

# **Dr. George Payton, Bible Translation, Session 21, Genitive Phrases**

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This is Dr. George Payton in his teaching on Bible translation. This is session 21, Genitive Phrases.

The next translation difficulty we will be talking about is how to translate genitive phrases.

And this is another communication challenge that we get when we encounter the New Testament and the Old Testament. A genitive phrase is a phrase in any language, but particularly in our case in Greek and Hebrew, that contains two nouns joined by the preposition of. And most commonly, genitive phrases we think of as showing possession.

So, you have the house of my mother, or we can say my mother's house. However, this type of construction has numerous other ways that it functions in Greek and Hebrew, and each language has 20 or 30 different functions in terms of how they use the genitive. We're not going to cover all of them, but we can at least cover some of them.

Then we'll cover the process of translating it. So, the first one is the tail of the dog. The tail of the dog.

Does the dog own the tail? Well, yeah, but you're not focusing on the ownership part of it. The tail is a part of the dog, so it's partitive—a bucket of water.

Okay, does the water own the bucket, or does the bucket own the water? No, it's not a possession thing. It is the bucket that contains water, the bucket which has water in it—song of Miriam.

Does she own the song? I don't know if she has the copyrights for the production of that particular song, so she may not own it, but she sang it anyway. It's the song that she sang—City of Jerusalem.

It's a city which is called Jerusalem. And so, these are usages of the phrase of the genitive construction with of and to nouns that don't communicate the possession, and that's what we're going to focus on. All right, so there are two basic kinds of genitive phrases, and one is subjective.

So, it relates to the subject who is doing the action or the action that is mentioned. Again, we get this with abstract nouns, which is actually an action. For example, the love of God or God's love.

God is the one who is loving, so He's the subject of this action of loving, and so we can even say God loves as an extrapolation of the love of God. And so God is a subject, and so this is a subjective use of the genitive. Then we have an objective, which is probably more common, and it's somehow describing this object.

So, you say, the boy had a fear of dogs. So, fear of dogs is the genitive construction. And it's describing the kind of fear that he had.

He was afraid of that dog, or dogs. So, knowing the kind of genitive phrase can help us to break down and understand its meaning and how it is used. It can be challenging to connect two nouns with of, and this is why we're doing it.

Again, we're focusing on all of these different translation challenges that we started with, with understanding the text first, understanding these different complicated translation difficulties first, and then phrasing it into the target language in the translation. Okay, so what are some examples of genitive phrases? Well, we've had some already, with two nouns joined together by the of, and we had the fruit of the Spirit. Again, this would not be a possession, and we said in that particular verse in Galatians that the Spirit produces fruit in people.

So, it's fruit produced by the Spirit; the Spirit is the one producing the fruit. Okay, and we talked about baptism of repentance. So, the relationship between baptism and repentance is that baptism is a sign that a person has repented.

So, getting baptized shows that they have repented. And we had the coming of the Lord, and that we said is a time phrase, the time when the Lord will come or would come. We also had this one: He told us about your love, He told us that you love people, or He told us the way that you love people.

Okay, so what did we do? How did we break this down? First of all, you consider whether it's the subject of the verb or an object, whether it is being described or is it someone describing a person doing the action, or somehow the person is related to the action. In what ways does the second noun modify the first one, or does the first one modify the second one? What we try to do is then express the relationship between these nouns in an explicit way so that people can make it clearer what it is that they're reading and what the relationship is between these two words. It sounds simple, but it's more challenging than one might think.

Okay, here's some examples. All right, Luke 1:5, in the days of Herod, king of Judah. Okay, in the days of Herod, that obviously is some kind of time phrase.

King of Judah, what was Herod's relationship to Judah? He ruled over Judah. So, we can say, at the time when Herod ruled over Judah. That breaks down the genitives, says it in a straightforward way, and uses real verbs.

We could even say here, if we want to retain the word, king ruled as king over Judah, and that would probably be a good thing to retain. So, we would say that when Herod ruled as king over Judah. Okay, Luke 1:6, it talks about Zacharias and Elizabeth were righteous in the sight of God.

The sight of God is then our genitive phrase. Walking blamelessly in the commandments of the Lord. So, God saw that Zacharias and Elizabeth were righteous, and so, in the sight of God, means God saw them.

And so, God being the seer, that is subjective. That's the main person that's seen. Okay? Another thing that they say in Hebrew, in some ways, is before the Lord.

As it said, Noah was righteous before the Lord. The word before is a preposition. It doesn't really tell us as much, so it's not getting us totally out of the issue.

It's not totally solving the problem. We could even say who God saw that. So, if we want to focus on them, rather than making God explicit, as soon as we make God explicit in a sentence, particularly these difficult phrases, it seems like everyone wants to jump into that, and that's the main point of the sentence.

Well, we're describing Zacharias and Elizabeth. It says to walk blamelessly in the commandments of the Lord and walk blamelessly in the laws that God commanded.

Again, that's describing the laws. And the laws came from the Lord. So, we could say that the Lord commanded us to be more accurate.

