

VIII. How to Study Topics and Relations between Texts

What does the Bible say about the Second Coming?
about raising children?

What are the parallel texts?



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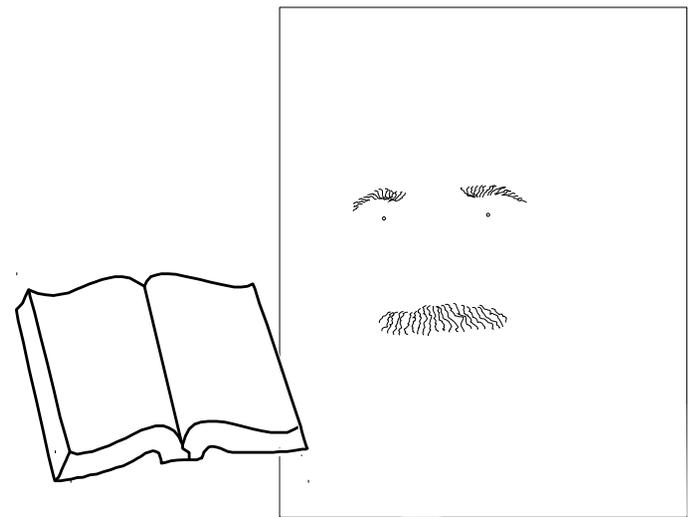
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The Challenge

How do I find out what the Bible says on any subject?

There are good and bad ways.



Reading Assignments

- Required: Poythress, *Symphonic Theology*
- Required if you don't understand Silva and Poythress:
 - Thiselton, “Semantics,” pp. 75-82, 85-88, in Marshall, *New Testament Interpretation*.
 - Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* 44-48
 - Barr, *Semantics* 206-238, 263-272
- Optional:
 - Silva, *Meaning* 101-135
 - Barr, *Semantics* 1-45, 107-140, 273-287

Where Are We?

- 1. Preliminary acquaintance with the text
- 2. Exegesis in the original setting
- 3. Relations with other passages
- 4. Role in redemptive history
- 5. Application

● Mistakes with words (section VII.) are tied to mistakes with concepts or topics.

Where Are We?

- 1. Preliminary acquaintance with the text
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● Mistakes in dealing with words (section VII.) are closely tied to mistakes with concepts or topics.

A. Sample Errors

How not to synthesize biblical teaching on a particular topic

Don't Read Theology Off Vocabulary Stock

- Jacob: “This aspect of miracles, as wide as it is diffuse, is confirmed by the language. The fact that Hebrew has not one but several terms to signify miracle attests its frequency, but also its fluidity.”
- Barr: “This argument seems to me completely to lack foundation. By the same logic Germans must think more frequently and more variably about humanity because they have two words corresponding to English ‘man’. Linguistically, the argument ignores the existence of synonyms, just as the theory implicit in it ignores the phenomenon of polysemy, i.e. the fact that one word can have more than one sense, ...” (p. 147).

Oddity of Appeal to Vocabulary

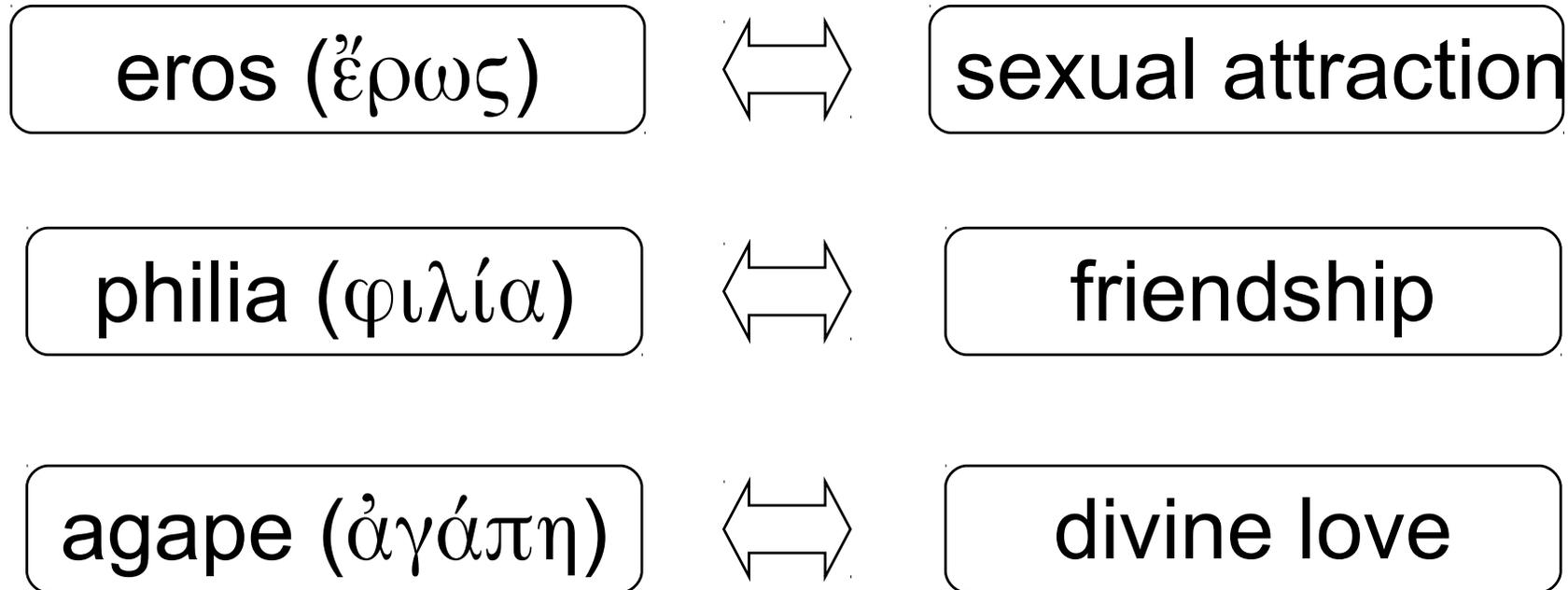
- Not true with German and English.
- Vocabulary stock does not mirror theology.

Oddity of Appeal to Vocabulary

- Note that we would not think of using this kind of argument with German and English.
- The mistake is to think that the vocabulary stock is directly a reflection of theological commitments or theories.

Overloading Words with Theology

- A sermon claims matching:



φιλέω and ἀγαπάω in NT

- φιλέω is used of
 - Father's love for the Son (John 5:20),
 - Father's love for Christians (John 16:27),
 - Christ's love for the beloved disciple (John 20:2),
 - worldly love (John 12:25, 15:19).
- The same for ἀγαπάω (John 3:35, 14:21, 21:7, John 3:19).
- ἀγαπάω is used of Amnon toward Tamar (2Kgm 13:1 LXX, translating 2 Sam 13:1).

B. A Positive Approach to Researching Topics

Tools to Use

- Cross references
- Topical Bibles and Bible encyclopedias
- Concordances

How do I
use them?



Using Cross References

- Cross references lead to related passages.
 - Nestle-Aland for NT.
 - NASB, RSV, NIV, ESV.
 - References not inspired, but editorial.

