Hermeneutics Workshop 08
Grammatical Interpretation:
Grammar & Syntax
For the Bible Institute at GCBC **Fall 2026**
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Introduction/Review:

Hermeneutics is important because the Bible is divine revelation. God has chosen to communicate through human authors to specific audiences. God's Word has meaning, and it is meant to be understood. Proper hermeneutics allows us to better understand God's Word. However, interpretation is not always an easy task. There are many challenges to interpretation because we are separated from the biblical text in multiple ways. These challenges are often ignored or overlooked, and that can lead to poor interpretation of Scripture. We should seek to identify these challenges, and then apply good principles of interpretation to these challenges in order to find the true meaning of the text. Following certain principles of interpretation leads us to developing a system of interpretation. Good biblical interpretation always emphasizes biblical context and cultural context. Good biblical interpretation also emphasizes grammatical interpretation. Grammatical interpretation includes studying the literary genre. It also includes studying the grammar and syntax of the passage.

Why Is Grammar Important?

Grammar is an important aspect of good biblical interpretation because God has communicated to us through language. Effective communication through language requires an understanding of grammar. Proper biblical interpretation requires understanding how words function individually and how they work together to communicate meaning. Understanding some of the grammar of the original languages can be helpful, but also understanding English grammar is helpful for proper biblical interpretation.

What is Grammar and Syntax?

Grammar refers to the rules governing how words function within a language. Grammar helps us understand what individual words mean, what function they serve within a sentence, and how they relate to one another. Grammar also helps us understand how actions, conditions, and relationships are communicated. Grammar controls the meaning of specific words and their relationships. Changing the function or relationship of words can change the meaning of a sentence. Understanding grammar helps us to be precise with our interpretation of Scripture.

Syntax is a specific subcategory of grammar. Syntax refers to the arrangement of words and phrases within sentences and how those arrangements communicate meaning. Syntax helps us determine who is performing an action or receiving an action. Syntax helps us determine which words modify other words. It also helps us determine how individual statements relate to one another or how an author develops an argument. Grammar is the overarching system of rules that governs an entire language, but syntax specifically deals with how words and phrases are arranged to form proper sentences. The same words can be used in two different sentences, and their arrangement can totally change the meaning of the sentences.

English grammar is important for us today because we read the Bible in English. However, it is important to acknowledge that English grammar is different from Hebrew grammar or Greek grammar. English relies heavily on word order to identify the subject and

object of a sentence, but Greek uses grammatical endings called inflections to communicate the function of words. Greek can sometimes arrange words in an order that would sound unusual in English while still communicating a perfectly clear meaning. Greek grammar is actually more precise than English grammar in many ways. English translators often changed word order or added some connecting words just to make the text more readable and understandable. This is one example of how Greek grammar and English grammar are different, and understanding that there are some differences can actually sometimes help us see the underlying Greek grammar even when we are reading an English translation.

Nouns:

Nouns identify people, places, things, and concepts. Jesus is a person. Jerusalem is a place. A cross is a thing. Faith is a concept. These are all nouns because they are identifying people, places, things, or concepts. The main grammatical functions of nouns are as subjects, direct objects, indirect objects, objects of prepositions, subject complements, and object complements. Nouns help provide clarity to our sentences. Nouns act as building blocks of communication because they help us identify who is performing an action and who is receiving an action in every story that we share.

