

MH EKΛYOMENOI IN GALATIANS 6:9

Aaron Michael Jensen
(aaron.michael.jensen@gmail.com)

Summary

The final phrase of Galatians 6:9, μὴ ἐκλύόμενοι, is today almost universally understood as a conditional participle, placing a strong warning on the end of Paul's encouragement to persist in doing good. This article argues on grammatical, contextual, and historical grounds that the participle would be better understood as having a 'manner' shading and as expressing the ceaseless nature of the eschatological harvest as an exhortation to ceaseless service in the present.

1. Introduction

In Galatians 6:9 Paul uses the promise of the eschatological harvest as positive motivation to encourage the Galatians to persist in doing good, writing τὸ δὲ καλὸν ποιοῦντες μὴ ἐγκακῶμεν, καιρῷ γὰρ ἰδίῳ θερίσομεν, 'In doing good, let us not grow weary, for in its time we will reap.' Paul then concludes this sentence with the participial phrase μὴ ἐκλύόμενοι. This participial phrase, widely assumed to be a conditional participle, is always translated something along the lines of 'if we do not give up'¹ and is said by commentators to 'set a condition on reaping'² and end Paul's exhortation on a 'somber note'³ and in a 'negative way'.⁴ Virtually all modern English commentators share this

¹ For example, 'If we faint not' (KJV, AKJV), 'If we do not lose heart' (NKJV, RSV), 'If we do not grow weary' (NASB), 'If we do not give up' (ESV, ISV, LEB, NET, NIV, NRSV), 'If we don't give up' (CEB, CSB, GW, NLT).

² Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998): 433.

³ A. Andrew Das, *Galatians* (Concordia Commentary; St Louis: Concordia, 2014): 622.

⁴ Douglas Moo, *Galatians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013): 388.

interpretation,⁵ and almost none of them seem to even consider any other possibilities for this phrase.⁶

But is a conditional participle the only possibility for understanding this phrase? And is it the best understanding of this phrase? In this article I will lay out the reasons for considering, and also preferring, a different interpretation – an interpretation which takes the circumstantial participial phrase *μὴ ἐκλυόμενοι* not as a conditional participle that expresses the condition under which the future harvest will take place, but as a participle of manner that expresses the manner in which the future harvest will take place: *‘At the proper time we will harvest untiringly, that is, unceasingly.’*

2. The Nature of Participial Shadings

In a discussion like this over which interpretive shading should be assigned to a circumstantial participle, it is important to recognise that labels such as ‘conditional’ or ‘manner’ or the rest of the possible shadings are referring to exactly that: shadings. With shadings we are not dealing with meaning which is encoded in the verb itself, but trying to identify the implicit but unclarified relationship between the action of the participle and that of the main verb. Robertson’s words on conditional participles are helpful here: ‘In such examples one must not think that the participle, for instance, means “if” ... The condition is hinted at, not stated.’⁷ This would imply that if a participle truly has conditional force the conditional sense hinted at should be at the very least discernable even if a translation did not use the word ‘if’. Such does appear to be the case for all of the other instances Robertson gives of conditional participles within the New Testament (Luke 9:25; 19:23;

⁵ The lone exception here would seem to be found in Max Zerwick, who notes the possibility of an alternative to this conditional interpretation in brief comments in two works of his. Max Zerwick, *Biblical Greek Illustrated by Examples* (Rome: Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1963): § 441; Max Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974): 576.

⁶ One modern commentator who does show an awareness of other interpretive possibilities is Ronald Fung, who, however, follows Charles Ellicott in quickly dismissing any non-conditional possibilities. Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988): 297, n. 82. Charles J. Ellicott, *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians with a Revised Translation* (Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1867): 131.

⁷ Archibald T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934): 1022.

Rom. 2:27; 1 Cor. 11:29; 1 Tim. 4:4; Heb. 2:3; 7:12) as well as for the additional instances given by Wallace (Matt. 21:22; Luke 15:4; possibly Acts 15:29; Acts 18:21; Rom. 7:3; 1 Cor. 6:1; 8:10; Col. 2:20; possibly 1 Tim. 4:6; 1 Tim. 6:8; Heb. 10:26; 11:32; 1 Pet. 3:6; possibly 2 Pet. 1:10).⁸ In all these passages, a translation which does not use ‘if’ still preserves the same basic relationship between the participle and the verb it modifies – all that changes is how explicit it is that the action of the participle (and hence the modified verb as well) may not be true. But when Galatians 6:9 is translated without the word ‘if’, any notion of it being a condition is difficult to perceive, and the sense of the translation is ostensibly different than if the word ‘if’ were there:

With ‘if’: ... for in its time we will reap if we do not tire.