Using Cross References

- A good cross reference Bible leads you to passages closely related to one starting passage.
 - Nestle-Aland for NT.
 - NASB, RSV, NIV, ESV have good reference systems.
 - Any such system is not inspired, but represents editorial judgment.

Using Topical Bibles

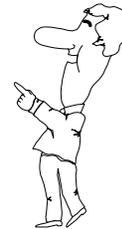
- Lists passages by topic.
 - Viening, Zondervan Topical Bible (same as Nave's)
 - Charles R. Joy, *Harper's Topical Concordance*

Using Topical Bibles

- A “topical” Bible lists under one topical heading all the passages that address the topic.
 - Viening, Zondervan Topical Bible (same as Nave’s)
 - Charles R. Joy, *Harper’s Topical Concordance*

Using Concordances

- A concordance can help with a topic.
- Hazardous to access topics through words..



Caution sign!

Using Concordances

- In many cases, using a concordance is an effective and efficient route to a topic.
- But there are hazards in accessing topics through words.



Caution sign!

Main Conclusions

- Teaching resides in sentences and paragraphs.
- The whole Bible addresses a topic.
- Short cuts can give partial answers.
- Use complementary emphases of different perspectives.

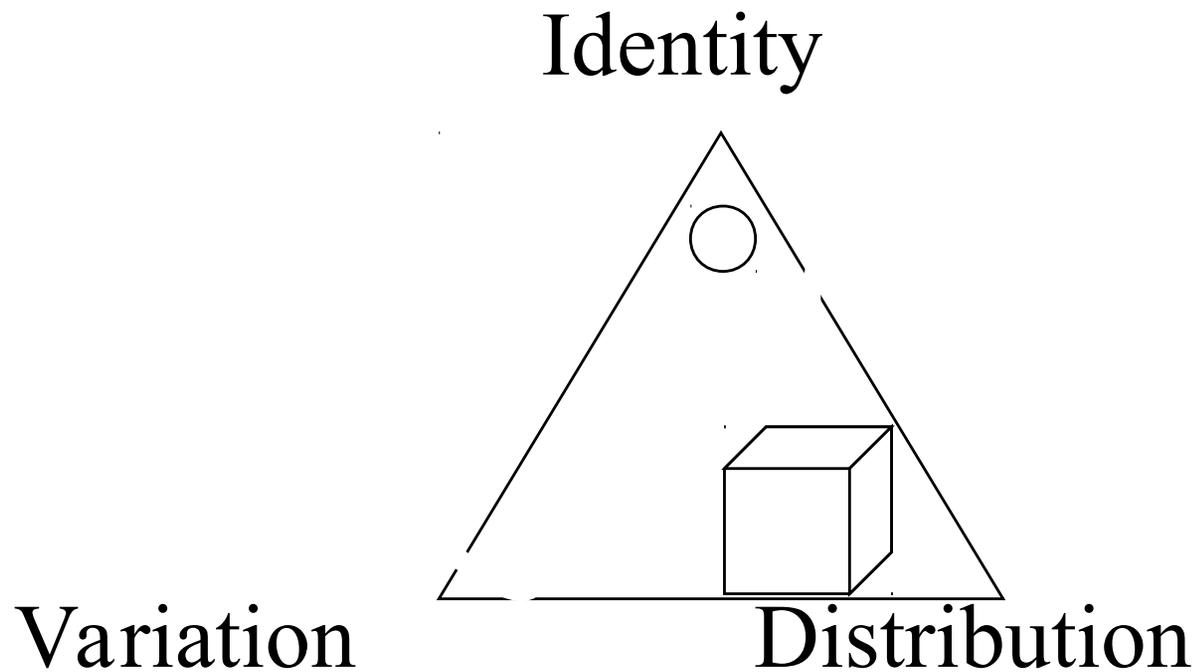
Main Conclusions

- Biblical teaching resides primarily in whole sentences and paragraphs.
- To find out about a topic, read the whole Bible and see what it says on the topic.
- Short cuts are hazardous, but can often give you partial but adequate answers.
- Use complementary emphases available from different perspectives.

C. The Word/Concept Distinction

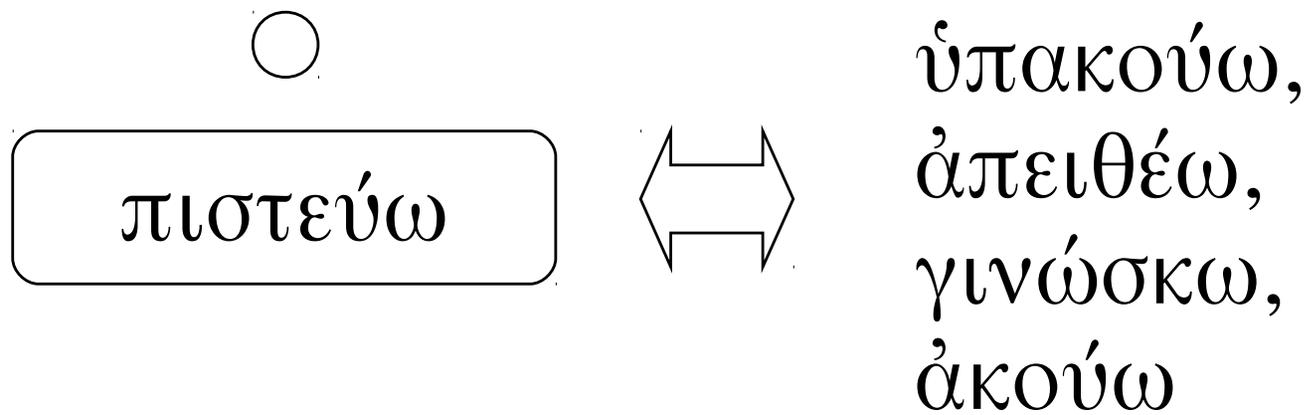
The Word πιστεύω

Characterized by:



Identity and Contrast of πιστεύω

- What words could be used instead?



Variation of πιστεύω

- What does it mean in various instances?

believe

1 John 5:1

believe (falsely)

2 Thess. 2:11

entrust

1 Thess. 2:4

assent

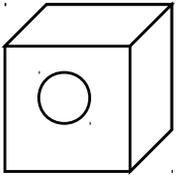
James 2:19

trust (personally)

Gal. 2:16

Distribution of πιστεύω

- In what contexts can it appear?



Persons believe facts/statements/persons.

