# Rule 5: Grammar

August 10, 2019 · https://letgodbetrue.com/sermons/2019/rule-5/

## Hermeneutics: How to Read and Understand the Bible

### RULE #5: Obey the Rules of Grammar.

I. God has chosen to communicate with written language, so we must learn the rules of language.

A. **Grammar**. That department of the study of a language which deals with its inflexional forms or other means of indicating the relations of words in the sentence, and with the rules for employing these in accordance with established usage. The science which analyzes those distinctions in thought, which it is the purpose of grammatical forms more or less completely to render in expression. [OED]

B. If you never learn to read, then you will be at a great disadvantage to know Scripture.

C. If you never learn elementary grammar, you will also find it harder to understand well.

D. However, it is important to also remember that we understand the things we read and hear with hardly any conscious thought about grammar. Even if you do not know the proper terms for various grammatical constructions or how to diagram sentences, you are probably still able to hear and understand. Teaching and defending demand more.

E. As noted earlier about reading, grammar hardly qualifies as a rule of interpretation, since it is fundamental to understanding writing from any source in any language.

1. But since Scripture clearly uses grammatical constructions in proving doctrinal points, it will be considered here as a rule of interpretation.
2. Neither grammar nor justification of print on a page is taught in II Timothy 1:13.
3. The “form of sound words” in II Timothy 1:13 is using words of a wholesome character or nature, as Paul did and taught elsewhere (I Tim 6:3; Titus 2:1,8).

F. Experience shows few Bible readers and preachers pay close attention to the language and grammar of Scripture any longer, and there are reasons for their carelessness.

1. Once you get in the habit of changing God’s words on a regular basis, then the individual words and their tight relation to the sentence lose importance.
2. Once in the habit of modifying the message and program to cater to carnal and unregenerate members, you emphasize the sound of words over their sense.

G. You will be accused of a nit-picking, old-fashioned method of interpretation, unless you can remember and explain the Holy Spirit’s examples of grammatical arguments.

H. It would serve serious students well to own at least one handbook of English grammar.

I. This study of Bible grammar is not exhaustive, but it should provoke careful study.

II. Remember arguments where the Holy Spirit appeals to grammar in Scripture to prove points.

A. Paul built a significant argument for salvation on the mere number of a noun (Gal 3:16).
    1. Were God's promises to Abraham and his "seed"? Or Abraham and his "seeds"?
    2. The difference here is the great contrast between Jesus Christ and antichrist Jews. Which of these two was the object of God's promises in Abraham?
    3. Paul appeals to the Old Testament and argues from the fact that every promise to Abraham and his seed were to a singular "seed" (from Gen 12:7 to Gen 24:7).
    4. The true fulfillment of the promises to Abraham and his seed are in Jesus Christ and His spiritual children, identified through faith (Gal 3:16 cp Gal 3:29).
    5. Salvation is by grace, not race or law, from the grammar in the Old Testament.
    6. It is gratifying to see modern translations of the Bible foolishly pervert this point by using indefinite (NIV) or plural (NASV) nouns in the promises to Abraham recorded in Genesis. Even the New King James Version makes this corruption.

B. Paul makes a fine switch from the active voice to the passive voice (Galatians 4:9).
    1. Arminian theology makes your salvation dependent on your knowledge of God.
    2. God's theology makes your salvation dependent on His knowledge of you.
    3. God knowing us is the key (Rom 8:29-30; Eph 1:6; II Tim 2:19; Matt 7:23).
    4. Paul reasons, if your salvation is by God's knowledge of you, why chase laws?

C. Jesus argued an important doctrine from the tense of a verb (Matthew 22:32).
    1. The Sadducees, pseudo-masters of the Bible, denied the resurrection of the dead.
    2. Jesus proved the resurrection of the dead by the present tense in "I am the God of Abraham," since He is God of the living, not the dead, and Abram was dead.
    3. Moses wrote this 400 years after Abraham and used the present tense (Ex 3:6).
    4. And Jesus argued His point from the only italicized word in Exodus 3:6! Glory!

D. Jesus argued another important doctrine with merely the tense of a verb (John 8:58).
    1. Limited by the Jews to 50 years, Jesus claimed the eternal nature of Jehovah.
    2. Comparing Himself to Abraham, He did not say, "Before Abraham was, I was."
    3. He said, "Before Abraham was, I am," using the sacred present tense (Ex 3:14).
    4. The Jews obviously understood the implications, for they tried to stone Him.