Greek nouns have three important grammatical characteristics. Greek nouns have gender, number, and case. Being familiar with these three characteristics can help us when we are trying to determine how a noun is functioning in a sentence. Greek nouns have gender. Greek nouns can be masculine, feminine, or neuter. The main function of Greek noun gender has little to do with biology, but rather it has to do with agreement. Adjectives and articles must agree with the nouns that they refer to in gender, number, and case. Pronouns must agree with their antecedent in gender and number, but not necessarily case. Therefore, Greek gender can help us identify what noun an adjective is describing. Number simply tells us whether a noun is singular or plural. The case of a Greek verb is especially important for interpretation. Greek uses five major cases. The nominative case usually identifies the subject or predicate nominative. The genitive case expresses possession, relationship, or description. The dative case often identifies an indirect object, means, or other relationships. The accusative usually identifies a direct object, but it is also sometimes be used as an object of a preposition. The vocative is the case of direct address. These cases are identified by their case endings. There are five sets of case endings. Thankfully, free Bible software can easily help you identify these cases without having to memorize all the endings. Some people use an eight case system to more clearly identify how a word is functioning. The ablative case shares the genitive case endings, but the emphasis of the ablative is often source. The instrumental and locative cases share the dative case endings. The instrumental emphasizes means or agency. The locative emphasizes location or sphere. Gender, number, and case all help us when we are interpreting Scripture. Specifically, identifying all the Greek noun cases you could possibly see will help you be able to interpret Scripture more effectively.

Pronouns:

Pronouns are used in place of nouns or to refer back to previously identified people or things. There are several types of pronouns. Personal pronouns identify persons. Some examples are *I, you, he, she,* and *they*. Demonstrative pronouns point to something. Some examples are *this, that,* and *these*. Relative pronouns connect clauses. Some examples are *who, which,* and *that*. Interrogative pronouns ask questions. Some examples are *who*? or *what*?

Reflexive pronouns refer back to the subject. Some examples are *himself*, *herself*, and *ourselves*. Possessive pronouns indicate possession. Some examples are *mine*, *yours*, *his*, and *hers*. Pronouns appear frequently throughout Scripture, and being able to correctly identify the antecedent of the pronoun is essential to proper interpretation of many passages of Scripture.

Greek pronouns are inflected for person, number, gender, and case. Pronouns must agree with their antecedents in gender and number, but not necessarily case. This agreement in gender and number can sometimes help us properly identify a pronoun's antecedent in a passage that the antecedent might otherwise be unclear. Greek verbs also are already inflected for person and number, and thus pronouns are often not necessarily in the Greek. Therefore, sometimes Greek pronouns are used to provide emphasis or contrast in a way that is different from how we see pronouns used in English. Paying attention to pronouns is key to many passages. Misidentifying the person or thing being referenced can change the meaning of an entire passage. Reading the context is often the key to properly identifying the antecedents to pronouns.

Verbs:

Verbs communicate what someone or something does, experiences, or is. Action verbs express physical or mental actions. Some examples are *run, think, jump, write,* and *eat*. Linking verbs connect the subject to a subject complement that describes or identifies the subject. Some examples are *am, is, are, was, were, be, being,* and *been*. Verbs in English have five core properties. Verbs have person, number, tense, voice, and mood. Verbs are particularly important in biblical interpretation because they communicate action, commands, promises, conditions, events, and state of being.

Greek verbs have person, number, tense, voice, and mood. However, they are not the exact same as the English properties. Greek verbs communicate more than simply whether an action happened in the past, present, and future. These verbs properties are all communicated through the verbs inflection. Greek verbs communicate person and number independently of pronouns. This is unique from how English communicates person and number. Greek also communicates tense in a unique way. The six Greek tense forms are present, imperfect, future, aorist, perfect, and pluperfect. These forms communicate both temporal information and verbal aspect.

The present tense communicates an action or state viewed as ongoing, developing, or characteristic. It usually emphasizes the action as it is taking place or as a continuing reality. I John 3:6 says, "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not…" Abideth is a present participle, and sinneth is a present verb. The one that is continually in a state of abiding is not continuing in sin.

The imperfect tense describes an action or state in the past, viewed as ongoing, repeated, or in progress. This tense is frequently used in historical narrative. Mark 1:5 says, "And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan." "Went out" and "baptized" are both imperfect verbs. These are both past actions that were in progress during the narrative.

The future tense generally communicated an action or state that will occur. This is commonly used for predictions, promises, and future events. I Thessalonians 4:16 says, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first." The verbs in this verse are in the future tense because they are referring to things that will happen.