Without ‘if’: ... for in its time we will reap not tiring.

I think this is indicative of the fact that the conditional interpretation of μὴ ἐκλυόμενοι is not a natural reading of this participle which needs only the help of a little shading to bring out the contextual nuance, but a thought foreign to the phrase itself which must be imported. When the Greek participle is simply rendered as an English participle, the label ‘manner’ would seem to be the most natural shading to assign to it.

3. Negation Practices in Koine Greek

Perhaps one reason why interpreters tend to immediately jump to a conditional shading is the use of the negative μή as opposed to οὐ. In Classical Greek this would be a certain indicator that the participle carried conditional force.⁹ In Koine Greek, as is found in the New Testament, however, it is standard for the participle to be negated with μή without any condition being implied.¹⁰ So while Paul’s use of μή

⁸ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996): 632-33.

⁹ Herbert Weir Smyth, *A Greek Grammar for Colleges* (New York: American Book Company, 1920): § 2045, 2067, 2728.

¹⁰ Ernest De Witt Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1898): § 485; F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1961): § 430; Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1999): 281; James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek: Volume 1. Prolegomena* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark,

may prejudice later interpreters towards a conditional understanding, it would not have given his first hearers any indication of the sense in which he was using this participle.

4. Aspectual Considerations

Where a grammatical clue to the sense of *μὴ ἐκλυόμενοι* is found is in the fact that this is a present and not an aorist participle. Present participles have imperfective aspect whereas aorist participles have perfective aspect. Although non-indicative verbs such as participles do not encode tense itself, the respective aspects of present and aorist participles readily lend to their being used in certain implicit temporal relationships between the action of the participle and that of the main verb. Since an aorist participle depicts an action as complete, often the action of the participle is going to have occurred previous to that of the main verb, while a present participle, depicting an action as ongoing, will almost always be contemporaneous to the action of the main verb.¹¹

While conditional participles can be used in the present and to speak of an action contemporaneous to their apodosis,¹² such an interpretation will not work in Galatians 6:9. If *μὴ ἐκλυόμενοι* were functioning as a

2006): 170; Stanley E. Porter, Jeffrey T. Reed, and Matthew Brook O'Donnell, *Fundamentals of New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010): 39.

¹¹ Older grammarians would have explained this phenomenon by saying that the tenses of the participles express time considered relatively from the main verb. But this phenomenon is noted and documented also by more recent grammarians who rightly reject an explicit encoding of tense within the participle. Buist M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990): 407; Albert Rijksbaron, *The Syntax and Semantics of the Verb in Classical Greek: An Introduction* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1994): 114; Wallace, *Grammar*, 614; Porter, *Idioms*, 188; Constantine R. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008): 72; Constantine R. Campbell, *Verbal Aspect and Non-Indicative Verbs: Further Soundings in the Greek of the New Testament* (New York: Lang, 2008): 22-23. While they note that an aorist participle is not uncommonly used to express contemporaneous action, the present participle they find to be used almost universally only in contexts in which the action is contemporaneous to that of the main verb.

¹² Drawing from Robertson's and Wallace's lists of conditional participles, the following conditional participles are found in the present: Matt. 21:22; Acts 15:29; 18:21; Rom. 2:27; 7:3; 1 Cor. 6:1; 8:10; 11:29; Col. 2:20; 1 Tim. 4:6; 6:8; Heb. 10:26; 11:32; 1 Pet. 3:6; 2 Pet. 1:10. In all of these cases, however, the action of the participle is contemporaneous to that of the main verb which functions as its apodosis, in stark contrast with what would be the case with *ἐκλυόμενοι* in Gal. 6:9 if it were a conditional participle.

condition of the harvesting, it would have to be speaking about the Christian's act of not giving up in the sowing, the doing good – something which occurs *before* the harvest.¹³ The fact that ἐκλυόμενοι is present and not aorist strongly suggests that the action of this participle is taking place at the same time as that of θερίσομεν and is not a previous condition of a subsequent harvesting. However, a present participle as appears in the text would be a natural morphological choice to express the manner in which the harvest takes place.

5. Word-Order Considerations

The word order used in Galatians 6:9 gives us another strong indication that μὴ ἐκλυόμενοι is an action happening at the same time as θερίσομεν and not before it. Porter has noted that participles which precede the main verb in word order also tend to precede it in sequence of action, whereas participles which follow the main verb tend to denote action either contemporaneous or subsequent to it.¹⁴ From the perspective of discourse analysis, Runge has documented how participles found in front of the main verb 'set the stage for the main action that follows, but the action is backgrounded', while participles found after the main verb 'often provid[e] more specific explanation of what is meant by the main action. In most cases, they practically spell out what the main action looks like.'¹⁵

Conditional participles certainly can be found following their main verb.¹⁶ However, as was seen above in the section addressing the

¹³ I am unaware of anyone who proposes that ἐκλυόμενοι as a conditional participle here expresses a protasis which is to be understood as contemporaneous with the harvesting, since that would imply that the continuance of the eschatological harvest, once entered, is conditioned on one's ability to continue in the reaping. Such an interpretation would be strange, as it would raise questions about the perfection and the eternality of the afterlife and would also have Paul undercutting his own encouragement as he gives it.

