

# **Dr. George Payton, Bible Translation, Session 22, Verbal Ideas and Genitive Phrases**

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This is Dr. George Paton in his teaching on Bible translation. This is session 22, Verbal Ideas and Genitive Phrases.

We've been talking about translating verbal ideas.

We've been talking about how to translate genitive phrases. Today, we're going to be talking about how to translate phrases that are genitive phrases containing verbal ideas, how to break those down, and how to communicate them. So, verbal ideas in and of themselves are challenging to translate because of the nature of these constructions.

As we said, it's cryptic. It does not say all of the information, and it also uses them in a way that's not technically a verb. It's using them as some other thing, like a noun or an adjective.

And so, we also have genitive phrases, and when you have verbal nouns or verbal ideas in genitive phrases, it becomes even more complex. Like what? Let me give an example here. From Luke 1, speaking of John the Baptist, your child will be called the prophet of the Most High.

What does that mean? That's a genitive phrase, and a prophet is actually one who prophesies. You will go before the Lord to prepare His ways, to give His people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness of sins, we've covered.

Knowledge of salvation, so they know about it. Therein lies the problem: another one, Ephesians 1:1, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.

And if you ask someone, do you know what that means? They'll say, yeah. If you ask them, can you tell me what that means? They'll go, um, and that's the problem. We're trying to alleviate the burden on the reader to try to figure things out.

That doesn't mean that everything in the Bible is easy to figure out or that it can be explained easily, but we're trying to do what? We're trying to remove as many stumbling blocks or difficulties as possible. So, the challenge of interpreting becomes greater when these compound phrases sometimes have an idiom or another figure of speech. To give knowledge of salvation may not necessarily be an idiom, but it's an idiomatic way of speaking.

And how do you give knowledge? What does it mean to give knowledge? Usually, something concrete is given. I gave Ted the book. But what does it mean to give knowledge? Does it mean to teach? Does it mean to inform or tell? What does it mean? Okay, the NLT expresses it, and this is how the NLT says it.

You will tell his people, so they chose that verb, how to find salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. That's better. I'm not sure about the verb find, but other problems are that it still has salvation and forgiveness, and it doesn't break them down.

This is the whole problem is we need to break those down in order to then make it more understandable. Okay, so these challenges are common all through the New Testament, especially in the epistles, but not only in the epistles. For example, from Ephesians again, he predestines us to adoption.

I should have underlined adoption; that's a noun. As sons through Jesus Christ, to himself, to the kind intention of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, which he freely bestowed on us in the beloved, abstract noun. In Him, we have redemption, noun, through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished on us in all wisdom, in insight, abstract noun.

He made known to us the mystery, abstract noun, of his will, again, according to his kind intention, which he purposed in him with a view to an administration, another noun, suitable to the fullness of times, genitive phrase with an abstract noun, fullness. So, you see, in the span of four verses, how many translation challenges did we just identify? Fifteen? Twenty? Something like that. There's a lot of them.

Okay. So remember, when we say the intention of his will, those are two things. Intention is one, and will is one.

Plus, that's all put together. So there are actually three right there. So every time we have a genitive phrase with abstract nouns in it, we have a compounded translation difficulty.

This is why Peter said that Paul's writings can be hard to understand. Yeah, it's very dense. There's a lot of information put together in a very concise way, and it makes it challenging to understand.

Okay. So, in this presentation, my goal is first to highlight the fact that these challenges exist, to highlight the fact that people reading the Bible face them because this way of using language is so foreign to the way that we say things in English. We just don't talk like this, at least unless you're writing a PhD, and you use all these abstract nouns and stuff like that because you want to sound smart or whatever it is.

But it's not the way that we normally talk. And it's foreign sounding. And so, if it sounds foreign, it could also be ununderstandable.