The aorist tense generally presents an action as a complete whole, without focusing on its internal development. This is called perfective aspect. The aorist tense is not always

communicating past time. The aorist tense often refers to past time actions within the indicative mood. However, in other moods, it does not necessarily communicate past time. John 2:11 says, "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him." All of the verbs in this verse are in the aorist tense and indicative mood. These are all referring to completed actions, but it does not mean that the actions could not be repeated. Jesus continued to do more miracles and manifest His glory. The disciples continued to believe on Jesus. However, the aorist tense in this verse is viewing these actions as a complete whole at this event.

The perfect tense describes an action or state viewed as completed, with attention to the resulting state or continuing relevance. This tense combines perfective aspect with a resulting state or present relevance. Ephesians 2:8 says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." "Saved" comes from a perfect passive participle. This is significant because it describes salvation as an accomplished work with an ongoing resulting condition. This specific example shows how the English translation does not always reflect the full aspect of the underlying Greek verb.

The pluperfect tense generally describes a completed action or state viewed from a past reference point, with attention to the resulting condition at that time. The simplest way to understand the pluperfect is as a past form of the perfect. Matthew 12:7 says, "But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless." "Had known" is a pluperfect tense. The Pharisees lack of knowledge in the past resulted in a state of error.

Greek verbs can have three different voices. This is unique from English that only has two voices. The three voices are active, middle, and passive. Voice identifies the relationship between the subject and the action expressed by the verb. Active voice means that the subject performs the action. "So loved" in John 3:16 is an active verb communicating that God is the subject preforming the action of loving. Passive voice means that the subject receives the action. "Are ye saved" in Ephesians 2:8 is a passive verb communicating that the believers being addressed received the action of salvation. Middle voice is the hardest for our English minds to understand. Middle voice generally presents the subject as participating in or being specially involved in the action. A person might perform an action for his own benefit or with particular involvement in its outcome. Some examples of how the middle voice might be used are reflexive or reciprocal usages. In the present and imperfect systems, Greek middle and passive forms share the same endings. So just because you see a form labeled as "middle" does not mean it can only be "middle." It could also be passive in those systems. The aorist and future systems have distinct middle and passive forms. There are also certain verbs that are classified as middle deponent verbs because they are always translated actively. John 14:3 says, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again." "I will come" is a middle deponent. It is translated actively even though it has a middle form. However, conceptually we can see how the action of coming is self-involving. Majority of the time we can conceptually see how a person is acting upon themselves or for their own benefit even if it is not fully represented in the English translation. Paying attention to voice is important for biblical interpretation. We need to be able to identify if we are supposed to be doing an action or receiving an action. Wrongly identifying the voice of a verb could totally change the meaning of a sentence.

Greek verbs can have four different moods. The four moods are indicative, subjunctive, imperative, and optative. Mood is important because it helps distinguish statements of fact, possibilities, commands, and wishes. The indicative mood generally presents something as an

assertion or statement. It is commonly used to communicate facts, events, and conditions. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." All the verbs in this verse are indicative forms. John is making assertions about the identity and existence of the Word. The subjunctive mood frequently communicates an action that is potential, anticipated, or dependent upon a condition. This mood commonly appears in purpose clauses, conditional statements, certain commands and exhortations, and statements involving possibility. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The "that" in this verse is ἵνα which introduces a purpose clause. Verbs that follow the ἵνα must shift into the subjunctive mood because they show the intended outcome of the main action. The fact is that God gave His son, and the potential result is that we should not perish. The imperative mood communicates commands, instructions, and exhortations. "Rejoice evermore" is an imperative. This mood is especially important when studying biblical instructions. The optative mood communicates a wish and potentiality. This mood is relatively uncommon the New Testament. Galatians 6:14 says, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." This expression of "God forbid" is in the optative mood because Paul is essentially saying, "I wish it would never happen" or "May it never be so."