¹⁴ Porter, *Idioms*, 188; Porter et al., *Fundamentals*, 110.

¹⁵ Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis* (Bellingham: Lexham, 2010): 249-68.

¹⁶ Drawing from Robertson's and Wallace's lists of conditional participles, the following conditional participles follow their main verb: Luke 9:25; Acts 18:21; Rom. 2:27; 1 Cor. 6:1; 11:29; Heb. 2:3; 11:32; 1 Tim. 4:4; 1 Pet. 3:6. In all of these cases, however, the action of the participle is contemporaneous to that of the main verb which functions as its apodosis, in stark contrast with what would be the case with ἐκλυόμενοι in Gal. 6:9 if it were a conditional participle.

participle's aspect, interpreting ἐκλύόμενοι as a conditional participle describing the Christian's persistence prior to receiving the harvest would mean that the action of ἐκλύόμενοι would have to have happened before that of θερίσομεν. So, in light of the tendency exhibited by participles when it comes to their relative word order, if ἐκλύόμενοι were a conditional participle here, it would be more natural for it to have been placed before the rest of the clause. But as a participle with a manner shading which, to use Runge's words, 'practically spell[s] out what the main action looks like', the word's location at the end of the clause, after θερίσομεν, is what would be expected.

6. Contextual Considerations

There are also two contextual factors which suggest that μὴ ἐκλύόμενοι describes the nature of the harvest and not the condition under which it will occur. The first comes from within the verse itself. A synonym of ἐκλύομαι appears earlier in the verse: ἐγκακέω.¹⁷ An interpretation which sees μὴ ἐκλύόμενοι as describing the manner of the harvest (as opposed to the condition under which it will occur) results in a sentence which has a sense of symmetry to it: 'Let us not grow weary in doing good, because at the proper time we will harvest without growing weary.' This kind of symmetrical balance¹⁸ seems very likely to be an intended rhetorical effect and should give the non-conditional interpretation a degree of priority over interpretations which would feature less artfulness.

The second contextual factor comes from a consideration of the two previous verses where the discussion of sowing and reaping was begun: 'For whatever a man sows, that is also what he will reap. For the one who sows for his flesh will reap destruction from the flesh, but the one who sows for the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit.' In these statements the question is not whether or not someone will have a

¹⁷ These two words are treated as a single item in Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996): § 25.288.

¹⁸ While the two clauses of this verse are not symmetrical grammatically in that the γάρ-clause is subordinate to the main clause, this does not preclude the subordinate clause from having a meaning which corresponds to and rhetorically balances with that of the main clause.

harvest in the future. The question instead is the nature of that harvest. So it would not seem to follow as well to say in verse 9 that if one gives up then there would be no harvest when the previous verses asserted the inevitability of some form of harvest. This too is a mark against the conditional interpretation of μὴ ἐκλυόμενοι. In favour of the manner interpretation, however, verse 8 specifically mentioned the fact that the life reaped from the Spirit is eternal, which would dovetail nicely with μὴ ἐκλυόμενοι then depicting the manner of such reaping as being unending.

7. The History of Interpretation

While interpreting μὴ ἐκλυόμενοι as a conditional participle has become standard in recent centuries, my proposal to understand the participle as expressing manner is nothing new. In fact, it is by far the more ancient understanding of the phrase. This is suggested, first, by two of the ancient versions. The Syriac Peshitta has *wlā tema'n lan* ('and we will not be weary'), attaching the final phrase to the rest of this verse using a basic copulative conjunction.¹⁹ Such a construction is

