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**THE CLASSIFICATION**

**OF INFINITIVES**

**A STATISTICAL STUDY**

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*Detailed information is provided here regarding the various*

*functional classifications of the infinitive, much of it never before*

*generally available. Special attention is given to the listing and classifi-*

*cation of governing words; the semantic interrelationship between*

*concepts which use the infinitive, even when they occur in differing*

*structural patterns; the long-debated question of the "subject" of the*

*infinitive with an attempt to state clearly what actual usage indicates,*

*and a brief, rather negative discussion of the use and non-use of the*

*article with infinitives.*

\* \* \*

INTRODUCTION

STARTING with a listing generated by a GRAMCORD1 computerized

search of all infinitives occurring in the UBS Greek NT, a detailed

study was made. Each infinitive was analyzed for classification, the

“subject" of the infinitive, the use or non-use of the article, tense,

voice, and the word governing the infinitive. This information was

then sorted and counted in many pertinent combinations by the com-

puter to provide the material basis and statistical data for this study.

Three major areas are explored in this article the functional classifica-

tion of infinitives, the problem of the "subject of the infinitive, and

the use or non-use of the article with infinitives.

1 A preliminary report on this program of computer-assisted analysis of the Greek

NT may be seen in my article, "Project Gramcord: A Report," *GTJ* I (1980) 97-99.

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A CLASSIFICATION OF USAGES

*Subject Infinitives*

An infinitive may function as the subject of a sentence or clause,

i.e., the doer of the action or that to which the state or condition of

the verb is predicated. The abstract character of the infinitive as a

verbal noun gives an impersonal character to the verb of such sen-

tences. This use of the infinitive is also common in English, although

usually in English the pronoun 'it' is used to signal a delayed subject

and the infinitive subject follows the verb; "it is necessary to go" is

more natural to the English ear than "to go is necessary," although

the infinitive functions as subject in either case.

Subject of Impersonal Verbs

Luke 20:22 provides an example of this usage: ἔξεστιν ἡμᾶς  
Καίσαρι φόρον δούναι ἣ οὔ; / 'Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to

Caesar?’2 The subject infinitive most frequently occurs with certain

verbs which are either always or predominantly impersonal. The verbs

actually found with an infinitive subject in the NT are δεῖ3 (120

times),4 γίνομαι when it means 'it came to pass that' (36 times),5

ἔξεστιν (29 times), δοκέω when it is impersonal (5 times),6 συμφέρει

and ὠφελεῖ (2 times each), and eight others (1 time each).7 One

examples shows an infinitive without a governing verb expressed; the

sense suggests that δεῖ be supplied. The infinitive in this usage is

almost always anarthrous. Only once9 is an article used, the genitive

τοῦ. The infinitive follows its verb 95% of the time.

Subject of a Predicative Verb

The subject infinitive also appears with the copula εἰμί which

predicates some quality or condition to the infinitive subject. This,

too, is an impersonal construction, but differs from the previous one

in that the impersonal verbs contain their own predication (it is lawful,

2 Unless otherwise stated, translations of the Greek text of the NT are from the

New American Standard version (*NASB*).

3 The actual forms used are δεῖ (92), ἔδει (22), δέῃ (2), and δεῖν (4).

4 The number of occurrences listed in parentheses here and throughout this article

counts the number of infinitives occurring with each verb, not the occurrences of the

verb. Frequently one verb governs a series of infinitives.

5 γίνεται (1), ἐγένετο (32), γένηται (2), γένοιτο (1).

6 δοκεῖ (1), ἔδοξε (4).

7 ἀνέβη, ἀπόκειται, ἀπολείπεται, ἐνδέκεται, ἔπρεπεν, κάθηκεν, συνέβη, χρή.

8 Rev 13: 10, ἀποκτανθῆναι.

9 Acts 10:25.

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it is *necessary*) whereas these state the predication as a predicate

complement, either adjective, noun, or otherwise. An example is found

in Mark 9:5: [Ῥαββί, καλόν ἐστιν ἡμᾶς ὦδε εἶναι / Ῥαββι, it is good

for us to be here'. In addition to the 57 instances where the predica-

tive verb is present,10 there are 31 instances where it is not expressed

but clearly must be supplied.

The predicate complement may be an adjective (71 times),11 a

noun (7 times),12 a participle (7 times),13 or the genitive personal

pronoun, ὑμῶν (1 time). In two instances14 infinitives seem to re-

quire ἔστιν to be supplied in the sense 'it exists', with no predica-

tion being stated. The infinitive is anarthrous 75 times; it has the

nominative article (τό) 10 times, the genitive (τού) twice, and the

accusative (τό) once. The frequencies for word order when the predic-

ative verb is present are Predicate/Verb/Infinitive (46 times), Verb/

Predicate/Infinitive (7 times), and Infinitive/Verb/Predicate (4 times).

When no predicative verb is expressed, the infinitive usually follows

the predicate complement (25 of the 31 total).

Subject of Passive Verbs

Infinitives which would have been the object of a verb in the

active voice may become the subject of its passive transform (22

instances). For example, Matt 13:11 has Ὑμῖν δέδοται γνῶναι τὰ  
μθστήρια / 'To you it has been granted to know the mysteries'. The

verbs found in this construction are δίδωμι (9), χρηματίζω (4), ἐπι-

τρέπω (3), γράφω (3), χαρίζομαι (2), and συμφωνέω (1). The infinitive

is anarthrous 20 times; the other two have the nominative τό.

Subject of Other Verbs

In light of the fact that the infinitive is a verbal noun and can

function as a subject, it is rather surprising that, apart from the three

categories previously listed, there are only three other instances of a

subject infinitive in the NT. They are Matt 15:20 (τὸ δὲ ἀνίπτοις

χερσὶν φαγεῖν οὐ κοινοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον / 'to eat with unwashed

hands does not defile a man') and twice in Rom 7:18 (τὸ γὰρ θέλειν

10 The forms used are ἕστιν, ἦν, ᾗ and εἴεν.

11 καλόν (24), εὐκοπώτερον (8), κρεῖττον (5), ἀδύνατον (4), ἀἰσχρόν (4), δίκαιον

(4), ἀναγκαῖον (4), ἀθέμιτον (4), δυθνατόν (3), μακάριον (2), περισσότερον (2), ἐμόν (2),

(2), and the following with one each: ἀνένδεκτον, ἀναγκαιότερον, ἀρεστόν, ἄξιον,  
δύσκολον, ὀκνηρόν, περισσόν, σκληρόν and φοβερόν.

12 ἀνάγκη (2), ἔθος (2), and one each of ἁρπαγμόν, Χριστός, and κερδος.

13 ἕξον (3), δέον (2), and πρέπον (2). These participles may be predicate adjectives

or perhaps periphrastic; note that each is a participle of an impersonal verb.

14 2 Cor 8:11 and Phil 1:22.

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παράκειταί μοι, τὸ δὲ κατεργάζεσθαι τὸ καλὸν οὔ / 'to will is present

with me, but to perform the good is not [present]').15 All three have

the nominative article τό.

Subject Infinitives

By far the most frequent usage of the infinitive is in the predicate

of a sentence--either as a complement of the verb, part of an object

clause, or as the direct object itself. Here the basis for classification

centers in the character of the verb which governs the infinitive.

The Complementary Infinitive

Many verbs take an infinitive as a complement to their meaning;

in a sense, the infinitive functions as the direct object of the verb. The

interdependence of the verb and the infinitive is often so close that it

forms a verb phrase or "chain." Verbs of this type are sometimes

called catenative. The chain may be composed of two, three, or more

links; the last one is always an infinitive or participle and the preced-

ing ones must all be catenative.

