

Grammarian's Corner

Participles, Part II

MENTAL ERRATUM: The Grammarian's Corner of April, 2006, discussed participles in attributive and predicate positions. Regrettably, in that issue I provided theoretical, but no New Testament, examples. To rectify this, several examples from the New Testament follow below (limited, for the time being, to those in attributive position. The first two (1 a and 1 b) are in the nominative case and function to modify subjects. The second two (1 c and 1 d) are in the accusative and function to modify direct objects.

1. Attributive¹

- a. 1 Corinthians 12:22 (see also 1 Cor. 3:7 and Mark 11:30).

...τὰ δοκοῦντα μέλη τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενέστερα ὑπάρχειν ἀναγκαῖά ἐστιν....²
“The members of the body **seeming actually to be weaker** are necessary....”

(Cf. ὁ λέγων τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἀνὴρ ἔρχεται [1 a, from *Concordia Journal*, April 2006].)

- b. Acts 9:7 (see also Rev. 14:13 and John 1:29).

οἱ δὲ ἄνδρες οἱ συνοδεύοντες αὐτῷ εἰστήκεισαν ἔννοι....
“The men **travelling with him** were standing speechless....”
(Cf. ὁ ἀνὴρ ὁ λέγων τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἔρχεται [1b].)

- c. Hebrews 11:10 (see also Heb. 12:1 and Eph. 3:19).

ἐξεδέχετο γὰρ τὴν τοὺς θεμελίους ἔχουσαν πόλιν....
“For he was looking forward to the city **having the foundations....**”

(Cf. ὁ θεός εὐλογεῖ τὸν λέγοντα τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἄνδρα [1 c].)

- d. Mathew 21:15 (see also Heb. 2:5 and John 4:11).

ιδόντες δὲ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς τὰ θαυμασία...καὶ τοὺς παῖδας τοὺς κρᾶζοντας ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ....
“And the chief priests and the scribes, upon seeing the wonders...and

¹ New Testament examples of participles in predicate position (point 2 in the April 2006, article) will be supplied in a future article. For attributive position participles in prepositional phrases, see, e.g., Rom. 8:18; 1 Pet. 1:13; and Luke 20:46.

² ἀσθενέστερα ὑπάρχειν goes with the participle in this sentence. Not infrequently Greek allows portions of the participial phrase in the “sandwich” position to extend beyond the article and noun.

the children **crying out in the temple**....

(Cf. ὁ θεὸς εὐλογεῖ τὸν ἄνδρα τὸν **λέγοντα τὴν ἀλήθειαν** [1 d].)

In the previous Grammarian's Corner, we spoke of participles in attributive and predicate positions, and drew parallels between them and simple adjectives (see also the examples above). We also noted that participles have more than adjectival characteristics; they also have verbal characteristics. It is to these additional characteristics that we now turn.

Because participles are built off verbal stems, they have the essential characteristics of verbs. Thus, they convey "tense" (e.g., present, aorist), as well as voice (e.g., active, passive). These factors are key and will be discussed in due course. More fundamental, however, is to ask a prior and larger question, viz., "What, in general syntactic terms, is the function of these forms? To my way of thinking, the best answer is that *participles are essentially shorthand for clauses*. That is to say, **a participle represents a complete subordinate clause**, with a subject and a verb, plus a word to link it to the main clause. In this article, we will consider participles in attributive position only, i.e., those comprising sentences such as 1 a – 1 d above, to see how they may be analyzed according to this understanding.

A participle in attributive position tells the reader/hearer something more about the noun or pronoun it is modifying and is, as noted previously, the equivalent of an adjective. Its verbal root, however, conveys action/activity as part of its modification. Thus, the participle says that a particular person/thing is engaged in or does some activity. To take an English example: "The man speaking the truth is coming" says that a particular man with the characteristic speaking the truth is on his way. This is the equivalent of the sentence "The man who is speaking the truth is coming."³ Described technically, the participle represents a subordinate clause introduced by a relative pronoun (in this case, "who"), which relates the verbal idea of its clause to a noun/pronoun in the main clause (in this case, "man"). The participle example is the English equivalent of the first and second Greek examples from the April 2006, issue, repeated under 1 a and 1 b, above: ὁ **λέγων τὴν ἀλήθειαν** ἄνθρωπος ἔρχεται, or, ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ **λέγων τὴν ἀλήθειαν** ἔρχεται (perhaps closer in a literalistic sense to 1 b). And these are the equivalent of a sentence with a clause introduced by a relative pronoun (in this case, ὅς): ὁ ἄνθρωπος **ὅς λέγει τὴν ἀλήθειαν** ἔρχεται. Such equivalence can be seen in Luke 20:46-47, in which a noun (in a prepositional phrase) is modified, first by an attributive position participle, and then by a relative clause: προσέχετε ἀπὸ τῶν γραμματέων **τῶν θελούντων** περιπατεῖν ἐν στολαῖς...**οἱ κατεσθίουσιν** τὰς οἰκίας τῶν χηρῶν.... "Beware of the scribes who desire to walk around in flowing robes...who devour the houses of widows...."

³ This was discussed briefly in the April article but only as an issue of translation.

We can, therefore, transform the New Testament examples given above in 1 a –1 d into relative clause constructions as follows:

1. a': ...τὰ μέλη τοῦ σώματος **ἃ δοκεῖ ἀσθενέστερα ὑπάρχειν** ἀναγκαῖά ἐστιν.
1. b': οἱ δὲ ἄνδρες **οἳ συνώδευον αὐτῷ** εἰστήκεισαν ἕνεοι....
2. a': ἐξεδέχετο γὰρ τὴν πόλιν **ἣ εἶχε τοὺς θεμελίους**....
2. b': ἰδόντες δὲ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς τὰ θαυμασία...καὶ τοὺς παῖδας **οἳ ἔκραζον ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ**....

But are these two formulations, i.e., a participle and a clause headed by a relative pronoun, actually full equivalents? That is an important question with exegetical implications. Generally, the answer given by grammarians, including myself, has been a strong “Yes” (see, e.g., Caragounis,⁴ Burton,⁵ BDF,⁶ Voelz⁷), but I have increasingly been led to question the assertion of equivalence. Indeed, a graduate student here at Concordia Seminary, Michael Hayes, is currently working on a dissertation that focuses on this point. We will turn to this question, including its importance, in the next installment.

James W. Voelz

⁴ Chyrs C. Caragounis, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament: Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Criticism*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004, 175.

⁵ Ernest De Witt Burton, *Syntax of Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1898), 164, 166.

⁶ Friederich Blass and Albert Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: A Translation and Revision of the Ninth-Tenth German Edition incorporating Supplementary note of A. Debrunner*, Trans. And rev. ed. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961), § 412.

⁷ James W. Voelz, *Fundamental Greek Grammar*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1993), 139.