¹⁹ Nöldeke states that 'instances ... where the *w* ["and"] introduces a pure conditional clause[] are rare in original writings in Syriac, as the more distinct *kd* ["when/although/because/while"] is used for this purpose'. Theodor Nöldeke, *Compendious Syriac Grammar*, trans. James A. Crichton (London: Williams & Norgate, 1904): § 334. Since the original Greek of Gal. 6:9 does not make use of a copulative conjunction such as καί, the use of a conditional *w* ('and') cannot be dismissed as a feature of translational Syriac, so it would have to be considered a feature of Syriac itself which was introduced into this verse by the Peshitta, which would be a rather unusual choice in the face of clearer alternatives. When specifically cataloging Syriac conditional constructions, Nöldeke does not even mention the use of *w* ('and') (*Syriac*, § 374-78). What is more striking is that Nöldeke, in his cataloging of the more circumstantial uses of *w* ('and'), happens to include a phrase from *The Homilies of Aphraates* (184, 5) which is virtually identical to the Peshitta translation of the last phrase of Gal. 6:9: '*hālén kulhén ... dketbet 'hedtāk ḥabībī wlā me'nat lī* "all this that I have written I have reminded thee of, beloved, without being wearied"' (*Syriac*, § 334). William Wright, *The Homilies of Aphraates, the Persian Sage, Edited from Syriac Manuscripts of the Fifth and Sixth Centuries in the British Museum, with an English Translation. Vol. 1: The Syriac Text* (London and Edinburgh: Williams & Norgate, 1869). Here in Aphraates it is clear that this final phrase does not express a protasis but manner. Since the only difference between Aphraates's construction and that of Peshitta Gal. 6:9 is number (Aphraates is speaking in singular) and tense (unlike in Gal. 6:9, Aphraates is referring to the past so he uses the perfect instead of the imperfect), this statement from Aphraates helps to confirm how the Peshitta rendering of Gal. 6:9 was meant to be understood.

It is worth further noting that if the Peshitta translators did understand this to be a conditional clause referring to an act of not giving up which would be logically and

not used in the translation of any of the other verbs labelled as conditional participles by either Robertson or Wallace.²⁰ In Luke 1:64, however, εὐλογῶν, a participle expressing manner, is similarly rendered in Syriac with a basic copulative conjunction.

Much like the Peshitta, the Sahidic Coptic translates μὴ ἐκλυόμενοι as *ntnšosm an*, ‘and we will not be faint’, opting for a conjunctive prefix over a conditional prefix or even a circumstantial converter.²¹ No other conditional participle in the New Testament, as identified by either Robertson or Wallace, which follows its main verb is rendered in Sahidica by a conjunctive prefix.²²

Ancient Greek-speaking expositors of this text which are extant also overwhelmingly favour a non-conditional interpretation of the phrase. Chrysostom,²³ Theodoret,²⁴ John of Damascus,²⁵ Oecumenius,²⁶ and

chronologically prior to its apodosis, their retention of the Greek word order in placing this phrase after its main verb would be a deviation from the version’s general tendency, as noted by Brock, to ‘completely restructure the sentence it is translating’, among other reasons, in keeping with its ‘prefer[ance] to give the verbs in their logical order’. Sebastian P. Brock, ‘VII. Limitations of Syriac in Representing Greek’ in *The Early Versions of the New Testament: Their Origin, Transmission and Limitations*, Bruce M. Metzger (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977): 83-98, esp. 89.

²⁰ In some cases the conditional shading of the participle is made explicit in translation using the conditional conjunction *ʿen* (‘if’) (Luke 15:4; Acts 18:21; 1 Tim. 4:4, 6; Heb. 2:3; 10:26). In some cases the circumstantial nature of the participle is rendered with the subordinating conjunction *kad* (‘when/although/because/while’) (Acts 15:29; Rom. 7:3; 1 Cor. 6:1; 1 Pet. 3:6; 2 Pet. 1:10).

²¹ Layton characterises the conjunctive prefix as ‘express[ing] the next distinct action in sequence ... and closely related or synonymous action’. Bentley Layton, *A Coptic Grammar with Chrestomathy and Glossary: Sahidic Dialect* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000): § 352. This alone rules out any possibility that the Sahidic Coptic translator understood this verb to refer to a growing faint which would be previous to the harvesting, as the conditional interpretation of the verb would require. Layton also states that that ‘apart from signalling sequentiality’ the conjunctive prefix ‘expresses no other grammatical categories or lexical content – no time relation, mood, aspect, particular kind of subordination, or the like’ (*Coptic*, § 351), meaning that it would lack the ability to mark a protasis. Layton further lists a number of conditional constructions possible in Coptic, but a conjunctive prefix is not found among the options for expressing a protasis (*Coptic*, § 495-501).

²² In some cases the conditional shading of the participle is made explicit by the choice of a conditional prefix (Luke 15:4; Acts 15:29; 1 Tim. 4:6). More frequently the circumstantial nature of the participle is rendered by the use of a circumstantial converter (Matt. 21:22; Luke 9:25; Acts 18:21; Rom. 2:27; 7:3; 1 Cor. 6:1; 8:10; 11:29; 1 Tim. 4:4; 6:8; Heb. 2:3; 10:26; 11:32; 1 Pet. 3:6; 2 Pet. 1:10).