So, it could be both. And just think, what about other languages? What about people who have no exposure to the gospel at all, no exposure to Christian things at all? They've never heard the Bible before. So, it's also foreign to those people in those other languages, even among Christians in those languages, in the same way, that it's a challenge for people in our churches here in America to understand.

The whole process of translating and breaking down abstract nouns takes time to develop these skills in order to interpret these passages, and it takes time to develop the skills to communicate these passages. So, let's just talk about some of the basic things that we can do to apply so that we can then break down and communicate these complex issues. Okay, so in Acts 13:12, Paul and Barnabas were teaching, and there was a proconsul there, and Paul did some things.

In the end, the proconsul believed in Jesus when he saw what had happened. Someone was cast blind, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord. What does the teaching of the Lord mean here? So, the proconsul was the one that was amazed.

Okay, so the teaching of the Lord, the verb to teach, Paul and Barnabas are the ones teaching, and the word of the Lord is what they were teaching, the word about the Lord or the scriptures, and they were teaching it to the proconsul. The proconsul was amazed at what Paul and Barnabas taught about the Lord or what Paul and Barnabas taught from the scriptures. But again, the Lord is the focal point there.

He's learning things about Jesus. He's learning things about God that he didn't know before, and he saw the power in Paul and Barnabas doing miracles, and then he was amazed at what he heard them say. And that's the sense here.

We're trying to get that across. Is this the best way to say it? I'm not really sure. By the way, any time we translate, we walk daily in a sense of inadequacy and humility.

Have I interpreted this the right way? Have we expressed it the right way? And we hold things lightly and try not to be too dogmatic about it. When I was working in Orma, I was working with two or three Orma men who actually were not believers, and I was working near our home. And so, every day, I'm there for lunch and for supper, for breakfast.

And my 10-year-old son, he said, Dad, you're the only one translating this. And this Bible that you're translating is going to be around for a long time. And if you get it right, it's going to be there for a long time.

If you get it wrong, it's going to be there for a long time. He says to me, do you ever think about that? I said, Son, I wrestle with that every minute of every day. We rely on God to give us those insights into understanding and how to express it.

If I had time, I could tell you stories about how God infused our minds with the Holy Spirit, giving us not only the right way to figure it out, but somehow we would say it in a certain way, and people go, wow. But I don't have time. But another time.

Another example is the same phrase teaching someone. So, in Revelations 2:15, so you also have some, excuse me, for you also have some who in the same way hold the teachings of the Nicolaitans. So, the first one was the teaching of the Lord, and the second was the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

So, break down the nouns. Teaching is teach. Nicolaitans are the ones doing the teaching.

They're teaching things, and they're teaching things to other people. We have a strange, a little bit strange anyway, verb here, though, to hold those things. How do you hold the teachings? It's a bit abstract.

We kind of get it. So also, there are some who believe or affirm the things that the Nicolaitans teach or are teaching or taught. So again, we're using those same principles again, trying to break it down.

Other examples. So this comes from Mark 4, the Parable of the Sower. But the worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

Clear. When Jesus told that parable without this explanation, his disciples said, sorry, we didn't get anything you said. Can you please explain that to us? And this is his explanation.

And I come away thinking, okay, I think I understand. Well, when we were working in Tanzania, we were in an office, and we had 10 different languages. We had people from 10 different Christian communities translating together.

And one of the first books that we did together was the Book of Mark. And so I went through Mark a lot. And we came to this verse, and we wanted to break down what these phrases mean. One of the phrases is worries of the world.

What does that mean? Is the world worrying? No, so it's not subjective. It's somehow objective. Worries, what does it mean? So, what is the verb? The verb is to worry.

Who worries? The world doesn't worry, so somehow, people are worrying. In other words, the people who have, in the parable, we step back and say, okay, God is talking about, or Jesus is talking about, the people who have received the word start to worry. What are they worrying about? They're worrying about things, and we'll flesh that out in a second.