E. Paul argued an apparent verb tense error contained advanced revelation (Romans 4:17).
    1. God told Abraham, "I have made you a father of many nations," when he was the father only of Ishmael, who would provide but one nation (Gen 17:5,20).
    2. God had purposed many nations through Isaac, and God's purpose is so certain that we can use past tense verbs for actions not yet done (Gen 17:4,16).

III. Consider these grammatical constructions and the doctrinal implications from true analysis.
A. Our Lord Jesus declared His Deity to Nicodemus by His use of a verb tense (John 3:13).
    1. He began by telling Nicodemus that He had come down from heaven.
    2. He added that He was still in heaven, even while they were talking on earth!

3. Modern translations profanely delete this glorious little phrase from the verse.
4. An angel or saint could come down, but only Jehovah God is omnipresent!

B. John's verb tenses in John 1:12 and context teach that regeneration is by God's power.
1. Those who "believe" (present tense) "were born" (past tense) of God.
2. Only this construction and understanding agrees with the facts of John 1:13.
3. "Received him" is past tense only to continue from 1:11 in historical mode.
4. John quickly brings this past tense to the present, by his explanatory "even."

C. Paul used verb tenses to show the gospel only benefits those already saved (I Cor 1:18).
1. Only those who "are saved" (perfect tense, passive voice) profit from the gospel.
2. Those perishing do not profit by the gospel; it is foolishness to them (II Cor 4:3).
3. The language is clear – a perfect tense are and present tense is – indicating salvation occurred prior to the gospel being received as the power of God.
4. God must call a man in order for the gospel to make sense (I Cor 1:22-24).

D. John proves the priority of regeneration to faith by verb tenses (John 5:24; I John 5:1).
1. The hearing and believing man "is passed" (perfect tense, passive voice).
2. We can prove this grammar by comparing I John 3:14 and I John 4:7.
3. We can prove this grammar by honest men who want to check the Greek verbs.

E. Paul teaches that our salvation is dependent on being accepted, not accepting (Eph 1:6).
1. Here we are dealing with the voice of the verb – are we are active or passive?
2. The religious world is clamoring, buying, and seducing sinners to accept Christ.
3. God declare our adoption to be the result of being made acceptable (Acts 10:35).

F. John proves God dwells in a person before that person will confess Christ (I John 4:15).
1. The act of faith, in confessing Jesus as Son, is the future tense, "shall confess."
2. The result of regeneration, indwelling by God, is present tense, "God dwelleth."
3. Learn the basic but important rule that the tenses of verbs in a sentence are more important than their order in the sentence.

G. Paul proves all foolish talking and jesting are sins by the number of a verb (Eph 5:4).
1. Some have taken the liberty to justify "convenient jesting," by limiting the condemnation of this text to only jesting, which, they say, is not convenient.
2. But the plural "are" covers all three sins: filthiness, foolish talking, and jesting, which requires all three to be inconvenient, or some filthiness to be convenient.

H. Paul argued we are already glorified by the use of the past tense of the verb (Rom 8:30).
1. We believe sure enough we are foreknown, predestinated, called, and justified.
2. But the text declares we are also glorified, which we view in light of Rom 4:17.

I. Paul argued that justification precedes faith in a good text on justification (Acts 13:39).
1. All that believe (plural, present tense) are justified (plural, perfect tense). Glory!

2. Paul further confirms the fact by ascribing justification “by him,” that is Christ!

J. Peter explained to Cornelius God had already accepted him and his family (Acts 10:35).
   1. He that feareth him (singular, present tense) is accepted with Him (singular, perfect tense), just as we know from Romans 3:18.
   2. He that worketh righteousness (singular, present tense) is accepted with Him (singular, perfect tense), just as we know from I John 2:29; 3:7,10.
   3. Being accepted with God through Jesus Christ is the key to salvation (Eph 1:6).

K. Be thankful for the particularly precise language of the King James Version English.
   1. Thee, thou, thy, and thine are always singular. You can count on it absolutely.
   2. Ye, your, and you are always plural. Again, you can count on it absolutely.
   3. Matthew 26:64 addresses Caiaphas directly, then promises a view for the group!
   4. Luke 22:31-32 says Satan wanted all of them, but Jesus prayed for each of them.
   5. John 3:7 shows Jesus spoke to Nicodemus alone, but He taught a universal rule.
   6. Don’t let modern illiterates tell you we don’t want “thee” or “thou” in the Bible.
   7. Why did Paul end his epistles to Timothy differently (I Tim 6:21; II Tim 4:22)?
   8. The thee and thou of the KJV are superior to any English version without them.

