

The Value of Learning Biblical Greek

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Dedicated to: Glenden Riddle¹

Introduction

Over a decade ago this writer heard a pastor tell of an encounter he had. The pastor had preached a sermon wherein, at some juncture, he dismissed the English translation and instead relied on a certain understanding of the Greek to explain the biblical text's meaning more accurately. Afterwards a lady approached him somewhat distraught. She did not like that a correct understanding of the text in question depended upon knowing Greek. The lady wanted assurances that the word of God could be understood apart from that knowledge.

Just this year this writer also had an encounter of a different kind. I was watching my son play soccer and speaking to another father. After learning that I taught biblical Greek at a seminary, the dad asked me if it was true that no Spanish translation is reliable. Someone the dad highly respected apparently convinced him of that position. I imagine that there are people who believe the same about every English translation. At any rate, the implication is that one has to be a Greek scholar to understand anything in the Bible.

In both stories, the desired objective is the same: to understand correctly the word of God. The difference involves the perceived value or importance of knowing the biblical languages and what their role should be in reaching that noble goal. Although neither example is particularly scholarly in nature nor well informed, each highlights a different extreme regarding this issue.

¹ Glen (1947-2015) passed away this year into the presence of our Lord whom he loved so dearly. His latest ministry work involved serving as a missionary to the Far East. He was also a professor of biblical languages at Chafer Theological Seminary where he taught me much of what I know in that area. Glen was extremely passionate about the biblical languages, especially Greek. I am very thankful for his life and all he taught me.

On the one hand, the lady wants Greek and the other languages to be of no value at all, lest she be hindered from comprehensively understanding **all** of Scripture on the basis of her English text alone. The irony here is that the alleged freedom from the biblical languages only exists through complete dependence on someone, somewhere, at sometime who had knowledge of the languages and used that knowledge to produce the needed translation. In other words, any understanding of the word of God is ultimately and inextricably linked to knowledge about the languages in which it was originally written. Furthermore, this view ignores or minimizes important realities inherent in translations and the translation process.

At the other extreme, the dad was under the impression that knowing Greek and the other languages was so essential that no one could really understand **any** of Scripture apart from knowledge of the original. Aside from the fact that this is probably just an excuse not to read the Bible or to have unchecked power over those who do not know the languages, the position overemphasizes issues with translations and the translation process. After all, people effectively communicate across language barriers every day by means of translation. It also leads to absurd idea that, instead of sending missionaries to translate the Scriptures into other heart languages, the church must send them to promote universal literacy in Hebrew and Greek.

The answer lies somewhere in the middle. Through a “good” or even “average” translation, men, women, and children can know much about God including His person, His work in history, how to have a relationship with Him through faith in Jesus Christ, how to live a life of faith and obedience that pleases Him, etc. That is undeniable. We praise God for the immeasurable blessings and benefits that translations of Scripture have been and continue to be for all. With that said, it would be a mistake to conclude that learning the biblical languages in general or biblical Greek in particular, the latter being the focus of this paper, is of little or no value. On the contrary, learning biblical Greek is of great value because it enhances one’s ability to study and interpret the Scriptures correctly. This paper will seek to

demonstrate that point through various textual examples, several of which are from Romans. Others are favorites of Glen Riddle, the servant of the Lord to whom this paper is dedicated.

Learning Biblical Greek Enhances One's Ability to Study and Understand the Word of God

Examples from Words

"Propitiation" in Romans 3:25

Many people who have not studied Greek - and perhaps some who have - believe that the primary benefit of acquiring the language is to learn what the various biblical words "actually mean."² This impression probably exists because the average churchgoer hears more from the pulpit about Greek words than any other element of the language. Some preachers, for example, appeal to a word's etymology, or historical origin, to provide insight into its meaning. For the same reason, others might include a lengthy word study in the sermon. Unfortunately, the result is often not a significant contribution to understanding the passage at hand but simply a concordance report of the various passages where the word occurs.

Various factors explain the emphasis upon Greek words in sermons. First, words are an important component of the language and, as such, worthy of diligent study. When that study yields valuable information, it should be shared. Second, information about words is much easier to communicate to the average church attendee and is "more exciting" than other technical grammatical points such as the aspectual force of the present participle. Third, some pastors, for whatever reason, have not developed proficiency with Greek and cannot delve into the text beyond a basic word study. Finally, a small minority of pastors – hopefully very small – simply talk about Greek words and other aspects of the language for the purpose of self-aggrandizement.

² It should be noted that this section is strongly influenced by ideas put forth in the following work: Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meanings: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

In light of the above, imagine the surprise of new students who are expecting to learn the “real meaning” of Greek words but discover that they will be memorizing glosses. That is, students learn English words whose meaning in a given context more or less adequately reflect, or translate, the Greek term used in a given context. The student learns that *ἁμαρτία* (hamartia) is translated as “sin” or “transgression.” Etymologies or other “real meanings” such as the commonly mentioned *ἁμαρτία* (hamartia; “sin”) as “missing the mark” are not learned.

Etymologies are not learned because their primary value is really limited to: 1) diachronic study of a language (how a language changes over time), 2) providing insight into words whose meanings are unknown due to very limited attestation in the relevant literature (an issue mostly involving *hapax legomenon* in the Old Testament where other Near Eastern languages are consulted), 3) explaining the meaning of some compound words, and 4) when an author clearly invokes etymology as relevant to understanding his statement. Thus, although etymologies can be interesting and even valuable for illustrative purposes, they are largely irrelevant in our central concern of exegesis, for interpretation of the text. What matters for exegesis is the word’s meaning (or meanings) when the author wrote. Perhaps the easiest way to validate that conclusion is to think of our own experience with English. Very few of us are aware of the etymology of most English words. For example, what is the etymology of “happy,” “concern,” “life,” or “banana”? Most of us do not know, nor do we care. Nevertheless, we do know what the words mean and use them all the time. The same would be true of a speaker of an ancient language.

Turning to word studies, a few benefits are worth mentioning. First, word studies are useful for determining a word’s semantic range, the various meanings of the word in different contexts.³ The

³ Meanings for the Spanish word *llave*, for example, include “an implement for opening a lock” (key), “an instrument for tightening a bolt” (wrench), and “a handle that controls the flow of water” (faucet). In English, “dump” can mean “to empty out a container by tilting” or “to end a romantic relationship with someone”. Puns are a particular area of humor that depend considerably on this feature of language, whether through ambiguity or the clever use of word meanings and contexts.

exegete uses that information to determine the use most appropriate to the context under consideration. To a certain extent this process reproduces information already available in the standard Greek lexicons by Bauer or Louw and Nida. Moreover, the results are often mundane and do not yield powerful preaching material. Nevertheless, the process is valuable for the contribution it makes toward understanding the passage's meaning, for the sake of the individual's personal exploration of the text, and for a continual evaluation of the Greek lexical tools used for biblical study.

