



Joyful And Ardent Labor In The Scriptures

Studying the Bible with humility and reverence.
Studying to get to know God in truth, then live accordingly.

Biblical Grammar: Worthy of Minute Study

Since it is not common practice to rely much on grammar when it is sought to interpret the Bible, my apology must be that the mechanics of speech provide a delicate and flexible means of communication which is worth scientific study.

. . . Syntax is the way single words are knit together in a phrase or sentence to form ideas, and so it is the accepted means by which one man presents his own mental images to another. It is the study of the way we speak. . . . Everyone who speaks has his own syntax, as well as his own vocabulary. . . . If by chance a man stays to examine the structure of the last sentence he uttered, in that moment he becomes a grammarian, in the special field of syntax, a scientist however modest in the most humane of all investigation. Moreover, that last sentence, examined expertly, might evoke some learned discussion which in turn would illuminate the speaker's idioverse of taste, education, hobbies and even moral fibre.

The study becomes crucial when it begins to take account of the speech-patterns of the different New Testament authors, and supremely of Jesus. It gives aid to the commentator and preacher which is unsurpassed for detail and power of insight. This is a science, not a field for unbridled imagination nor for reading things into an innocent text. All the discipline and patience which men devote to empirical science is demanded and the results are as reliable.

The reader may be disappointed if syntax takes him into the byways of holy Scripture as well as along the high roads of doctrine and controversies. The research is necessarily microscopic. He may allege that it fusses too much with adverbs, particles, varieties of subordinate clauses, moods, and tenses. It puts everyone's speech through a vast number of filters and measures. Nothing is overlooked, not even the order of words and clauses in the sentence. So, although syntax can illuminate the large places, perhaps its most valuable contribution for the careful student will be in sifting out the unobserved revealing characteristics which distinguish one man from another. It brings St. John to life and helps the reader to feel his emotional and mental pulse; it brings the reader close enough to St. Paul's mind and heart to understand exactly why he used that very phrase and no other. By a massive display of detail it makes the Word of God live again.¹

Toiling in the Bible with such precision is neither excessive nor merely academic. See C. Matthew McMahon's article "Where Oh Where has the Precisionist Gone?"²

Notes

¹ Nigel Turner, *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), 1–2. Copyright © Nigel Turner. Material reproduced by kind permission of The Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd, www.continuumbooks.com. Turner prefaces *Insights* with the statement that the book "is published in the sincere belief that the grammarian's toil in the back room should be humbly offered to God in the service of his whole Church" (vii).

² C. Matthew McMahon, "Where Oh Where has the Precisionist Gone?," A Puritan's Mind, <http://www.apuritansmind.com/pastors-study/where-oh-where-has-the-precisionist-gone-by-dr-c-matthew-mcmahon/> (accessed December 19, 2013).