Okay, what does the world represent? Again, this is some kind of idiom or figurative expression, perhaps metonymy, where the world stands for something else. What does the word represent? Does it represent worldly things? Jesus said, you are in the world but not of the world. This looks a little bit different, and it immediately precedes desires for other things, and it immediately precedes riches, and so somehow they could be a little bit synonymous, or at least in the same general category.

All right, so are those worldly things? Looking at the word riches? Yeah, maybe. Okay, what is the relationship between worry and the world? This is what we have to ask ourselves, and it looks to be worrying about things of the world, worrying about worldly possessions, perhaps. Okay, so one way to rephrase it is, when they worry about worldly things, comma, and then we'll go on.

Again, we have to do it step by step, going through and breaking these things down slowly. The next one is the deceitfulness of riches, and this one was the one that caused the problems for our Tanzanian translators. Again, we're working in Swahili as our language of communication, and each team would then translate it into their own language.

The deceitfulness of riches. Verb, to deceive. Riches and people.

Who is doing the deceiving? Not only do we identify who the participants are, but are people deceiving riches? Are riches deceiving people? So, when I asked our Tanzanian translators what this meant, This is what they said, and this is a literal word-for-word translation of deceitfulness of riches into Swahili. Udanganifu wamali. Deceit of riches.

And I said, so what does that mean? They said, well, it's wrong to cheat someone out of their riches. So the word udanganifu, or danganya, is the verb. It means to take advantage of.

It means to trick, to cheat, to swindle people. So, this danganya doesn't mean deceive them about the truth. It actually has an idea in the African mind of to swindle or to cheat someone out of something.

And so, if we're talking about all the participants, you danganya a person out of some possessions. And so, they said it's bad to swindle money from people. Is that what this phrase is saying in this particular verse? I seriously don't think it is.

What they missed was that number one, this is personification, where money is doing something, excuse me, yeah, riches is doing something. And they missed that riches is actually the thing that is doing the deceiving. So, this is objective, excuse me, subjective.

The subject, riches, is doing the deceiving, and the people being deceived are the other participants in this verb. So, if we wanted to say it in a different way, they are deceived by riches. Again, we have to go step by step, breaking this down.

Okay. Worries of the world, we broke that down. The deceitfulness of riches, we broke that down.

There's another one that we need to talk about. Desires of other things. So desires, this isn't a genitive phrase but desires is a verbal noun.

And choke is a verb; it's a straight-up verb. So, things are choking the world. Again, that's very figurative language.

So, desire. And the people in the verse being referred to that have received the word desire things. Desires for other things, it doesn't specify, but we can interpret it.

Worries about the world, deceitfulness of riches, and desire for other things are all in the same general category. And choke these desires, choke these things. Another one has become unfruitful, and it's slightly different, but it is a figurative way, because you say the word becomes unfruitful.

How do we unpack that? How do we understand that? So, fruitfulness means producing fruit. Unfruitfulness means it doesn't produce fruit. So, to produce fruit or to bear fruit.

So, the word is bearing fruit in people's lives. And so again, the word is an abstract concept, and it's a personification. The word is doing something.

Words don't do things in the same way that animate objects do. Fruit is also figurative. Figurative for what? Good works, obedience, faith, all of those things.

That's all wrapped up in that word fruit. So, this is a very loaded one sentence with three clauses in it, and all these other pieces to it are all tied in together. So, we've broken down each of these parts.

How do we put it all together? How do we come up with another way of saying this? Okay, so the Parable of the Sower, this is what it started out as. But the worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. That's where we started.

Here is one possible rendering. But when they worry about worldly things and are deceived by wanting riches and desire other things, these things choke out the word, and they do not produce fruit in them. So, is this rendering quote-unquote right? I don't know.

Is it close to what we think the meaning is? It is close. Is it better? That's for you to decide. But again, we can take this rendering produced in English, use that as a point of discussion, we're mulling it over, and then use that particular phrasing going into this other language.