The second way word studies are helpful is tracing the development of different events, themes, concepts, and teachings in Scripture. The interpreter, however, must remember that study of one term or even other lexically related terms does not necessarily encompass all that Scripture has to say about a given topic. A comprehensive investigation should include non-lexically related terms, whether synonyms or antonyms, as well as passages that address the topic without using the terms normally associated with the matter. This may occur, for example, in biblical stories and parables.

A third benefit of word studies is that they can highlight certain connotations or associations that the author or biblical reader would immediately make but are not obvious to us. This brings us to the verse mentioned in the above subtitle, Romans 3:25, which is cited below beginning from verse 21.

²¹ But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; ²⁵ whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation (ἱλαστήριον) in His blood through faith. (Rom 3:21-25; NASB)⁴

The word translated as "propitiation" by the NASB and numerous other versions is *ἱλαστήριον* (hilastērion).⁵ Using a Greek concordance or other electronic search tool reveals that *ἱλαστήριον*

⁴ The New American Standard Bible (NASB) is used throughout this paper. Although other versions will be referenced as well, this one is used because it is known to be one of the more "literal" translations. As such, if the present author can demonstrate important aspects that do not readily appear using this or other "literal" versions, the point has a solid foundation.

⁵ Other versions that translate *ἱλαστήριον* (hilastērion) as "propitiation" include the 21st Century King James Version (KJ21), American Standard Version (ASV), BRG Bible (BRG), Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition (DRA),

(hilastērion) appears twice in the New Testament: Romans 3:25 and Hebrews 9:5. The latter occurrence is clearly a reference to the mercy seat that was on top of the Ark of the Covenant in the tabernacle and overshadowed by two cherubim. Upon broadening the search, the Greek student learns that *ἱλαστήριον* (hilastērion) appears twenty-one times in the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament.⁶ Surprisingly, every occurrence is a reference to the mercy seat.

Without delving too deeply into the details, the basic idea of the mercy seat was one of a meeting place between a holy God and a sinful people (Ex 25:17-22; Lev 16:1-22). Consequently, when Paul writes that God set Jesus forth as a *ἱλαστήριον* (hilastērion; “mercy seat”), those familiar with the LXX immediately associate Jesus with the mercy seat from the Old Testament. They recognize that Jesus is the ultimate mercy seat, the meeting place between a holy God and sinful people. Unfortunately, that vivid association is lost to those who read the English translation “propitiation” or any number of other renderings.⁷

Someone might object saying that learning or exploring the Greek text is not necessary here since numerous versions translate *ἱλαστήριον* (hilastērion) as “mercy seat” thereby retaining the

English Standard Version (ESV), English Standard Version Anglicised (ESVUK), Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB), King James Version (KJV), Authorized King James Version (AKJV), Modern English Version (MEV), and New King James Version (NKJV).

⁶ The references in the LXX are Ex 25:17 (x2), 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 31:7, 35:12; 38:5, 7 (x2), 8; Lev 16:2 (x2), 13, 14 (x2), 15 (x2); Num 7:89.

⁷ These other renderings include, “so that ... we could come to God” (Contemporary English Version, CEV), “as that-which-satisfies [His wrath]” (Disciples’ Literal New Testament, DLNT), “as a way to forgive people’s sins” (English Revised Version, ERV), “reconciliation” (1599 Geneva Bible, GNV), “the means by which people’s sins are forgiven” (Good News Translation), “reconciliation” (Jubilee Bible 2000, JUB), “to take the punishment for our sins and to end all God’s anger against us” (Living Bible, TLB), “to set the world clear with himself through the sacrifice of Jesus” (The Message, MSG), “as an atoning sacrifice” (Mounce Reverse-Interlinear New Testament, MOUNCE), “expiation” (New American Bible, Revised Edition, NABRE), “to pay for sins through the spilling of blood” (New International Reader’s Version, NIRV), “sacrifice of atonement” (New International Version, NIV; New International Version UK, NIVUK; New Revised Standard Version, NRSV; New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised, NRSVA; New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition, NRSVCE), “expiation” (Revised Standard Version, RSV, Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition, RSVCE), “atoning sacrifice” (World English Bible, WEB), “whom God ordained forgiver” (Wycliffe Bible, WYC).

association.⁸ Furthermore, numerous study Bibles, commentaries, or electronic Bible programs include that type of information. The problem with the first point is that, although the information is available in some translations, it is not present in all translations, which results in conflicting data. The person who does not know Greek is lacking a tool that enables direct evaluation and explanation of that data, that is, the varying translations. Rather than going directly to the text, he must resort to secondary sources. Besides missing the joy and satisfaction of finding the answer personally, the same problem exists at a different level. If the secondary sources conflict regarding the Greek, who is to be believed and on what basis? The person without knowledge of Greek must decide without an important tool. The point is that believers and teachers in particular should strive to be, first and foremost and to the extent possible, students of the word. Greek is a valuable tool that enables more direct study of the word, and knowing it is of great benefit. As this paper proceeds, these same basic issues will emerge time and again.

Differentiating between “Sons” and “Children” in Romans 8:12-21

Romans 5:1-8:39 constitutes a major section in Paul’s magnum opus.⁹ The primary focus of that section is the sanctification of the believer. Already justified by faith, the believer should pursue a life that pleases God, a life of victory over sin, thereby avoiding His temporal wrath. Throughout the section, Paul presents several important truths with respect to achieving that victory as well as one sure way to experience failure in the Christian life, by focusing on keeping the law. Despite those important truths, the key to victory is ultimately found in Romans 8, the climax of the section, where Paul unveils God’s secret weapon in the spiritual battle: the Holy Spirit.

⁸ The versions that specifically say ‘mercy seat’ (differences in hyphenization or capitalization notwithstanding) include: Darby Translation (DARBY), Lexham English Bible (LEB), Net English Translation (NET Bible), and Young’s Literal Translation (YLT). Other versions that do not have “mercy seat,” but the reality is clearly expressed in another form include: Amplified Bible (AMP), Common English Bible (CEB), Complete Jewish Bible (CJB), God’s Word Translation (GW), Names of God Bible (NOG), Orthodox Jewish Bible (OJB), and The Voice (VOICE).

⁹ Some argue that this section begins in 5:12, and others prefer 6:1.

