

Grammarian's Corner

Participles, Part III

In the previous "Grammarian's Corner" (July 2006), we described participles as shorthand for subordinate clauses. We noted that those in attributive position represent a subordinate clause introduced by a relative pronoun. Indeed, we asserted equivalence of the two structures by referring to Luke 20:46-47, where we find in parallel an attributive position participle and a relative clause: προσέχετε ἀπὸ τῶν γραμματέων τῶν θελώντων περιπατεῖν ἐν στολαῖς...οἱ κατασθίουσιν τὰς οἰκίας τῶν χηρῶν.... "Beware of the scribes who desire to walk around in flowing robes...who devour the houses of widows..." In the last paragraph of that installment, however, we raised a red flag, asking whether full equivalence of the two constructions is actually a fact (though most scholars, including myself, have understood them so to be), noting that a study now commenced by Michael Hayes is considering precisely this issue in detail.

Why this question over full equivalence? Because of the actual cases in which each construction seems to appear. Consider the four passages quoted in the last "Grammarian's Corner":

- a. 1 Corinthians 12:22 ...τὰ δοκοῦντα μέλη τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενέστερα ὑπάρχειν ἀναγκαῖά ἐστιν....¹
- b. Acts 9:7: οἱ δὲ ἄνδρες οἱ συνοδεύοντες αὐτῷ εἰσήκεισαν ἔνεοι....²
- c. Hebrews 11:10: ἐξεδέχετο γὰρ τὴν τοὺς θεμελίους ἔχουσαν πόλιν....³
- d. Matthew 21:15: ἰδόντες δὲ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς τὰ θαυμασιά...καὶ τοὺς παῖδας τοὺς κρᾶζοντας ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ....⁴

In each case, the clause represented is properly understood to be **restrictive**, i.e., the entity in the clause represents a smaller subcategory of a larger group.⁵ Thus in a. above, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are a subcategory of all members of the body, some of which are

¹ "The members of the body **seeming actually to be weaker** are necessary...."

² "The men **travelling with him** were standing speechless...."

³ "For he was looking forward to the city **having the foundations**...."

⁴ And the chief priests and the scribes, upon seeing the wonders...and the children **crying out in the temple**...."

⁵ Here is an example in English: **restrictive**: "The thieves stole the TV that was in the living room," meaning there were a number of TVs in the house, and they stole the one in the living room; **non-restrictive**: "The thieves stole the TV, which was in the living room," meaning they stole the one TV in the house, and it was in the living room. Note the presence or absence of the comma in these cases. Generally, "that" is also used in a restrictive clause, "which" in a non-restrictive one.

not weaker.⁶ In b., the men who were traveling with Paul were a subgroup of all men. In c., the city which has foundations is a subcategory of all cities, and in d., the children who were crying out were a subgroup of all children in Jerusalem at the time.

By contrast, subordinate clauses headed by a relative pronoun seem to be non-restrictive in their meaning. A clear example is 1 Peter 2:11:

Ἀγαπητοί, παρακαλῶ ὡς παροίκους καὶ παρεπιδήμους ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν σαρκικῶν ἐπιθυμῶν αἵτινες στρατεύονται κατὰ τῆς ψυχῆς.

“Beloved, I exhort (you) as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the fleshly desires, which war against the soul.”

Are there fleshly desires that do not war against the soul? Most certainly not. So, one could almost translate this verse thus: “...to abstain from the fleshly desires, which, by their very nature/which, by definition, war against the soul.” Other examples are:

Luke 2:4: ...εἰς πόλιν Δαυὶδ ἣτις καλεῖται Βηθλέεμ....

“...unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem....”

John 8:53: μὴ σὺ μείζων εἶ τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀβραάμ οὗτος ἀπέθανεν;

“You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died are you?”

Acts 1:10-11a: ...καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄνδρες δύο παρειστήκεισαν αὐτοῖς...οἱ καὶ εἶπαν....

“...and behold, two men were standing by them..., who also said....”

We can see the contrast in close proximity in Colossians 1:12-13:

...εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρὶ τῷ ἱκανώσαντι ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν μερίδα τοῦ κλήρου τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ φωτί, ὃς ἔρρυσάτο ἡμᾶς....

“...giving thanks to the father who has made you sufficient for the/your share of the portion of the saints in light, who has rescued us....”

There is only one father who has made us sufficient (it's not our earthly one), hence, the attributive position participle providing a restrictive clause. But it is the same person—no more limiting, just amplifying—who rescued us, thus the relative pronoun introducing a non-restrictive clause. See also John 6:27 for a similar example. This means that, in fact, we should probably not see the attributive position participle and the relative pronoun in Luke 20 (see first paragraph, above) as equivalents; rather, the first should be restrictive, warning of the (subcategory of) scribes who desire to walk around gaining attention, while the second is non-restrictive, further describing this same subset of scribes (= “who, by the way...”). It also means that the “equivalents” to the attributive position participles

⁶ Put another way, “weaker” does not apply to all members of the body as it would in a non-restrictive clause.

given in the last “Corner” installment, p. 314, are probably not live alternatives after all.

Let me end this installment with the observation that the analysis we suggest is not without its minor problems, especially attributive position participles in the nominative that seem to be a restriction, not on what they modify directly but upon all other alternative possibilities. See, for example 1 Peter 1:3:

Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁ κατὰ τὸ πολὺ αὐτοῦ ἔλεος ἀναγεννήσας ἡμᾶς εἰς ἐλπίδα ζωσαν....

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the one who has, according to his great mercy, begotten us again unto a living hope (as opposed to anyone else who might attempt such a salvation)....”⁷

But this is why Mr. Hayes is doing his in-depth analysis.⁸

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⁷ The sentence is certainly not implying that there are multiple gods and fathers of our Lord Jesus Christ so that it is restricting us to the one among these who did the begetting anew!

⁸ Another minor problem is the issue of relative pronouns in the accusative. See e.g., John 6:51c: καὶ ὁ ἄρτος δὲ ὃν ἐγὼ δώσω ἡ σὰρξ μου ἐστίν. This seems to be restrictive, but, it should be noted, one could not use a participle to convey this idea unless it were in the passive voice (future tense!), *viz.*, ὁ δοθησόμενος ὑπ’ ἐμοῦ....