At least 72 verbs are followed by 892 complementary infinitives

in the NT. Most of these verbs have a corresponding verb in English

which also takes an infinitive complement. There is little agreement

among grammarians in classifying these verbs, so the attempt made

here must be a tentative and rather hesitating one. This study classi-

fies six categories of verbs that take complementary infinitives.

1. Verbs Expressing Will or Desire, and their Opposites. The

complementary infinitive is found with verbs meaning 'to will, to

wish, to desire' (θέλω [130], βούλομαι [39], ἐπιθυμέω [9], and ἐπι-

ποθέω [4]) and the closely associated idea 'to choose, to prefer, to be

pleased', expressed by εὐδοκέω (9), συνευδοκέω (2), αἰρέω (2), φιλέω

(2), and φροντίζω (1). An opposite sense, 'to be ashamed' (ἐπαισχύν-

ομαι [2] and αἰσχύνομαι [1]) also takes the complementary infinitive.

2. *Verbs Expressing an Activity to the End that Something Shall*

*or Shall Not be Done*. This rather cumbrous heading is taken from

Smyth16 and includes a great number and variety of verbs which take

a complementary infinitive. Some express 'attempt, effort, force'

(ζητέω [35], συμβουλεύω [2], and once each: ἀγωνίζω, ἀναμιμνήσκω,

ἀναπείθω, ἀσκέω, ἐπιζητέω, φιλοτιμέομαι, πειράομαι, and ζηλόω).

15 This is a literal translation. *NASB* uses the gerunds "the wishing" and "the

doing" to translate the Greek infinitives.

16 Herbert W. Smyth, *A Greek Grammar* (New York: American Book Co., 1916)

304.

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Some express the concept of 'undertaking' or 'accomplishing' (μέλλω

[93], ἄρχομαι [92], τολμάω [13], ποιέω [12], κινδυνεύω [4], προσ-

τίθημι [3], ἐνεργέω [2], προενάρχομαι [2], and one each: ἑτοιμάζω,

παρρησιάζω, προλαμβάνω, προμελετάω, and προσποιέομαι). Other

verbs express the opposite idea, 'to thwart, to hinder, to delay' (ὀκνέω

[12], φοβέομαι [4], ἐγκόπτω [3], ὑποστέλλω [3], and one each: ἐξα-

Πορέω, ἐνεδρεύω, κατέχω, and χρονίζω).

3. *Verbs of Permitting and Allowing, and their Opposites*. These

include ἐπιτρέπω (16), ἀφίημι (15), ἐάω (4), λαγχάνω (1) and the

opposite sense of 'refusing, forbidding, preventing': κυλύω (10), παρ-

αιτέω (2), ἀπαρνέομαι (1), and ἀρνέομαι (1).

4. *Verbs Denoting Ability and Know-How*. 'Ability' is expressed

most frequently by δύναμαι (213); other verbs related to this concept

are ἰσχύω (17), ἐξισχύω (2), and κατισχύω (2). Also related are δίδωμι

in the sense 'give [the ability] to' (11), ἔχω in the sense 'have [the

ability] to' (23), εὐκαιρέω 'have time to' (3), εὐοδόομαι 'to succeed, to

get along well' (1), and εὐκαιρέω 'to find [by study]' (1). 'Know-how' is

represented by οἶδα (13), γινώσκω (2), μανθάνω 'to learn how to' (9),

and μυέομαι (4).

5. *Verbs denoting Fitness, Propriety, Custom*. Verbs used in

this sense are ἀξιόω 'to consider worthy' (3), the passive of καταξιόω

in the sense 'be counted worthy' (2), and εἴωθα 'be accustomed to'.

Δίδωμι in the sense 'to give [the privilege] to' (5) also belongs here.

6. Verbs Denoting Need or Obligation. This class is composed

of ὀφείλω 'to be obligated to, to owe' (25), along with δίδωμι in the

sense 'to give [the need] to' (2).

Less then 2% of the complementary infinitives have the article.

Eight are found with the genitive article and eight with the accusative,

compared to 878 anarthrous complementary infinitives in the NT.

Infinitive in Indirect Discourse

When an infinitive stands as the object of a verb of mental

perception or communication and expresses the content or the sub-

stance of the thought or of the communication it is classified as being

in indirect discourse.17 Compared with the previous category, the list

17 The term "indirect discourse" is used in various ways by grammarians, from a very

broad sense (such as A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the*

*Light of Historical Research* [Nashville: Broadman, 1934] 1029, 1031ff.) to the strict

(sense of only indirectly quoted words (as in H. P. V. Nunn, *A Short Syntax of New*

*Testament Greek* [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1951] 97-99). My usage here will

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of verbs found with this usage of the infinitive is a little larger (82

versus 72) but the number of infinitives involved is much smaller (362

versus 892). I offer here an attempt to classify these verbs.

*1. Verbs of Mental Perception: Recognizing, Knowing, Under-*

*standing.* An example of this usage is found in Heb 11:3: Πίστει

νοούμεν κατηρτίσθαι τοὺς αἰῶνας ῥήματι θεοῦ / 'By faith we under-

stand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God '. The infini-

tive κατηρτίσθαι expresses the content of the mental perception--what

was understood. Verbs found with this usage of the infinitive are

ἀκούω (2), καταλαμβάνω (1), νοέω (1), οἶδα (1), and θεωρέω (1).

2. *Verbs of Mental Perception: Thinking, Believing, Feeling,*

*Deciding.* For this usage see, e.g., Luke 2:44: νομίσαντες δὲ αὐτὸν  
εἶναι ἐν τῇ συνδίᾳ / 'His parents supposed Him to be in the cara-

van '. The infinitive εἶναι tells what they thought--that he was in

the caravan. The following verbs are used in this category: δοκέω

(29), κρίνω (12), νομίζω (10), λογίζομαι (6), πείθω (6), τίθημι in

the sense 'to make up one's mind, to resolve' (4), δοκιμάζω (2),

ἐπιλανθάνομαι (2), οἴομαι (2), πιστεύω (2), σθμντίθεμαι (2), ὑπονοέω

(2), ἡγέομαι, and one each: ὁρίζω, προορίζω, προτίθεμαι, στηρίζω

and ὑποκρίνομαι.

3. *Verbs of Mental Perception: Hoping, Expecting.* 1 Tim 3:14

provides an example of this category: ἐλπίζων ἐλθεῖν πρὸς σὲ ἐν  
τάχει / 'hoping to come to you before long'. The infinitive ἐλθεῖν

expresses the substance of this hope--the thing he hoped for. Verbs

used are ἐλπίζω (13), προσδοκάω (2), and προσέχω (2).

4. *Verbs of Communication: Indirect Statement.* For an example

see 1 John 2:6: ὁ λέγων ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν / 'the one who says he abides

in Him'. The infinitive expresses the content of what was said; in

direct. discourse it would be a statement, "I abide in Him." The

following verbs are classified in this category: λέγω (42), μαρτυρέω

(4), ἀναθεματίζω (3), ἀπαγγέλλω (3), ἀποκρίνομαι (3), φάσκω (3),

ἐπαγγέλλω (2), ὀμνύω (2), ὁμολογέω in the sense 'to promise, to

agree to' (2); and once each: βοάω, διισχυρίζω, ἐπιδείκνυμι, ἐρῶ,

φημί, κατακρίνω, προαιτιάομαι, σημαίνω, and συνίστημι.

5. *Verbs of Communication: Indirect Question*. Acts 10:48 has

an example of this classification: τότε ἠρώτησαν αὐτὸν ἐπιμεῖναι  
ἡμέρας τινάς 'then they asked him to stay on for a few days'. The

be two-fold: (a) mental activity and perception when it states the content or substance

of the thought, and (b) indirect communication, whether as statement, question, or

command.