By the time that Paul dictates Romans 8, he can say that everyone who belongs to Christ is indwelt by the Spirit (8:9). This means that, as believers, they are “in the Spirit” (ἐν πνεύματι; en pneumati) and able to please God as opposed to unbelievers who are “in the flesh” (ἐν σαρκί; en sarki) and unable to please God (8:8-9). Although the believer’s body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness (8:10). Just as the Spirit raised Christ from the dead, it acts as a resurrecting force within the believer to give life to his dead body (8:11). In light of those facts, Paul writes the following:

¹²So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—
¹³for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons (υἱοί) of God. ¹⁵For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons (υιοθεσίας) by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!”
¹⁶The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children (τέκνα) of God, ¹⁷and if children (τέκνα), heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*.

¹⁸For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons (υιῶν) of God. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children (τέκνων) of God. (Romans 8:12-21; NASB)

Although much could be said about this passage, the current focus is on the words “sons” (υἱοί; huioi) and “children” (τέκνα; tekna). For various reasons, this author believes that Paul uses different terms to make an important distinction. In this passage, “sons” are mature believers who live “according to the Spirit” and who “by [means of] the Spirit ... are putting to death the deeds of the body.” This means that there are also believers who are not “sons” because they are not living according to the Spirit but according to the flesh. The word “children,” on the other hand, encompasses all believers and, as believers, they are members of God’s family, whether mature or not. All children are heirs of God (8:17) and will experience the glorious freedom of the new creation (8:21).

Whether the reader agrees with that view of the text or not, a few important points about the value of learning Greek can be made. First, one who is studying the Greek text can easily see that Paul

uses distinct terms for “sons” (υιοί; huioi) and “children” (τέκνα; tekna). This forces a careful reader to consider why that is so and to provide a reasonable explanation. One clear possibility would be the position stated above. Another proposed explanation is that Paul uses the words for “sons” and “children” synonymously and interchanges them to avoid repetition. Thus, knowing Greek opens the door to possible interpretations, but it does not necessarily resolve all interpretative disputes.

Second, numerous English versions use two terms, “sons” and “children,” in the passage.¹⁰ Readers of those versions will likely assume that the two English words reflect two distinct Greek words. A few might even verify that assumption with an electronic tool or other secondary source. As such, a careful English reader can at least, upon seeing the context and the different words, consider the possibility that Paul has two groups of believers in view. Other English versions, however, show one term, usually “children” for both υιοί (huioi; sons) and τέκνα (tekna; children), thereby eliminating from consideration what this author believes to be the best interpretive option for the passage.¹¹ This is not to say that translations can or even should show every interpretative possibility. That would be impossible and foolish. It does demonstrate, however, that translations, sooner or later and for better or for worse, become interpretations, often without the reader realizing it. Learning Greek minimizes that issue by providing direct access to the text behind the translation. It also enables one to explain to others the rationale behind differences in translations.

The third point is similar to the second but views the issue from a different perspective. The present author examined Romans 8:12-21 in sixteen Spanish Bibles, a list that includes the most popular

¹⁰ Versions that distinguish between the terms include the KJ21, ASV, AMP, BRG, CJB, DARBY, DLNT, DRA, ESV, ESVUK, Expanded Bible (EXB) (only in parenthesis), GNV, HCSB, PHILLIPS, KJV, AKJV, LEB, MEV, NASB, NET, NKJV, NLV, RSV, RSVCE, WE, YLT. This note does not consider the term υιοθεσία (huiothesia), a term that includes part of υιός but is often translated “adoption.”

¹¹ Versions that do not distinguish between the terms but translate both as “children” or “true children,” unless otherwise noted, include CEB (“sons” is translated “sons and daughters”), CEV, ERV, GW, GNT, International Children’s Bible (ICB), International Standard Version (ISV), JUB (both terms translated as “sons”), TLB (one “sons” is translated as “children”), MSG (neither are translated often), NOG, NABRE, New Century Version (NCV), NIRV, NIV, NIVUK, New Living Translation (NLT), NRSV, NRSVA, NRSVACE, NRSVCE, OJB (all terms are “bnei”), VOICE, WEB, WYC (both terms translated as “sons”). The note does not consider the term υιοθεσία (huiothesia), a term that includes part of υιός but is often translated “adoption.”

versions in use today. Of those sixteen, all use one term, “hijos,” for both *υιοί* (huioi; “sons”) and *τέκνα* (tekna; “children”).¹² To the extent that believers in the Spanish-speaking world rely solely on the Spanish translations, they are forced into a specific understanding of the text which carries with it important soteriological implications. A legitimate alternative is completely obscured from view.

This shows that the call for teachers and other individuals to learn Greek is not limited to believers of one particular language. After all, whether for theological or linguistic reasons, a translation (or translations) in one language may mask aspects of scriptural truth that are completely obvious or at least perceivable in the translation (or translations) of another language and vice versus. The resulting understandings (or lack there of) influence the doctrine and practice of believers who speak the affected language. This phenomenon is countered when believers of different language backgrounds can examine the Greek text, identify those masked areas, and teach other believers about them. Thus, the Greek text serves as a corrective and unifying basis for study of the New Testament within one’s native language and across the language barriers.

One final point about the global church is salient. English speakers are often not aware that, in addition to exporting movies and McDonald’s abroad, we export our Christianity. Regarding literature, many of the Christian works available in other languages, whether popular works by Swindoll or scholarly ones by Carson, are translated or adapted from English. If the American church deemphasizes in depth study of Greek, fewer scholarly works will be produced and those that are produced will probably be of lesser quality. That same void will filter into the international church, at least until they rise up and produce their own materials as some are beginning to do. Thus, whether Americans foster

¹² La Biblia de las Américas (LBLA), Dios Habla Hoy (DHH), Jubilee Bible 2000 (JBS), Nueva Biblia al Día (NBD), Nueva Biblia Latinoamericana de Hoy (NBLH), Nueva Traducción Viviente (NTV), Nueva Versión Internacional (NVI), Nueva Versión Internacional Castilian (CSV), Palabra de Dios para Todos (PDT), La Palabra (España; BLP), La Palabra (Hispanoamérica; BLP), Reina Valera Contemporánea (RVC), Reina-Valera 1960 (RVR1960), Reina Valera 1977 (RVR1977), Reina-Valera 1995 (RVR1995), Reina-Valera Antigua (RVA).

love or disdain for biblical Greek, that attitude and the results thereof will affect others beyond our borders.

