

Life Group Greek

Introductory Lesson – Alphabet, Translation Theory, and Vocabulary

INTRODUCTION

In 1978 I graduated from Coronado High School in Lubbock, Texas. In addition to the graduation ceremony of our high school, our church noted the moment with a senior recognition service one Sunday morning. At that service, each graduating senior walked across the stage and was given a hardback New International Version of the New Testament (the “NIV”), complete with our names engraved on the front cover.

The New Testament NIV had been out only a few years, and this was my first copy. I was excited. It was not going to take the place of my note-laden Harper Study Bible, but I was ready to re-read the New Testament, making my notes in the margin as I went along. As I read, I was a bit taken aback when I found typos! Typos surely had no place in the Bible!

A few years later, I was comparing my graduation NIV to a later NIV that included the Old Testament. The typos were fixed (whew!), but I was amazed at the differences in some of the verses compared to the Revised Standard Version and New American Standard versions that were my “go-to” Bibles. Around 1992, I lost my Harper Study Bible (in the Revised Standard Version), and the NIV became my new Bible of choice for the next 15 years.

By 2007, I had shifted my everyday usage to the English Standard Version, which I typically use today. I was not prepared, therefore, for the big fuss that arose over the NIV when it came out with a new edition in 2011. There were small points of academic debate over passages like Matthew 13:32, which in the older NIV read,

Though it [the mustard seed] is the smallest of all *your* seeds.

The 2011 NIV removed the word “your.” But the headline changes with the 2011 NIV centered on it becoming “gender-neutral.” This caused uproar in the evangelical community, with the Southern Baptist Convention rejecting the version, while Lifeway Bookstores, the Southern Baptist bookstore chain, continued to sell it. One can quickly find well-informed scholars on both sides of the debate over whether it is a “good” translation or not. Not surprisingly, you can also find non-scholars who have firmly entrenched positions on both sides of the issue as well.

This is an introductory lesson to a closer examination of how the Greek language affects our understanding of Scripture. As an introduction, we consider certain challenges faced by translators when translating the Greek text into English. That might seem simple, but it is not. Every translation makes sacrifices in an effort to meet the translators' goals, and one purpose of this lesson is to point out those sacrifices. This also serves as a nice way to practice the Greek alphabet, where we start the lesson.

The Greek Alphabet

One's first goal is to learn the lower case letters. It will be useful to recognize the letters, their names, and a core pronunciation. We do not know with great precision how the ancients pronounced their Greek, and it is likely that pronunciation differed in different regions (just as it does in English). For purposes of this study the goal merely needs to be a consistent pronunciation.

Lower case	Upper case	Name	English
α	\mathbf{A}	Alpha	a
β	\mathbf{B}	Beta	b
γ	$\mathbf{\Gamma}$	Gamma	g
δ	$\mathbf{\Delta}$	Delta	d
ϵ	\mathbf{E}	Epsilon	e (short)
ζ	\mathbf{Z}	Zeta	z
η	\mathbf{H}	Eta	e (long)
θ	$\mathbf{\Theta}$	Theta	th
ι	\mathbf{I}	Iota	i
κ	\mathbf{K}	Kappa	k
λ	$\mathbf{\Lambda}$	Lambda	l
μ	\mathbf{M}	Mu	m
ν	\mathbf{N}	Nu	n
ξ	$\mathbf{\Xi}$	Xi	x
\omicron	\mathbf{O}	Omicron	o (short)
π	$\mathbf{\Pi}$	Pi	p
ρ	\mathbf{P}	Rho	r
σ, ς	$\mathbf{\Sigma}$	Sigma	s
τ	\mathbf{T}	Tau	t
υ	\mathbf{Y}	Upsilon	u, y
ϕ	$\mathbf{\Phi}$	Phi	ph
χ	\mathbf{X}	Chi	ch
ψ	$\mathbf{\Psi}$	Psi	ps
ω	$\mathbf{\Omega}$	Omega	o (long)

The Greek “s” is written as σ, unless it comes at the end of a word, then it is written as ς. Also note that Greek doesn’t have an “h,” but if a word begins with a vowel, it is assigned a “breathing mark.” The breathing mark looks similar to a comma (facing either forward or backward) placed *above* the vowel. When the mark looks like a comma facing backwards, it is called “rough” (e.g., ᾱ), in which event you add an “h” sound. So ᾱ would sound like the English “ha.” If the comma faces normal (e.g., ᾱ), the sound is called “smooth” which makes it irrelevant, and you pronounce the word as if it is not there.¹

Once someone has familiarity with the Greek alphabet, one way to practice letter recognition is to find Greek words that have made it into our English vocabulary thousands of years later. Can you guess the Greek words below? Just turn the Greek letters into their English equivalent. Remember that Greek doesn’t have a letter “C,” so the Greek “κ” can be an English “C” or “K.” Also the Greek “ι” is not just an English “I” but also an English “J.” Finally, note that the Greek “υ” can be an English “U” or an English “Y.” (I will put the answers at the end of the lesson.)