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direct quote would be a question, "Will you stay on . . . ?" Verbs used"

with an infinitive in indirect discourse are ἐρωτάω (10), αἰτέω (6),

εὔχομαι (6), δέομαι (4), προσεύχομαι (3), παραιτέω (2); and once

each: ἐπερωτάω, ἐπικαλέομαι, κατανεύω, and κατασείω.

6. *Verbs of Communication: Indirect Command or Entreaty.*

Luke 18:40 has the following example: ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐκέλευσεν αὐτὸν  
ἀχθῆναι πρὸς αὐτόν / 'Jesus commanded that he be brought to Him'.

The direct quotation would have been a command or exhortation,

"bring him to Me." Several verbs fall in this category: παραγγέλλω

(32), παρακαλέω (30), κελεύω (26), εἶπον (11), γράφω (7), διατάσσω

(7), ἐντέλλομαι (4), ἐπιτάσσω (4), διδάσκω (3), νεύω (2), συμβουλεύω,

(2), τάσσω (2), ὑποδείκνυμι (2); and once each: ἀπειλέω,

δείκνυμι, διαμαρτυρέω, ἐνορκίζω, ἐπικρίνω, ἐπιστέλλω, εὐαγγελίζω,

in the sense 'to proclaim that', κηρύσσω, παιδεύω, παραινέομαι,

προστάσσω, and συμφρονίζω. In one passage the governing verb is

unexpressed; some form of διδάσκω probably should be supplied

(1 Tim 4:3; cf. v 1).

Object Infinitive with Other Verbs

It may be surprising, but there are only two (or perhaps three)

other instances where an infinitive stands as the true object of a verb.

2 Cor 8:11 reads νυνὶ δὲ καὶ τὸ ποιῆσαι ἐπιτελέσατε / 'but now finish

doing it also'; the infinitive seems to be a true object rather than a

complement to ἐπιτελέω. In Phil 4:10 (ὅτι ἤδη ποτὲ ἀνεθάλετε τὀ  
ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ φρονεῖν / 'that now at last you have revived your concern

for me'), φρονεῖν seems to be functioning as a simple noun object.

One other passage that perhaps belongs here is Rev 13:10: εἴ τις ἐν  
μαχαίρῃ ἀποκανθῆναι, αὐτὸν ἐν μαχαίρῃ ἀποκτανθῆναι / 'If anyone

is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed’.18 The

first ἀποκτανθῆναι is clearly the predicate of a verb which needs to be

supplied (perhaps "is destined" as the *NASB* supplies in the first half

of the couplet, or perhaps simply the copula as the *NIV* does in both

halves of the couplet; in the latter case the infinitive would not strictly

be *object*, but rather a subjective complement).

It might well be argued that some of the infinitives which I have

classed as complementary might be considered simply as noun objects

of the verb. In such cases I have tried to follow the lead of other

18 The translation given in this instance is from the *NIV* which follows Codex A.

*NASB* follows a different text and translates, "if anyone kills with the sword." The

whole passage is greatly compressed and difficult to interpret.

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grammarians19 who list the governing verb as one which elsewhere

takes an infinitive to complete its meaning.

*Adverbial Infinitives*

In many instances the infinitive is used, in effect, as a subordinate

adverbial clause which usually expresses time but may also express

cause, purpose or result.

*Infinitive of Purpose or Result*

The most natural adverbial use of the infinitive, either articular

or anarthrous, is to express the end or direction of an action, whether

intentional (purpose) or consequential (result). Grammarians who

have studied the historical development of the Greek language point

out that the Greek infinitive originated as a verbal substantive with a

fixed dative or locative case form.20 Thus, as Robertson says, "This

notion of purpose is the direct meaning of the dative case which is

retained. It is the usual meaning of the inf. in Homer, that of pur-

pose”21 and "This dative inf. was probably a survival of the old and

once common dative of purpose.”22 In later Greek, especially in

Hellenistic Greek, the infinitive in this and all other uses gave way

increasingly to the ἵνα-clause until it disappeared entirely in modern

Greek where it is replaced with νά (i.e., ἵνα) + subjunctive. In the NT

it is still very common as an expression of purpose, along with ἵνα.

The relation between purpose and result is a close one and often

difficult, sometimes impossible, to distinguish. Intended result is pur-

pose; accomplished or realized purpose is result, and it is not clear in

every instance which is in the mind of the author.23 For example, in

Rev 5:5 ἐνίκησαν ὁ λέων . . . ἀνοῖζαι is an accomplished fact, but the

speaker might be pointing to the reason for the action. Another factor

contributing to this confusion between purpose and result in the NT

may be the theological context which presents a sovereign God whose

purposes always become results and results always arise out of his

purposes.

In this classification I label each example as either infinitive of

purpose or of result where it seems reasonably clear to do so, and I

put in another category those which might reasonably be either.

19 See particularly BDF, 201-5.

20 For a discussion of the origin and development of the infinitive in the Greek

language see Robertson, *Grammar*, 1051-56.

21 Ibid.,1087.

22 Ibid., 1053.

23 For a rather thorough discussion of this problem see Robertson, *Grammar*,

1089-91.

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1. *Infinitive of Purpose.* Two clear examples of infinitives of

purpose are Matt 2:2: ἤλθομεν προσκυνῆσαι αὺτῷ / 'we have come

to worship Him' and Luke 15:15: ἔπεμψεν αὐτὸν εἰς τοὺς ἀγροὺς  
αὐτοῦ βόσκειν χοίρους / 'he sent him into his fields to feed swine'.

Verbs found with an infinitive of purpose are (a) 'to send': ἀποστέλλω

(19), ἐξαποστέλλω (2), πέμπω (4); (b) 'to give': δίδωμι (17), παρα-

δίδωμι (3); (c) 'to choose': ἐκλέγομαι (4), προχειρίζομαι (3); (d) more

than 40 others with three or less infinitives involved; and (e) a special

category of intransitive verbs of motion: 'to go' or 'to come'; com-

pounds of βαίνω (13), ἔρχομαι and its compounds (79), πορεύομαι

and its compounds (12), compounds of ἄγω (5); verbs meaning 'to be

present, to have come', ἥκω (2), παραγίνομαι (2), πάρειμι (1); and

miscellaneous intransitive verbs of motion (19).

2. *Infinitives of Result.* Sometimes a particle indicates that an

infinitive is an infinitive of result. Ὥστε is a combination of the

comparative particle ὡς 'as' with the enclitic te 'and' (note the accent:

not ὡστε as it would have to be if it were one word) and means 'and

so' or 'so as'. The Blass-Debrunner grammar says, "The introductory

particle for the infinitive of result is ὡστε as in classical.”24

There are 64 infinitives in the NT introduced by ὡςστε or ὡς. Of

these, all but 8 are infinitives of result, the result being either an

actual occurrence (51), a fictional occurrence as part of a parable (3)

(Matt 13:32 twice, Mark 4:32), or the occurrence which could follow

if some condition were met (Matt 24:24; 1 Cor 13:2). Of the remaining

eight, five may perhaps be explained away. In Matt 15:33 the ὡςτε

may be understood as the co-ordinate of τοσοῦται: "so many loaves

as it would take to actually feed so great a crowd." In Matt 10:1 (two

occurrences), 27:1, and Acts 20:24 the results intended were actually

realized later; this was known at the time when the record was written

and may be reflected in the choice to use ὡστε or ὡς. But the three

remaining passages are different. In Luke 9:52 there is some doubt

whether the intended result was actually realized. If ὡς ἑτοιμάσαι

αὐτῷ means to prepare the people of Samaria to receive Christ, it was

not realized, as the following verse shows. But probably these words

should be understood to mean "to make arrangement for Him"

(*NASB*); if so it is clearly actual result. In Luke 20:20 it is true that

Jesus was actually delivered over to the rulers, but it did not come

about by the tactics reported in this verse, that is, by listening to

Jesus' teaching in order to trap him by his speech. Thus, the purpose

24 BDF, 197. They go on to explain that there is uncertainty whether the simple ὡς

is used, just as there is about its use in customary Attic. In the UBS3 text ὡς appears

with the infinitive twice (Luke 9:52 and Acts 20:24), both with textual variants includ-

ing ὡστε and both with the meaning of intended result (i.e., purpose).