²³ Ἐπὶ μὲν γὰρ τῶν γηπόνων οὐχ ὁ σπεύρων μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ θερίζων πολὺν ὑπομένει τὸν πόνον, αὐχμῶ καὶ κονιορτῶ καὶ πολλῇ μαχόμενος ταλαιπωρία· τότε δὲ οὐδὲν τούτων ἐνι, φησὶν· ἃ καὶ παραδηλῶν ἔλεγε· Καίρῳ γὰρ ἰδίῳ θερίσομεν μὴ ἐκλυόμενοι. (‘For in the case of husbandmen it is not only the sower but also the harvester who endures much toil, fighting against thirst and dust and great distress. But

Theophylact²⁷ all take μὴ ἐκλυόμενοι to describe the nature of the harvesting – its manner – without even mentioning any possibility of giving the participle a conditional shading,²⁸ suggesting that it may never have even occurred to them as a viable interpretation.²⁹ Of the Greek-speaking commentators, only Photius I seems to have preferred the conditional sense.³⁰ Additionally, Latin writers such as Jerome³¹ and Ambrose³² also share the non-conditional interpretation.

he says that then there will be none of these things for someone. And to indicate these things he said, “For in its own time we will harvest not growing faint.”) John Chrysostom, *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Galatas* (PG 61:677).

²⁴ Μηδὲν τῶν ἀνιαρῶν διακοπτέτω τὴν περὶ τὰ καλὰ προθυμίαν. Πόνου γὰρ δίχα θερίσομεν τὰ σπειρόμενα· τοῦτο γὰρ ἔφη, μὴ ἐκλυόμενοι. Ἐπὶ μὲν γὰρ τῶν αἰσθητῶν σπερμάτων καὶ ὁ σπόρος ἔχει πόνον, καὶ ὁ ἀμητός ὡσαύτως· διαλύει δὲ πολλάκις τοὺς ἀμῶντας καὶ τὸ τῆς ὥρας θερμόν· ἀλλ’ ἐκεῖνος οὐ τοιοῦτος ὁ ἀμητός· πόνου γὰρ ἐστὶ καὶ ἰδρώτος ἐλευθερός. (‘Let no troubling thing interrupt your eagerness for what is good. For without toil we will harvest what has been sown. That is why he said “Not growing faint”. For in the case of perceptible seed both the sowing has toil, and the reaping does too, and often this brings the reapers and the daily harvest to an end. But not so with that kind of reaping, because it is free of toil and sweat.’) Theodoret of Cyrillus, *Commentarius in Omnes Pauli Epistolas* (PG 82:501).

²⁵ «Καιρῷ γὰρ ἰδίῳ θερίσομεν, μὴ ἐκλυόμενοι.» Οὕχ ὥσπερ ὁ σαρκικός ἄπορος, φησί, καὶ ἐν τῷ ἀμητῷ πολλὸν ἔχει κόπον, οὕτω καὶ ὁ πνευματικός, ἀλλ’ ἐν ἀναπαύσει γίνεται πολλῇ. (‘“For in its time we will harvest not growing faint.” Unlike the fleshly [harvest], he says, which is difficult and has much labour in the reaping, the spiritual [harvest], on the other hand, takes place with much rest.’) John of Damascus, *Expositio in Epistolas Pauli* (PG 95:817).

²⁶ Εἴτα ἐπειδὴ θερισμοῦ ἐμνημόνευσεν, αὐτὸς δὲ κόπου δεῖται καὶ καμάτου, προσέθηκε, «Μὴ ἐκλυόμενοι,» ὥσει ἔλεγεν· Ὁ θερίζων τότε, οὐ κάμνει, οὐδὲ ἐκλύεται, ὥς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ τοῦτῳ. Μὴ τοίνυν ἀκούσαντες θερισμόν, πάλιν καὶ τότε μοχθεῖν ὑπονοήσητε. (‘Then, since he mentioned a harvest, but one which lacks labor and work, he added, “Not growing faint”, as if he were saying, “The one who harvests then does not work or grow faint as in this world. So do not suppose, when you hear of a harvest, that you will be weary again then too.”’) Oecumenius of Tricca, *Commentaria in Epistolas Pauli* (PG 118:1161).

