

Thelo

- A. The verb *thelo* belongs to the following word group:
1. *Thelo* (θέλω) (verb), “to wish to have, to desire, to wish, to purpose to do, to be willing.”
 2. *Thelesis* (θέλησις) (noun), “a willing, will, wish, determination.”
 3. *Thelema* (θέλημα) (noun), “will, desire, determination, purpose, inclination.”
- B. Classical Usage
1. This verb was not common until about 250 B.C., however, it was predominately used in the papyri to denote a personal wish or desire.
 2. The earlier form of *thelo*, *ethelo*, was used throughout classical Greek up until the end of the 4th century B.C. and it is still listed in some lexicons as *ethelo*.
 3. In the papyri *thelo* is used to communicate something hoped for or to express a willingness.
 4. Deitrich Muller lists the following classical meanings for *ethelo*:
 - a. “to be ready” (Homer, *Iliad*, 7, 364; Epictectus, *Dissertationes* 1, 119), “to prefer, to be inclined” (Homer, *Iliad*, 23, 894; Plato, *Theaet.* 143g).
 - b. “to wish” (Herodotus 2, 2), “to desire” (Homer, *Odyssey*, 11, 566); also in the sexual sense (Homer, *Odyssey* 3, 272).
 - c. “to have in mind” (Homer, *Iliad*, 1, 549).
 - d. “to will, both as determining and coming to a decision”
 - e. “to will, in the sense of compelling, and overbearing the will (Homer *Iliad*, 14, 120; 19, 274; Plato *Phdr.* 80d).
 5. Gottlob Schrenk commenting on the difference of meaning between *thelo* and *boulomai*, writes, “The original difference in meaning between *boulomai* and *ethelo* is disputed in philogogical investigation. Two diametrically opposing views confront one another. a. The one finds *thelein* impulsive and unconscious desire and in *boulomai* rational and conscious. *Ethelein* thus signifies volition by inclination or natural instinct, the *proclivitas animi e desiderio*, while *boulomai* denotes a decision of will based on deliberate resolve, the *consilium secundum deliberationem*. On the other hand, *ethelein* is understood to mean the resolution of the spirit, and *boulesthai* as desire or inclination, as the wish of the soul. The first view is supported by the fact *boulesthai* is related to *boule*, *bouleuein*, *bouleuesthai*. The second view argues amongst other things that it is often used synonymously with *epithumein*. It is difficult to decide between them because at a very early date with two groups overlap. Hence the only course is to study the usage in different periods. The following results accrue from such historical investigation. In Homer there are 38 instances of *boulomai* and 294 of *ethelo*. *Boulomai* always has here the sense of ‘to prefer,’ ‘to choose,’ whereas *ethelo* is used for all the other nuances of volition. Thus *ethelo* is the older and more comprehensive term. It is particularly loved by the poets, whereas *boulomai* is preferred by the prose writers and predominates from the time of Herodotus. In time it replaces *ethelein* so fully that always in Thucydides, Isocrates and

Lycurg., and mostly in Plato, Lysias, Andocides, Aeschines and Demosthenes, this is restricted to its original sense of being ready or inclined. In Polybius, and also Diodorus, *ethelein* notably retreats into the background. Yet in the NT, and also in Epictetus, the relationship is reversed and *ethelein* is more common. In modern Greek *boulomai* has been almost completely crowded out by *thelo*:" (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* volume 1, pages 629-630).

6. The verb appears 17 times in the writings of Polybius meaning "to purpose," 4 times the word means "to be ready or willing" and sometimes it means "to resolve."
7. Schrenk lists the following classical meanings for *thelo* (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* volume 3, pages 45-47):
 - a. "to be ready or inclined, to consent to"
 - b. "to take pleasure in, to like"
 - c. "express desire, wanting, a strong desire to have, to take pleasure in, to experience desire or impulse, to come together, to conceive"
 - d. "to wish, to be determined to perform some action, to be on the point of doing something., to purpose, to intend, to aim"
 - e. "to resolve, to decide, to choose, to maturely weigh a decision, to decide resolutely but with self-constraint and free resolve"
 - f. of God "to sovereignly decide a matter"

C. LXX Usage

1. *Thelo* is attested over 100 times in the LXX and very often of an aspect of God's character.
2. The LXX uses *thelo* to translate 13 Hebrew words and most often:
 - a. *chaphets*, "to be pleased, to be delighted, to have delight in, to have pleasure in (44 times).
 - b. *avah*, "to be willing (33 times).
3. The LXX mainly has *thelein* with God as subject.
4. The LXX uses the word of God's sovereign rule in creation and human history, for His control manifested in individual events.

D. Josephus and Philo

1. Josephus and Philo employ the verb in relation to God's sovereign will.
2. Philo used it in dealing with God's creation, His direction of the world structure and His revelation.

E. NT Usage

1. *Thelo* appears approximately over 200 times in the NT.
2. It has the full range of classical meanings depending upon the context.
3. The verb has the following meanings (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* pages 354-355):
 - a. *wish* of desire
 - b. *wish, will, of purpose, resolve wish, want, be ready*
 - c. (*apart of an idiom*) *what can this mean?*
 - d. *take pleasure in, like*

- e. *maintain* contrary to the true state of affairs
- 4. Louw and Nida list the following NT meanings for the verb (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*):
 - a. *to purpose, generally based upon a preference and desire* (volume 2, page 357).
 - b. *to have a particular view or opinion about something* (volume 2, page 366).
 - c. *to desire to have or experience something* (volume 2, page 289).
 - d. *to take pleasure in something in view of its being desirable* (volume 2, page 301).
 - e. *(an idiom, literally 'it wishes to be') something which is to mean or to be understood in a particular manner* (volume 2, page 404).
- 5. The *New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* lists the following NT meanings (pages 285-286):
 - a. *to be resolved or determined, to purpose*
 - b. *to desire, to wish*
 - c. *to love followed by an infinitive to like to do a thing, be fond of doing*
 - d. *to take delight, have pleasure*
- 6. Dietrich Muller states that "*thelo* frequently appears in the NT in a quite secular sense for general willing, desiring (e.g. Matt. 20:21; Matt. 26:17 par. Mk. 14:12), resolute willing (e.g. Matt. 25:15; John 7:44), finding pleasure in, liking (e.g. Mk. 12:38 par. Luke 20:46), claiming (2 Pet. 3:5)" (*The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology* volume 3, page 1019).
- 7. In the NT the word is used of:
 - a. *human volition*
 - b. *sovereign will of God*