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in this context failed. There seems to be no doubt, however, that in

Luke 4:29 ὥστε is used with an infinitive to express an intended result

which, obviously, was in no sense realized. Jesus was not thrown

down from the hill, as is explicitly stated in the next verse. Apparently

the confusion over purpose and result, between intended and actual

result, must sometimes be recognized even when ὥστε occurs.

The other five infinitives identified in this study as infinitives of

result do not use ὥστε or ὡς. In Matt 21:32 belief, expressed by the

infinitive πιστεῦσαι, was not the purpose for repentance but the result

of it. So also in Rom 7:3 the wife's freedom from the law of her dead

husband is not "in order that she may not be an adultress," but it

results in her not being so. In Heb 11:8 Abraham obeyed "with the

result that" he went out, not "in order to" go out. And in Rev 2:20

(twice) it is preferable to understand the immorality and eating of

idol-sacrifices as the result rather than the purpose of Jezebel's false

teaching.

3. *Infinitives either Purpose or Result*. The fact that the infini-

tive may express either purpose or result requires the interpreter to

make a subjective decision or admit uncertainty as to the precise

significance of the infinitive. The preceding sections include those

instances where this writer has made that decision. The present cate-

gory includes 19 places25 where there was uncertainty regarding classifi-

cation. The reader is called upon to use his own judgment in these

cases.

Perhaps this whole issue should prompt us to look again at our

own language. Is it always possible to make distinctions between

purpose and result in the English use of the infinitive? And, do we

need to do so?

Articular Infinitives with Prepositions

Of all the many uses of the Greek infinitives, this one is the most

foreign to English speakers. English uses infinitives in all the ways

that Greek does as subjects of verbs, as objects (both complementary

and in indirect discourse), as adverbs expressing purpose or result,

and in apposition to nouns, adjectives, and pronouns. But there is

nothing in English to prepare the beginning Greek student for the use

of the infinitive when it stands as object of a preposition and func-

tions as an adverbial clause.

It is impossible to translate these constructions literally into

any understandable English. They most naturally are translated by

25 Mark 7:4; Luke 1:25; 24: 16, 45; Acts 7: 19; 10:47; 15:10; 20:30; Rom 1:24, 28; 11:8

(twice), 10; 2 Cor 10:16 (twice); Gal 3:10; I Thess 3:3; Rev 16:9, 19.

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TABLE 1

Articular Infinitives with Prepositions

Tense of

Prepo- Infinitive:

sit ion Article Number Pres. Aor. Perf Meaning

εἰς τό 71 32 37 2 Purpose: "in order to"

ἐν τῷ 56 44 12 Temporal: "while, as, when"

διά tό 32 24 1 7 Causal: "because"

μετά tό 15 14 1 Temporal: "after

πρός tό 11 3 8 Purpose: "in order to"

πρό tοῦ 9 1 8 Temporal: "before"

ἀντί tοῦ 1 1 Substitution: "instead of"

ἕνεκεν tοῦ 1 1 Causal: "because, for the sake of"

ἕως tοῦ 1 1 Temporal: "until"

πρίν - 8 8 Temporal: "before"

πρὶν ἤ - 3 3 Temporal: "before"

converting them into subordinate clauses, choosing the conjunction

according to the meaning of the preposition and changing the infini-

tive into a finite verb. For example, Luke 11:27 (ἐν τῷ ΄'εγεομ αὐτὸν

ταῦτα) may be translated "while he was saying these things." A literal

translation would be, "in the him to say these things," and, less literal,

"in the process of his saying these things." Table 1 sets forth the basic

information regarding these constructions.

Only those prepositions listed in Table 1 are used in this con-

struction. There are two examples which conform completely to this

pattern but which clearly do not belong to this category: 2 Cor 8:11;

ἐκ τοῦ ἔχειν / 'by your ability' (*NASB*), and Heb 2:15: διὰ παντὸς

Τοῦ ζῆν / 'through [their] whole life' or 'all their lives' (*NASB*). These

will be considered later under the category *Infinitives as Simple*

*Nouns.*

A characteristic of this construction is the use of the article with

the infinitive; the only exception is with πρίν. Robertson explains,

"The use of πρίν with the inf. was common in Homer before the

article was used with the inf. The usage became fixed and the article

never intervened.”26 He points out that the case used with πρίν is

Ablative (Genitive).

The tense of the infinitive signifies, of course, not time, but aspect.

The present is used for a durative aspect and the aorist for simple

occurrence or indefinite. This produces a subtle distinction especially

in the case of ἐν τῷ with the infinitive. When the present is used the

26 Robertson, *Grammar*, 1075.

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sense is durative; it is continuing action going on at the same time as

the main clause. When the tense is aorist it is simple occurrence,

simultaneous but not emphasizing the continuing action. Usually

*NASB* translates ἐν τῷ with the aorist infinitive by "when" (9 of the

12 times it occurs). They use "while" or ''as'' 31 times and "when"

only 7 times with the present infinitive.

Six of the prepositions used with infinitives are temporal in sig-

nificance and express time relative to the main sentence as either

antecedent (πρό, πρίν, πρὶν ἤ, ἕως), contemporary (ἐν), or subsequent

(μετὰ). Two express purpose or end (εἰς, πρός); two express cause

(διά, ἕνεκεν); and one, substitution (ἀντί). The meanings given in

Table 1 are the more common ones, but they are not exhaustive.

With ἐν the sense is sometimes instrumental (Acts 3:26, Heb 8:13).

The εἰς τό + infinitive construction seems sometimes to be the same

as the simple infinitive of purpose or result; in two instances it seems

exactly equivalent to the simple epexegetical infinitive of an adjective

(Jas 1:19, twice).

Causal Infinitive

The one passage which alone shows the infinitive without a pre-

position functioning in the adverbial sense of cause is 2 Cor 2:13: τῷ

μὴ εὑρεῖν με Τίτον / 'because I did not find Titus'. The case of the

infinitive is instrumental-dative (with τῷ), which is appropriate to the

causal sense. The construction is structurally parallel to the purpose

and result categories already discussed.

*Absolute Infinitives*

The Infinitive Absolute

The classical infinitive absolute is described by Goodwin in his

grammar of classical Greek: "The infinitive may stand absolutely in

parenthetic phrases, generally with ὡς or ὅσον. . . . The most com-

mon of these expressions is ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν or ὡς εἰπεῖν to put it in a

word or if one may say so, used to soften a statement.”27 This con-

struction occurs only once in the NT and is in fact the very example

Goodwin quoted--Heb 7:9: καὶ ὠς ἔπος εἰπεῖν / 'and, so to speak'.

The Imperatival Infinitive

In grammatical terminology *absolute* is often used to refer to some-

thing which appears alone, without object or grammatical connection.

27 W. W. Goodwin, *Greek Grammar*, revised by C. B. Gulick (Boston: Ginn and

Co., 1930) 323.

