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**Letter to My Greek Students**

**David Alan Black**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

New Testament Greek is disarmingly straightforward. I’m sure you’ve realized this as you’ve studied verbs and nouns, paradigms and principal parts. After a year’s worth of instruction and testing you’ve acquired the ability to read simple Greek prose with the minimal use of a lexicon. That is an amazing achievement, and I congratulate you for it. Yet in some respects the real challenge is only beginning.

I am amazed – mildly horrified even – at how many of my Greek students never make any use at all of the language skills they worked so hard to acquire while in seminary. I think the effect of this is very serious. It has led to the I-don’t-see-any-value-in-using-Greek notion, a kind of credibility gap between the classroom and real-world ministry. What really is the trouble here?

The fault is partly mine. You see, I take my salary under false pretenses. I’m paid to get my students to learn, and as a teacher I’m always asking how I can know whether students are learning or not or whether they’re learning the right things. And I have to say, “I don’t know. There are only hints.” In one sense, teaching as it’s ordinarily understood in school – the external direction of learning – is often the enemy of learning. Just because a person has two semesters of Greek is no guarantee that he or she will use any of this knowledge, much less use it in a way that honors God and edifies others. My goal is not for students to be able to say, “Look here, I’ve studied Greek and even received an A or two,” but to help people, including myself, learn to use Greek skillfully in our lives.

Let me tell you *why* I have taught you this language. It is simply this. God has a plan for individuals. And He has communicated this plan to us in His Word. Our God is a communicative God, and He has made known His will to and through His spokesmen who penned the Scriptures. Biblical truth is just that: truth that is communicated in and through the Bible. It is truth that is at once “inspired by God” and “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” It is clear that biblical truth is not given for knowledge’ sake alone. I therefore emphatically agree with the old Scottish proverb that says: “Greek, Hebrew, and Latin all have their proper place. But it is not at the head of the cross, where Pilate put them, but at the foot of the cross in humble service to Jesus.” The ultimate reason for teaching and learning New Testament Greek is that, properly applied, it can issue in a “readiness for every good work” – that is, a life that is equipped to do God’s will and go God’s way.

What all this implies is that if we are to move from the classroom to real life we shall have to prize what we have learned and view it as a life skill and not merely as an educational attainment. Of course this is not easy. Almost all of us feel tremendous ambivalence as we wrestle with the question of just how to apply everything we’ve learned in the classroom to the real world. Obviously, knowledge of Greek is essential if we are to have a firm foundation upon which to build our exegesis of the New Testament. On the other hand, I must say forcefully that facts, no matter how brilliantly taught or diligently acquired, are nothing more than the raw building blocks of life. How we put them together, and for what use (and whose glory), is another matter altogether.

The climax of your year of Greek instruction has now been reached. Where has all this led? We have been brought to the point where we can finally study (and hope to grasp) the message of the New Testament as God laid it down for us two millennia ago. Perhaps even more importantly, we have been brought to the point where the Psalmist’s prayer may become our own in a fresh and new way (Psalm 119:14-16):

In the way of your testimonies I delight
   as much as in all riches.
I will meditate on your precepts
   and fix my eyes on your ways.
I will delight in your statutes;
   I will not forget your word.

It has been a great joy for me to have had you in my class. You are greatly loved and appreciated. May God richly bless you and make your studies count, not merely for time, but for eternity.

Your servant, and His,

Dave Black

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David Alan Black is the editor of [www.daveblackonline.com](http://www.daveblackonline.com/).