²⁷ Εἴτα ἐπειδὴ μέγα ἀπήτησε. Τίθησι καὶ τὸ ἐπαθλον εὐθύς, ὅτι “Θερίσομεν.” Πῶς; Μὴ ἐκλυόμενοι, τουτέστι, μηδένα κόπον ἔχοντες, ἀλλὰ πᾶσαν ἀνάπαυσιν. Ἐνταῦθα μὲν γὰρ αὐχμοὶ καὶ κόποι ἐν τῷ θερισμῷ· ἐκεῖ δὲ οὐχ οὕτως. (‘Then, when he has demanded great things, he also immediately sets forth the prize: “We will harvest”. How? “Not growing faint”, that is, not having toil but all rest. For here there are thirsts and labours in the harvest, but that is not the way it is there.’) Theophylact of Bulgaria, *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Galatas* PG 124:1025.

²⁸ The exception to this is Oecumenius, who relates the opinion of Photius I cited below.

²⁹ On the validity of the argument from the silence of the Greek Fathers, see Moisés Silva, *Philippians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005): 27.

³⁰ Ἡ «Μὴ ἐκλυόμενοι», τουτέστι μὴ ἀποναρκῶντες, μηδὲ τῆς ἀγαθοεργίας ἀφιστάμενοι. Τῶν γὰρ εἰς τέλος ἀγωνιζομένων ἐστὶν ὁ στέφανος. (‘Or, “Not growing faint”, that is, not growing inactive or abstaining from doing good. For the crown is for those who struggle to the end.’) Photius I of Constantinople, quoted in Oecumenius, *Commentaria* (PG 118:1161).

This non-conditional interpretation also ostensibly persisted for years. It can be found in Anselm,³³ Aquinas,³⁴ de Lyra,³⁵ and Erasmus,³⁶ and later was a common interpretation within the Reformation tradition. Martin Luther himself translated the participle *ohne Aufhören* ('without ceasing'), and his comments elsewhere repeat this non-conditional interpretation.³⁷ Virtually the same interpretation as Luther is also found in Heinrich Bullinger,³⁸ Johannes Brenz,³⁹

³¹ *pro qualitate vel diversitate sementis, diversas nos facere messuras, centesimum et sexagesimum, et tricesimum fructum, quam segetem nemo potest metere deficiens.* ('According to the quality and difference in sowing, we reap different harvests – a hundred, sixty, and thirty times as much fruit, a crop which no one can reap while growing weary.') Jerome, *Commentaria in Epistolam ad Galatas* (PL 26:432).

³² *'Bonum autem facientes non deficiamus; tempore enim proprio metemus infatigabiles.' Hoc dicit, quia qui fortis est ad seminandum, fortis erit et ad metendum, id est, sic recipiet, quomodo facit.* ("But in doing good let us not grow weary, for in the proper time we will reap tirelessly." He says this because those who have the strength for sowing will have the strength for reaping, that is, he will receive in the way he acts.) Ambrose of Milan, *Commentaria in Epistolas B. Pauli* (PL 17:391).

³³ *non deficientes . i . incessanter & sine fine: quia sicut non deficiamus seminando, sic non deficiemus metendo.* ("Not growing faint", that is, ceaselessly and without end, for just as we have not grown faint in sowing, so also we will not grow faint in reaping.") Anselm of Canterbury, *Enarrationes in epistolas S. Pauli*, h.l.

³⁴ *Et merito non est deficiendum, quia expectamus remunerationem aeternam et indeficientem. Unde subdit tempore enim suo metemus non deficientes. Unde dicit Augustinus: si homo non imposuerit finem operi, nec Deus imponet remunerationi.* ('And rightly we must not grow faint, because we await an eternal and untiring reward. That is why he adds, "for in its time we will reap without growing faint". That is why Augustine says, "If a man has not put an end to his work, God also will not put an end to his reward."') Thomas Aquinas, *Super Epistolam B. Pauli ad Galatas lectura*, c. 6 l. 2.

³⁵ *Tempore enim suo me. non defici. Quia merces illa erit aeterna.* ("For at its time we will reap without growing faint." Because that reward is eternal.) Nicolaus de Lyra, *Biblia Sacra cum glossis, interlineari & ordinaria*, h.l.

³⁶ *nam suo tempore fructus continget a deo nunquam interiturus, proque temporariis officiis merces reponetur aeterna.* ('For at its time never-ending fruit will come from God, and for temporary duties an eternal payment will be given back.') Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, *Paraphrases Des. Erasmi Roterdami In epistolas Pauli apostoli ad Rhomanos, Corinthios & Galatas* (Basel: Froben, 1520): 492.

³⁷ *Et ut hoc nobis facilius persuadeat, addit: 'Tempore enim suo metemus non defatigati,' Quasi dicat: spectate et expectate perpetuam messem, quae futura est, tum nulla ingratitude aut malicia hominum poterit vos avocare a benefaciendo.* ('And to persuade us of this more easily, he adds, "For in its time we will reap tirelessly." It is as if he were saying, "Look for and wait for the perpetual harvest which is to come. Then no ingratitude or malice on the part of people will be able to divert you from doing good."') Martin Luther, *In epistolam S. Pauli ad Galatas Commentarius 1531* (1535), WA 40.2, 163-64.