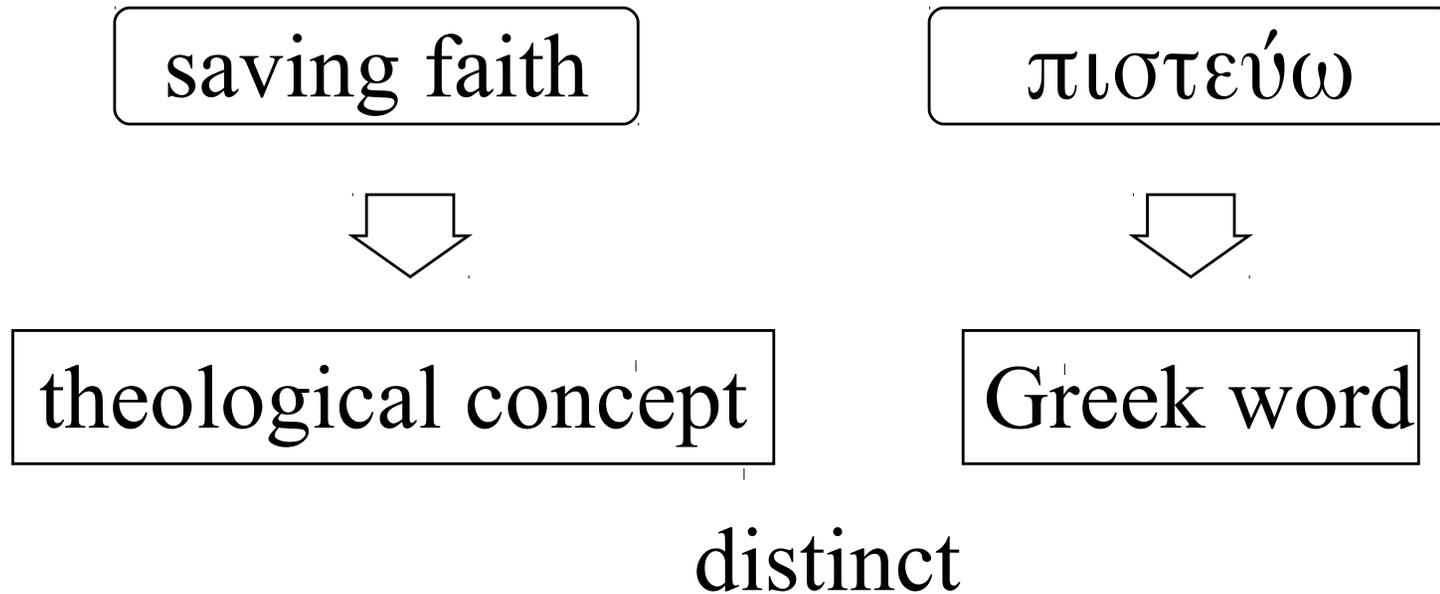
The Word πιστεύω

- **Identity and Contrast** of πιστεύω:
What words could be used instead?
ὑπακούω, ἀπειθέω, γινώσκω, ἀκούω
- **Variation:** What does it mean in various instances? believe 1 J. 5:1; believe (falsely) 2 Th. 2:11; entrust 1 Th. 2:4; assent Jas. 2:19; trust Gal. 2:16
- **Distribution:** in what contexts can it appear? Persons believe facts/statements/persons.

The Concept of Saving Faith

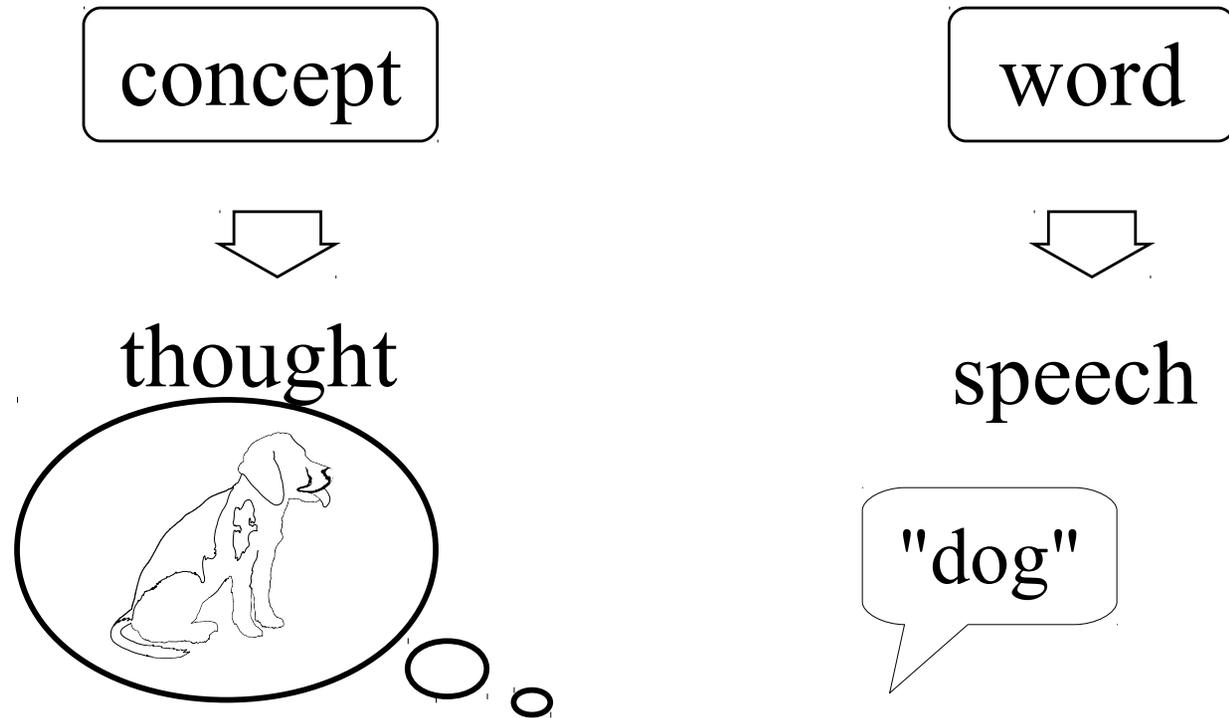
- **Identity and Contrast** of saving faith. What can occur instead? assent, indifference, unbelief, rebellion, hypocrisy
- **Variation**: weak, strong, deep, shallow, consistent, inconsistent faith
- **Distribution**: in what contexts can it appear? Who believes; what he believes; context of God's call; other Christian graces

The General Distinction of Word and Concept



But linguists differ on how best to describe the distinction.

My Approach



Pattern of Speaking

Human action:

**Human
Views**

Utterance

Divine action:

**Plan for
light**

**“Let there
be light.”**

Gen. 1:3

Divine being:

Father

Word

John 1:1

Conclusions on Word and Concept

- Distinguish word and concept.
- Rooted in Trinitarian mystery; not exhaustively analyzable.
- We work with words and concepts.
- Ordinarily, we do not reflect explicitly.
- Desire for precision can produce mistakes.

Conclusions on Word and Concept

- We can distinguish word and concept.
- The distinction is rooted in Trinitarian mystery. It is not exhaustively analyzable.
- We all work with words and concepts.
- Ordinarily, you do not need to reflect explicitly on the distinction.
- But when we want precision, mistakes can happen.

