

A Little Bit of Greek

Session 5: What Is the Great Commission Telling Us to Do

In person at Wai 'alae Baptist Church

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To learn Greek, most English speakers need to first learn English. Knowing how to speak a language is very different from understanding the language and how it works. If we needed to learn conversational Koine Greek, we could avoid learning grammar just like we learned English without learning grammar. However, since we are dealing with understanding a written language that few people speak, we need to understand Greek grammar and how the language works – which means we need to learn how English works too.

Participle – the Verbal Adjective

Most of us have a basic understanding of these main parts of speech

Noun

Verb

Adjective

A participle complicates things because it is a verbal adjective that can be used as noun and form verb phrases. We use participles all the time – not always correctly – but many people have difficulty understanding a word that seems like a verb but acts like an adjective or a noun while retaining certain aspects of a verb like tense, voice, and use of objects.

In English, we have two participles.

Present – formed by adding -ing to a verb. For example, *running*

Past – Usually formed by adding -ed or -en to a verb. For example, *proved* or *finished*.

Participles are very useful.

The *running* car eventually overheated.

The car is *running*.

Running the car is the only way to hear what might be wrong with it.

In each of these, the participle is used as a different part of speech and different part of the sentence. You should be able to see that *running* has voice, tense, and in the last example a direct object.

You might have been using participles your entire life without understanding them. Even if you don't understand them now, you will go on using them. In fact, the main way people misuse an English participle is by using what is called a dangling participle.

Running down the street, my nose was broken when I fell.

The grammatically correct understanding of this sentence is either funny or gross.

The point is that although you might not understand the grammar and might even use it in error, you can communicate and most people will understand what you are trying to say. With Koine Greek, we need to understand the grammar so that we can understand better what the writers are saying.

The Greek Participle

The Greek participle has some similarities with the English participle. It is a verbal adjective that can be used in the same way as the English participle, but it also has usages that are different.

- Both can be used as adjectives.
- Both have verbal aspects like tense and voice.
- Both can take direct and indirect objectives.
- Both are formed by adding suffixes to the verb.
- Greek participles also have gender, case, and number.

When we looked at verbs earlier, we saw that the present tense in Greek can be translated as

τρέχει He runs or He is running or He does run.

Notice that the present progressive “is running” is formed with one word in Greek while requiring two words in English. This is another difference between the two languages.

Uses of the Greek participle

- Substantively – as a noun
- Adjectival – describing a noun
- Adverbial – indicating when (while, after, before), how, by what means (by), under what conditions (if), purpose (in order to), result (with the result), cause (because, since), and concession (although, in spite of)
- Absolute
- Imperative – Command
- Indicative

Some of these uses are rendered as simply words in English, while others can affect sentence structure (syntax). Since we did not grow up speaking Koine Greek, it is difficult for us to understand how the Greeks used the participle the way that we use the English participle. That’s why we need to look carefully at how the author is using participles keeping in mind the various options and the conditions upon which they could have been used.

Participles in Action

In Matthew 28:18-20, there are four participles.

¹⁸ καὶ **προσελθὼν** ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς **λέγων**· Ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς· ¹⁹ **πορευθέντες** οὖν **μαθητεύσατε** πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, **βαπτίζοντες** αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, ²⁰ **διδάσκοντες** αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν· καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος.

¹⁸ And Jesus **came** and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ **Go** therefore and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ **teaching** them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Here they are in order. Write how the Greek participle is translated into English.

προσελθὼν – having gone or come to –

λέγων – saying –

πορευθέντες – going –

βαπτίζοντες – baptizing –

διδάσκοντες – teaching –

One of the ways that we analyze usage is by looking at the sentence structure. This is sometimes called syntactical analysis. A way to do this is to show what are the main parts of a sentence, what parts are subordinate, and what parts are parallel. We will focus on verses 19-20a because it is one sentence in Greek.

οὕν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη

πορευθέντες

βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος,

διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν.

Notice this is how different from the English.

Go therefore and

make disciples of all nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

Two ways that we emphasize things in Greek and English

- Main verb/clause
- Word order

What is the difference between what the English and Greek emphasize?

Which one is correct?

Does it make a significant difference? If so, what is that difference?

How does this affect how we understand what Jesus told his followers (including us) today?