Examples from Syntax

Contrasting Heirships in Romans 8:17

The previous passage from Romans 8 contains another element worthy of discussion: the μέν...δέ (men... de) construction. The μέν...δέ (men... de) construction presents a contrast between two items. In some contexts, this contrast can be reasonably shown with an intensive such as “indeed” and the adversative conjunction “but.” Other contexts might warrant a more cumbersome rendering such as “on the one hand” and “on the other hand” to bring out the contrast. Some familiar examples include Mark 14:38b, Luke 10:2, Acts 1:5, and 1 Corinthians 1:12. Consider the Greek text of Romans 8:17 where the μέν...δέ (men... de) construction is bolded and underlined. The Greek is followed by two English translations.

16 αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα συμμαρτυρεῖ τῷ πνεύματι ἡμῶν ὅτι ἐσμὲν τέκνα θεοῦ. 17 εἰ δὲ τέκνα, καὶ κληρονόμοι· κληρονόμοι **μέν** θεοῦ, συγκληρονόμοι **δέ** Χριστοῦ, εἴπερ συμπάσχομεν ἵνα καὶ συνδοξασθῶμεν. (Romans 8:16-17; UBS 4th Edition)

16 The Spirit itself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God. But if children, *we are* also heirs: **on the one hand**, heirs of God **but, on the other hand**, coheirs with Christ if indeed we suffer with *Him* in order that we might be glorified with *Him*. (Author’s translation)

¹⁶The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, heirs also, heirs of God **and** fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*. (NASB)

Paul concludes that, by virtue of having God’s Spirit, he and his believing readers are God’s children. One might recall that the giving of the Spirit was mentioned in Romans 5:5 immediately following the section of justification by faith in Christ apart from works (3:21-25; 4:1-9, 24-25; 5:1). By virtue of being children, they are heirs. The apostle then uses the μέν...δέ (men...de) construction to highlight a distinction of some kind regarding that heirship.

What is the nature of this distinction? To begin, there are heirs of God. On the other hand, there are coheirs with Christ. The different terms, κληρονόμοι (klēronomoi; “heirs”) versus συγκληρονόμοι (sugklēronomoi; “coheirs”) and θεοῦ (theou; “of God”) versus Χριστοῦ (Christou; “of Christ”), punctuate the reality of a contrast. Furthermore, coheirship with Christ is clearly linked with the subordinate clauses εἴπερ συμπάσχομεν (eiper sumpaschomen; “if indeed we suffer with *Him*”) and ἵνα καὶ συνδοξασθῶμεν (hina kai sundoxasthōmen; “in order that we might be glorified with *Him*”) through various forms of the prefix συν (sun; “with”). The συν (sun) prefix communicates the idea of association. Thus, being συγκληρονόμοι (sugklēronomoi; “coheirs with Christ” or “heirs together with Christ”) is based on the condition that συμπάσχομεν (sumpaschomen; “we suffer with *Him*”) so that συνδοξασθῶμεν (sundoxasthōmen; “we might be glorified with *Him*”). In other words, coheirship with Christ is specifically conditioned upon suffering with Him but being an heir of God is not. The latter, as mentioned above, is conditioned upon faith in Christ apart from works.

Paul’s discussion in Romans 8 provides at least one detail regarding a benefit of being God’s heir. As a child, that individual will have a glorified body and live in a new creation free from corruption (8:21-22). Regarding what coglorification might entail, Paul does not explicitly say in Romans. However, 2 Timothy 2:11-13 presents a similar motif where enduring with Christ results in reigning with Him but denying Him results in forfeiture of that privilege. The concept that Christ has received a kingdom for His endurance and will grant the same privilege to believers who endure also appears in Revelation 2:26-28 and 3:21. Even in Jesus’ ministry, the theme of reigning with Christ appears in passages such as Mark 10:33-45 and Luke 19:11-27. In the latter instance, reigning is based on faithfulness.

Perhaps the reader noticed that the NASB does not here translate the μέν...δέ (men...de) construction as a contrast. The μέν (men) is untranslated, and the δέ (de) is rendered with the

coordinating conjunction “and.”¹³ In fact, the contrast is not present in **any** of the English or Spanish versions that this author consulted.¹⁴ Most versions leave the *μέν* (men) untranslated, although a few give it an intensifying force such as “certainly” or “indeed.” Even so, they translate the second half with “and” instead of the adversative conjunction “but.” That fact is very surprising considering that, as the following table shows, **all** other *μέν...δέ* (men...de) constructions in Romans present a contrast of some kind, often a very strong one.¹⁵ Given this powerful evidence, one becomes suspicious that theology had a significant role in the translation of Romans 8:17.

| All μέν...δέ (men...de) Constructions in Romans | |
|---|--|
| Ref: | Verse: |
| 2:6-8 | 6 ὃς ἀποδώσει ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ· 7 τοῖς μέν καθ’ ὑπομονὴν ἔργου ἀγαθοῦ δόξαν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ ἀφθαρσίαν ζητοῦσιν ζωὴν αἰώνιον· 8 τοῖς δέ ἐξ ἐριθείας καὶ ἀπειθοῦσι τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πειθομένοις δὲ τῇ ἀδικίᾳ, ὀργὴ καὶ θυμὸς. ⁶ who will render to each person according to his deeds; ⁷ to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; ⁸ but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. |
| 2:25 | 25 περιτομὴ μέν γὰρ ὠφελεῖ ἐὰν νόμον πράσσης· ἐὰν δέ παραβάτης νόμου ᾖς, ἡ περιτομὴ σου ἀκροβυστία γέγονεν. ²⁵ For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. |
| 5:16 | 16 καὶ οὐχ ὡς δι’ ἐνὸς ἀμαρτήσαντος τὸ δῶρημα· τὸ μέν γὰρ κρίμα ἐξ ἐνὸς εἰς κατάκριμα, τὸ δέ χάρισμα ἐκ πολλῶν παραπτωμάτων εἰς δικαίωμα. ¹⁶ The gift is not like <i>that which came</i> through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment <i>arose</i> from <i>one transgression</i> resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift <i>arose</i> from many transgressions resulting in justification. |
| 6:11 | 11 οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς λογίζεσθε ἑαυτοὺς [εἶναι] νεκροὺς μέν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ ζῶντας δέ τῷ θεῷ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. ¹¹ Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. |

¹³ Although the translation of *δέ* (de) as “and” is legitimate in many circumstances, the combination of *μέν...δέ* (men...de) normally warrants the contrasting translation.

