

A Pastor's Perspective: "Building Confidence by Studying Biblical Languages"

Someone recently asked me, "How is learning the original languages building biblical confidence?" I'm grateful for the question, because like most every other human, my personal time and funds are limited. So if I'm going to commit to this kind of study, it's energizing to know that there are benefits to persevering.

Admittedly, I'm late in the game of learning the languages. I've served in various pastoral roles since 2004, but just recently started taking classes in Greek. Already I know one of the benefits is a stronger confidence in God's Word.

So how does learning the original languages build biblical confidence? Many answers could be give, but the main one is this: ***Studying the original language slows me down.*** If I'm not careful, I have the tendency to craft my sermons based upon presuppositions about a text, rather than the text itself.

I **want** my sermons to be something along the lines of:

1. What does the text say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What do we need to believe?
4. How should we then live?

But too often, the guiding forces in my sermon preparation can follow these lines:

1. What's my most current pet peeve?
2. What great idea did I just have from reading a blog post or devotional book or watching *Harry Potter*?
3. What church member's Facebook post did I just see that now I must deconstruct?

In other words, if I'm not careful, my sermons can reflect confidence in self rather than confidence in Scripture. This is a constant battle I'll fight as long as I'm preaching. So I'm thankful for the opportunity to look at each week's text in the original language. It forces me to slow down (way down—I'm not too swift with Greek) and ask myself what does this text say? What is this author trying to drive home?

For example, yesterday I was beginning a study in Galatians. I've read Galatians enough to already know what those verses were about. I could've skimmed them and then plopped out a teaching outline. But thankfully I got speed-bumped by the Greek language. Paul used a preposition "διά" when he described his apostleship. He was commissioned as an apostle not from men or *through* (διά) men, but *through* (διά) Jesus Christ.

I stopped. Though I, Steve Rahn, firmly believe that I received my calling from God to serve as a pastor, I wasn't commissioned *through* Jesus Christ. I was commissioned *through* a church. Not so with Paul. He received his calling from God. And he received his commission *through* Jesus Christ. Paul had authority that I'll never have. His words carry tremendous weight.

This wasn't a brilliant insight that no one has ever seen before. It wasn't even an insight obscured in my English translation. And yet, it was incredibly helpful when discerning the point of Paul's introduction to Galatians. An insight I would have missed had I not slowed down to look at the Bible in its original languages.

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