- | | |
|-------------|---------------|
| 1. κινημα | 6. διπλωμα |
| 2. χαος | 7. ἐμφασις |
| 3. ἡλεκτρον | 8. βακτηρια |
| 4. ιδεα | 9. μητροπολις |
| 5. δραμα | 10. διαγνωσις |

IMPORTANT

Some engaging with these lessons have more Greek knowledge than others. Regardless of your level of knowledge, don’t be discouraged! Some of the points and claims in the lesson benefit from further or more technical explanations. Those additions will generally be placed in footnotes to make reading the general text more conducive for the general reader.

The Greek Geek

The comic strip 'The Greek Geek' consists of six panels. In the first panel, a 'Greek Newbie' asks about the breathing mark (Alpha, Beta, Gamma). In the second panel, the 'Greek Geek' explains that a verb's accent is recessive. In the third panel, the 'Greek Newbie' reacts with 'Oh... Uhh...'. In the fourth panel, the 'Greek Geek' repeats the explanation. In the fifth panel, the 'Greek Newbie' asks about the breathing mark again. In the sixth panel, the 'Greek Geek' repeats the explanation.

¹ There are, of course, many aspects of Greek words that we will not be covering. For example, words have accents that are readily visible when reading a Greek New Testament. By and large, those accents are not relevant to our discussions.

There are many ways to learn and practice the Greek alphabet. Our first several classes will practice using the alphabet by focusing on some Greek vocabulary. Before getting to those, in this introduction we consider some of the most basic difficulties of translating the Bible.

TRANSLATION DIFFICULTY

Wikipedia lists 104 English translations of the full Bible.² That doesn't count those versions that are partial translations. One might fairly ask, "How can that be?" After all, shouldn't there really be one or two main ways to translate from Greek/Hebrew into English?

One is tempted to think of translation as a basic algebra problem. If $x + 2 = 5$, then we readily see that x is 3. We could then plug that 3 into each problem where we have an x . If the algebra problem was a Greek passage, then we could say that when we see x we are looking at the translation – "3." It would be a mistake to think that Greek translates into English in a similar way. One cannot merely take each Greek word and turn it into its English equivalent. Translating from Greek to English (or most any other language) is not high school algebra. Differences in language, grammar, culture, idioms, and more, combine to make translation very difficult. This is true even in modern languages, but especially as we go back in antiquity.

Pepperdine University Greek guru Rick Marrs is fond of using an example from Spanish to teach translation challenges. In Spanish, one does not speak of a clock "running." The clock "walks." So if one looks at the Spanish phrase, "*El reloj está caminando*," it means literally, "The clock is walking." In Mexico, clocks walk, but in the United States, we speak of clocks "running." This simple example shows a difficulty a translator faces in modern times with two active languages that are subject to differences in culture and expression. Can you imagine the quizzical look on people in the U.S. when asked if their clock had stopped walking?

Recognizing these difficulties is not new. In the 20th century, one of the most influential Bible translators was Eugene Nida (1914-2011). Nida held a Master's Degree in New Testament Greek and a PhD in Linguistics. He worked for decades on helping fashion cross-denominational Bibles, and he pioneered the philosophies of Biblical translation. Nida coined several phrases describing Bible translation that many still use today.

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_English_Bible_translations.

One phrase was “formal equivalence.” In a formal equivalence translation of the Bible, the translator tries to reproduce the language of the original as closely as possible in the new language. There are varying degrees of formal equivalence. Some focus on mirroring each Greek word with an English equivalent. Some emulate the sentence structure of the original in the translation. Some even try to reproduce the original word order as closely as possible.

Nida coined a second phrase for another end of the spectrum in Bible translation – “dynamic equivalence.” Many today use an alternate phrase “functional equivalence.” In a dynamic equivalence translation, the goal is not a strict adherence to a word-for-word, sentence-by-sentence translation. Rather the translator tries to reproduce in the reading audience, the same communication effect that the original text would have had on the original reader. Nida wrote,

the *response* of the *receptor* is essentially like that of the original receptors.³

The translator does not feel bound to reproduce sentence structure or even the strict adherence of one English word to each Greek word. Some of the dynamic equivalence translations go so far that they are more typically called a “paraphrase,” rather than a translation.

The mantra often used in comparing this is that a “formal equivalent” translation seeks to reproduce what the original text said, while the dynamic or functional equivalent version seeks to reproduce what the original audience would have heard.

