

# The Semantics of ἐν ᾧ in I Peter

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## Abstract

The prepositional phrase ἐν ᾧ occurs repeatedly in I Peter, and scholars debate its function in each occurrence. To determine the most likely functions of the phrase, this article analyzes each instance in the book. Based on the context of each occurrence, ἐν ᾧ is likely causal in I Pet 1.6 and 3.16, where it should be translated as “because of this” or “because of which.” In I Pet 2.12, ἐν ᾧ is both causal and concessive. In I Pet 3.19, however, it is likely a dative of reference, so should be translated as “in which.” Finally, in I Pet 4.4, ἐν ᾧ again functions causally.

## Keywords

I Peter, ἐν ᾧ, prepositional phrases, semantics, New Testament Greek

## Introduction

A recent NT Greek grammar defines the function of prepositions: “A preposition helps clarify the relationship that a substantive has with the rest of the sentence” (Köstenberger, Merkle, and Plummer 2016, 397). Complicating this clarifying role of prepositions is the reality that prepositions are “semantically poor, but very dense. . . . Their meaning is ill-defined but its nuances are manifold” (Bortone 2010, 41). For example, the Greek preposition ἐν occurs 2,752 times in the New Testament (Köstenberger, Merkle, and Plummer 2016, 403). The standard NT lexicon BDAG lists twelve general uses for ἐν after qualifying that these are only “the main categories, which will help establish the usage in individual cases” (326). Köstenberger, Merkle, and Plummer helpfully counsel, “it is probably best to consider how an *entire*

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*prepositional phrase* functions in relation to the rest of the sentence” (2016, 397).<sup>1</sup> Scholars debate the semantics of ἐν ᾧ in each of its five occurrences in 1 Peter. Though previous scholars have argued that ἐν ᾧ functions idiomatically throughout 1 Peter as a circumstantial conjunction, grammatical differences among the various occurrences of ἐν ᾧ in 1 Peter require Bible translators to consider how the phrase functions in each instance. Various scholars have argued that in the New Testament, prepositions have a wide range of functions (Bortone 2010; Watt 2017; Porter 2017). To determine how ἐν ᾧ functions in 1 Pet 1.6; 2.12; 3.16, 19; and 4.4, this article will examine each occurrence in its immediate grammatical context within 1 Peter.

### The use of ἐν ᾧ in 1 Pet 1.6

The phrase ἐν ᾧ first occurs in 1 Pet 1.6. The prepositional phrase ἐν ᾧ subordinates the following verb, ἀγαλλιᾶσθε, to the preceding phrases of 1 Pet 1.3-5. First Peter 1.3-12 is an introductory statement that explains why God is worthy of praise: It is because he has caused Christians “to be born again to a living hope” and has given Christians a heavenly inheritance that they will receive “in the last time” (1 Pet 1.3-5).<sup>2</sup> “The last time” (v. 5) is the only possible antecedent for ᾧ (v. 6) from its immediate context. The relative pronoun ᾧ may be either masculine or neuter, and Bible translators must determine which better fits the context of its occurrence in 1 Pet 1.6. Though ᾧ is morphologically ambiguous, it is most likely neuter in 1 Pet 1.6.

If ᾧ is masculine, its antecedent is καρῶ, and ἐν ᾧ must function temporally in 1 Pet 1.6 (Michaels 1988, 27–28; Martin 1992, 309–11). Identifying καρῶ as the antecedent of ᾧ, however, would make the present indicative “you rejoice” (ἀγαλλιᾶσθε) indicate future tense. Present indicatives in Koine Greek are grammatically capable of expressing future time, but ἀγαλλιᾶσθε more likely functions as a present tense verb here. Michaels objects to this possibility on theological grounds:

Neither Peter nor Paul nor James knows of a “paradox” of joy in suffering. Suffering produces sorrow, while joy is the result of vindication. In the present passage, suffering and sorrow belong to the present, while vindication and joy, although very near, belong to the future. (Michaels 1988, 37)

However, 1 Pet 4.13 commands Christians to “rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings” in the present. First Peter does, in fact, know the paradox of joy in suffering. Furthermore, ἀγαλλιᾶσθε refers to present joy in 1 Pet 1.8: “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, italics are original to quotations.