¹⁴ The following English versions lack the contrast. Unless otherwise noted, the *μέν* (men) is not translated. When translated, it is with an intensive force such as “indeed.” However, since the *δέ* (de) is translated with “and” instead of “but,” the contrast is lacking. Again, the versions without the contrast are: KJ21, ASV, AMP, BRG, CEB, CJB, DARBY, DLNT, DRA (intensive of “indeed”), ERV, ESV, ESVUK, EXB, GNV (intensive of “indeed”), GW, GNT, HCSB, ICB, ISV, PHILLIPS, JUB (intensive of “certainly” but since the conjunction is not translated as “but,” the contrasting force is absent), KJV, AKJV, LEB, TLB, MSG, MEV, MOUNCE (this reverse interlinear is based on the NIV, but it seems that, since the NIV does not include the contrast or translate *μέν* (men) with an intensive force, the corresponding Greek text of *μέν* (men) is not present), NOG, NABRE, NASB, NCV, NET Bible (intensive of “namely”), NIRV, NIV, NIVUK, NKJV, NLV, NLT, NRSV, NRSVA, NRSVACE, NRSVCE, OJB, RSV, RSVCE, VOICE, WEB, WE, WYC (intensive of “indeed”). The following Spanish versions lack the contrast: LBLA, DHH, JBS (intensive of “ciertamente”), NBD, NBLH, NTV (intensive of “de hecho”), NVI, CST, PDT, BLP, BLPH, RVC, RVR1960, RVR1977, RVR1995, RVA, and TLA.

¹⁵ The NASB translates 9:21 with “and” instead of “but,” but the contrast is contextually obvious.

| All μέν...δέ (men...de) Constructions in Romans | |
|---|---|
| 7:25 | 25 χάρις δὲ τῷ θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν. ἄρα οὖν αὐτὸς ἐγὼ τῷ μέν νοῦ δουλεύω νόμῳ θεοῦ, τῇ δέ σαρκὶ νόμῳ ἁμαρτίας. ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other , with my flesh the law of sin. |
| 8:10 | 10 εἰ δὲ Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν, τὸ μέν σῶμα νεκρὸν διὰ ἁμαρτίαν, τὸ δέ πνεῦμα ζωὴ διὰ δικαιοσύνην. ¹⁰ If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. |
| 9:21 | 21 ἢ οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν ὁ κεραμεὺς τοῦ πηλοῦ ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ φυράματος ποιῆσαι ὁ μέν εἰς τιμὴν σκεῦος ὁ δέ εἰς ἀτιμίαν; ²¹ Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? |
| 11:22 | 22 ἴδε οὖν χρηστότητα καὶ ἀποτομίαν θεοῦ· ἐπὶ μέν τοὺς πεσόντας ἀποτομία, ἐπὶ δέ σὲ χρηστότης θεοῦ, ἐὰν ἐπιμένῃς τῇ χρηστότητι, ἐπεὶ καὶ σὺ ἐκκοπήσῃ. ²² Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. |
| 11:28 | 28 κατὰ μέν τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἐχθροὶ δι' ὑμᾶς, κατὰ δέ τὴν ἐκλογὴν ἀγαπητοὶ διὰ τοὺς πατέρας· ²⁸ From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; |
| 14:2 | 2 ὃς μέν πιστεύει φαγεῖν πάντα, ὁ δέ ἀσθενῶν λάχανα ἐσθίει. ² One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables <i>only</i> . |
| 14:5 | 5 ὃς μέν [γὰρ] κρίνει ἡμέραν παρ' ἡμέραν, ὃς δέ κρίνει πᾶσαν ἡμέραν· ἕκαστος ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ νοῦ πληροφορεῖσθω. ⁵ One person regards one day above another, another regards every day <i>alike</i> . Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. |

The previous discussion attests to the value of learning Greek. Although some of those benefits were mentioned above, they are worth repeating. First, the above understanding is much easier to perceive, accept, and defend on the basis of the Greek text than from the English. Second, learning Greek allows the student to embark on his own exciting journey of confirmation and discovery through study of the Scriptures. Third, if someone wants to investigate, evaluate, or simply disagree with the above conclusions, that person will be in a much better position to do so with a knowledge of Greek. Otherwise, he must resort to searching the writings of others who know Greek rather than personally searching the Scriptures first for answers. Even when the individual finds information in the literature regarding the matter, he lacks an important tool for a comprehensive evaluation of what those authors assert. This third point has important implications for the local church. Although this writer certainly encourages pastors and Bible teachers to pursue competency with Greek, it is also healthy for churches to have lay people with that knowledge. Lay people who know Greek are not only blessed in their

personal study of the word but, through their example, prompt the leadership to begin studying biblical Greek or to grow in that area. Furthermore, a pastor is more likely to ensure that any teaching based on the Greek is accurate when he knows that others can evaluate its veracity.

Participles a Plenty in Hebrews 6:4-6

Greek participles are words that have a verbal and adjectival nature. In a given context, one of those two natures is emphasized. That is, sometimes a participle will function as a verb or verbal modifier, and other times a participle will function as an adjective. Similar to other adjectives, the adjectival participle can function as a noun (substantively) or modify another noun, either directly (attributive) or by predicating something about it (predicate). As other exegetes will confirm, the participle's flexibility is what makes it particularly challenging for the reader of Greek but also why the participle can bear valuable exegetical fruit. The same is certainly true in the famous warning passage of Hebrews 6:4-6 below, where the numerous participles are highlighted and underlined.

4 Ἀδύνατον γὰρ τοὺς ἅπασι φωτισθέντας, γευσαμένους τε τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς ἐπουρανίου καὶ μετόχους γενηθέντας πνεύματος ἁγίου 5 καὶ καλὸν γευσαμένους θεοῦ ῥῆμα δυνάμεις τε μέλλοντος αἰῶνος 6 καὶ παραπεσόντας, πάλιν ἀνακαινίζειν εἰς μετάνοιαν, ἀνασταυροῦντας ἑαυτοῖς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ παραδειγματίζοντας. (Hebrews 6:4-6; UBS 4th Edition)

⁴For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. (NKJV)

The Greek sentence in 6:4 begins with the adjective *Ἀδύνατον* (adunaton), which means “impossible.” The translators add “*it is*” for the sake of clarity in English, although the pronoun “it” is not completely necessary. The words *πάλιν ἀνακαινίζειν εἰς μετάνοιαν* (palin anakainizein eis metanoian; “to renew again to repentance”) do not appear until a couple of words into verse 6. Those words, along with *Ἀδύνατον* (adunaton; “impossible”), form the central thought of 6:4-6: “to renew again unto repentance is impossible.”

Between *Ἀδύνατον* (*adunaton*; “impossible”) and *πάλιν ἀνακαινίζειν εἰς μετάνοιαν* (*palin anakainizein eis metanoian*; “to renew again to repentance”) appear six participles, five of which are aorist tense and functioning in the same way. The first, *φωτισθέντας* (*phōtisthentas*; “enlightened”), has the article *τούς* (*tous*) which means that the participle is functioning adjectivally. Furthermore, the participle is substantival because it is not modifying another noun in the context. In other words, those contextual details plus other morphological features are why the participle is translated “those who were enlightened.” Lastly, the participle functions as the direct object of *ἀνακαινίζειν* (*anakainizen*; “to renew”) because the former is in the accusative case.