The English Standard Version, New American Standard, and the King James Version are classic “formal equivalence” translations. The NIV walks a line between being a formal equivalence version and a dynamic equivalence version. The Good News Bible exemplifies a more fully dynamic equivalence approach, and The Message is a full-fledged paraphrase of the original text.

A classic example of the dynamic equivalence change in the NIV over the stricter word-for-word translation of the New American Standard is the debate over general neutrality language in the translation. As mentioned earlier, in 2011 the NIV issued a new edition attempting a more gender-neutral translation. This was not a flight from acceptable translation theory, but was an effort to use a dynamic equivalence approach for certain passages specifically on the issue of gender.

³ Nida, Eugene A., and Taber, Charles R., *The Theory and Practice of Translation, With Special Reference to Bible Translating*, (Brill 1969), at 200.

We might think of it this way, in New Testament times, there was a usage of “man” (*anthropos* - ἄνθρωπος) to refer to all people. We see this early in our New Testaments in passages like Matthew 4:19,

And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (ESV).

Jesus is not there referencing that the apostles were to preach good news and bring into the kingdom only men. The word for “man” (*anthropos*) means here “people,” something “men” has historically been used for even in English. Many in church are familiar with the term “the fall of man” to refer to the fall of Adam, Eve, and their offspring. The Cambridge Online Dictionary states,

Traditionally, we use *man* to refer to all human beings, male and female, usually in contrast with other animals. However, many people consider this to be sexist, so it is better to use a different expression, such as *human beings*.⁴

As English has turned from that traditional label of “man” as including both a male and a female, it has brought about a change in writing. In my legal writings, as well as in jury arguments, I am careful to use gender free language and speak of “people” or “persons” rather than “men” or “man.” That is my effort to be as clear as possible as well as to avoid offending someone who might think me socially insensitive.

In this vein, the 2011 edition of the NIV sought to keep gender-specific words where the gender has a targeted meaning of that word. In those circumstances where the original hearers or readers would have heard the word and understood it beyond its true specific gender, however, the translators have used a gender-neutral word. So the 2011 NIV translates Matthew 4:19,

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”

The NIV is trying to convey a modern English equivalent to what the translators think the original audience understood from the original Greek.

Determining The Meaning Of A Greek Word

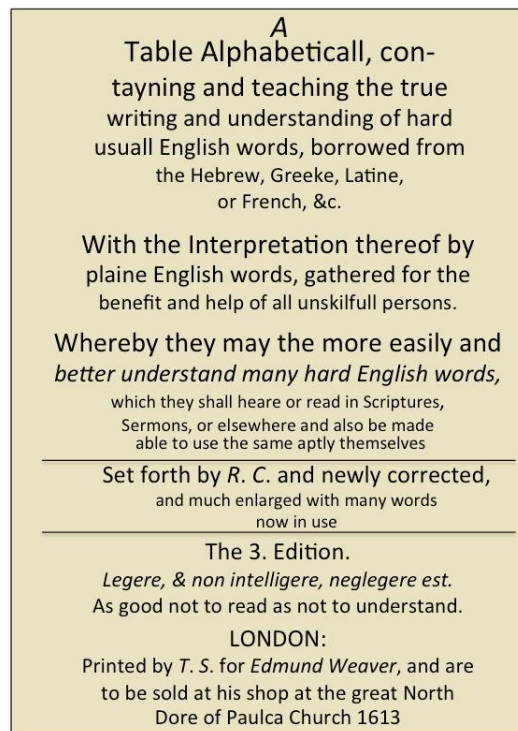
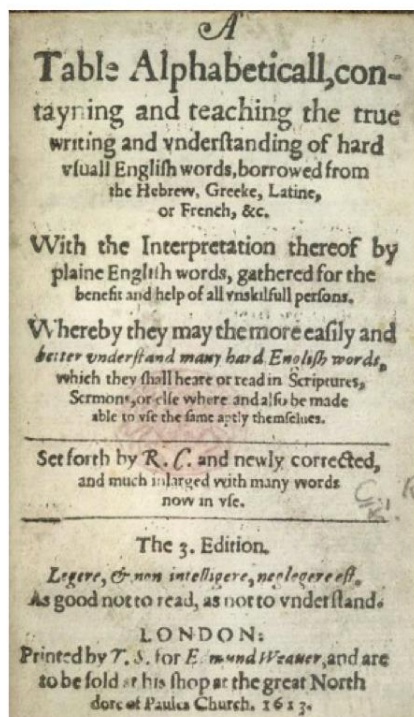
Regardless of the translation theory used, the translator faces the task of assigning some English word(s) for the Greek words. This is a primary task that involves

⁴ <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/grammar/british-grammar/man-mankind-or-people>.

multiple stages. First, one must decide what the Greek word actually meant. Then one must figure out how to turn that meaning or concept into English. Sometimes it is simple, not unlike the algebra problem. More times than not, however, it is not so easy.

