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It's time for the Biblical Prophecy Program with your host Alan Kurschner of Eschatos Ministries.

Avoiding the word concept fallacy. A lesson in biblical and theological interpretation. Well this past week I've been in Canada doing New Testament research. So I am not in the studio in New Jersey with this recording of the program. However, I did plan and bring along my microphone and some recording equipment, so I could still produce this program this week. Speaking of the program, it's just going to be a brief program today. However, even though it's going to be a brief topic or a brief program, the topic is extremely important. Some of you may look at the title of this episode and say, Well what does this have to do with biblical prophecy? Well, today I'm addressing a sound, biblical and theological interpretive principle. And if you want sound biblical prophecy, you should practice sound biblical interpretive principles. And one of these principals is avoiding doing fallacious word studies. One of these lexical or word fallacies is called the word concept fallacy. Sometimes it can go under the label of theological word or the theological word fallacy or theological concept fallacy. Myself and others just call it the word concept fallacy. I think that's the best description of it.

This is not some obscure fallacy that is committed on the rare occasion by interpreters. In fact, I think this is one of the most common word fallacies out there. At least, I think it's in the top three. It's committed by so many different biblical and within many biblical and theological contexts. In our context - biblical prophecy - I've heard it committed and I've read it from different writers that they've committed this fallacy. I've seen all millennialists, premillennialists, postmillennialists, posttribulationist, pretribs, yes, even some prewrathers have committed this fallacy.

So you're probably asking yourself, What is this fallacy, or what is this word concept fallacy? I'm going to first define it, and then I'm going to give some examples of it.

The word concept fallacy is an assumption that studying a single word or phrase corresponds to having studied the entire biblical concept, or theological concept. The fallacy is also called a concordance type of method of interpretation. In other words, opening up your concordance and fingering down the page, and looking for all the usages of a single word, of a particular word, and then just stop there. Well concordances can be a good thing. They can be a beginning point for studying, but there's an important difference between studying a biblical concept and studying the meaning of a particular word. For example, if we want to learn what the Bible teaches about love, it would be a mistake to restrict our study only to the word, for example, agape. Because there are many, many descriptions and terms that convey different aspects of love. Agape is just one of many of them. So we need to take Scripture in a contextual sense, and recognize that there's synonyms and other similar phrases and descriptions that develops a concept rather than collapsing some entire concept exclusively in a single term.

Moises Silva gives a great example of this. In his work on lexical semantics he writes, "A very important passage on the subject of hypocrisy is Isaiah 1:10-15." But the student suckled at the concordance would never find the word hypocrisy. Instead, he would come to an unrefined understanding of the topic. Did he understand that? In other words, one of the most graphic passages in the Bible on

hypocrisy is found in Isaiah 1:10-15, these five or six verses. Yet, even though it's a very graphic, explicit passage on hypocrisy - a very important passage on hypocrisy and the concept of hypocrisy - you're not going to find the word hypocrisy. So, if you're committing a word concept fallacy, your conclusions or your data is going to be very selective, it's going to be limited. And it's going to exclude one of these explicit passages on hypocrisy. By the way, I do write on this fallacy in my book Antichrist Before the Day of Lord: What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Return of Christ. In fact, in one of the end notes I give a larger explanation of this fallacy.

So, now that we've defined the word concept fallacy, I'm going to give you a few examples that I've heard in eschatological context. And I could give many more, but I think a few of them will be sufficient. Well, one that seems to come up all the with posttribs, I just end up rolling my eyes every time I hear it, is that they'll say, The trumpet judgments are not God's wrath because the word wrath, or the Greek word behind that - for them, at least for this particular word, for wrath - is orgy. And they will say well orgy is not found in the Trumpet narrative. Well, I'm just like banging my head against the wall when I hear that, [chuckle] because first of all it's not true. I mean, you have it in the Sixth Seal narrative, which actually announces, or it signals the trumpet judgments. In Revelations 6:16 and 17, you have orgy mentioned. Revelation 11:18, you have this term looking back at the Trumpet narratives. So on that score they're wrong. Second, and more importantly, even if the term wasn't even used, who cares? This is a word concept fallacy, because orgy is not-- this is not the only term that describes God's intense wrath. There's a host of descriptions in the Trumpet-- just read the Trumpet narrative in Revelation 8 and 9, there's a host of descriptions, you don't need the word. In fact, I would argue if you had the word orgy or wrath, it's almost redundant. There's all this graphic language that conveys the wrath of God. You don't always needs some didactic term to say this is the wrath of God. That doesn't make any sense. Especially, when you're dealing with Revelation, very descriptive, graphic, apocalyptic language. It's not a didactic prose type of literature.