The next aorist participle, *γευσάμενους* (*geusamenous*; “have tasted”), is connected to the first by *τε* (*te*; “and”). This particle enables the second participle *γευσάμενους* (*geusamenous*; “have tasted”) to share in the force of the article *τούς* (*tous*) that accompanies the first participle *φωτισθέντας* (*phōtisthentas*; “those who were enlightened”). Thus, *γευσάμενους* (*geusamenous*; “have tasted”) is also adjectival and functioning as a noun. Although it could be translated, “those who have tasted,” the sense “have tasted” suffices in tandem with “those who were enlightened.”

The next three aorist participles in the series are *γενηθέντας* (*genēthentas*; “have become”), *γευσάμενους* (*geusamenous*; “have tasted”), and *παραπεσόντας* (*parapesontas*; “have fallen away”). Each is connected to the article of *φωτισθέντας* (*phōtisthentas*; “those who have been enlightened”) through the conjunction *καί* (*kai*). Consequently, they are all substantival participles and could be translated as “those who have become,” “those who have tasted,” and “those who have fallen away,” respectively, although “have become,” “have tasted,” and “have fallen away” also work when added to the “those who” of the first participle. It should be noted that the one present participle in the series, *μέλλοντος* (*mellontos*; “coming”), clearly functions as an attributive participle, modifying *αἰῶνος* (*aiōnos*; “age”).

To summarize, although it may sound complicated, the grammar on this point is quite straight forward. The five aorist participles of *φωτισθέντας* (phōtisthentas; “those who have been enlightened”), *γευσαμένους* (geusamenous; “have tasted”), *γενηθέντας* (genēthentas; “have become”), *γευσαμένους* (geusamenous; “have tasted”), and *παραπεσόντας* (parapesontas; “have fallen away”) are adjectival participles functioning as nouns. They should be translated accordingly: “those who have been enlightened, have tasted..., have become..., have tasted..., and have fallen away.”

All the English and Spanish versions that this author consulted agree with the previous conclusion, at least with regards to the first four participles.¹⁶ Many versions also agree concerning the fifth participle, *παραπεσόντας* (parapesontas; “have fallen away”).¹⁷ The curious thing, however, is that numerous translations, including the the NKJV quoted above, reject a simple substantival translation and insert “if,” thereby placing the substantival participle within a conditional clause.¹⁸ The purpose seems to be and the result definitely is to communicate more of a hypothetical situation, especially with regards to the falling away. In other words, although the translators can conceive of those who “were enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,” the idea that those individuals “have fallen away” remains subject to doubt, subject to an “if.” To be blunt, that sort of addition is neither

¹⁶ The English versions that translate the first four aorist participles as substantival or, at least, give that understanding include the following: KJ21, ASV, AMP, BRG, CEB, CJB, CEV (in meaning but not syntax), DARBY, DLNT, DRA, ERV (in meaning but not syntax), ESV, ESVUK, EXB, GNV, GW, GNT, HCSB, ICB, ISV, PHILLIPS, JUB, KJV, AKJV, LEB, TLB, MSG, MEV, NOG, NABRE, NASB, NCV, NET, NIRV, NIV, NIVUK, NKJV, NLV, NLT, NRSV, NRSVA, NRSVACE, NRSVAC, OJB, RSV, RSVCE, WEB, WE, and YLC. Spanish versions include: LBLA, DHH, JBS, NBD, NBLH, NTV, NVI, CST, PDT, BLP, BLPH, RVC, RVR1960, RVR1977, RVR1995, RVA, and TLA.

¹⁷ The English versions that translate *παραπεσόντας* (parapesontas) as a substantival participle (e.g. “those who have fallen away”) or at least give that understanding, as opposed to a condition introducing a substantival participle (“if they fall away”), include the following: ASV, CEB, CJB, CEV, DARBY, DLNT, DRA, ERV (in meaning but not syntax), ESV, ESVUK, GW (in meaning but not syntax), GNT, HCSB, ISV, PHILLIPS, JUB, LEB, TLB, NOG, NABRE, NASB, NCV, NET, NIV, NIVUK, NLT, NRSV, NRSVA, NRSVACE, NRSVAC, OJB, WEB, WYC, YLC. Some versions may have a note offering a conditional statement as an alternate rendering. Spanish versions include: LBLA, JBS, NBD, NBLH, NTV, NVI, CST, PDT, BLP, BLPH, RVC, RVR1960, RVR1977, RVR1995, and RVA.

¹⁸ The English versions that introduce the final participle with the conditional “if” include the following: KJ21, AMP, BRG, EXB, GNV, KJV, AKJV, MSG, MEV, NIRV (this version managed to present it both ways so it is included here), NKJV, NLV, RSV, RSVCE, WE, and WYC. Spanish versions include DHH and TLA. Some versions may include a note stating the substantival rendering (“and have fallen away”) as a possibility.

necessary nor warranted given the grammar discussed above. The individual with an understanding of how the Greek participle works should be able to identify that fact and explain it to others.

Now that the six participles preceding *πάλιν ἀνακαινίζειν εἰς μετάνοιαν* (*palin anakainizein eis metanoian*; “to renew again to repentance”) have been analyzed, the two participles following that phrase can be discussed. The participles *ἀνασταυροῦντας* (*anastaurountas*; “crucifying again”) and *παραδειγματίζοντας* (*paradeigmatizontas*; “putting to an open shame”) clearly do not continue the series of substantival participles. The first clue that the list has concluded is that the flow was interrupted by the infinitive *ἀνακαινίζειν* (*anakainizein*; “to renew again to repentance”) and other surrounding words. Second, these participles are present tense, not aorist as those of the series. Third, these are not connected to the previous series by a particle (τε; *te*) or conjunction (καί; *kai*). Finally, in the overall context, it makes more sense to view them as modifying the infinitive *ἀνακαινίζειν* (*anakainizein*; “to renew again”). Thus, the participles *ἀνασταυροῦντας* (*anastaurountas*; “crucifying again”) and *παραδειγματίζοντας* (*paradeigmatizontas*; “putting to an open shame”) are adverbial.