Have you ever heard of a man named Robert Cawdry? He is credited with putting together the first English dictionary. His work makes it quite nice if we are trying to determine the meaning of a certain English word in the year 1604, when he published his dictionary.

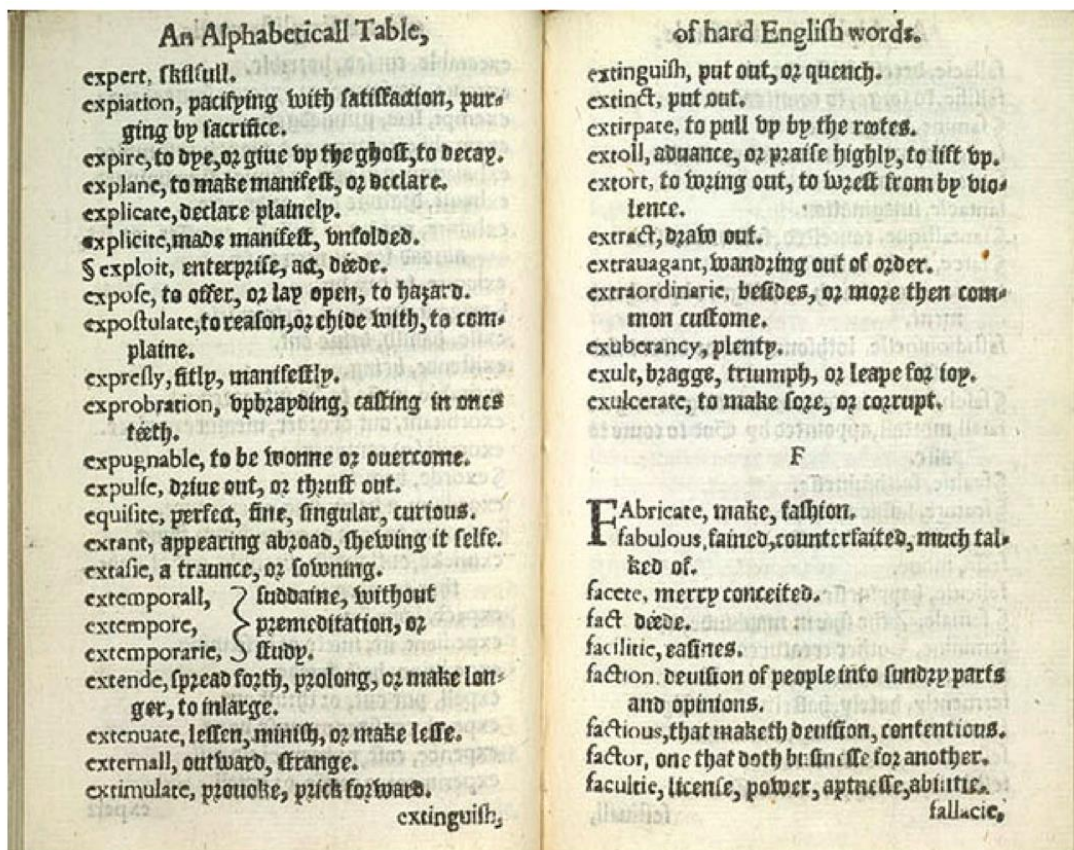
Below I have set several pictures of Cawdry's third edition (1613). On the left is the title page. I have retyped it in a more readable modern font on the right. Following that are two pages of Cawdry's text setting forth his definitions of English words from 400 years ago.



Several interesting things stand out. First, the fonts themselves are unusual. Look carefully at the fourth line of the title page. There is the word “understanding.” The word really looks like “vnderftanding.” 400 years ago, the writers used a “v” to write a “u” when it started a word, but our more usual “u” if the letter came in the middle of the word. This is also seen in the fifth line with the word “usual,” written as “vsuall.” This shows another font difference. Just as ancient Greek wrote the “s” different when it came at the end of a word (ς) versus elsewhere (σ),

so the old English font wrote an “s” as an “s” at the end of a word but as an “f” elsewhere. See this clearly in line ten, “perfons” for “persons.”