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Robertson uses the term to describe an infinitive construction other

than the infinitive absolute already described (he deals with the

category under a different heading). He applies this term to those

instances where an infinitive seems to stand as the main verb of a

sentence in a context of imperatival sentences, functioning as if it

were an imperative. The infinitive is absolute in the sense that there is

no "main verb on which it depends." It is true that in classical Greek

there was such an imperatival infinitive. Goodwin describes it, "The

infinitive with a subject nominative is sometimes used like the second

person of the imperative" (emphasis added). He says of a similar

construction (infinitive with a subject accusative):

This construction has been explained by supplying a verb like δός or

δότε *grant*. . . or γένοιτο may it be. . . . In *laws, treaties*, and *procla-*

*mations*, the infinitive often depends on ἔδοξε or δἐδπλταο *be it enacted,*

or κεκέλευσται *it is commanded*; which may be expressed in a previous sentence or understood.28

A few infinitives in the NT have been accounted for as impera-

tival, and in order to present as complete a picture as possible I have

identified eleven examples.29 However, it should be noted that there is

no instance in the NT of a subject in the nominative case as required

in the classical pattern. Also, as Goodwin pointed out, even the

classical construction could be explained by supplying a governing

verb expressed or understood in the context. Blass says, "a governing

verb (of 'saying', χρή, δεῖ) can readily be supplied everywhere in the

New Testament passages (which was not the case with the old impera-

tival inf.)"30 He would limit the NT examples to Rom 12:14 and Phil

3:16. It is my judgment that all these so-called imperatival infinitives

should be considered elliptical and assigned to the complementary or

indirect discourse categories already presented.31

*Limiting Infinitives*

An infinitive often is used with nouns, adjectives, and pronouns

to limit, describe, or explain them by adding some qualifying or

restrictive factor. An example is found in Rev 5:9, 12: Ἅξιος εἶ  
λαβεῖν τὸ βιβλίον καὶ ἀνοῖζαι τὰς σφραγῖδας αὐτοῦ, . . . Ἄξιος . .

28 Ibid., p. 324.

29 Acts 15:23; 23:26; Rom 12:15 (twice); Eph 4:23 (twice); 4:24; Phil 3:16; 2 Thess

3:14; Tit 2:9; Jas 1:1.

30 BDF, 196.

31 Compare a similar problem and solution of the so-called imperatival participle

discussed in my previous article, "The Classification of Participles: A Statistical Study,"

*GTJ* 5 (1984) 163-79.

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TABLE 2

*Comparison of Words Which Govern or Are Limited by Infinitives*

Nouns Adjectives Verbs Periphrastic Verb Phrases

ἀνάγκη (7) ἀναγκαῖον (4) ἀναγκάαζω (10) ἔχειν ἀνάγκην

ἄξιος (11) ἄξιόω (3)

ἀρχή (1) ἄρχομαι (92) ἀρχὴν λαβεῖν

βουλή (1) βούλομαι (39) ἔθεντα βουλήν

γννώμη (1) γινώσκω (2)

δεῖ (120) δέον ἐστίν

δύναμις (1) δυνατός (10) δύναμαι (213)

ἐλπίς (3) ἐλπίζω (13)

ἐνέδρα (1) ἐνεδρεύω (1) ἐνέδραν ποιοῦντες

ἐνέργεια (1) ἐνεργέω (2)

ἐντολή (1) ἐντέλλομαι (4) ἐντολὴν ἔχειν

ἐξοθσία (25) ἔξεστιν (29) ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν or δίδοναι,

ἔξον ἐστιν, ἔξον [ ἐστίν]

ἐπαγγελία (2) ἐπαγγέλλω (2)

ἐπιποθία (1) ἐπιποθέω (4) ἐπιποθίαν ἔχειν

ἔτοιμος (8) ἑτοιμάζω (I) ἑτοίμως ἔχειν, ἐν ἑτοιμῳ ἔχειν   
 εὐκαιρέω (3)

εὐκαιρία (1) θέλω (130)

θέλημα (1)

ὀκνηρόν (1) ὀκνέω (1)

ὀφειλέτης (2) ὀφείλω (27)

παρρησία (1) παρρησιάζω (1) παρρησίαν ἔχειν

πίστις (1) πιστευω (2)

πρέπει (11) πρέπον ἐστίν

προθυμία (1) πρόθυμον (I)

σπουδή (1) σπουδάζω (1) σπουδὴν ποιούμενος poiou<menoj

χάρις (2) χαρίζομαι (3)

χρεία (9) χρείαν ἔχειν

χρόνος (1) χρονίζω (1)

λαβεῖν τῆν δύναμιν καὶ ... κ.τ.λ. / '(the Lamb) is worthy to take the

book and to open its seals. . . worthy to receive power, etc.' The

infinitives explain in what respect worthiness is ascribed. Some

grammarians use the term 'epexegetic' for this usage.

The nouns or adjectives used in this construction are very com-

monly those which are in the semantic range of verbs which cus-

tomarily take the complementary infinitive (those which denote ability,

fitness, readiness, need, desire, etc.). Table 2 gives a comparative

listing of words which govern or are limited by infinitives.

Infinitives Limiting Nouns

The largest category of these limiting infinitives occurs with

nouns (88 instances). An example is found in 1 Cor 9:4: μὴ οὐκ

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ἔχομεν ἐξουσίαν φαγεῖν καὶ πεῖν / 'Do we not have a right to eat

and drink?' The noun ἐξουσίαν is explained by referring it to eating

and drinking. Nouns limited thus by infinitives express either (1)

'power, ability, authority' (ἐξουσία [25], δύναμις [1]); (2) 'desire'

(θέλημα [1], ἐπιποθία [1], προθυμία [1]); (3) 'need, obligation' (χρεῖα

[9], ἀνάγκη [5], ὀφειλέτης [2]); (4) 'time' (καιρός [6], ἡμέρα [3], ὥρα

[1], εὐκαιρία [1], χρόνος [1]); and (5) a miscellaneous list of 31 others.

The infinitive has the genitive article 14 times, the accusative once;

the article is absent 73 times.

Infinitives Limiting Adjectives

The infinitive limits an adjective 43 times. An example is in

2 Tim 2:2: οἴτινες ἱκανοὶ ἔσονται καὶ ἐτέρους διδάξαι / 'who will be

able to teach others also'. Applying the classifications used before for

nouns, these adjectives express (1) 'power, ability, authority' (δυνατός

[8], ἱκανός [6], ἀρκετός [1]); (2) 'desire' (ἕτοιμος and ἑτοίμως [8],

πρόθυμον [1]); (3) 'need, obligation' (ἀναγκαῖον [1]); (4) 'time' (βραδύς

[2], ὀξύς [1], ταχύς [1]); (5) miscellaneous (ἀδικός [1], δυσερμήνευτος

[1], ἐλεύθερος [1]); and a new category, (6) 'fitness' (ἄξιος [11]). Two

of the infinitives have the genitive article, two the accusative, and 39

are anarthrous.