A city of Galilee. What does that mean? It means a city which is located in Galilee region, or in the region of Galilee. But if we're trying to break down and not use the word of, trying to re-express it in a different way.

Other examples. The city of Joppa. Is that the same thing as the city of Galilee? Probably not.

Okay, the city called or named Joppa. Bethlehem, the city of David. Did David own the city? No.

David, this is actually in the New Testament, so obviously, David's been dead for centuries. So he didn't own it. Was David living there? No, he wasn't.

But it's David's hometown. In fact, he came from that area, if you read his history, that's the region where he grew up in. All right.

Capernaum, a city of Andrew and Peter. That one, Andrew and Peter were alive at the writing of that, and so it's the city where Andrew and Peter lived. All this is not hard to figure out, but sometimes you can't use that of phrase, and so you need to say it in a slightly different way.

And so all I'm doing here is making explicit what things you already knew. You can figure that out, it's not a terribly difficult thing at this point. Okay, how about this one? Genesis 2:11 and 12 talks about the land of Havilah, land of Havilah, and gold of that land.

So, what is the relationship between gold and the land? Did the land produce the gold? I'm kind of yes and kind of no, but somehow, people got gold from the land in Havilah. So the land was named Havilah, and gold from that land. So you're talking about its location, its source, and where it came from.

So, if we say the food of Japan is fantastic, the food that people normally eat in Japan is where it came from, and that's its source. All right, let's go on. I hope that doing all of this

gives you an idea of these examples. again, a lot of them are very intuitive, but we'll get into other things that are not quite so intuitive.

All right, Acts 2:38. This is where Peter tells people in Jerusalem to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins, and then it goes on and says, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. What is the gift of the Holy Spirit referring to? Well, the Holy Spirit is the thing that's being given.

God will give you the Holy Spirit. God will put onto you the Holy Spirit. So the gift of the Spirit, the Spirit is the gift.

Holy Spirit is the gift. Actually, I don't like to say the Holy Spirit; I like to say the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit is a personage. So, Holy Spirit.

What about Acts 12? Acts 12 is the one that mentions the gifts of the Holy Spirit. So, is that the gifts that the Holy Spirit receives? Is the Holy Spirit the gift? Actually, the Holy Spirit is the one giving the spiritual gifts. So, gifts of the Spirit, we could say, are gifts that the Holy Spirit gives.

The problem is that those two phrases, the gift of the Holy Spirit and gifts of the Holy Spirit, are exactly the same, except that the gift is plural in one. But they're exactly the same, and they mean two different things. So, we think, oh, gifts of the Spirit.

So, if you say, my birthday present, are you talking about something that you received? It's tricky, isn't it? Or is it something that I'm giving to someone for their birthday? Okay, what birthday present did I buy for Ted, or what birthday present did I receive in another way? John 5:42, and here we have a phrase, you do not have the love of God in your hearts. Jesus talks to people, and he rebukes them in this long discussion that Jesus had in John 5. And it's apparent that Jesus is at odds with the people there, and we're trying to then understand why he accuses them of not having the love of God in their hearts.

Okay, so remember what we said about words like love? You have a person who loves, and you have someone who is loved or something who is loved. So, is Jesus telling them that God does not love you and your hearts? That's one possibility. So God is the lover, and the people are the ones being loved.

Is it talking about them loving God or not loving God? And if you look at the context, Jesus is saying that you think that you are following the laws, but you don't have the love of God in your heart. How can we rephrase that and break that down, and what does that mean? And if you look at it, he's accusing them of not loving God. You do not love God in your hearts.

But you see how the love of God, the love of God, covers a multitude of sins. Another thing about the phrase love of God is that it's an abstract phrase that, if we read it too quickly, we think we understand it. We need to rethink that, and we need to make sure that we get what is being communicated.

Okay, options for translating genitive phrases. First of all, we determine the relationship between the two phrases, and we also determine what the function of that phrase is. So, if I

can go back to this one, gifts of the Holy Spirit describe the Holy Spirit giving people spiritual empowerment.

The function is to describe the work of the Holy Spirit. You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit is describing what they will be given, and so that description is the important part. And the love of God, they were not doing certain activities, and the activity in focus here is loving God, and so that is what we mean when we say the function of the phrase.

Okay, and then you explore different options for translating these different phrases. What are the different ways that they can say things in the target language? So if they have similar phrasing, or if they can say the love of God and it communicates the correct thing if they say the gift of the Holy Spirit and it communicates the correct thing, there's no need to change anything. You can just translate it using the form of the biblical text.

And as I said in Swahili, sometimes they do use these nouns with of, and it does communicate fine. If it communicates fine, then as we say, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. There's no need to because it's already communicating well.

Great. For example, they went to the city of Jerusalem. If I translated that into Swahili, people would understand perfectly that that's the name of the city.

We wouldn't have to change anything. However, if it sounds awkward, it does not communicate, and it doesn't make the relationship and or the function explicit, then we need to readjust it and say things more explicitly in a clear way so that people understand. Thank you.

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