In the following pages with definitions you can readily see how well-meaning errors can come in as one dabbles with definitions. The word “extinct” is found on the second page below. The definition is given as “put out.” We see this usage in a form of “extinct” – extinguish – given in the dictionary right above “extinct.” We can say, “Put out the candle” or “Extinguish the candle.” Yet one would dare say, “My wife was quite extinct with me” in lieu of “My wife was quite put out with me!” Or what reaction might you get if you asked someone to “make the cat extinct,” instead of asking them to “put out the cat”? Translation is made difficult as we try to tie ancient meanings to current vocabulary.



Of course, over time the meaning of words changes. When I was young I remember seeing the musical West Side Story, where one of the lyrics is, “I feel pretty, oh so pretty. I feel pretty, and witty and gay!” That musical hit Broadway in 1957. The idea of feeling “gay” has a much different meaning in American life in 2015! The word has changed its primary meaning.

Greek is no different. Early in the Greek language the word for “tent” or “booth” was *skene* (σκηνή). It was used for the tent or booth that actors in the theater would use for costume changes. As the theater grew more elaborate, *skene* – σκηνή became the word used for the wall that was a backdrop for painted scenery. The word soon evolved further into the actual “scene” of action.

When scholars work to translate the Greek New Testament, one of their first chores is to figure out the meaning of the Greek words *at the time of and in their place of usage*. It would be an easier challenge if a Robert Cawdry-type had produced a Greek dictionary in 50AD. But scholars do not have that resource. What they do have are many other writings using most of the same words. A principle way for scholars to deduce meaning, therefore, is to look at other uses of the same or similar terms. Even that, however, is not a simple process. Age enters into the equation.

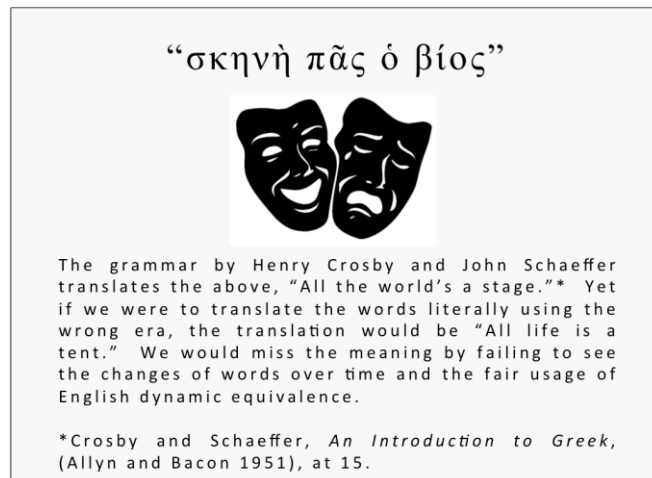
The Greek language is one of our oldest continually used and written languages still in use today. Homer’s Greek predated the New Testament by eight centuries. Plato and Aristotle predate our Greek New Testament by about 400 years. That does not mean that those writings are of no use in figuring out the meaning of New Testament words, but it does mean that

scholars are necessarily cautious and do not immediately assume that the words mean the same at the hands of our New Testament writers.

Scholars use many resources in discerning the right meaning of New Testament vocabulary. Four often-used resources are: (1) the New Testament; (2) the Septuagint; (3) the church fathers; and (4) ancient papyri.

New Testament One of the best ways to understand the fullness of meaning of various Greek words in the New Testament is the New Testament itself. From reading all of the usages of certain words, we get a fuller flavor of the meaning simply by seeing it in different contexts.

Septuagint Another source for study in language meaning and usage is the Greek translation of the Old Testament (generally called “the Septuagint”). While parts of that work are several hundred years older than the New Testament, the



Greek Old Testament was the Bible of the first century church, and would have informed Paul's vocabulary as well as that of other New Testament writers. We read Paul and others using a Greek Old Testament in their quotations more times than not.

Church Fathers On top of those resources, scholars also have the writings of the church fathers that came in the generations after the apostles. Through those writings we are also able to get insight into the meanings of words.

Papyri In the hands of many museums, as well as private collectors are great numbers of ancient papyri⁵ that were written in everyday Greek and come from the same time and era as the New Testament. These other writings often shed a great deal of light on the vocabulary of the New Testament era.

With these tools, scholars are generally quite at home in deciphering the meaning of the Greek words in the Bible, but that doesn't mean their job of translating into English is easy! For even after the Greek vocabulary are understood, there remains the very difficult and sometimes seemingly impossible job referenced earlier of marrying up each Greek word to an English equivalent. These are matters we get to explore more fully in this class, as we look at some important Greek vocabulary over the next several lessons.

LIMITS OF A ONE-FOR-ONE TRANSLATION

Even armed with these resources, scholars have a considerable chore changing Greek into English. A number of Greek words really don't have a simple English translation.