Infinitives Limiting Pronouns

The limiting or describing function of the infinitive is seen when

it stands in apposition to a pronoun. Jas 1:27 has two examples of

this: θρησκεία καθαρὰ ... αὕτη ἐστίν, ἐπισκέπεσθαι ... τηρεῖν /

'This is . . . pure religion, to visit, . . . and to keep'. The pronoun

explained by this construction is usually the demonstrative οὗτος (15

times).32 The interrogative τις is predicate after an infinitive subject

eight times, although six of the examples are found in one statement

reported in three parallel passages.33 Twice an infinitive stands in

apposition to the relative pronoun ὅς or, perhaps more precisely, to

the understood antecedent of the relative. The two passages are Acts

3:18: ὁ δὲ θεὸς ἃ προκατήγγειλεν ... παθεῖν τὸν Χριστὸν αὐτοῦ /

'the things which God announced beforehand, . . . that His Christ

should suffer' (in a more direct sentence the infinitive would be the

object in direct discourse) and Titus 2:2: Σὺ δὲ λάλει ἃ πρέπει τῇ

ὑγιαινούσῃ διδασκαλίᾳ. Πρεσβύτας νηφαλίους εἶναι, κ. τ. λ. / 'Speak

32 Acts 15:29; 26:16; Rom 1:12; 14:13; 1 Cor 7:37; 2 Cor 2:1; 7:11; 1 Thess 4:3, 4, 6

(twice); Heb 9:8; Jas 1:27 (twice); 1 Pet 2:15.

33 Matt 9:5 (twice); Mark 2:9 (twice); Luke 5:23 (twice). The other two are Mark

9:10 and 1 Cor 5:12.

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the things which are fitting for sound doctrine, older men are to be

temperate, etc.' (the infinitive clause expresses that which is πρέρει; in

more direct structure this could be stated, "it is fitting to be temper-

ate, etc.").

Other Appositional Infinitives

A few other infinitives have been classified as appositional. In

Acts 24:15, ἀνάστασιν μέλλειν ἔσεσθαι stands in apposition to ἐλπίδα:

'hope. . . that there is going to be a resurrection'. In I Cor 7:25 w[j

. . . πιστὸς εἶναι / 'as . . . one who is trustworthy' stands in apposition

to the subject of the main verb δίδωμι, as ὠς would indicate. In Rev

2:14 the two infinitives φαγεῖν . . . καὶ πορνεῦσαι are in apposition

with σκάνδαλον, explaining its constituent parts. Rev 12:7 is a diffi-

cult sentence, but the infinitive is most easily explained as being in

apposition to πόλεμος: "there was war in heaven, Michael. . . waging

war with. . . “

The Infinitive as a Simple Noun

In two passages an articular infinitive stands as the object of a

preposition in a structure exactly like those already described (articu-

lar infinitives with a preposition), but in neither case can these be

considered such. Rather, the infinitive seems to be functioning as a

simple noun. In 2 Cor 8:11 (ἐκ τοῦ ἔχειν), the preposition is one

which is not used elsewhere in that construction. Ἐκ τοῦ ἔχειν states

the source from which the completion of the act should come, 'by

your ability' (*NASB*), 'according to your means' (*NIV*), or 'out of that

which you have' (*KJV*--probably clearest; certainly the most literal).

In Heb 2:15 (διὰ παντὸς τοῦ ζῆν), the situation is similar. While διά

is used in the adverbial construction in the sense of 'because' (with

an accusative), it never is so used in the sense of 'through' (with

a genitive). In this passage another factor needs to be considered.

This infinitive ζῆν is the only one in the entire NT which has an

adjectival modifier, παντός. There is evidence that this particular

infinitive became in actual use a virtual noun (like ζωή) to the extent

that in Ignatius frequently it was modified by an adjective and even a

genitive.34

THE "SUBJECT" OF THE INFINITIVE

The quotation marks in this heading indicate that the term

"subject" is being used in a way which needs an explanation. It is

34 A. Buttman, *A Grammar of the New Testament Greek* (Andover: Warren F.

Draper, 1891) 262.

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customary for elementary grammars to say that the subject of an

infinitive is in the accusative case. This gross oversimplification ofthe matter may be a helpful, generalized first step for beginners, but

it soon demands qualification and even correction. One of the major

goals for this study has been a clarification of this rather confusing

problem.

A thorough discussion of the question may be found in Robert-

son.35 He insists that "the inf. is not finite, and, like the participle, has

no subject.”36 With regard to the so-called accusative subject, he

considers "the true nature of the acc. with the inf. as being merely

that of general reference.”37 To the present writer this seems to be

technically correct. The infinitive is a verbal noun, a noun expressing

the abstract notion of the verb, a name given to the action or condi-

tion expressed by the verb. As such it does not need to identify a doer

of the action or a possessor of the condition; if it is desired to indicate

such, it appears as a limiting adjunct rather than a subject. The

accusative of general reference, if used, limits the abstract notion to

its particular application.

But this is not the whole picture. In most occurrences the infini-

tive is referred by the context to a particular doer or possessor of that

abstract verbal notion, and most frequently it is not accusative. In

almost one-half of the NT infinitives (48.8%), it is referred to the

subject of the governing verb which is in the nominative case. The

noun to which an infinitive refers is accusative in 33.1 % of the cases,

dative in 8.9%, genitive in 3.0%, and vocative in 0.2% of the cases. In2.5% of the cases, the doer is not explicitly mentioned in the sentence

and cannot be identified by case. Those which are truly general or

abstract account for 3.6%.

Furthermore, a distinction needs to be made between the "gram-

matical subject" and the "logical, subject" of the infinitive, that is, the

doer or possessor of the verbal idea expressed by an infinitive. Tech-

nically, with Robertson, there is no "grammatical subject." Those

who speak of the accusative as subject probably have in mind that

most commonly, if an explicit "subject" is stated within the infinitive

clause, it is accusative.

In translating infinitives it is common to convert them into

clauses; in many instances they cannot be translated into English in

any other way. That necessitates changing the infinitive into a finite

verb and giving a subject to that verb. In the remainder of this discus-

sion I will be using the term "subject" in the sense of the logical

35 Robertson. *Grammar*. 1082-85.

36 Ibid., 1082.

37 Ibid., 1083.

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subject, the doer of the action of the possessor of the condition

expressed by the infinitive. How this subject relates to the rest of the

sentence is the basis of the analysis given here.

Same as Subject of the Governing Verb

This is the situation with more than half of the infinitives in the

NT. It is most frequently in the nominative case (1115 times), whether

expressed as a noun, pronoun, other substantive, or simply by the as

personal ending of the verb. However, if the governing verb is a

participle (which like the infinitive is not finite and has no grammatical

subject), the grammatical case of the doer of the action of the parti-

ciple is determined by the word with which the participle agrees and

therefore may be any case. An example of a genitive is in Luke 21:28:

ἀρχομένων δὲ τούτων γίνεσθαι / 'when these things begin to come to

pass'. The subject of γίνεσθαι is the same as that of its governing verb

ἀρχομένων; the subject of ἀρχομένων is the substantive it modifies,

τούτων, which is genitive because it is in a genitive absolute construc-

tion (this is the situation in 23 examples). The participle may be a

genitive as object of a preposition (7 times), as a possessive genitive a

(5), or as the genitive object of ἀκουω (1). Another passage involving a

two infinitives is elliptical so that it is difficult to account for the

genitive case.38 There are 13 instances of the participle being dative

because it is an indirect object (7), a predicate dative of possession (in

doxologies) (4), an object of a verb taking the dative (1), or a dative l

of reference (1). For example, I Pet 4:5 has οἳ ἀποδώσουσιν λόγον  
τῷ ἑτοίμως ἔχοντι κρῖναι / 'they shall give account to Him who is

ready to judge'. The subject of κρῖναι is the same as its governing

verb ἔχοντι which is in the dative as indirect object of ἀποδώσουσιν.

There are 40 infinitives whose subject is accusative, the same as its

governing verb (17 are participles and 23 are other infinitives).

Same as Direct Object of Main Verb

A large number (79) of infinitives have as their subjects an accusa-

tive direct object of the main verb. An example is found in Matt

28:20: διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα / 'teaching them to

observe all that'. Αὐτούς may be considered to be the direct object of

διδάσκοντεσ, "teaching them" (cf. Matt 5:2), or as the subject of the

verbal idea in τηρεῖν, "teaching that they should keep. . . ." It is not

always easy to decide which is intended, but it probably is of little

significance either way. In two other instances, where the finite verb

takes a genitive object, the subject of the infinitive is genitive.