³⁸ *Opponit autem laboris fastidio fructum amplissimum et quietem nunquam cessaturam. Qui aratro terram proscindit, rastro hanc verrit, seminat et variis defatigatur laboribus, hoc uno se consolatur & in opere retinet quod sperat messem labori responsuram. Paulus ergo aeterno praemio proposito retinere vult fideles in*

Aegidius Hunnius,⁴⁰ and Abraham Calov.⁴¹ English Bible translations pre-dating the King James Version likewise reflect this same non-conditional understanding. Wycliffe renders the phrase as ‘not faylinge’ and Tyndale does so as ‘without werynes’. The conditional interpretation, however, can be found in Calvin,⁴² Beza,⁴³ and Grotius.⁴⁴

officio. Quoties igitur benefaciendo defatigatur aliquis, cogitet affore tempus quo vicissim absque omni cessatione sit aeterna fruiturus requie. (‘But he opposes a loathing of labour with the fullest fruit and a never-ceasing rest. He who plows the earth with a till, sweeps it with a hoe, sows, and is wearied by the different labours consoles himself and continues in the work for this one reason: he hopes that the reaping will correspond to his labour. Therefore Paul, by setting before them the eternal reward, wants the faithful to continue in their task. Therefore whenever someone is wearied in doing good, let him consider that a time is approaching when he will in turn enjoy eternal rest without any cessation.’) Heinrich Bullinger, *In D. Apostoli Pavli ad Galatas, Ephesios, Philippen. Et Colossen. Epistolas Henrychi Bullingeri Commentarii* (Zürich: Christoffel Froschouer, 1535): 107v.

³⁹ *Hoc igitur tempus non est negligendum, ut suo tempore perpetuum habeam messem.* (‘Therefore this time must not be neglected so that in its time we may have a perpetual reaping.’) Johannes Brenz, *Explicatio Epistolae Pauli ad Galatas* (Schwäbisch Hall: Peter Frenztz, 1546): 205r.

⁴⁰ *Sensus autem est: Benefactores istos in illa semiterna messe sine ullo vel taedio, vel intermissione, suae benignitatis fructum immarcessibilem, perpetuumque percepturos esse.* (‘But the sense is that in that everlasting reaping those good-doers are going to gain the unfading and perpetual fruit of their kindness without any either weariness or intermission.’) Aegidius Hunnius, *Thesaurus Apostolicus Complectens Commentarios in omnes Novi Testamenti Epistolas et Apocalypsin Iohannis* (Wittenberg: Gerdesius, 1705): 434.

⁴¹ *Illud μὴ ἐκλύόμενοι nonnulli ad praedicatum referunt, metemus sine defatigatio. In satione forte sit labor & defatigatio; set in messe nulla erit. Nulla erit satiety vitae aeternae. Respondet ita non inconcinne promissio monitionem Apostolicae: Bonum faciendo μὴ ἐκκακῶμεν, ne defatigemur, tempore enim suo etiam metemus sine defatigatione.* (‘Some refer μὴ ἐκλύόμενοι to the predicate: “We will reap without weariness.” Perhaps in the sowing there is labor and weariness, but there will be none in the reaping. There will be no satiety to eternal life. So the promise corresponds not inelegantly to the apostle’s admonition: “In doing good, μὴ ἐκκακῶμεν, let us not grow weary, for in its time we will also reap without weariness.”’) Abraham Calov, *Biblia Novi Testamenti Illustrata: Tomus II. Exhibens Epistolas Apostolicas Universas, et Apocalypsin Johanneam* (Dresden and Leipzig: Zimmermann, 1719): 639.

⁴² ‘If we faint not. That is, we shall reap the fruit which God promises, if we “persevere to the end”’ (Matt. 10:22). John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1854): 180.

⁴³ *Sic autem omnino resolui debet participium, quasi scriptum sit εἰ μὴ ἐκλύεσθαι.* (‘Thus the participle should be completely unpacked as if what was written was “if we do not grow faint”.’) Theodore Beza, *Annotationes majores in Novum Dan. Nostri Jesu Christi Testamentum* (Geneva: Jérémie Des Planches, 1594): 346.

⁴⁴ *Participium hoc vim habet conditionis, modo ne defatigemur.* (‘This participle has the force of a condition: “as long as we do not grow faint”.’) Hugo Grotius, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum* (Paris: Vidua Gulielmi Pele, 1646): h.l.