L. The right location of a comma defies the damnable doctrine of soul sleep (Luke 23:43).
   1. Jesus told the thief they would be together that very day in Paradise by saying, “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”
   2. Russellites and Adventists read, “Truly I tell you today, You will be with me in Paradise,” allowing the thief’s soul to sleep until some future time (NWT).

M. Jesus was in the tomb two Sabbath days, based on the timing of the purchase of spices.
   1. Mark 16:1 indicates the women had bought the spices after a Sabbath day.
   2. Luke 23:56 indicates they had prepared those spices before a Sabbath day.
   3. The first Sabbath was Passover Sabbath; the next was the weekly (John 19:31).
   4. The women bought and prepared their spices on a day between these Sabbaths.
   5. Here is circumstantial evidence for our Lord’s “three days and three nights.”

N. Ignoring the italicized words both condemns Jesus Christ and violates the true grammar.
   1. Arthur Pink suggested much light might be found by ignoring italicized words!
   2. Jesus argued from italicized words (Ex 3:6 cp Matt 22:32; Deut 8:3 cp Mat 4:4).
   3. Peter also argued doctrine from italicized words (Psalm 16:8 cp Acts 2:25).
   4. Can Mr. Pink discover how David and Elhanan killed Goliath (II Sam 21:19)?

O. Jesus presently has His rod of iron rule by believing a verb tense (Revelation 2:26-27).
   1. He received such a throne and authority already, by the past tense “received.”
   2. We are not looking for some Jewish millennium in the future for Jesus to reign.

P. God counted Paul faithful before conversion, by virtue of verb tenses in I Timothy 1:12.

1. The coordinating conjunction “for” gives Paul’s faithfulness as a factor in God enabling him for the ministry.
2. God measured Paul by his knowledge, which was unbelief (1:13; I Kings 15:14).

Q. Matthew used a different verb to lay a trap for higher and textual critics (Matthew 27:9).
1. We condemn all the modern translations for crediting Isaiah with Mark 1:2.
2. Zechariah wrote what Jeremiah spoke! Zechariah tells us so (1:4; 7:7,12).

R. Verb tenses must be understood carefully in cases of quoted prophecies, for the prophet’s perspective was future, but the application by the apostle is present or past.
1. Acts 2:17-21 was future to Joel, but not to Peter. It was fulfilled at Pentecost.
2. Acts 15:16-17 was future to Amos, but not to James. It was fulfilled with Paul.
3. Romans 11:26-27 was future to Isaiah, but not Paul. It was fulfilled with Christ.
4. Hebrews 8:8-12 was future to Jeremiah, but not Paul. It was fulfilled in Christ.
5. Hebrews 12:26 was future to Haggai, but not to Paul. It was fulfilled in Christ.

S. Some have used Acts 2:41 to teach that baptism and church membership are simultaneous events, both of which are results of Peter’s preaching in Acts 2:40.
1. “Then” is a conjunctive adverb that connects the independent clause of Acts 2:40 and the first independent clause in Acts 2:41. It does not affect the second independent clause of Acts 2:41, because conjunctive adverbs do not connect more than two such clauses.
2. The two independent clauses of Acts 2:41 have two distinct and different time frames for their actions. The baptism of the first clause occurred after Peter’s preaching by virtue of “then” which means “at that time.” The addition of three thousand souls simply occurred sometime during that day.
3. The two independent clauses of Acts 2:41 have two distinct and different subjects. The subject of the first clause is “they that gladly received his word,” and the subject of the second clause is “about three thousand souls.”
4. A colon separates the two clauses, which is second only to the period in disconnecting clauses with independent and discontinuous grammatical constructions.
5. The “and,” which serves as a coordinating conjunction in Acts 2:41, does not require addition to the church to be simultaneous with baptism any more than the following six clauses coordinated by “and.”