38 1 Tim 4:3 (twice).

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Same as Indirect Object of Main Verb

More frequent (171 times) is a similar co-functioning of a noun

as a dative of indirect object or dative of reference and as the subject

of an infinitive. For example, Matt 3:7 reads, τίς ὐπέδειξεν ὑμῖν  
φυγεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς μελλοῦσης ὀργῆς / 'who warned you to flee from the

wrath to come?' The dative pronoun ὑμῖν functions in the main clause

as indirect object of the verb. It is also subject, the doer of the action,

of the infinitive φυγεῖν.39

There are many indicators, however, which warn against putting

the dative on a par with the accusative as subject of the infinitive.

First, there are many places where this co-functioning dative occurs

where other elements of the infinitive clause show that the writer

thinks of the subject as accusative. For example, in Matt 18:8 is

found, καλόν σοί ἐστιν εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν ζωὴν κυλλὸν ἢ χωλόν, ἢ  
δύο χεῖρας ἢ δύο πόδας ἔχοντα / 'it is better for you (dative) to enter

life crippled or lame (accusative), than having (acc.) two hands'. While

soi< is properly dative in the main clause, in the infinitive clause

adjectives and participles referring to the same person are accusative,

as if to agree with σέ. Apparently there was an underlying sense that

called for the accusative, but the abbreviated actual statement per-

mitted the co-functioning. Note that the same structure is used again

in v 9, and cf. the parallel passages, Mark 9:43, 45, 47 where σέ is

used in place of σοί. The difference, if any, seems to be between "it is

good for you to . . ." and "it is good that you should. . . ." This co-

functioning dative with participial modifiers in the accusative is found

also in Luke 5:7, Acts 20:35, and Acts 25:27. Mark 6:39 has καὶ  
ἐπέταξεν αὐτοῖς ἀνακλῖναι πάντας / 'And he commanded them

all to recline'. The indirect object αὐτοῖς is immediately adjacent

to the accusative subject παντας ('them [dative] all [accusative]');

Acts 17:30 is similar. In 1 Tim 6:18 the predicate complement of

the infinitive is accusative even though the subject referred to is

present in a co-functioning dative. Gal 2:6 (cf. v 9) is similar, except

that a co-functioning genitive is used.

Second, this co-functioning is not limited to the dative. It has

already been seen with the accusative direct object. It occurs also with

the genitive.40 Even the nominative could be labelled as co-functioning,

39 This construction has been studied by E. J. Lovelady, "Infinitive Clause Syntax

in the Gospels" (Th.M. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1976) 134-40. One quota-

tion will express the thrust of his conclusion: "The dative word or construction in

question is serving *en portmanteau*, for it co-functions, for practical purposes, both on

the main finite clause level, and on the more restricted infinitive clause level" (p. 137).

40 E.g., Acts 19:16. The subject of the infinitive is expressed in the main clause as

genitive object of a preposition (κατ' αὐτῶν).

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for half of all infinitives show the subject of the main verb co-

functioning as the subject of the infinitive. Here also there are indica-

tions that an understood subject accusative is in the background.

Usually (34 times) when the infinitive is a predicative verb followed

by a subjective complement, that complement is put in the nominative

case if the subject, as subject of the governing verb, is nominative.

But there are two instances where the accusative is used.41 When the

nominative subject is explicitly repeated as reflexive object of the

governing verb (Heb 5:5) it is put in the accusative case.

Third, occasionally when the subject of the infinitive is the same

as some other part of the sentence it is repeated explicitly as an

accusative adjunct of the infinitive. An example of this is found in

2 Cor 2:13: οὐκ ἔχηκα ἄνεσιν τῷ πνεύματί μου τῷ μὴ εὑρεῖν με  
Τίτον / 'I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my

brother Titus there' (*NIV*). The subject of both the main verb and the

infinitive is Paul, nominative as subject of ἔσχηκα, but repeated as an

accusative me in the infinitive clause.

Fourth, even where the subject is abstract or general (see below)

and is not mentioned anywhere in the text, it may be modified by a

participle in the accusative case.42

Same as Some Other Part of the Sentence

A few times (21) the subject of the infinitive is referred to in

other parts of the sentence. There are four instances where those

addressed directly in the vocative case are the doers of the action of

the infinitive. Once a nominative substantival participle and once a

substantive clause introduced by ὅτι and functioning as subject of the

sentence (hence, the clause is nominative) are subject of the infinitive.

The subject of the infinitive is genitive 30 times (genitive of possession

[23 times], genitive object of a preposition [6 times], and a partitive

genitive [1 time]). In 20 instances it is expressed by a word in a dative

relation to the sentence, (predicate dative of possession [9 times],

dative of reference [9 times], dative of advantage [1 time], and dative

object of a preposition [1 time]). There are five examples where the

subject is accusative as the object of a preposition.

Subject Explicitly Expressed in the Infinitive Clause

A very large number (608) of infinitives have their subject ex-

plicitly stated within the infinitive clause, either as a noun (228 times)

41 Luke 11:8, Acts 18:3. Both are articular infinitives after a preposition.

42 E.g., I Pet 2: 15. The subject is general-it is true of anyone. But it is modified

in the infinitive clause by an accusative adverbial participle ἀγαθοποιοῦντες.

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or pronoun (380 times) or some other substantival expression (7 times).

The case is always accusative.43 Apparently this is the basis for the

prevalent notion that the infinitive takes an accusative subject. It

seems to be true when the subject is specifically included as part of

the infinitive clause.

Subject Unexpressed; to be Supplied from Context

In 58 instances there is no mention anywhere in the sentence of

the doer of the action of the infinitive, but from the general context

this subject can be understood. Since it is not part of the sentence its

case is undetermined.

Subject is Abstract, General or Indefinite

In 82 instances the subject of the infinitive is best considered to

be abstract, general, or indefinite. It applies to any or all; there is no

specific doer or possessor involved. Matt 9:5 offers an example: τί

γάρ ἐστιν εὐκοπώτερον, εἰπεῖν ... ἣ εἰπεῖν / 'For which is easier,

to say. . . or to say'. The one doing the saying is not in mind,

it is true whoever says it. Matt 12:12 reads, ἔξεστιν τοῖς σάββασιν  
καλῶς ποιεῖν / 'it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath'. Compare

also Mark 12:33, Jas 1:27.

Indeed, Robertson insists (as has already been pointed out) that

this is true of all infinitives by their nature as abstract nouns and this

abstract quality is referenced to particular cases by the accusative of

general reference. But this seems to ignore the majority of instances

where a particular "subject" is present to the minds of the readers in

other parts of the sentence. It is not true that all infinitives which do

not have an accusative of reference are to be considered abstract and

general.

Summary

The following statements will summarize the conclusions of this

study regarding the subject of the infinitive. Most frequently the sub-

ject is the same as that of the governing verb; hence, in the nominative

case except when the governing verb is a participle--then it may be inany case. Very often the subject of the infinitive co-functions in a

grammatical relation to some other part of the sentence, such as

direct or indirect object, object of preposition, a substantive participle

43 Clyde W. Votaw ("The Use of the Infinitive in Biblical Greek" [Ph.D. disserta-

tion, University of Chicago, 1896] 58) states, "When the subject of the infinitive is

expressed it is always in the accusative case."