When you hear someone say the following formula, X word is not found in this passage, therefore X concept is not found there in that passage. Whenever you hear someone say this formula or in so many words, you know that you've just heard them commit the word concept fallacy, because they're saying that a concept - please understand this - they're saying that a concept can only be found in a passage if a particular word is found there. How many times have you heard, Well, the rapture is not found in the Bible, therefore the rapture is not taught in the Bible." That's a real common one by non-rapturist, but if you read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, it's a description of the rapture - the concept of the rapture. You don't need the word rapture. You could have the word rapture in there if you did a new translation, when it talks about being caught up together or caught up in the air, you could use the term rapture if you want.

Just a few more examples. I've heard some people claim that the Third Seal in Revelation does not correspond to the famine element of the beginning of birth pains, because the word famine is not mentioned in the Third Seal narrative. Again, this is the word concept fallacy. Its absence is irrelevant. Again, it's an assumption that studying a single word or phrase corresponds to having studied the entire biblical concept, and that the concept can only be present if a particular word is present. I've heard some interpreters say that the Seven Year Covenant in Daniel 9 is not a peace covenant because the word peace is not mentioned. Again, we have to look at the context, the question is, does the context teach? It's the context that determines whether it's a peace covenant or not. Not because of whether or not the word peace is present in the passage or absent.

There's many more instances of this fallacy that I've heard over the years, but I think you get the point. I've saved the most common one until now. This is one that's committed by pretribulationists and we've all have heard this one before. Pretribulationism, they claim that because the actual word, church - ecclesia - does not appear in chapters-- Revelation chapters 4 and 21, between 4 and 21, they argue, therefore the church is going to be raptured before the Great Tribulation. They're committing the word - let's all say it together - the word concept fallacy. It's assumed by them that the church is going to be raptured before the events in Chapter 4. It's sort of a very similar argument when they say

Matthew 24 - The Olive Discourse - is not for the church, because it's not a "church teaching" because the word church is not found in that passage. They have other arguments. Don't get me wrong, but that's one of their arguments. They use a word concept fallacy. And it is bad argumentation. It's simply naive. It completely ignores context. atomizes the text. But I'm going to provide a link in the show notes actually, to an article I wrote in response to that one pretrib argument, referring to the word church in the Book of Revelation. And I'm just going to refer you to that article. It's a very full article, and I actually make some pretty-- in response I use-- kind of reduce their argument to absurdity by saying things like, well the word church is not found in the rapture passage in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18, therefore is the church not raptured [laughter]? By their logic, right? By their logic, I guess the church is not raptured. So it's very-- anyway I think I gave a number of arguments responding to that. And I will leave a link to that article in the show notes.

Also, be sure to go to alankurschner.com and do a word search. No pun intended [chuckles]. Do a word search on the website using the term word concept. You'll see I have several articles about this and responses to this lexical fallacy. I'm going to also leave some links to a bibliography on this issue in the show notes, so be sure to check that out. And again, the show notes is going to be at alankurschner.com/12, that's where you can find the show notes. So be sure to check them out. To be sure-- don't get me wrong, you don't have to know any Greek. Can we repeat this? You do not have to know any Greek at all to grasp and avoid this fallacy. Knowing or not knowing Greek is irrelevant. If the Bible was written in German, we'd still be dealing with the same issue. If the Bible was originally written in English, it would be the same issue. Greek is not the issue, it's the principle of the fallacy. In fact, I hear many scholars who know Greek. They commit this fallacy, a lot of them. Like I said, this is a common fallacy. If someone wants to argue that a concept is not found in a biblical passage, they need to do so by - guess what? That's right - context. Not stating whether a mere absence or particular word is there in the passage. But it's the context. Because there can be other descriptions that convey a concept in a passage than some particular word someone is fixated on. Let me tell you, there are a lot of people who are fixated on particular words. And boy, if that word is not found in that passage they're studying, then, by golly, the concept is not found there. They don't realize they're committing this fallacy.

A final point on this word concept fallacy. Think about it. You would never want someone to apply this fallacy, this standard to your thought process and your writings. In other words, you would never want to be chained to a single word to describe all of your emotions or your thought processes. Can you imagine that? I can't [chuckle]. And the biblical writers, they had hundreds and perhaps thousands of expressions or descriptions to draw from, to convey concepts. So don't limit them to a single word, if you don't want to be limited to a single word. Listen, the Bible is abundantly rich of God's revelation. The Bible is a kaleidoscope of language. Well, I hope this explanation of the word concept fallacy helps in your personal studies, and also in maybe helping other people to avoid these fallacies, so you could, again, come to better conclusions and have better sound theology, and for our purposes better sound biblical prophecy.