Okay, as you do this, by all means, use commentaries, other Bible versions, any other resources that you can, and try to arrive at an interpretation that is in the acceptable range. It may not be the perfect interpretation; you may not be able to say everything that you want to say, but hopefully, we're not making an interpretation that's radically different from everything that everyone else has said. So, is it safe for most people to agree with this, or have most commentators said similar things about it? So we use all of these resources.

What we've done so far in going through everything I've said is to break down it linguistically, break down all these different parts, and use these different translation strategies, these different translation principles, but we're not doing it in a vacuum. There are a bunch of people who have lived way before us and who've written about all these things for over 2,000 years, and it behooves us to make use of those resources. Okay, here's an example from Romans 1, and this was part of my work when I did that translation workshop in Uganda.

Romans 1, Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures concerning his son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ, our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among the Gentiles for his name's sake, among whom you are also called the called of Christ to all who are beloved of God in Rome. Paul hasn't even started yet, and this is his lead-in. Wow.

Okay, so what do we do with all this? Let's wrap this up. So, it would take me probably—actually, let me go back to this a second. So, as I was working through this in my office, I was working from home, and my kids were there.

And so at lunchtime, they knew that I'd been working on Romans. And so, they said, so Dad, what did you read today? What did you work on? And I said I worked on Romans 1 through 7. Okay, Dad, well, what does that mean? And I said, I have no idea. I don't know.

I hadn't really gotten all these things fleshed out. Well, part of what we do is look at each clause and, related to other clauses, which clause is the main one and which one is an explanation of something else. So, we look at the way that the information flows together.

For example, Paul, a bondservant of Christ, called an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand is subordinating the gospel of God. So that's underneath that, through his holy prophets in the scriptures.

So the promises came from the prophets, and the prophets told us about it in the scriptures. We have to work out all of the interrelationships between those clauses. By the way, what's the difference between a clause and a phrase? A clause is a phrase that contains a verb.

If there's no verb there, then it may not be a clause. Sometimes, we have, in Greek and in Hebrew and in Swahili and other languages, a verbless clause with the verb to be. Like, he is the president.

And sometimes you can say in Swahili that he is president. And it makes perfect sense. So, apart from the verb to be, the clause is a phrase with a verb.

So, we look at these clausal relationships and what is prominent and what is subordinate. We need to look at all of those things. Once we establish that, we will start looking at the participants.

We look at the verb itself. What concrete finite verb is going to be here? And how does all of that fit together and interlink? It's really, really complex. So, these are seven verses out of 7,800 verses in the New Testament.

Okay, so now we're down to 7,793. Great. And this is going to take us how long to figure out and translate? It could be a day, or it could be several days.

And that's just to understand it. Such is the work of translation. All right, so let's bring this to a close and say this is what we've been doing up to now.

So, we identify the verbal nouns and the participles, and we identify the participants, whether they are animate or inanimate. Is there some kind of figure of speech



involved? Sometimes several in one phrase, as we saw. Is there personification? We determine the relationship between the two clauses.

For example, obedience of faith is to produce obedience of faith in the Gentiles. So, they obey, they believe. If we want to break down obedience as a verb, it is obey, and faith as a verb is to believe.

How, then, do we fit those together? How are they connected? That's the question that we have to ask ourselves. What is it that the preaching of the gospel will produce in the Gentiles? And we can say, have faith, or believe and obey. So that's what Paul is trying to accomplish, is that the Roman Gentiles will do what? They will believe in Christ, and they will obey the teachings of Christ.

So, obedience of faith can be broken down that way. But try to put that into that sentence, and it's this long seven verses and trying to fit it all together. Yeah, it's challenging.

So, then we rewrite the verse as best we can to get some kind of first draft going. Then, we use that verse as a basis from which to translate. And that's the process that we went through.

I hope this has been helpful. Our next discussion will be on passive constructions. Thank you.

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