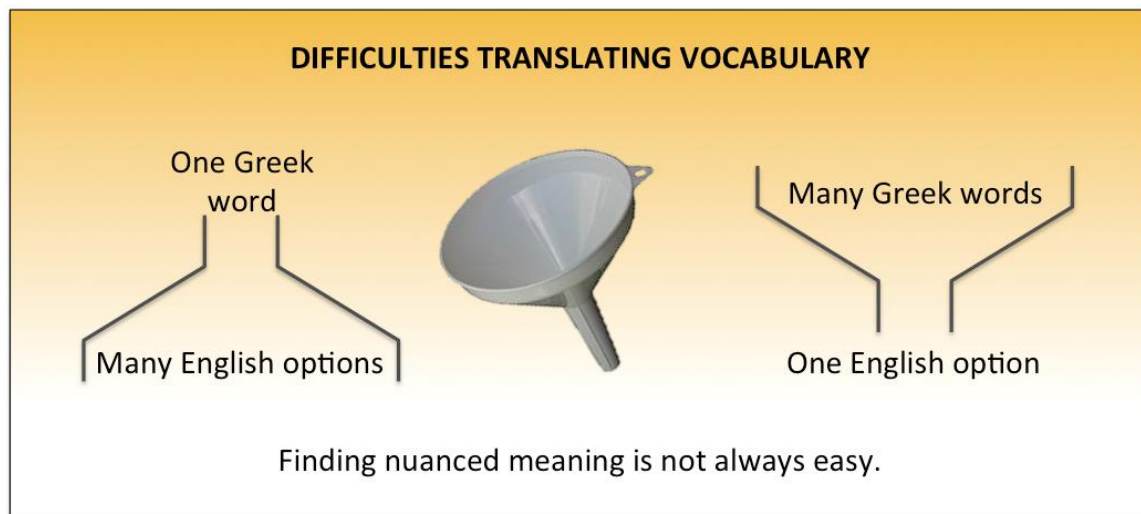
It is often a difficult task of the translator to find the best English equivalent for a Greek word. Occasionally the chore is fairly simple; however, many times the Greek word really needs several English words to give its fullest meaning. This puts the translator in the tough position of deciding which of several English words best explains the Greek idea.

⁵ The ancient Mediterranean world discovered that pressing the stalks of papyrus plant into thin sheets produced a material that one could write on. It was ancient "paper." Modern scholars call it "papyrus" (singular) or "papyri" (plural). Our word "paper" derives from the ancient material and word. Because of its plant-based composition, most of it has long since degraded. Most that has survived has been found in the arid climate of Egypt, which was not only the source of most papyri (the plants grew in the Nile), but Egypt's dry desert air has been a preservative.

Vocabulary

Consider the example of the Greek word *logos* (λόγος). *Logos* means, “thought, word, reason, discourse, a matter” and more! It can even mean an “argument.” Sometimes by context the translator can determine if, for example, “thought” is meant. But sometimes, the scholar is just left to choose a word (bad pun) and let the reader go from there. We have this in the first chapter of John where the Greek begins, “In the beginning was the *logos* – λόγος.” It is the *logos* – λόγος that “became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Now does John mean “word,” “thought,” “discourse,” “narrative,” “matter,” or one of the other English words wrapped up in the Greek *logos* - λόγος? Our translators routinely choose “word,” but we should never confuse John of meaning simply our English “word.” “Word” works well as God *spoke* existence into creation. Some words are easily dismissed as contrary to the point John was making. It seems readily apparent that John did not mean, “In the beginning was the argument”!

The above illustration is like an upside-down funnel. You have many Greek ideas in a single word that in English take the form of many words. Not surprisingly, you can also have the funnel right side up. This is a reverse of the problem.



A ready example of this reverse problem comes from the fact that there are several Greek words for love, each with different meanings or emphasis on the concept. Yet in English, those words are often best translated simply “love,” and we miss the fact that the writers were using different words with slightly different meanings. So in John 21:15-17 we have an interchange between Jesus and Peter where Jesus asks Peter three times whether Peter “loves” him. Each time Peter affirms his love.

In the interchange, two different Greek words for “love” are used, a distinction not present in the English. There is the Greek verb *agapao* (ἀγαπάω), which many believe conveys a divine or special love (many know the noun form *agape* - ἀγάπη). There is also the Greek verb *phileo* (φιλέω), which many believe denotes a friendship affection.⁶

With those two separate verbs, it is interesting to read John’s Greek of the interchange between Jesus and Peter. Consider the passage in the ESV English on the left below, and the same ESV passage on the right, with “love” removed and the appropriate Greek word inserted:

John 21:15-17 ESV

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.