There are two non-finite verbal hybrids that do not have a personal subject attached to them. The first is the infinitive which is a verbal noun. An infinitive is a verbal form that commonly functions as a noun or expresses purpose, result, or other relationships. Some English examples are *to believe, to serve,* and *to understand*. Greek infinitives have tense-form and voice, but do not have person or number like finite verbs. Matthew 5:17 says, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." This verse contains multiple complementary infinitives. The infinitive "to destroy" completes the action of "I am come." "To fulfil" is also an infinitive that is expressing the purpose of the main action. The second is the participle which is a verbal adjective. The participle combines characteristics of a verb and an adjective. It can describe a person or thing while also communicating an action or state. Some examples in English are *believing, walking, speaking,* and *having been saved*. Participles have tense-form, voice, case, gender, and number. So they possess properties of both verbs and adjectives. They can function in several ways, including adjectivally and adverbially. Matthew 28:19 says, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." There is actually only one imperative verb in this verse, "teach." "Go ye therefore" is actually a participle that modifies the main command to teach. The idea is "teach all nations as you are going." Participles appear frequently throughout the New Testament, and being able to identify them along with their properties is helpful for good biblical interpretation.

Adjectives:

Adjectives provide additional information about nouns. Adjectives can communicate quality, characteristics, identity, quantity, and comparison. Some examples are *good, great, holy, righteous, eternal,* and *faithful*. I Peter 1:15 says, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation." "Holy" describes the character of God and the conduct expected of believers. Adjectives are descriptive words that add detail and color to the text.

Greek adjectives agree with the nouns that they modify in gender, number, and case. This is important because the adjective's grammatical form helps establish which noun it describes. Greek adjectives can also appear in different in different positions relative to the noun, which can affect their grammatical construction. Paying attention to these descriptive words is really important for good biblical interpretation because of the additional information they provide.

Greek Article:

English traditionally classifies articles within the category of adjectives. However, it is worth addressing separately because Greek communicates definiteness and indefiniteness differently than English does. English has the definite article *the*, and the indefinite articles *a,* and *an*. Greek has a definite article (ὁ, ἡ, and τό), but there is no separate indefinite article. The Greek definite article changes form according to gender, number, and case. The Greek article serves multiples purposes. It can communicate definiteness by identifying specific nouns. It can help identify grammatical relationships because of its gender, number, and case. It can substantivize other parts of speech. It can turn an adjective or participle into a noun-like expression. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word…" The definite article is identifying the specific Word. A noun without the definite article is called an anarthrous noun. An anarthrous noun can communicate several different things depending on its grammatical construction and context. An anarthrous noun can communicate indefinite meaning, qualitative meaning, and it can sometimes still be a definite noun. John 1:1 continues with saying, "and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." God at the end of the verse does not have the definite article. Some translations translate this indefinitely by saying that "the Word was a god." However, the absence of the article here is not communicating that the Word is one god among many gods. It is communicating that the Word possesses God's quality and nature. We cannot assume that an anarthrous noun is always indefinite. Context must be examined when determining if an anarthrous noun is indefinite, qualitative, or definite.

Adverbs:

Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. They describe how, when, where, or to what extent something happens. Some examples are *quickly, carefully, always, never, here,* and *very*. Greek adverbs also communicate time, place, manner, and degree. Adverbs are indeclinable unlike adjectives and nouns. This means that their form does not change according to case, gender, or number. Matthew 6:33 says, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." "First" modifies the action of seeking. Adverbs can significantly qualify an instruction or statement. Pay attention to words that communicate priority, frequency, manner, and degree. These words help with good biblical interpretation by qualifying certain verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs.

Prepositions:

Prepositions are words that express relationships between words. Some examples are *in, on, through, by, with, from, for, into,* and *under*. Ephesians 2:8 says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." This verse contains many prepositional phrases. "By grace," "through faith, "of yourselves," "of God," are all prepositional phrases. These prepositions communicate different relationships between words.