D. Examples of Reasoning with Words and Concepts

Concept of “People Belonging to God”

- 1 Pet. 2:9: λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν
“a people belonging to God”

same
w/c

- Mal. 3:17: ἐγὼ ποιῶ εἰς περιποίησιν
“my own possession”

same
concept

- Exod. 19:5: ἔσεσθέ μοι λαὸς
περιούσιος ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν ἐθνῶν
“you shall be to me my own people from
among all the nations”

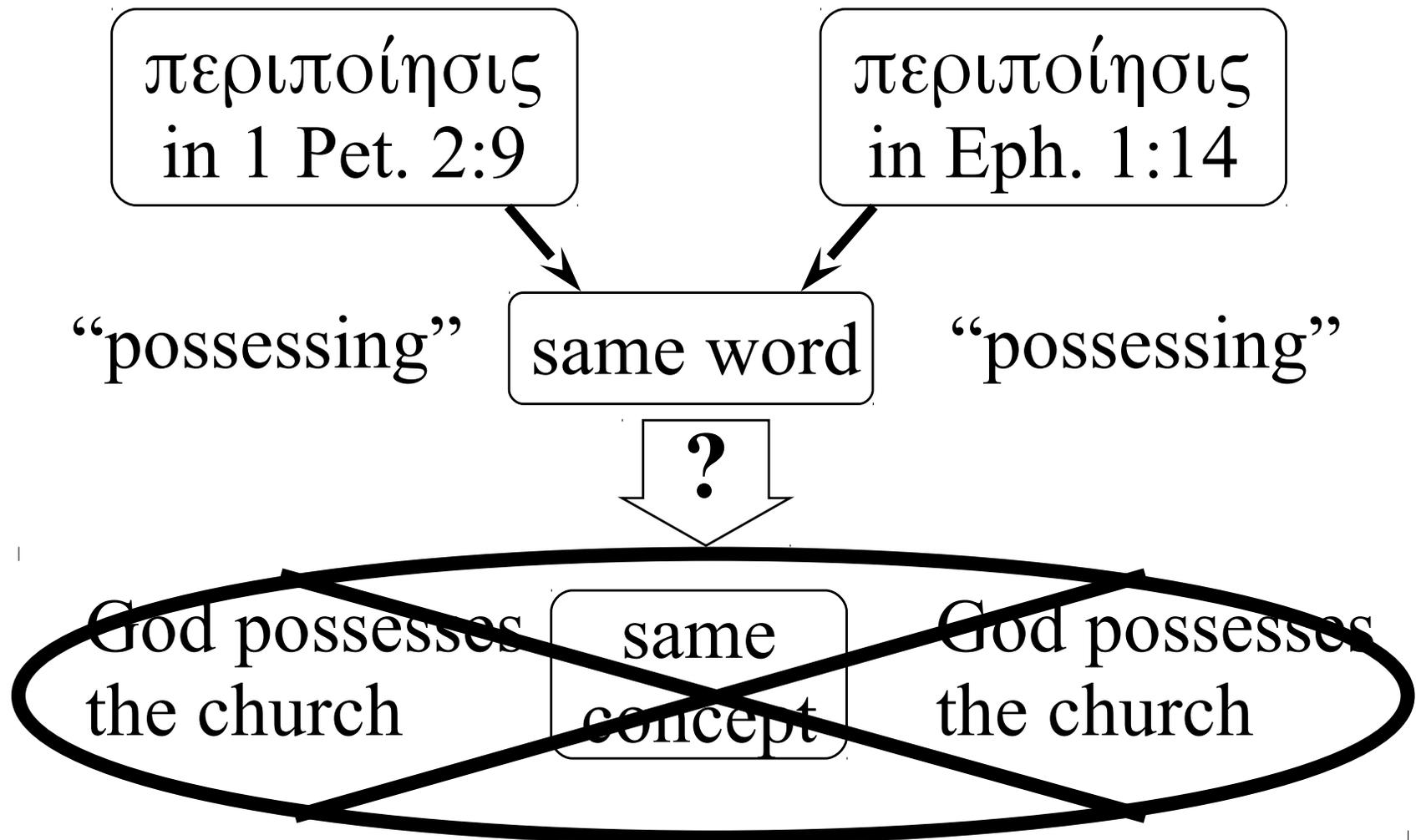
Interpreting περιποιήσεις

- Eph. 1:14: ὃ ἐστὶν ἀρραβῶν τῆς κληρονομίας ἡμῶν, εἰς ἀπολύτρωσιν τῆς περιποιήσεως, εἰς ἔπαινον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ. “redemption of possessing”
- Who is possessing whom?
- NIV: “redemption of those who are God’s possession”
- Or, RSV: “until we acquire possession of it”

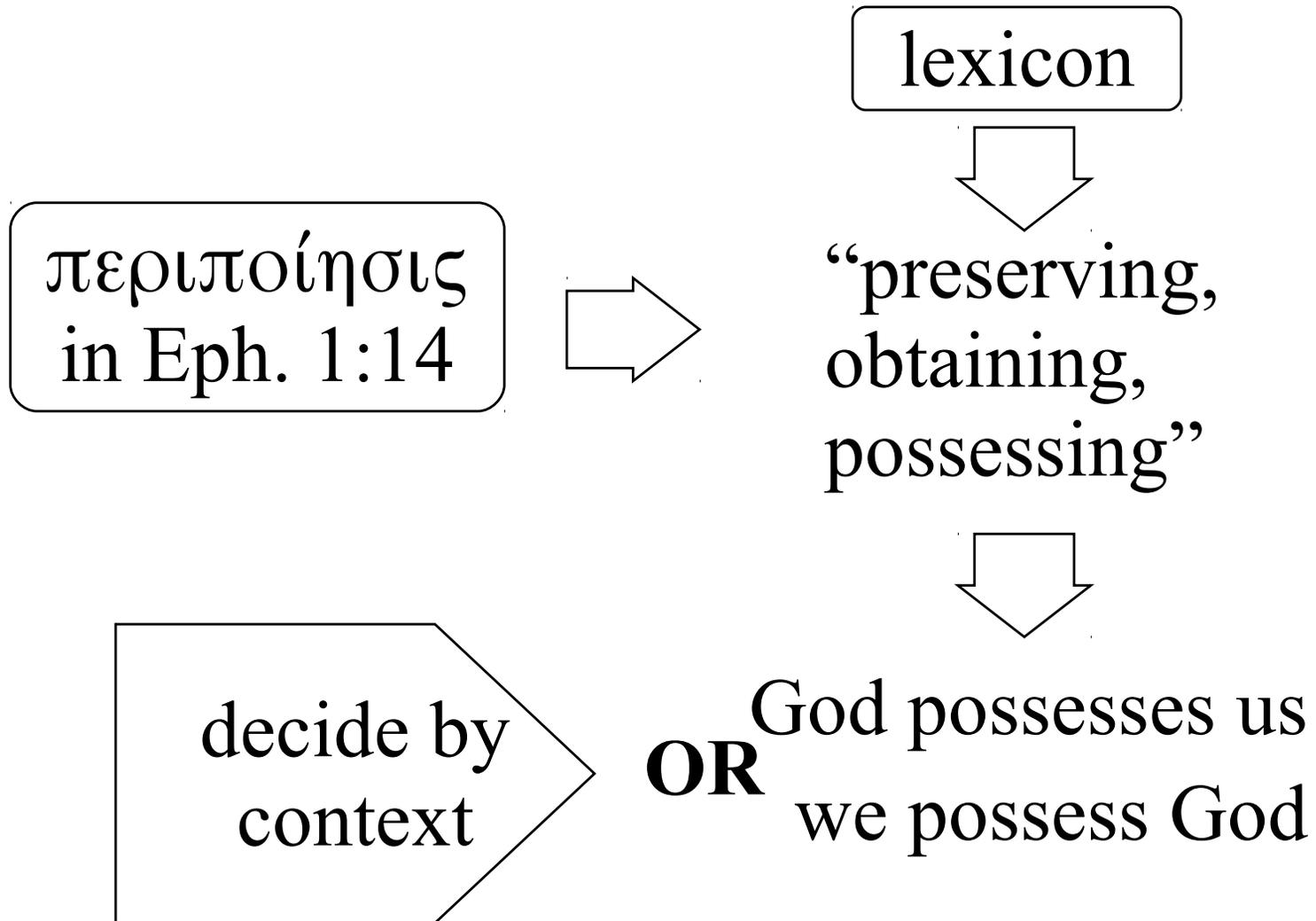
Which?



