

How to Build a Word Study

- Not all topics lend themselves to word studies. In many cases, the best method is to write the question on a 3 x 5 card, stick it in the top of your Bible so you can see it at all times, then read the whole New Testament (or at least Romans through Jude).
- Many times, doctrines are built around a certain word. Some examples are worship, fellowship, commands, offend, judging, righteousness, silent, and forgiving, among many others. In most cases, these doctrines use a time-tested cult technique of term-switching in which the word in question is assigned a definition based on a verse or two, then that definition is forced upon other contexts. The purpose of the method that follows is to find all (or at least a good try at finding all) of the passages that use that word. Each occurrence of the word should be evaluated in its context. Then, all of the contexts should be compared and contrasted to determine a reasonable definition or set of definitions.

1. Choose a word that appears less than 100 times in the New Testament.

Example: Fellowship

2. Make a list of all the variations on that word that are used in the New Testament.

Example: In the case of fellowship, there are not any. But if the word were “worship,” you would include worshipped, worshipper, worshippers, worshippeth, and worshipping.

3. Note the numbers listed to the right of each reference. The New Testament ones are italicized, indicating that they are Greek words. The regular font ones are Hebrew. Make a list of the different numbers.

Example: for fellowship, the numbers are 2842, 3352, and 4790.

4. Look in the Greek dictionary in the back of the concordance. Make sure you use Greek and not Hebrew. Find each number. Write down the English rendition of the Greek word that is given right after the Greek letters. Also look at the entries a little above and below to see if there are variations on the Greek word.

Example: 2842 koinonia, 3352 metoche, 4790 sugkoinoneo

Variations: 2839 through 2844 are all based on the same root. 3353 is much like 3352. And 4791 looks like 4792.

5. At the same time as copying the Greek word in English letters, look at the end of the entry for that number. There will be a colon followed by a long dash (:–). Following that symbol are all the English words that were translated from that Greek word. They are in alphabetical order. There is no importance to the order. Add those English words to the list of words to look up.

Example: for fellowship

2842 communicate, communication, communion, distribution, fellowship.

3352 fellowship

4790 communicate, have fellowship with, be partaker of

6. Using the list of English words that have been assembled, go back to the main concordance and jot down all of the references (book, chapter, verse) for the main word you have chosen.

Example: for fellowship, Ac 2:42; 1 Co 1:9, 10:20; 2 Co 6:14, 8:4; Ga 2:9; Eph 3:9, 5:11; Php 1:5, 2:1, 3:10; 1 Jn 1:3, 1:6, 1:7.

7. Now, look up each new English word that was found in the Greek dictionary. However, only include the ones that use one of the numbers from the original word.

Example: for fellowship, look up communicate, communication, communion, distribution, and partaker. Look for 2842, 3352, and 4790 in those listings. Be sure to include variations on those words, like communicated and communicating. This would add Ga 6:6, Php 4:14, 1 Tim 6:18, Hb 13:16, Php 4:15, Phlm 6, 1 Co 10:16, 2 Co 6:14, 13:14, Rm 15:26, 2 Co 9:13, Rm 12:13, 1 Co 9:23, 1 Tm 5:22, 1 Pt 5:1, 2 Jn 11, Rm 15:27, 1 Co 10:18, 2 Co 1:7, Php 1:7, Hb 2:14, 1 Pt 4:13, 2 Pt 1:4, Rv 18:4, Rm 11:17.

8. Look up all the passages and read the context around it. Summarize the importance of the word under consideration in that paragraph.

Example: There are 38 verses, but many of them are in the same paragraphs, so there are only about 20 contexts.

9. Generalize all of the usages into as few definitions as possible. Usually, there will be only one. But, sometime a word is used in two or more distinctly different ways.