



Systematic Theology

A study of the major doctrines of Scripture

TOPIC 7 – HERMENEUTICS: BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION
LESSON 137 – GRAMMATICAL FALLACIES

EXEGETICAL FALLACIES (SECOND EDITION) – DA CARSON

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The Importance of This Study

- ▶ Exegetical fallacies are painfully frequent among us. Make a mistake interpreting Shakespeare's plays and it is unlikely that there will be any eternal consequence. But we cannot lightly accept a similar laxity in the interpretation of Scripture. We are dealing with God's thoughts: we are obligated to take great pains to understand them truly and to explain them clearly.
- ▶ This study focuses on exegetical fallacies, not on historical and theological fallacies, except insofar as the latter impinge on the former.
- ▶ There is no sustained discussion of the Holy Spirit's role in our exegetical task. That is important, but it involves a shift to a hermeneutical focus instead of an exegetical focus.

Grammatical Fallacies

- ▶ Previously we looked at word studies and how these can quickly lead to error based on a misunderstanding of vocabulary, meaning, root words, and usage. Grammatical errors are more complex due to the difference in the nature of words and grammar. Words are building blocks and grammar serves as the architecture into which the words are placed.
- ▶ Many pastors will do word studies and look up every time that a specific word (like ekklesia) occurs in the text of Scripture, but not that many will search for every instance of a genitive absolute. Therefore we see that grammatical construction has not undergone the level of inductive study as have words.

Grammatical Fallacies

- ▶ Far more time is spent on word studies than any kind of grammatical analysis. Word studies are easier to do and easier to explain. It is more difficult to explain grammar than vocabulary.
- ▶ We must keep in mind, as we look at grammatical errors or questions, that the principle of entropy operates in living languages as well as in the world of physics. Languages break down over time, the syntax becomes more flexible, the number of exceptions increase, etc.
- ▶ As a result, technical commentaries on the New Testament that were widely used 120 years ago are unreliable on many grammatical points simply due to the increase in papyrological discoveries. More texts help us understand more of the meaning.

Grammatical Fallacies

- ▶ Another avenue for error within the Greek language, for example, is the differences between classical Greek and Hellenistic Greek. Then factor in that the New Testament was written primarily in a form of Hellenistic Greek known as *koine*. Grammatical structures can vary widely between these categories of a language family. Using classical Greek grammar can render *koine* almost unreadable.
- ▶ We also may run into difficulty studying tenses and moods. Tense refers to time: past, present, future, and so forth.
- ▶ One example of tense causing confusion can be an author describing a particular action as complete, even if it took a long time to complete, and choose not to use the aorist tense (past action without noting completion or continuation). So was the action past, or continuing, or completed? The tense alone cannot give us that information in every instance.

Aorist Tense

- ▶ The aorist tense, as mentioned, refers to an action but it does not, as was once believed, indicate that the action has been completed once for all. The aorist tense refers to an action without specifying whether it is unique, repeated, instantaneous, or accomplished.
- ▶ If aorist indicates a once for all completed action then we must take Romans 12:1 to say that “presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice” only happens one time and never again.
- ▶ We must not build a doctrinal case upon a grammatical tense alone.

First Person Aorist Subjunctive

- ▶ Paul Barger did an experiment in which he used GRAMCORD computer facilities to call up every instance of the first person aorist subjunctive in the Greek New Testament. He divided this list into 2 groups, singular and plural. Then he attempted to analyze the results, testing them against standard grammars and commentaries.
- ▶ This demonstrates the type of work that would be required to do grammatical studies like we do word studies!

Middle Voice

- ▶ Middle voice is used when a subject acts for self, and sometimes it allows for something to be done. Therefore each middle voice verb must be examined on its own within *****context*****, before it is used to formulate a doctrinal conclusion.

Conditionals

- ▶ In first class conditions, often called "real" conditions, it is often thought that the protasis is assumed to be true – that is, the thing assumed is real. As a result, many prefer to begin every first class protasis with "since" instead of with "if."
- ▶ In one commentary on 1 Corinthians we are told that in chapter 15, verses 12-16, the conditional sentences begin with an assumed fact: "IF it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead..."
- ▶ This is a fallacy! If it is assumed to be true, it still may not be true. So we cannot base the argument on conditional statements alone.

The Article

- ▶ The definite article in Greek is extraordinarily difficult to classify exhaustively. As a result we need to understand that just because the Greek text has an article that the English translation must also as well. This imposes Greek grammar on English grammar. Unlike English, the Greek does not have an indefinite article.
- ▶ In English the definite article is “the.” The Greek has 3 definite articles based on gender – masculine, feminine, and neuter.
- ▶ In English we have indefinite articles, “a” and “an.” There is no indefinite article in Greek, but instead an indefinite pronoun is used – “any.”

The Article – Granville Sharp Rule

- ▶ If two substantives are connected by kai (and) and both have the article, they refer to different persons or things; if the first has an article and the second does not, the second refers to the same person or thing as the first.
- ▶ For example, Titus 2:13 – Is this God and Jesus, or Jesus as God?

KJV - Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;

NKJV - looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

ESV - waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

The Article – Granville Sharp Rule

▶ Also see 2 Peter 1:1 – one person who is God and Savior

KJV – to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:

NKJV – To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

ESV - To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

The Article – Colwell Rule

- ▶ If a definite noun preceded a copulative verb, it was normally anarthrous; if it followed, it was articular.
- ▶ What is the difference?
- ▶ John 1:1 NKJV - In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- ▶ John 1:1 New World Translation - The Word was in the beginning with God and was a god.

Renewed Precision

- ▶ GRAMCORD – Grammatical Concordance - <http://www.gramcord.org/>
- ▶ For 31 years the nonprofit GRAMCORD Institute, a consortium of seminary professors and publishing Biblical scholars, has set a standard for Bible software. It is the Institute's chartered mission to pioneer new technologies and publication-quality tools that the for-profit, commercial sector is less likely to encourage and support. We pioneered the original Greek New Testament grammatical concordance program in 1976. (GRAMCORD is short for GRAMmatical conCORDance -- an unprecedented concept at the time and the first ancient language software package ever released to the general public.)

Next Week

- ▶ Logical Fallacies:
- ▶ Why are fire engines red?
- ▶ There are 12 inches in a ruler
- ▶ Queen Elizabeth is a ruler
- ▶ The Queen Elizabeth is a ship
- ▶ Ships sail on the sea
- ▶ There are fish in the sea
- ▶ Fish have fins
- ▶ The Fins fought the Russians
- ▶ Russians are red
- ▶ Since fire engines are always rushin', fire engines are red.