John 21:15-17 with Greek inserts

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you *agapao* - ἀγαπάω me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I *phileo* - φιλέω you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you *agapao* - ἀγαπάω me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I *phileo* - φιλέω you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you *phileo* - φιλέω me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you *phileo* - φιλέω me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I *phileo* - φιλέω you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.

Jesus twice asked Peter whether he “agape’d” Jesus. Each time Peter changed the verb noting his “phileo” for Jesus. The third time Jesus used Peter’s verb asking if Peter “phileo’d” Jesus and Peter is saddened that Jesus asked this third time, but then affirms his “phileo” of Jesus.

⁶ A careful word study indicates that neither of these words is so clearly defined in Classical Greek or Koine Greek. (“Koine Greek” is a term used to classify the common Greek in usage at the time of the New Testament’s composition.) There are times where *agapao* is clearly not always a “divine love” like when it is used in the Old Testament translation into Greek (the “Septuagint”) that was done in the immediate centuries preceding Jesus. It is used for the incestuous “love” that Amon had for his half sister Tamar that drove him to rape her.

Now is there a reason for John changing the words for love in the conversation? Are we to conclude that John was indicating that Jesus was seeking a deeper or godlier level of love than Peter was willing to commit? Or maybe John is simply being John, with his tendency to vary his vocabulary lightly apparently for variety's sake.⁷ Scholars debate this issue, but the necessities of translation remove the English reader from the scholastic discussion of what John meant, if anything, in using the two different words.

Theology

Another difficulty for the translator is translating Greek words that have a distinct meaning, but have historically been given an English word that fits a practical or theological aim, even though the word fails to capture the true sense of the original word. For example, scholars use the English word “baptize” to translate the Greek *baptizo* (βαπτίζω), even though the Greek word literally means, “to put or go under water.”⁸ Yet, because there has been a ritual in the Church for nearly two thousand years, the English translations dating back to Wycliffe (c.1331–1384) and Tyndale (c.1494–1536) simply used the ritual word “baptize” rather than translate the word for its original meaning.

Lest this seem a small thing, consider the engagement of noted New Testament scholar N.T. Wright with the NIV translation. Wright believes that in translating Romans and Galatians, the NIV is more geared toward making sure Paul's words reflect what “the broadly Protestant and evangelical tradition said he said” rather than what Paul really said.⁹ Wright used blunt language detailing,

There are many who, having made the switch to the NIV, are now stuck with reading Romans 3:21-26 like this: “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known. . . . This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. . . . [God] did this to demonstrate his justice . . . he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.”

⁷ See generally the discussion at Morris, Leon, *The Gospel of John, New International Commentary of the New Testament*, (Eerdmans 1995), at 769ff; Carson, D.A., *Exegetical Fallacies* (Baker Academic 1996), 2013 Ebook edition at 73ff.

⁸ See *baptizo* (βαπτίζω) in Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d Edition (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979).

⁹ Wright, N.T., *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (IVP ACADEMIC 2009), at 51-52.

Wright's example from Romans 3:21-26 is a passage we will consider in one of our upcoming lessons.

Culture

A third difficulty in translating Greek vocabulary into English arises from finding Greek words that were used in the Greek culture in ways that are not existent in our culture today. With the translator unable to stop and give a lesson in the history of Greek culture and life, it makes it quite difficult to find an English word that "works" in translation.

One example of this is found in Galatians 3:24-25 where Paul references the Law as a *paidagogos* (παιδαγωγός). The translators struggle with this because there is no real English equivalent. The *paidagogos* - παιδαγωγός was unique to the Greek culture of the day. It was an individual who was charged with taking care of young children, teaching them manners and proper behavior, and, once old enough, walking the children to and from school to be sure they arrived safely. There is no such role in modern English life, so the translators choose from different optional terms. The ESV and NIV call the *paidagogos* - παιδαγωγός the "guardian." The King James Version refers to it as a "schoolmaster," while the Revised Standard Version used "custodian." The Message is not trying to limit the vocabulary to a one-for-one exchange with the Greek, so it goes expansive translating the *paidagogos* - παιδαγωγός as "Greek tutors ... who escort children to school and protect them from danger or distraction, making sure the children will really get to the place they set out for."

Hebraisms

A fourth difficulty concerns words that, while written in Greek, are actually expressions of a Hebrew idea or concept that we easily lose by translating the Greek into English. We might think of it as taking a piece of wood and using it to mark a second piece for cutting. While the second piece should closely approximate the first piece, any carpenter will tell you not to use the cut piece as the guide for marking a third piece. Always use the first piece, or the marks will drift further and further from where they ought to be!