Adverbial participles have a logical relationship to the verb that they modify. The participle may describe when the verb’s action occurs (temporal), the means through which the verb occurs, the manner in which the verb occurs, the cause or reason the verb occurs, a condition that must be met for the verb to occur, a concession in spite of which the verb still occurs, the purpose for which the verb occurs, or the result of the verb. The individual who knows Greek has the opportunity to analyze the context in an attempt to determine what the logical relationship between the verb and adverbial participle is. Sometimes the relationship is obvious. Other times it is more difficult to determine. The process does provide the exegete with the opportunity to consider possibilities not immediately evident in a translation.

The last point intimates that translators pass through the same process of determining the logical relationship of the adverbial participle to the verb. Sometimes they add words to clarify that

relationship to the reader. In the passage under consideration, the NKJV translates the two adverbial participles as causal: “For *it is* impossible ... to renew them again to repentance, **since** they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame” (Hebrews 6:4a, 6b). The NASB likewise includes a causal sense, although a textual note indicates the possibility of a temporal (“while”) one: “...it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, **since** they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame” (Hebrews 6:6b). One interesting point is that, although both versions seek to italicize words that are added to the text, neither does so with “since” in this passage. The text of the translation leaves the impression that “since” is part of the actual text when, in fact, it is a reasonably drawn conclusion from the context, albeit not the only one.

Examples from Literary Devices

Alliteration in Romans 1:30-31

Authors use different literary techniques in their writings. These devices add flare to the message and facilitate interesting and effective communication. In Romans 1:28-32, as Paul nears the end of his discussion regarding God’s wrath against the gentile world, he lists various vices. That list concludes with a literary splash in the form of alliteration. The final five fiendish fetishes found there all begin with the Greek letter alpha (α).¹⁹ Those flaws are highlighted in the following texts.

28 καὶ καθὼς οὐκ ἔδοκίμασαν τὸν θεὸν ἔχειν ἐν ἐπιγνώσει, παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς εἰς ἀδόκιμον νοῦν, ποιεῖν τὰ μὴ καθήκοντα, 29 πεπληρωμένους πάσῃ ἀδικίᾳ πονηρίᾳ πλεονεξίᾳ κακίᾳ, μεστοὺς φθόνου φόνου ἔριδος δόλου κακοηθείας, ψιθυριστὰς 30 καταλάλους θεοσυγεῖς ὑβριστὰς ὑπερηφάνους ἀλαζόνας ἐφευρετὰς κακῶν, γονεῦσιν **ἀπειθεῖς, 31 ἀσυνέτους ἀσυνθέτους ἀστόργους ἀνελεήμονας**; 32 οἵτινες τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπιγνόντες ὅτι οἱ τὰ τοιαῦτα πράσσοντες ἄξιοι θανάτου εἰσίν, οὐ μόνον αὐτὰ ποιοῦσιν ἀλλὰ καὶ συνευδοκοῦσιν τοῖς πράσσουσιν. (Romans 1:28-32; USB 4th Edition)

²⁸ And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,²⁹ being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips,³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, **disobedient** to parents,

¹⁹ Some manuscripts, including the Majority Text, include a sixth word that begins with alpha, ἀσπόνδους (irreconcilable).

³¹**without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;** ³² and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. (NASB)

The translators managed to maintain the alliteration reasonably well in English through the negative prefix “un”. The sister Spanish translation was not so fortunate, however (“...**desobedientes** a los padres, **sin entendimiento, indignos de confianza, sin amor, despiadados;**” LBLA). Despite the effort, the English essentially loses two words in the alliterative flow, one being ἀπειθεῖς (apeitheis; “disobedient”) and the other being ἀσυνέτους (asunetous; “without understanding”). Also not retained is the similarity of sound in the three middle terms ἀσυνέτους (asunetous; “without understanding”), ἀσυνθέτους (asunthetous; “untrustworthy”), and ἀστόργους (astorgous; “unloving”). Of course the reader of the English text might assume alliteration is present. He might even confirm that assumption by referencing the Greek text or a secondary source such as a commentary. But what fun is it to read others’ discoveries when one could learn Greek and make his own?

Admittedly, knowledge of this particular literary feature does not affect one’s understanding of the **meaning** of the text. That is certainly not to say that there are not other examples that do affect one’s understanding. But the current point is that knowledge of this particular feature contributes to one’s **appreciation** of the text. In other words, it impacts the reader in a rhetorical sense. Although not quantifiable, the alliteration draws the reader closer to the message because it grabs his attention. It encourages him to respond. Moreover, the reader assimilates something about the author’s literary style. Those effects are indeed valuable.

Inclusio in Hebrews 5:11-6:12

Inclusio is a literary device that uses similar words, phrases, or ideas at the beginning and end of a section to indicate a portion of text is a unit. They are found throughout Scripture and were particularly helpful in establishing units of thought because the earliest Greek manuscripts did not include paragraph markings or spaces between words. Hebrews 5:11-6:12, for example, is marked as a

literary unit via inclusio and the overall content. The following text will only include the verses directly surrounding the inclusio.

5:11 Περί οὗ πολὺς ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος καὶ δυσερμῆνευτος λέγειν, ἐπεὶ **νωθροὶ γεγόνατε** ταῖς ἀκοαῖς. 12 καὶ γὰρ ὀφείλοντες εἶναι διδάσκαλοι διὰ τὸν χρόνον, πάλιν χρεῖαν ἔχετε τοῦ διδάσκειν ὑμᾶς τινὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τῆς ἀρχῆς τῶν λογίων τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ γεγόνατε χρεῖαν ἔχοντες γάλακτος [καί] οὐ στερεᾶς τροφῆς. ... 6:9 Πεπέισμεθα δὲ περὶ ὑμῶν, ἀγαπητοί, τὰ κρείσσονα καὶ ἐχόμενα σωτηρίας, εἰ καὶ οὕτως λαλοῦμεν. 10 οὐ γὰρ ἄδικος ὁ θεὸς ἐπιλαθέσθαι τοῦ ἔργου ὑμῶν καὶ τῆς ἀγάπης ἧς ἐνεδείξασθε εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, διακονήσαντες τοῖς ἀγίοις καὶ διακονοῦντες. 11 ἐπιθυμοῦμεν δὲ ἕκαστον ὑμῶν τὴν αὐτὴν ἐνδείκνυσθαι σπουδὴν πρὸς τὴν πληροφορίαν τῆς ἐλπίδος ἄχρι τέλους, 12 ἵνα μὴ **νωθροὶ γένησθε**, μιμηταὶ δὲ τῶν διὰ πίστεως καὶ μακροθυμίας κληρονομούντων τὰς ἐπαγγελίας. (Hebrews 5:11-13; 6:9-12; UBS 4th Edition)

