

Have You Ever Considered the Importance of Words?

The way we use words matters.

- We are to “*speak the truth in love*” (**Eph. 4:15**).
- We must season our words (speech) with salt (**Col. 4:6**).
- Words can justify or condemn us (**Matt. 12:37**).

We also must be careful how we receive words.

- Jesus warned that we must be careful what and how we hear.
 - *Then He said to them, “Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given”* (**Mark 4:24**).
 - *“Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him”* (**Luke 8:18**).



**“Through the Looking Glass” – Ch. VI
Lewis Carroll (1871)**

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘glory,’” Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. “Of course you don’t – till I tell you. I meant ‘there’s a nice knock-down argument for you!’”

“But ‘glory’ doesn’t mean ‘a nice knock-down argument,’” Alice objected.

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master – that’s all.”

Alice was too much puzzled to say anything; so after a minute Humpty Dumpty began again. “They’ve a temper some of them – particularly verbs; they’re the proudest – adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs – however, I can manage the whole lot of them! Impenetrability! That’s what I say!”

- Humpty Dumpty essentially claimed that he could decide for himself what words mean, regardless of what the words REALLY meant.
- Many people essentially have this same attitude when examining the Bible.
 - *“When I [read a verse], it means just what I choose it to mean.”*
- And if we ever try to point out how someone is misunderstanding, misapplying, or manipulating the specific language (that is, the specific use of words) in a passage, you may hear the person say, **“Well, that’s just semantics”** or **“We are arguing over semantics.”**

“Just Semantics”

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Semantics

“**Just semantics**” is commonly used today to belittle something seen as not important and insignificant. However, the English word “semantics” comes from the Greek “semantikos,” which literally means “**significant.**”

Robert Henderson, University of Arizona

The phrase, 'that's just semantics,' is . . . a little confusing. People seem to use it when they want to say that the disagreement they're currently having is due to word choice and not due to a substantive disagreement. But that is not semantics at all . . . The reason this phrase has nothing to do with actual semantics is that **if we were having an argument that boiled down to 'just semantics,' then we would be having an argument about what words mean. But that is not insubstantial at all!**

Jenny Lederer, San Francisco State University

'It's just semantics' is a common retort people use when arguing their point. What they mean is that their argument or opinion is more valid than the other person's. It's a way to be dismissive of language itself as carrier for ideas. **It implies that ideas and arguments can be separated from the words and phrases used to encode those ideas. The irony, of course, is that the words and phrases we use are the ideas.**

Semantics

“Truth is a matter of semantics, whether we like it or not.”

Michael Robotham

- Truth is not vague, obscure, or impossible to recognize, or difficult to trust.
 - *“The commandment of the Lord is **clear**, enlightening the eyes” (Psalm 19:8b, NRSV).*
 - *“For the word of the Lord is **right and true**” (Psalm 33:4a, NIV).*
 - *“The Lord’s words are **absolutely reliable**” (Psalm 12:6a, NET).*
- Nor is truth subjective; it is objective and obtainable.
 - *“Sanctify them through thy truth: **thy word is truth**” (John 17:17, KJV).*
 - *“And **you shall know the truth**, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).*
- **However, understanding and obeying the truth does require us to properly discern the words of the Holy Spirit.** In this sense, truth really is a matter of semantics.
- We should never think it’s **“just semantics”** when we disagree about meanings of words in the Bible because that indicates we are unclear about God’s objective truth!

Creation Completed in Literal “Days”

- Many Christians will compromise the truth of the creation being completed in six literal days (**Gen. 1**) to try harmonizing Biblical teaching of how old the earth is with scientists who claim our earth and universe are billions of years old.
- Believers who hold to this theory will use **2 Pet. 3:8** to support their claim:
 - ***“But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”***
- However, consider some simple truths proving the “days” of creation in **Gen. 1** are literal singular days & not long ages of time.

- 1) God defined His own terms in **Gen. 1:5**:
 - ***“God called the light Day and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.”***
- 2) In **Gen. 1:14-18**, we learn how the sun and moon and stars were made to be *“for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years.”*
 - “Days” is a measurement of time distinct from “years.”
- 3) In **Rom. 1:20**, we read ***“Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.”***
 - Someone has been here to witness God’s power since the creation of the world.

The Sex vs Gender Debate

“What do we mean by sex and gender? Aren’t these terms interchangeable? Perhaps at some point in time they were used as synonyms, but this is no longer true in science . . . In the study of human subjects, **the term sex should be used as a classification, generally as male or female, according to the reproductive organs and functions that derive from the chromosomal complement** [generally XX for female and XY for male]. In the study of human subjects, **the term gender should be used to refer to a person's self-representation as male or female, or how that person is responded to by social institutions on the basis of the individual's gender presentation** . . . While an individual’s internal sense of gender can be female or male, some people identify as nonbinary – neither female nor male. Other individuals can identify as a gender that is the same as (cisgender) or different from (transgender) the one assigned at birth.”

“What Do We Mean By Sex and Gender?” – Yale School of Medicine (2021)

The Sex vs Gender Debate

“**Sex** refers to the different biological and physiological characteristics of males and females, such as reproductive organs, chromosomes, hormones, etc. **Gender** refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men – such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men.”

Council of Europe (2024)

The Sex vs Gender Debate

But what does the Bible say? It says sex and gender are identical in the eyes of God.