Over time the conditional interpretation won out and received virtual unanimity. In 1862 H. A. W. Meyer even claimed that ‘nearly all modern expositors’ joined him in rejecting the non-conditional sense.⁴⁵ So while the standard interpretation historically seems to have been the non-conditional construal of the participle, by the nineteenth century it seems that this interpretation was dying out and has since become largely extinct and forgotten. The weight of antiquity, in particular the versions and Greek-speaking antiquity, does prove, however, that this understanding of the phrase is at least deserving of consideration.

8. The Import of a Non-Conditional Understanding

Several commentators have rejected the idea that the participle has a manner shading and speaks of a tireless harvest because they see it as ‘adding no particular force to the general exhortation’.⁴⁶ They call such a meaning ‘very vapid’⁴⁷ and ‘feeble, superfluous, and almost trifling, little in harmony with the thoughtful manner of the apostle elsewhere’⁴⁸ as if all it would be saying was that the eschatological harvest would be significantly less toilsome than any earthly harvest. While it is true that the more ancient Greek expositors who interpreted the participle as expressing manner did tend to understand the significance of this phrase in that way,⁴⁹ a different understanding of the significance is found among the ancient, medieval, and Reformation Latin expositors,⁵⁰ and a stronger understanding at that.

Commentators who assume the eschatological harvest is called tireless in comparison with an earthly harvest are overlooking the pragmatic use of ἐκλύομαι here, which is elicited by the context of the

⁴⁵ H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Galatians*, trans. G. H. Venables (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1873): 334.

⁴⁶ Ellicott, *Galatians*, 131, whose words here are cited with approval by Fung, *Galatians*, 297, n. 82.

⁴⁷ Henry Alford, *Alford's Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Guardian, 1976): 63.

⁴⁸ Meyer, *Galatians*, 334.

⁴⁹ See the above quotations from Chrysostom, Theodoret, John of Damascus, Oecumenius, and Theophylact. Of these, however, Theodoret does hint at the idea that a tireless harvest also means an endless harvest.

⁵⁰ See the above quotations from Jerome, Ambrose, Anselm, Aquinas, de Lyra, Erasmus, Luther, Bullinger, Brenz, Hunnius, and Calov.

verse. Both ἐκλύομαι and ἐγκακέω in this verse speak of tiring and growing weary, but they imply more than that. The implication of μὴ ἐγκακέω is more than just to not become tired as one does good; it is to persist and not stop doing good. Likewise, the implication of θερίσομεν μὴ ἐκλύόμενοι is more than just that the future harvesting will not be wearisome; it is that the future harvesting too will persist and not stop.⁵¹ It is the enduring nature of the harvest which Paul is ultimately describing, not its ease. Such a promise of a future unending harvest finds biblical precedent in Amos 9:13. And while the idea that the harvest will not end would not have been new information to the Galatian Christians, the promise of a harvest which itself will persist forever would have been great encouragement to them to persist in doing good at that time.

While this different understanding of the trailing participial phrase does not effect a significant change in the content of Paul's overall argument, it does suggest a rather different tone to Paul's exhortation than commonly understood by commentators today.⁵² Instead of ending negatively by making the eschatological reaping conditioned upon their perseverance in doing good, Paul reminds them of the endless reaping awaiting them and their labours to positively coax them towards a perseverance in doing good. According to the conditional understanding of the participle, Paul would be using an implicit threat to spur them with the law, but when the participle is understood to express manner Paul is using an explicit promise to motivate them with the gospel.

⁵¹ The conditional interpretation would agree here that in this verse both ἐκλύομαι and ἐγκακέω are speaking of a tiring which implies a stopping, as is further clear from the translations which render ἐκλύόμενοι as 'give up'. The distinction between the conditional interpretation and the manner interpretation is not found in the meanings of the words themselves but in their referents: is the stopping from weariness referring to the sowing or the reaping? It seems, however, that those who have followed the conditional interpretation and explicitly rejected the manner interpretation (cited above) have been willing to make use of this pragmatic use of ἐκλύομαι for their own understanding but have failed to allow or consider the manner interpretation to be using it in this same way.

⁵² See the examples of this cited above in the introduction.

9. Conclusion

I have argued here that $\mu\eta\ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\lambda\upsilon\omicron\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\iota$ in Galatians 6:9 should be understood not as expressing a condition but as expressing manner, namely, that the future reaping will be unceasing. A number of evidences were brought forth in support of this claim: the nature of participial shading, the aspect of the verb, the word order of the clause, the context of this verse, and the understanding of the ancients. Perhaps not one of these arguments is enough to be considered conclusive on its own, but taken cumulatively they demonstrate that this non-conditional interpretation should again be considered in modern times and is the far more preferable reading.