These passages can sometimes be easily identified, like the Greek usage of "hosanna," an Aramaic word spelled with Greek letters. The word means, "Save, I pray." Rather than translate the Aramaic, the translators just change the Greek letters of the Aramaic word into English letters. More subtle situations arise in cases like Mark 12:28-29. Compare the King James to the English Standard Version (I have bolded the key words):

KING JAMES

And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the **first** commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The **first** of all the commandments *is*, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord.

ESV

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the **most important** of all?” Jesus answered, “The **most important** is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’”

The King James translates a certain word in the passage very literally in both the question and answer. The word is *prote* (πρώτη) meaning “first.” The ESV, however, and many others also translate the word as “most important,” which in a sense is “first in priority.” The reasoning behind the difference in translation is the language that Jesus was speaking. As Jesus spoke in a Semitic language (whether Hebrew or Aramaic), he was using a language that does not have special forms for the comparative and superlative of words (like we do in English with –er and –est, so we can say something is “bigger” or “biggest”). As a result, in Hebrew one would use a “positive adjective” and say something is “big” or “good” or “first.” The translator then knows to make it “bigger/biggest,” “better/best” (depending upon context), or “most important” as we have in Mark 12:28-29.

Clearly this passage is not a make or break passage for most readers. It is used to illustrate the issue of resolving passages that draw from the Hebrew into Greek, then further into English. We will see more important examples in a later lesson.

Over the next several lessons, we will try to develop some dexterity with the Greek alphabet while we work through examples of language issues.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“In the beginning was the word... and the word became flesh and dwelt among us”* (Jn. 1:1, 14).

John writes a profound mystery, and the deeper we get into the Greek, the more marvelous the mystery is. Jesus the *logos* of God. We have a kaleidoscope of meaning in the Greek, and it gives us so much to contemplate and reflect on. John doesn’t remove the mystery of the pre-existing Jesus or of the incarnation by putting Jesus into some simple-to-understand box. Jesus is much more than our brains can understand, yet he

has chosen to descend into flesh, into something we *can* grasp. Into that mystery, we then see a clarity of love and purpose.

Our Greek studies should bring a greater depth of understanding, but also a greater depth of mystery. The two go hand in hand!

2. “*Do you love me?*” (Jn 21:15).

John begins with the *logos* mystery, but he ends with a practical question. What do we do with Jesus? That is the real question all of us should answer? Do we love him? If so, will we follow him, making his priorities our own?

3. “*But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known...*” (Rom. 3:21).

What do we do with passages like this, when scholars of the stature of N.T. Wright challenge the translation of the greatest selling version in modernity? A question I am constantly asked is “What is the *best* Bible translation?” The easy answer is, “whichever one you will read!” The fuller answer is, use several! Get a more literal one or two, and then also get one or more that offer the dynamic equivalence translation. Then study from each! Read from each. This will deepen your study. Also commit to this class for this term, and let’s dig deeply into the Greek! It should be fun and beneficial!

TRANSLITERATION EXERCISE

- | | | |
|-----|------------|------------|
| 1. | κινημα | cinema |
| 2. | χαος | chaos |
| 3. | ηλεκτρον | electron |
| 4. | ιδεια | idea |
| 5. | δραμα | drama |
| 6. | διπλωμα | diploma |
| 7. | εμφασις | emphasis |
| 8. | βακτηρια | bacteria |
| 9. | μητροπολις | metropolis |
| 10. | διαγνωσις | diagnosis |

HOMework

To recap, we are memorizing 1 John this year in the English Standard Version. That amounts to two verses a week. To be current, we need to have memorized 1 John 1:1-3:23. This week we add 1 John 3:24-4:1. We provide all verses below for your help!

1John 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— **2** the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— **3** that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. **4** And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. **6** If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. **7** But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. **8** If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. **10** If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

1John 2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. **2** He is the propitiation for our sins,

and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. **3** And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. **4** Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, **5** but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: **6** whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. **7** Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. **8** At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. **9** Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. **10** Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. **11** But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

12 I am writing to you, little children,
because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.

13 I am writing to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.
I am writing to you, young men,
because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you, children,
because you know the Father.

14 I write to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men,
because you are strong,
and the word of God abides in you,
and you have overcome the evil one.

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. **16** For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. **17** And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

18 Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. **19** They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. **20** But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. **21** I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. **22** Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. **23** No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. **24** Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. **25** And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.

26 I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. **27** But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him. **28** And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. **29** you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

1John 3:1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. **2** Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. **3** And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. **4** Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. **5** You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. **6** No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. **7** Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. **8** Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. **9** No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. **10** By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not

practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

11 For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. **12** We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. **13** Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. **14** We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. **15** Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. **17** But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? **18** Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

19 By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; **20** for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. **21** Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; **22** and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. **23** And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. **24** Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by

this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

1John 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.