IV. Grammar follows context and the preceding rules, because context determines grammar.

A. Prepositional phrases must often be judged to be either subjective-genitive or objective-genitive. Is the object of the preposition the subject or object of the genitive case?
1. A subjective-genitive construction makes the object of the preposition the subject of the genitive phrase. The object of the preposition performs the verb.
   a. In I John 3:16, God’s love for us caused Him to lay down His life for us.
   b. In Haggai 2:7, the “desire of all nations” is a prophecy of Jesus Christ, Who is desired by all nations. There is no one desiring nations. Consider this difference long enough to fully

understand it.

c. In Daniel 11:37, Herod did not forsake desiring women, for he had ten wives; but he did forsake women's desire, for he killed their babies.

d. In James 2:4, we allow evil thoughts to be the basis for our judgments. We are certainly to judge evil thoughts, but that is not taught here!

e. In II Corinthians 5:14, Christ's love for Paul constrained him to zeal, which is the great love he prayed for all men to perceive (Eph 3:14-19).

2. An objective-genitive construction makes the object of the preposition the object of the genitive phrase. The subject of the preposition performs the verb.
   a. In Luke 11:42, the Pharisees were passing over their love of God, which they ought to have done. They were not neglecting God's love of them.
   b. In I Timothy 6:10, the temptation is loving money, not money loving us.
   c. In Acts 13:34, the sure mercies are God's in raising David's Son, Jesus.
   d. In I Timothy 3:6, novices might be condemned for pride like the devil.
   e. In Jude 1:21, we keep ourselves loving God, for God loves us forever.
3. We argue that such a construction is to be subjective-genitive in Romans 3:22; Galatians 2:16,20; 3:22; and Philemon 3:9 where righteousness and justification come by Christ's faith and not our own. Consider that all modern Bible translations change this phrase to "faith in Christ" in all of these places.
4. We deny the travesty of Scripture when some have argued that "the gift of the Holy Ghost" in Acts 2:38 is the Holy Spirit giving church membership through water baptism. The giving here is by God, and the gift is the Holy Ghost. Simply consider Acts 2:33 and John 7:39 and Ephesians 1:13.
5. These grammatical constructions are interpreted by following the rules that have come before. Simply looking at the words and grammar will not give a hint.

B. Long and complicated sentences must be diagrammed according to the rest of Scripture.
   1. I Pet 3:18-20 describes Noah preaching by Christ's Spirit, while he was building the ark, to his disobedient generation, who were in prison when Peter wrote.
      a. Jesus did not descend into hell and preach to the spirits in prison, as the Catholics want us to believe. He went to Paradise with the thief.
      b. He commended His spirit to His Father's hands, not the prison warden!
   2. Revelation 13:8 is short, but five consecutive prepositions modify "written"!
      a. Men wax eloquent about a Lamb slain from the foundation of the world!
      b. But the word "slain" is a participial adjective simply modifying the lamb.
      c. The preposition "from," as prepositions do, tells us at what time the names were not "written" in the book.
      d. We confirm our choice by Christ's death in time (Gal 4:4) and Rev 17:8.
      e. Jesus is described here as a Lamb slain for us to see a connection to 5:6.

C. Long distance or complex relations of pronouns and antecedents must be Scriptural.
    1. In Psalm 105:36, the antecedent of “their” must be Egypt or the land of Ham.
    2. In Psalm 105:37, the pronoun “them” must be Israel from way back in 105:23.
    3. In Psalm 105:28, the pronoun “they” could be plagues, Moses/Aaron, or Egypt.
    4. Daniel 11 has very intriguing pronouns clarified only by context and history.

V. Corruptions of Scripture’s grammar could be multiplied indefinitely with little profit for most.
    A. Galatians 1:15-16 does not teach Paul was regenerated in his mother’s womb or at birth.
        1. The two parenthetical elements are unrelated to one other in a grammatical way.
        2. Both simply describe God’s calling of Paul to the ministry (Jer 1:5; Rom 1:1).
    B. Acts 2:38 will not allow substitution of other parts of grammar for “Christ” in the verse.
        1. Wanting to thwart the Campbellite doctrine of baptismal regeneration, it has been suggested that “anointed” be substituted for “Christ” in this text, for it to read, “baptized in the name of Jesus, anointed for the remission of sins.”
        2. Since “Jesus Christ” is a noun in this verse, it is invalid to substitute the participial adjective “anointed” in its place grammatically.
        3. Since the preposition “for” modifies the verb “baptized,” it is invalid to move its connection to an inserted participial adjective not in the original sentence.
        4. Such gymnastics and violation of grammar are perversely wrong and give the enemies of the cross the type of ammunition for ridicule they do not deserve.
        5. We know that the preposition “for” in this context means “in testimony of,” as proven by I Peter 3:21, and indicated by Mark 1:40-44.

← Rule #4
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