False Reasoning from a Concept



Valid Reasoning from Lexicon



Reasoning from Context

■ Eph. 1:14: ὁ ἐστὶν ἀρραβὼν τῆς κληρονομίας ἡμῶν, εἰς ἀπολύτρωσιν τῆς περιποιήσεως, εἰς ἔπαινον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ.

Got it.



Eph. 1:3-14
is about our
blessings

God possesses us
we possess God

■ Answer: context points to saints' inheritance
—a different concept from 1 Pet. 2:9.

E. Analyzing Theological Dictionaries

Background for TDNT

- Kittel, ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT) is chief example.
- Various German scholars authored individual entries.
- Ask whether word or concept is discussed.

Background for TDNT

- Gerhard Kittel, ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT) is the chief example, but others could be used.
- Kittel, and later Gerhard Friedrich, are general editors. But various German scholars authored individual entries.
- You need repeatedly to ask whether word or concept is being discussed. Watch for confusion between the two.

TDNT 1:214 (on ἀκολουθέω)

concept

Kittel:

word

= “to follow”

should have
“discipleship,”
the concept

Because it signifies following the Messiah, this discipleship is essentially a religious gift.

ἀκολουθεῖν means participation in the salvation offered in Jesus.

In Lk. 9:61f. only he who εὐθετός ἐστὶν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ can achieve ἀκολουθεῖν.

TDNT on ἀκολουθέω

word

no

yes, meaning
“to follow”

no,
John 11:31

On this basis it is no accident that the word ἀκολουθεῖν is used only in the Gospels, that there is agreement as to its use in all four Gospels, and that they restrict the relationship signified by it to the historical Jesus.

TDNT on ἀκούω (1:220)

Kittel:

trivial

As is only natural, the content of hearing is determined by the content of the message. In the New Testament this is always the offering of salvation and ethical demand in one.

oversimple

Hearing, then, is always the reception both of grace and of the call to repentance. This means that the only marks to distinguish true hearing from purely physical hearing are faith (Mt. 8:10; 9:2; 17:20 etc.) and action (Mt. 7:16, 24, 26; R. 2:13 etc.). This is not the place to treat of the interrelationship of the two.

no,
Acts 7:12

restrict to
favorite
cases

TDNT on ἀκούω (1:220)

no,
Acts 5:21;
9:21

beware of
oversimple
fusion of
related
meanings

It is surely evident, however, that NT hearing as reception of the declared will of God always implies affirmation of this will as the willing of salvation and repentance by the man who believes and acts. There thus arises, as the crowning concept of the obedience which consists in faith and the faith which consists in obedience, ὑπακοή πίστεως, R. 1:5; 16:26

Restricting and Loading Words

word

ἀκούω, “hearing”

NT hearing

hearing will of God

affirmation

will to save

concept

read into
other cases

restrict and load

... NT hearing as reception of the declared will of God always implies affirmation of this will as the willing of salvation and repentance by the man who believes and acts.

A Well-Organized Article

Albrecht Oepke, *TDNT* 1:368-372

word

A. Meanings of ἀνίστημι and
ἐξανιστάναί

concept

B. Resurrection in the Greek World

concept

C. Resurrection in the OT and Judaism

concept

D. Resurrection in the NT

I know what
he's talking about.



Bultmann on γινώσκω, *TDNT*

so exclude
as “unin-
teresting”

word

concept

There is no special sense even in cases where there is admonition to embrace a special knowledge. Yet the usage diverges at this point from that which characterises the Greek world. It approximates to the OT view in which knowledge is also a movement of the will, so that it means: “let it be told you.” That is to say, it is no mere question of objective confirmation but of a knowledge which accepts the consequences of knowledge.... (p. 704).

trivial?
or does
he mean
“approves”?

concept? Imports ideas from
context around the word

γινώσκω, *TDNT* 1:703-708

concept

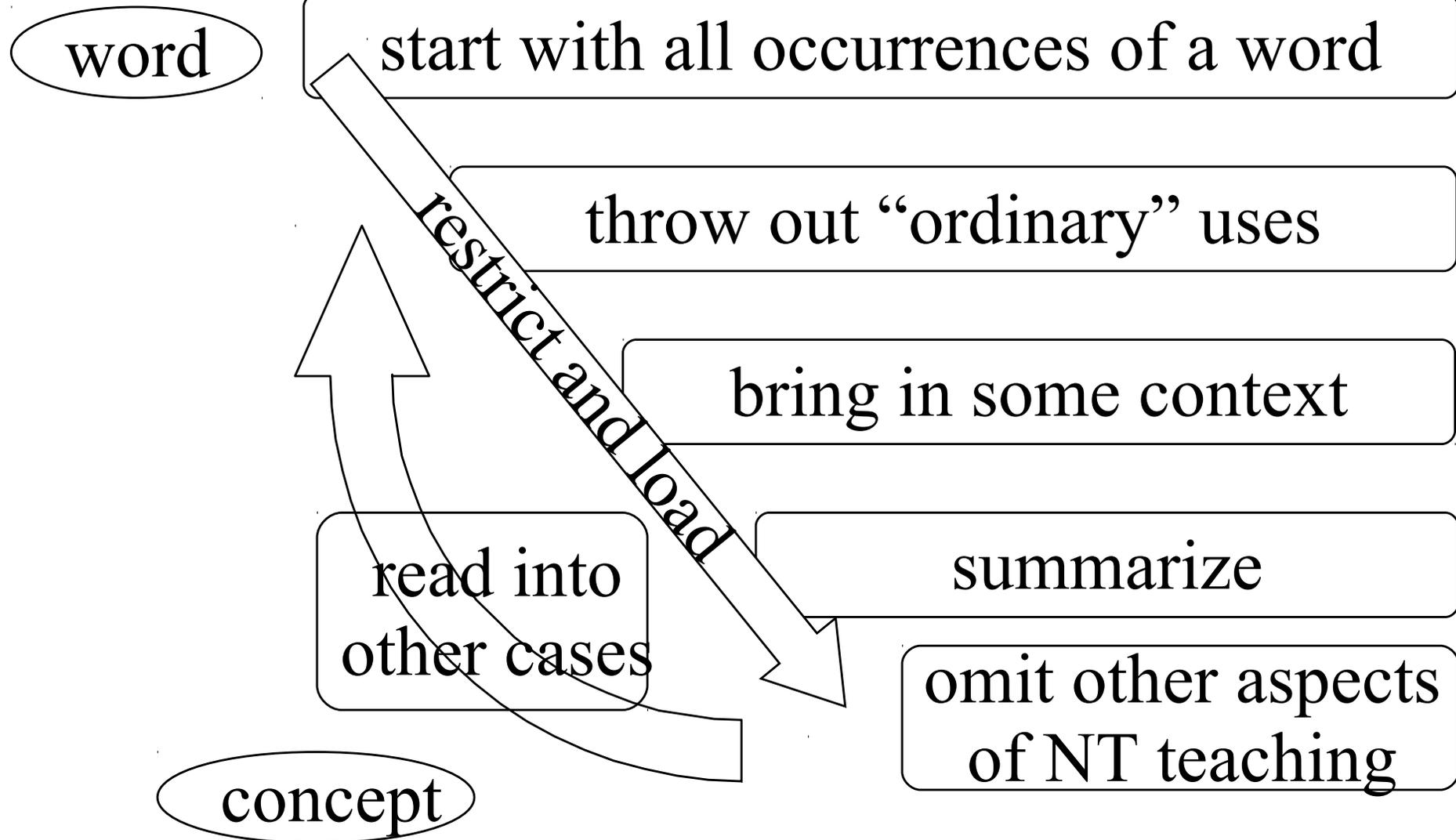
In other passages, however, we clearly see the OT view that knowledge is insight into the will of God in command and blessing. It is primarily acknowledgment, and obedient or grateful submission to what is known. (pp. 704-5).

