body of Christ]
until mature [the fullness of the stature of Christ]
so that we not be unstable children
but (by speaking the truth in love)
we grow up into the head, Christ
from Him the body causes itself to grow

Flow of Ephesians 4.11-16

V. Group Discussion

Go around the table and have everyone discuss their answers to these homework questions. The goal is for us to better understand how Paul's sentence in 4:11-16 flows.

1. What is the connection between Ephesians 4:11 and 4:12 (Look at how 4:12 begins: 'to equip')?
2. What does verse 4:13 explain about 4:12 (Look at how verse 13 begins: 'until')?
3. What is the connection between Ephesians 4:14 and 4:11-13 (Look at how 4:14 begins: 'so that')?

How does understanding these connections help us understand Paul's flow of thought?

VI. Homework

- READ: "Explanation of Word Worksheet"
- MEMORIZE: Ephesians 4:16
- WORD-WORK: Fill out the first 5 questions of the Word Worksheet (your final!)