Greek prepositions are particularly important because they are closely connected to the case system. Different prepositions take different cases, and sometimes the same preposition can communicate different meanings depending on the case used. ἐν is a common preposition in the New Testament that can mean *in, with,* or *by*. ἐν only takes the dative case. ἐκ is another common preposition in the New Testament that can mean *out of* or *from*. ἐκ only takes the genitive case. Those are a couple of single-case prepositions which means that they only take one case. διά is an example of a two-case preposition. διά can mean *through* when it takes the genitive or it can mean *because of* when it takes the accusative. μετά is another example of a two-case preposition. μετά can mean *with* when it takes the genitive or it can mean *after* when it takes the accusative. Therefore, rightly identifying the case of the object of the preposition is a key part of rightly interpreting the preposition itself. Prepositions can often be translated many different ways, but using context along with grammatical construction can help us narrow down what the preposition actually means in that passage.

Conjunctions:

Conjunctions connect words, phrases, and clauses. Some examples are *and, but, or, for, because, if,* and *therefore*. Conjunctions are especially important when following the logical flow of an argument. *And* adds or connects ideas. *But* introduces contrast. *For* introduces an explanation or reason. *Because* introduces a cause or reason. *If* introduces a condition. *Or* introduces an alternative. *Therefore* draws a conclusion. There are coordinating conjunctions and subordinating conjunctions. Coordinating conjunctions join two grammatical equal elements. Subordinating conjunctions make one element dependent on the other element. Conjunctions are key for understanding how words, phrases, and clauses are connected to one another.

Greek also has many important conjunctions. The three most common coordinating conjunctions in Greek are καί, δέ, and ἀλλά. καί can mean *and*, *also*, or *even*. καί is a connecting word. This is the most common word in the New Testament besides the article, and the intended meaning in a specific verse largely depends on the context. δέ can mean *but* or *and*. This is more of a transitional word. Context also plays a large part in how it is translated. ἀλλά can mean *but*, *rather*, or *on the contrary*. This word is much stronger form of contrast than δέ. Greek also has many important subordinating conjunctions. ἵνα is a very important word in the New Testament. ἵνα can be translated "so that," "in order that," or "that." This subordinating conjunction introduces a purpose clause. Purpose clauses are often key for determining the main point of a passage. ὅτι is another important subordinating conjunction. This word can be translated "that," "because," or "since." This conjunction often expresses the cause or logical reason of the main verb. εἰ is a conditional conjunction that is usually translated "if." This is used when the condition is assumed to be true for the sake of the argument (First Class condition). It typically pairs with the indicative mood. It can also be used for Second Class conditions that are paired with a past indicative. This expresses a condition assumed to be contrary to reality. ἐάν is another conditional conjunction that is usually translated "if" or "whenever." This is used when the condition is a future probability or an uncertainty (Third Class condition). It always pairs with the subjunctive mood. These first three classes are the most common in the New Testament. All of these conjunctions are important aspects of New Testament interpretation. Paying close attention to these connecting words is often key to understanding the author's reasoning.

Interjections:

Interjections communicate strong emotion or an exclamation. Some examples are *oh!* or *behold!*. Romans 11:33 says, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" There are two interjections in this verse. These interjections express the depth of Paul's amazement and reverence. Greek also uses exclamatory expressions and particles to communicate emotion and emphasis. Interjections are less central to grammatical analysis than nouns and verbs, but they help communicate the author's tone and emphasis.

Homework – Analyze Grammar and Syntax:

You should have picked a passage, identified challenges, established interpretive principles, considered systematic/theological assumption, identified the key aspects of the biblical and cultural context, and analyzed the literary genre. Now, you should analyze the grammar and syntax of your passage. Identify the nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, articles, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections. Identify the subject and main verb of each sentence. Identify the noun's gender, number, and especially case. Identify the verb's person, number, tense, voice, and mood. Identify any commands, conditions, or statements of fact. Identify connecting words and explain how they relate to the passage's main ideas. Bible software can help with the parsing of the main nouns and verbs.

Conclusion:

Grammar and syntax are essential tools for accurately interpreting Scripture. Individual words matter, but so do their grammatical functions and relationships within a sentence. Understanding the parts of speech, Greek noun cases, Greek verb tenses, voices, and moods, and sentence structure helps us better understand what the biblical writers intended to communicate. The goal is to understand how the words of Scripture work to together to communicate God's intended meaning.