Compare
Exod. 7:5;
Ezek. 6:7.
Important
texts are
left out.

The Christian view of knowledge is thus largely determined by the OT. (p. 708).

concept

Introducing Distortion



Summary Evaluation of TDNT

- Many truths, sometimes about words and sometimes about concepts.
- Mixing the two invites distortion:
 - Overloads word with extra meaning.
 - Confused, overgeneralized, or one-sided summaries arise from selective evidence.
- Selective use can introduce bad theology.

Summary Evaluation of TDNT

- It said many true things, sometimes about words and sometimes about concepts.
- Mixing the two invites distortion:
 - One overloads word with extra meaning.
 - Confused, overgeneralized, or one-sided summaries arise from selective use of evidence.
- Such selective use can introduce bad theology.

Relation of Words and Concepts

word

- ἀκολουθέω
- ἀκούω
- γινώσκω

concept

- discipleship (μαθητής, τηρέω, ὄνομα, ...)
- hearing the gospel believingly (πιστεύω, γινώσκω, πείθω, ὑπακούω, ...)
- knowing God savingly (οἶδα, ἐπιγινώσκω, πιστεύω, ἀγαπάω, ...)

F. Using Scholarly Tools

Using Theological Dictionaries

- TDNT is the worst. But all are confused in method.

“theological”

“dictionary”

concept

word

Promising both
word and concept
in one place invites confusion

Positive Use of Theological Dictionaries

You can rely on information in these instances:

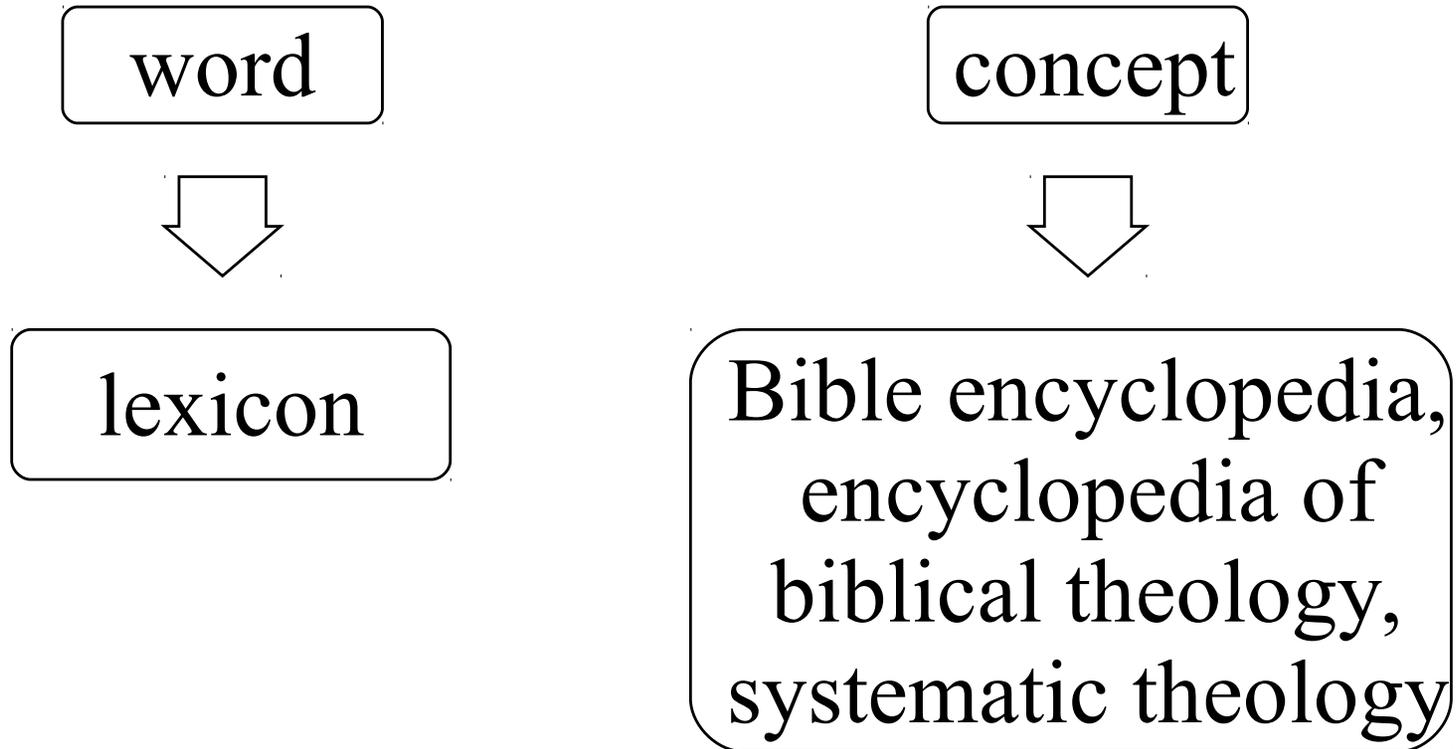
- Technical terms
- Secular words (e.g., γαμέω)
- Exegesis of individual passages
- Sections discuss words alone or concepts alone.

