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Resources for Teachers

Wendell Willis

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Wendell Willis, Editor

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR CONCORDANCE II. Going Behind Different Translations

The most helpful and unique feature of analytical concordances (such as Strong or Young) are the appendices which allow students to take advantage of the original languages of the Bible without learning Greek or Hebrew.

In the first installment of this series, we looked at the way in which an analytical concordance can be useful to help us locate the possible range of meanings for words and their nuanced meanings in the New Testament. This can also be done with a good Bible Word Book or Dictionary.

A second use of the analytical concordance is to relate verses which use the same word, although the translations do not reflect that. All translations are to some extent an interpretation, and the translator must decide what nuance of a word is intended in the original language, and what nuance of the contemporary speech best expresses that meaning today. We should not regret their work in this area, indeed we should appreciate these attempts to express accurately in present language the subtlety and intent of the Bible words. (This is, however, a good reason to use several translations when studying a passage).

By using an analytical concordance we are able to go behind these translations to see what original words are being translated, and to locate other uses of these words in the Bible. In this way the student is able to be aware of word use similarities which the translations may obscure.

Wendell Willis is the Involvement Minister for the South National Church of Christ in Springfield, Missouri. He has a graduate degree from A.C.U. and a PhD from S.M.U.

To give an example, if one is studying 1 Corinthians 8, in verse one we find that love is more valuable than knowledge in the Christian life, because "love builds up" (NIV, "edifieth" in KJV). "Building up" or "edification" is a valuable study in Paul, and worth pursuing in its own right. When one looks up "edify" in the concordance and checks other places where it occurs, unless the analytical appendix is used, it is likely that a very important usage will be overlooked.

Let me give examples using both Young's and Strong's concordances on how to check this out. One begins with the English word taken from the KJV translation in the passage under study (in this case, 1 Cor 8:1). Looking up "edify" in KJV one sees that in this passage it renders the word "oikodomeo" (in Greek, οἰκοδομῶ). Then turning to the appendix at the back of Young's concordance (p. 81) and looking up in the Greek (in "Lexicon N. T. Greek") the word "oikodomeo" we find that this Greek word is also translated as "build", "build up" and "emboldened." In 1 Corinthians 8:11 it is translated "emboldened" (the only time this translation occurs in the N. T. for this word).

Using Strong's one also looks up "edifieth" and finds our verse, 8:1. The reference number in Strong is 3618. Going to the "Greek Dictionary" in the back and looking up this number we find "oikodomeo" and see that the other meanings given are "build (-er, -ing, up)" and "embolden." Returning to the English concordance and looking up "embolden" we find that it translated "oikodomeo" in 8:11 (which we confirm by looking closely at the Greek terms).

As a result of these studies, we see that in 1 Corinthians 8 there is contrasted two ways of "building up." One of these ways of "building up", being guided by love (8:1), strengthens the weaker Christian. The

other, guided by selfish determination to do whatever one wishes will “build up” the weaker believer to his own destruction! It is the sort of edification that parades its “deeper wisdom” and encourages the weaker person to act beyond what their faith allows. Upon doing so the weaker person is overcome with guilt and grief and loses their confidence in God. Fine edification this! The arrogant “builds up” the weak to their destruction.

Another use of this lexical appendix is to see relationships between words in the original languages which are obscured in English translations. Often these relationships cannot be made clear in English because English lacks an equivalent term in common usage to that original term.

An example is that in Greek there is a close relationship between “righteousness” and “to justify”, because they are respectively the noun and verb forms of the same Greek word. However, since there is no English verb form of “righteousness” the translators are forced to look for another word group to use.

If one looks up “righteousness” in the Greek Lexicon section of the concordance it can be seen that it most often translates the Greek word *dikaiosune* (in Greek, δικαιοσυνη). Turning to the Greek lexicon and looking up this word (p. 65 in Young’s appendix; # 1343

in Strong), and looking near it we see that related words include: *dikioma* (judgment, righteousness), *dikaio* (just, righteous), *dikaiosis* (justification) and *dikaioo* (free, or most often “justify”). In this way the non-Greek reading student can see a very important relationship completely obscured in translations.

But what importance does this have, beyond being clear about what Greek words are behind the English translations? Just this, in some passages the words occur with intensity and frequency that translations fail to convey. For example, look at Gal 2.16-21, we see that the way we are “justified” (v. 16—three times!, 17) by faith is by the crucifixion of the Lord. This way of justification, unlike keeping the Law, does not set aside the “righteousnes” of God, but affirms it.

Another similar study can be done to see the close relationship between “faith” (πιστω in Greek) and “believe” (πιστευ in Greek), that cannot be seen in translation because English has no verb form of “faith” and the verb cognate to “belief” (namely, “believe”) is pressed into service.

The next time you are doing serious textual study, and discover some key words in a passage, try this way to get full use and advantage from your analytical concordance—it is a better aid than most realize!