Gender

- *“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground” (Gen. 2:7a).*
- *“Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman” (Gen. 2:22a).*

Sex

- *And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female’” (Matt. 19:4).*

See how terms denoting **gender** ("**man**" and "**woman**") and **sex** ("**male**" and "**female**") are used interchangeably? That's because the Bible - thus God - views sex and gender as identical constructs that He created and assigned/assigns. **So, no, it's not “just semantics” when we insist that a male is a man and a female is a woman.**

Jesus is Creator, Not Created

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him” (Col. 1:15-16).

- **“Firstborn”** indicates Jesus is supreme over all creatures, not that He is a created being. It refers to firstborn in position, not in time. Consider the example of Ephraim:
 - *“They shall come with weeping, And with supplications I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, In a straight way in which they shall not stumble; For I am a Father to Israel, And **Ephraim is My firstborn**” (Jer. 31:9).*
 - *“Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on **Ephraim's** head, **who was the younger**, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn” (Gen. 48:14).*

Jesus is Creator, Not Created

- Jesus accepted worship (**Matt. 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 28:9, 17; Heb. 1:6**), whereas Cornelius – a created being (“*man*”) – did not accept worship (**Acts 10:25-26**).
- We are only authorized to worship the Creator (**Rom. 1:25**), and Jesus is the Creator.
 - *“In the beginning was the Word, and **the Word was with God, and the Word was God**. He was in the beginning with God. **All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made**” (John 1:1-3).*
 - *Then God said, “**Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth**” (Gen. 1:26).*

It's not “just semantics” when we contend Jesus was at Creation, not one of the creations.

Long Hair is “a” and Not “the” Covering

“But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering” (1 Cor. 11:15).

That the hair is regarded by Paul as a covering in v.15 is not necessarily an argument that the hair is the same as the head covering that he is describing in the earlier verses (esp. v.10). Throughout this unit of material, Paul points out the similarities of long hair with a head covering. But his doing so seems to suggest that the two are not to be identified with each other. Precisely because they are similar they do not appear to be identical (cf. vv.5, 6, 7, 10, 13). If head covering = long hair, then what does v.6 mean (“For if a woman will not cover her head, she should cut off her hair”)? This suggests that the covering is not the same as the hair itself.

NET Translator Footnotes

- It is not “**just semantics**” that the Holy Spirit intentionally used the word “a” and not “the” to show how hair is **one** of the coverings under consideration in the passage.
- Women should always be covered with a covering of long hair; plus, they should wear an artificial covering when they pray/prophesy (**see v.4, 5, 13**). Men have the opposite requirements.

Abortion is Murder Because Life Begins Before Birth

We know murder is a sin, but how do we know abortion is murder?

Luke 1:41-44 Proves Life Begins Before Birth.

“And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!’ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy” (ESV).

Exod. 21:22-24 Confirms This Truth.

“If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman’s husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”

Abortion is Murder Because Life Begins Before Birth

“How do we know when a baby in the womb becomes a ‘*baby*?’ When does it become a living being?”

- To that I simply say, I don't know.
 - No qualifier is used in either **Luke 1:41-44** or **Exod. 21:22-24**.
- I do know prematurely born babies not carried to full term – though their survival rate is significantly lower than babies carried to full term – can survive and often do.
 - Survival is possible because they become living beings in the womb. If not, all prematurely born children would be stillborn.
- I do know that **at some point** the unborn in the womb becomes a “*baby*” with “*life*,” and to take that life is murder.
 - Murder –“The unlawful premeditated killing of one human being by another” (Oxford Languages Dictionary).

See how dangerous the attitude of “it’s just semantics” can be?

Baptism is “For” (Not “As Result Of”) Forgiveness of Sins

- Numerous passages prove that water baptism is required for salvation.
 - **Acts 2:38**, for example, reads, “*Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’*”
- Most denominations try to get around the very plain meaning of this text by contending that the word “*for*” denotes “because of,” or “as result of,” which would mean a person is baptized because his sins are already forgiven. **But salvation comes AFTER baptism.**
 - A similar example that works in the reverse order is found in **Matt. 19:9**. Whereas forgiveness of sins only comes after (not before) baptism, fornication must occur before (not after) a divorce for it to be scriptural.
- The NET Translators make the same argument about **Acts 2:38** as most denominations:

There is debate over the meaning of . . . the prepositional phrase . . . “for/because of/with reference to the forgiveness of your sins.” Although a causal sense has been argued, it is difficult to maintain here.

Baptism is “For” (Not “As Result Of”) Forgiveness of Sins

Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.

Definitions of “For” (Merriam-Webster):

- Used as a function word to indicate a **purpose**.
- Used as a function word to indicate an **intended goal**.
- Used as function word to indicate the **object or recipient of a perception, desire, or activity**.

Acts 2:38

- **Purpose:** Forgiveness of Sins (v.38).
- **Goal:** Forgiveness of Sins (v.38).
- **Object:** Water (John 3:3-5; Acts 8:36).
- **Recipient:** Sinner (v.36-37; Acts 22:16).
- **Perception:** Need Forgiveness (v.40-41; Acts 22:16).
- **Desire:** Forgiveness/Salvation (v.40-41).
- **Activity:** Baptism/Burial (v.38; Rom. 6:3-5).

- It’s just like Peter said, “**Baptism . . . now saves you**” (1 Pet. 3:21).
- And it’s just like Jesus said, “**He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned**” (Mark 16:16).