Positive Use of Theological Dictionaries

You can rely on information in these instances:

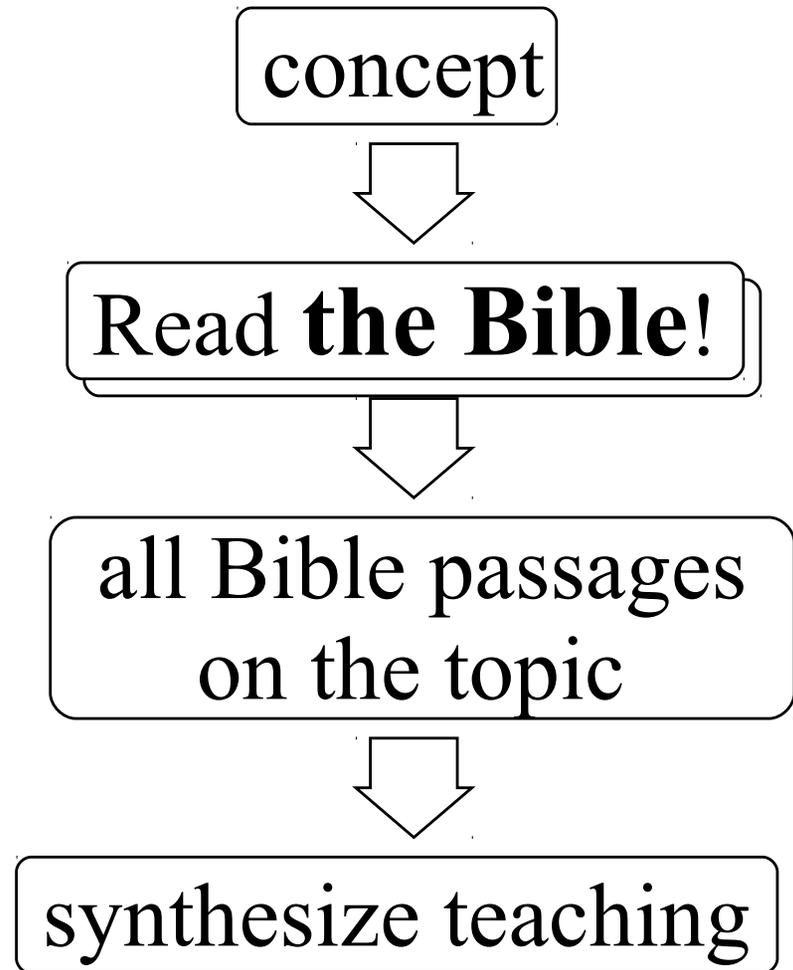
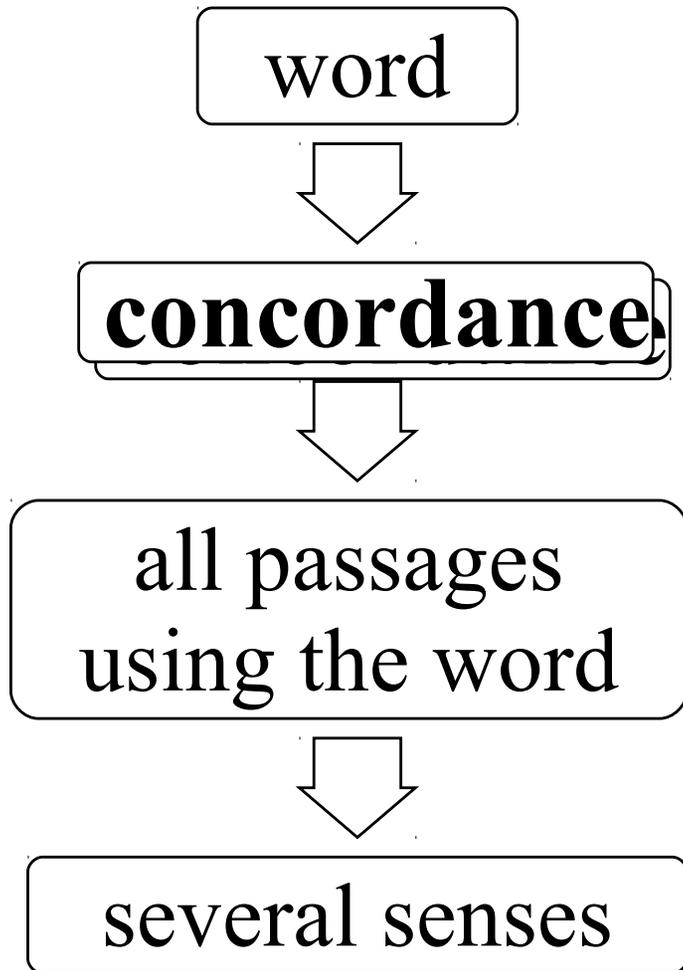
- Technical terms
- Secular words (e.g., γαμέω)
- Exegesis of individual passages
- Sections that clearly discuss words alone or concepts alone (but even here, bias towards passages that happen to use a word).