¹¹ Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain, since **you have become dull** of hearing. ¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ... ⁹ But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. ¹⁰ For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. ¹¹ And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹² so that **you will not be sluggish**, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (NASB)

The inclusio begins in 5:11 with *νωθροὶ γεγόνατε* (*nōthroi gegonate*) and ends with *νωθροὶ γένησθε* (*nōthroi genēsthe*). The term *νωθροὶ* (*nōthroi*) is clearly the same in each instance. Although *γεγόνατε* (*gegonate*) and *γένησθε* (*genēsthe*) appear very different, the lexical form is actually the same, *γίνομαι* (*ginomai*). Observe that the English of the NASB obscures the inclusio by rendering the first use of *νωθροὶ* (*nōthroi*) as “dull” and the second as “sluggish.”²⁰

The inclusio has value in determining the import of the passage. As discussed previously, this passage contains a harsh warning in 6:4-8. Although there are various intersecting issues and resulting implications regarding each issue, one primary concern focuses on if the warning addresses believers. The inclusio contributes one piece of evidence to the argument that the warning, in fact, addresses

²⁰ English versions that retain the force of the inclusio include the following: AMP, CEB, CJB, DLNT, GW, HCSB, ISV, LEB, NOG, NET, and NLT. English versions that do not retain the force of the inclusion include the following: KJ21, ASV, BRG, CEV, DARBY, DRE, ERV, ESV, ESVUK, EXB, GNV, GNT, ICB, PHILLIPS, JUB, KJV, AKJV, TLB, MSG, MEV, NABRE, NASB, NCV, NIRV, NIV, NIVUK, NKJV, NLV, NRSV, NRSVA, NRSVACE, NRSVCE, OJB, RSV, RSVCE, VOICE, WEB, WE, WYC, and YLT.

believers. It does so by encapsulating the warning between texts that, without a doubt, address a believing readership.

At the front end of the warning, the author tells the readers that they have become *νωθροί* (*nōthroi*), “dull of hearing,” which implies they had a sharper spiritual understanding at some point. In fact, considering the time involved, they should be teachers (5:12). Why would the author think unbelievers should be teachers? The readers, however, have not advanced as expected but have regressed toward spiritual infancy (5:12-13). As babes, their nutrition must consist of milk and not more substantive food, that is, in depth scriptural teaching that results in enhanced discernment between good and evil (5:13-14). After 5:14 there is a most unhelpful chapter division that should be placed elsewhere. In 6:1-3, instead of reviewing Christianity 101, the author encourages the readers to pursue “perfection.” With that the author enters the warning (6:4-8).

Following the warning, the author likewise presents the readers as believers. He refers to them as “beloved” (*ἀγαπητοί*; *agapētoi*) and expresses confidence that they will not experience the aforementioned fate but will persevere and enjoy “things that accompany salvation [deliverance]” (6:9). His expectation is based, at least in part, on the fact that God will remember their past work and love for Him manifested in their ministry toward the saints, a work they were maintaining (6:10). The author longs that his readers continue faithful to the end so that they may not become *νωθροί* (*nōthroi*), “dull” (6:11-12) or perhaps “duller” since they are already “dull” (5:11). The goal is to inherit the promises through faith and patience (6:12).

Thus, the author uses the words *νωθροὶ γέγονατε* (*nōthroi gegonate*) and *νωθροὶ γένησθε* (*nōthroi genēsthe*) to indicate that Hebrews 5:11-6:12 is a cohesive literary unit, the chapter break notwithstanding. The beginning of that unit addresses his believing readers as does the end.²¹ It would be

²¹ Although the warning portion also clearly points to believers, for the purposes of showing the value of the inclusion, it is sufficient to argue with respect to the front and back end.

absurd to conclude that the warning of 6:4-8 does not contemplate or apply to the believers addressed in the immediate context.

The reader does not have to agree with the above conclusion for the primary point of this section to be achieved.²² Namely, knowing Greek allows the interpreter to see important elements related to the literary structure of the text. That structure is relevant for various reasons, including its contribution to the book's and/or passage's flow, meaning, and rhetorical impact on the reader.

Conclusion

Learning biblical Greek is extremely helpful because it enables one to study and understand God's word better. Affirming that truth in no way diminishes the appreciation for or importance of the numerous translations available, through which countless individuals have entered into a saving relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ and have grown into mature believers. Numerous teachers of God's word have had fruitful and effective ministries with no or very limited knowledge of Greek. Nevertheless, the various examples have shown and many more could be added to show that there is immense value in having direct access to the Greek text behind the translations. Important details emerge that are not always visible in a translation. Moreover, the individual who knows Greek has an important tool for understanding, evaluating, and explaining materials that, in one way or another, address the Greek. These materials include translations, the textual apparatus (provides information regarding the differences in manuscripts), works dealing with textual criticism, lexicons, grammars, commentaries, journal articles, sermons, and the information presented by sophisticated Bible programs. Even presentations such as this one should be evaluated using knowledge of Greek. Furthermore, the ability to understand Greek instills a deeper sense of confidence in one's interpretive work. Lastly, it is just plain fun.

²² The objector, of course, would have to address the points made herein and propose an alternative explanation.

In light of the many benefits, the call is for those who are or want to be diligent students of Scripture to become competent in biblical Greek. This call is particularly relevant for those with the enormous responsibility of teaching God's word, but it also applies to lay people and even children. For various reasons, some will not be able to pursue this goal. Certainly in most cases a legitimate reason is not inability because anyone who has learned one language can learn another. It is just a matter of investing the necessary time and discipline. Although not all will be able to heed this call, those who can should because the reward is worth the work. For those looking for a place to start, consult my free grammar: *Biblical Greek: Beginning the Adventure*.²³ For those with a foundation but need to improve, pick up a Greek Reader.²⁴ To conclude, we leave the reader with a quote from Martin Luther about the importance of the biblical languages.

And let us be sure of this: we will not long preserve the gospel without the languages. The languages are the sheath in which this sword of the Spirit is contained; they are the casket in which this jewel is enshrined; they are the vessel in which this wine is held; they are the larder in which this food is stored; and, as the gospel itself points out, they are the baskets in which are kept these loaves and fishes and fragments.²⁵

²³ The conference CD includes two PDF files of this free grammar. One is preferable for printing and the other for electronic viewing. A free copy may also be requested writing to biblicalgreekbegtheadventure@gmail.com

²⁴ Two good readers in English are *The UBS Greek New Testament: A Reader's Edition* by Barclay M. Newman or *A Reader's Greek New Testament: 2nd Edition* by Richard J. Goodrich and Albert L. Lukaszewski.

²⁵ Martin Luther, "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools" (1524).