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TABLE 3

Cases Used as “Subject” of Infinitives

Easily General

Under- or

stood Indefinite Nom. Gen. Dat. Acc. Voc. Total

Subject Same as Governing

Verb 1115 38 13 40 1206

Same as Direct Object 2 79 81

Same as Indirect Object 171 171

Same as Some Other Part

of Sentence 2 30 20 5 4 61

Explicit in Infinitive Clause 632 632

Not Expressed 58 82 140

Total 58 82 1117 70 204 756 4 2291

2.5% 3.6% 48.8% 3.0% 8.9% 33.0% 0.2%

or adjective, a possessive construction, etc. This co-functioning results

in the subject being in any of the cases. When the subject is expressly

stated as an adjunct of the infinitive it is always in the accusative case.

The accusative also must be understood to be present to the mind

even when the subject co-functions with some other non-accusative

element of the sentence. These conclusions are summarized statisti-

cally in Table 3.

ANARTHROUS VERSUS ARTICULAR INFINITIVES

In the NT the infinitive is anarthrous 1977 times (86.3%). The

article appears with it 314 times (13.7%). The reasons for this and the

significance of it have been the subject of discussion among gram-

marians (with most of the discussion long in theory and short in

substance). This presentation will attempt to summarize the situation

in three negative observations and a positive but general suggestion.

Not for Case Identification

The use of the article does not seem to be for the purpose of

identifying the case of the non-declinable abstract infinitive, although

it does that incidentally at least part of the time. In the vast majority

of instances there is no article, and no reason is apparent why these

are not just as much in need of case identification as those where

it is present. Even when the article is present it does not distinguish

between the nominative and accusative (τό serves for both). But this

is particularly demonstrated by the genitive article (τοῦ) with the

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infinitive, which is. used for every case function; with subject infini-

tives which are nominative, with purpose infinitives which are closest

to the original dative-instrumental case, and with the accusative infini-

tive as object of verbs, as well as with some which stand in a properly

genitive relationship. J. H. Moulton speaks of the τοῦ as ". . . retain-

ing its genitive force almost as little as the genitive absolute.”44

*Not for Function Indicators*

The case of the article does not seem to be related to the classi-

fication of infinitive functions.45 Every classification except one shows

both articular and anarthrous constructions. The one exception, the

adverbial use of the infinitive with prepositions, does seem to be

characterized by demanding the article, although even one of these is

anarthrous.46 The article does identify which meaning of the preposi-

tion is intended when the preposition can use more than one case.

For example, διὰ τό indicates that διά means 'on account of' rather

than 'through'. But apparently this is not the reason for its use, since

it is used even where the preposition has only one case.

*Not for Case Relationships*

We have already seen that the genitive article is used with some

subject infinitives. Object infinitives have an article only 27 times; 11

are accusative as would be expected, but 16 are genitive, not one of

which goes with a verb which normally takes the genitive.47 With

purpose and result infinitives 41 genitive and one accusative articles

are found; none of them use the dative which might be expected.

Even with the limiting or epexegetic infinitive the article does not

indicate the case relation which exists between the noun or adjective

and the infinitive construed with it. The vast majority are anarthrous,

and when the article is used it is usually the ambiguous τοῦ. The same

44 James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. I, *Prole-*

*gomena* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908) 216.

45 A. T. Robertson (*Grammar*, 1063) says, "The articular inf. has all the main uses

of the anarthrous inf."

46 πρίν is not strictly a preposition; it is a temporal adverb which takes the infini-

tive in this construction. It is used only twice elsewhere in the NT with finite verbs

when the sentence is negative. This does not, however, explain the absence of the

article; cf. ἕως, which also is a temporal adverb, and uses the article with the infinitive

in this construction. See above and n. 26.

47 In Rom 15:22 ἐγκόπτω / 'to hinder from' is followed by the genitive infinitive,

which seems a natural case for this meaning although there are no other examples of its

use with this verb. In 2 Cor 1:8 a genitive infinitive follows the verb ἐξαπορέω as it

does elsewhere, although not in the NT.

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adjective may be followed by τοῦ (Luke 24:25: βραδεῖς . . . τοῦ

πιστεύειν) and τό (Jas 1:19: βραδὺς εἰς τὸ λαλῆσαι). The noun

ἐξουσία is explained by an infinitive 25 times; only once does the

infinitive have the article τοῦ, but there is no clear difference in sense.

Nouns expressing time have the epexegetic infinitive 12 times, five

with τοῦ and seven anarthrous, apparently with no discernible case

distinction.

Perhaps the Same as with Nouns

The significance of the article with infinitives, if there is any,

apparently must be sought in other directions. Robertson says that

"The article has just the effect that the Greek Article has with any

abstract substantive, that of distinction and contrast.”48 He explains

varied uses of τοῦ as stylistic, "It is only in Luke (Gospels 24, Acts 24)

and Paul (13) that tou? with the inf. (without preposition) is common.

They have five-sixths of the examples and Luke himself has two-thirds

of the total in the New Testament.”49 Blass-Debrunner says; "The

article with the infinitive, strictly speaking, has the same (anaphoric)

significance as it has with nouns. . . . In general the anaphoric signifi-

cance of the article, i.e., its reference to something previously men-

tioned or otherwise well known, is more or less evident."50 Such

statements are general enough to sound impressive but vague enough

to provide little help in particular instances. For practical purposes

the situation may be summarized in a couple suggestions. In the vast

majority of cases no question need be asked; the 86% of the anar-

throus infinitives clearly are the normal situation. The 14% with the

article seem to be very like those without; perhaps it is worthwhile

exploring a general indication of contrast or specific references. But

perhaps, as Robertson comments, it is a matter of style or personal

whim. Or, may I suggest, it may be simply a grammatical idiom-

almost half of the infinitives with the article belong to a grammatical

construction (object of a preposition) which apparently required it.

The use of the article with infinitives is summarized in Table 4.

A FURTHER STUDY PROPOSED

This article may fittingly close with a suggestion for another very

interesting and it is believed very instructive field of study related to

the NT usage of the infinitive--a statistical study of word order pat-

terns. Someone familiar with the techniques of tagmemic grammar

48 Robertson, *Grammar*, 1065.

49 Ibid., 1067.

50 BDF,205.

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TABLE 4

Use of Article with Infinitives

Anarthrous Nom. Gen. Dat. Acc. Total

I. Subject Infinitives

Impersonal Verbs 202 1 203

Predicative Verbs 75 10 2 1 88

Other Verbs 3 3

Passive Verbs 20 2 22

2. Object Infinitives

Complementary 876 8 8 892

Indirect Discourse 353 8 1 362

Other 1 2 3

3. Adverbial Infinitives

Purpose or Result 291 41 1 333

With Prepositions 11 12 56 131 210

Causal 1 1

4. Absolute Infinitives

Infinitive Absolute 1 1

Imperatival (?) 11 11

5. Limiting Infinitives

With Nouns 73 14 1 88

With Adjectives 40 2 42

With Pronouns 18 1 5 24

Apposition 5 1 6

6. Simple Nouns 2 2

Totals 1977 16 91 57 150 2291

could explore the whole problem of word order within the infinitive

clause--of such elements as subject, object, predicate complement,

adverbial modifiers, and other adjuncts along with the infinitive itself,

and of the whole infinitive clause within the sentence framework.

Perhaps insights of exegetical significance may be discovered; certainly

more confidence regarding the language patterns of NT Greek would

be the product. An important beginning in this direction has already

been made by Dr. Lovelady, "Infinitive Clause Syntax in the Gospels"

(Th.M. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1976). It needs to be

completed with the assistance now available from the computer.

The use of a ἵνα-clause as a substitute for the infinitive will be

dealt with in this writer's next proposed article: "A Statistical Study

of the Subjunctive."

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