Clear Method

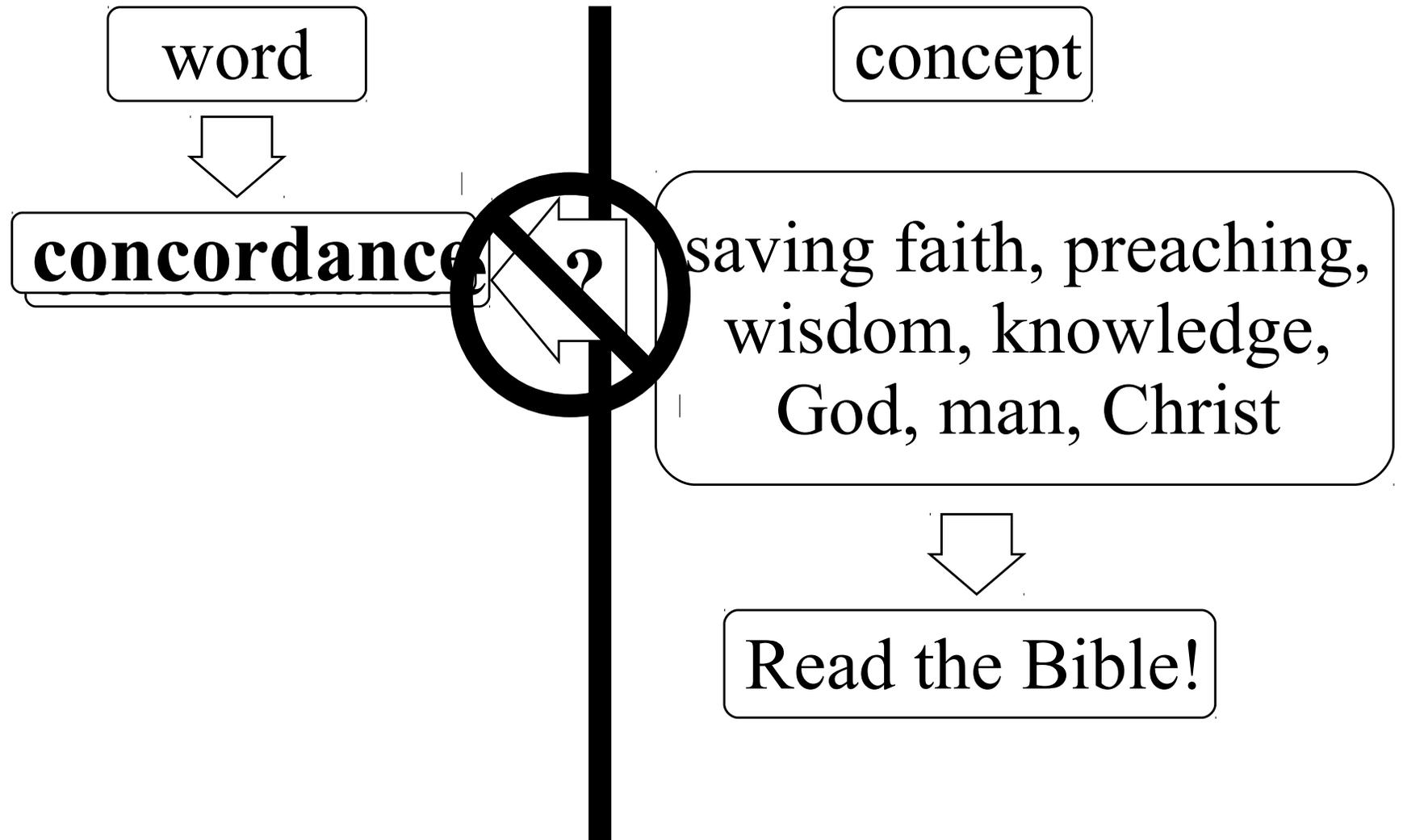


- Don't spend money on theological dictionaries.

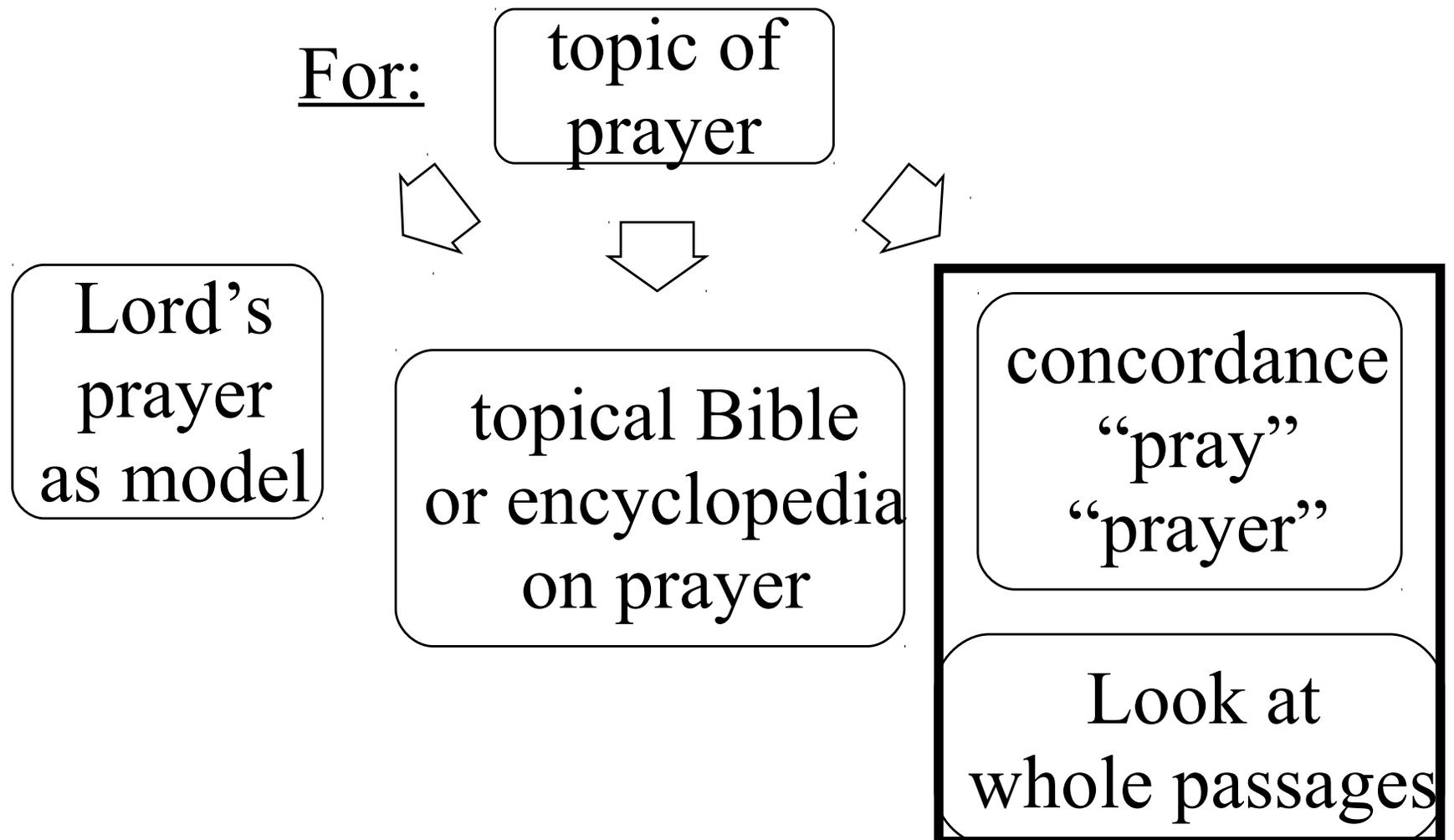
Using a Concordance



Don't Try to Get a Concept from a Concordance



Concordance as a Shortcut



Benefits of a Concordance

- Brings up forgotten aspects.
 - E.g., with prayer, only petitionary prayer.
- Sometimes gives all passages.
- Better using several words:
προσεύχομαι, προσευχή, δέομαι,
εὐχαριστέω, εὐλογέω, ὁμολογέω, ἐρωτάω.

Benefits of a Concordance

- It brings to your attention aspects of the subject that you might otherwise forget. E.g., in thinking about prayer you focus only on petitionary prayer.
- Sometimes it gives you all the pertinent passages, because they all use one word.
- You do better using several words:
προσεύχομαι, προσευχή, δέομαι,
εὐχαριστέω, εὐλογέω, ὁμολογέω, ἐρωτάω.

Danger of a Concordance

- Degree of success depends on topic.
 - “Prayer” works, but not “discipleship.”
- Layperson can locate whole passages.
- Experts trip up by looking at a word, not a passage.

Reassuring!



Danger of a Concordance

- Degree of success depends on your topic. “Prayer” would work, “discipleship” would not.

Reassuring!

- A layperson can do well using a concordance in order to locate and read whole passages. It's the **experts** who can trip themselves up by reading too much into a word instead of looking at a whole passage.

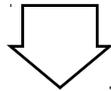


Words and Whole Passages

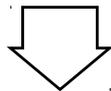
topic: prayer in John Owen

word

“prayer”



concordance

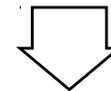


Owen means
“prayer”

(uninteresting)

concept

Read Owen to find
out what he teaches



relevant passages may
include an essay on
the glory of Christ!

makes sense