<sup>2</sup> All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are ESV.

not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice [ἀγαλλιᾶσθε] with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.” Christians’ love and faith in Jesus are present realities. Indeed, faith must be a present reality, for faith will become sight at Jesus’ second coming (1 Pet 1.5, 7; cf. 1 Cor 13.8-13). If the other present tense verbs in 1 Pet 1.8—ἀγαπάτε, μη ὀρώντες, and πιστεύοντες—depict present reality, then ἀγαλλιᾶσθε similarly describes present reality. Furthermore, ἀγαλλιᾶσθε cannot function as a future tense in 1 Pet 1.6 because that is not how 1 Pet 1.3-12 functions. Rhetorically, 1 Pet 1.3-12 is the exordium of the letter, in which the author “creates a good atmosphere,” gives “no explicit exhortation,” and describes his audience “as living in an ideal way” (Thurén 1995, 91). These considerations undermine Greg Forbes’s contention that ἐν ᾧ most likely functions temporally in 1 Pet 1.6 (2014, 23). Though morphologically ᾧ may be a masculine singular dative, for contextual reasons it is not likely masculine.

If ᾧ is not masculine in 1 Pet 1.6, it must be neuter. Apart from καιρῷ, 1 Pet 1.3-5 does not contain a word that grammatically could be a specific antecedent for ᾧ in 1 Pet 1.6. The next-nearest masculine noun, “God” (1 Pet 1.3) is “too far removed to be [the] likely” antecedent of ᾧ (Schreiner 2003, 66). Since ᾧ in 1 Pet 1.6 lacks a specific antecedent, it most likely refers to the content of 1 Pet 1.3-5 as a whole. The phrase ἐν ᾧ relates 1 Pet 1.6 to 1 Pet 1.3-5 by stating that the new birth, eternal inheritance, and present preservation of Christians’ faith are the grounds for Christians’ joy in the midst of various trials (so also Fink 1967, 35; Thurén 1995, 96; Achtemeier 1996, 100; Elliott 2000, 339; Schreiner 2003, 67). As these commentators have noted, the sense of ἐν ᾧ in 1 Pet 1.6 may be communicated by the phrase “because of this.” Of major English Bible translations, the recent EHV is the only one to translate ἐν ᾧ as “because of this.”<sup>3</sup> This causal translation of ἐν ᾧ is preferable because it makes the sense of the original language most clear to readers of Bible translations.

## The use of ἐν ᾧ in 1 Pet 2.12

The phrase ἐν ᾧ next occurs in 1 Pet 2.12. The grammar of the sentence is challenging: τὴν ἀναστροφὴν ὑμῶν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἔχοντες καλήν, ἵνα ἐν ᾧ καταλαοῦσιν ὑμῶν ὡς κακοποιῶν ἐκ τῶν καλῶν ἔργων ἐποπτεύοντες δοξάσωσιν τὸν θεὸν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἐπισκοπῆς (1 Pet 2.12).<sup>4</sup> The first verb in this verse is the participle ἔχοντες, so the whole verse is continuing the

<sup>3</sup> In contrast to CSB, ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV, and NRSV. These versions translate ἐν ᾧ as “in this,” which can communicate an inferential relationship between the preceding and following verses, but translating ἐν ᾧ as “because of this” (EHV) makes this inferential relationship explicit.

<sup>4</sup> This article takes the Greek text of 1 Peter from NA28, the standard critical edition of the Greek New Testament.

paragraph begun in the previous verse by the present indicative παρακαλώ: Ἀγαπητοί, παρακαλῶ ὡς παροίκους καὶ παρεπιδήμους ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν σαρκικῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν αἵτινες στρατεύονται κατὰ τῆς ψυχῆς· (1 Pet 2.11). In these verses, Peter is urging (παρακαλῶ) his audience to “abstain” (ἀπέχεσθαι) from sin and instead to have good conduct (τὴν ἀναστροφὴν . . . καλήν) so that “Gentiles” (ἔθνεσιν) who “speak against you as evildoers [καταλαλοῦσιν ὑμῶν ὡς κακοποιῶν] . . . may . . . glorify God on the day of visitation [δοξάσωσιν τὸν θεὸν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἐπισκοπῆς]” (1 Pet 2.11-12).<sup>5</sup> How does the phrase ἐν ᾧ in 1 Pet 2.12 relate to this overall thrust of 1 Pet 2.11-12?

To determine how ἐν ᾧ functions in 1 Pet 2.12, it is best first to identify how other constituents of 1 Pet 2.12 function. The participle ἔχοντες is the main clause’s verb in 1 Pet 2.12. By virtue of the hortatory nature of παρακαλῶ in 1 Pet 2.11, ἔχοντες has imperatival force: “Have your conduct be good among the Gentiles” (1 Pet 2.12, my translation). The rest of 1 Pet 2.12 is a complex purpose clause introduced by ἵνα. The main verb in this purpose clause is the third person plural aorist subjunctive δοξάσωσιν. Its implied subject is the ἔθνεσιν among whom the Christians are to have good conduct. These Gentiles presently slander Christians “as evildoers” even though they see Christians’ good works, which the third plural present indicative καταλαλοῦσιν shows. In fact, the Christians’ good works are what make Gentiles’ characterization of Christians slanderous. The Christians’ conduct makes it apparent that others’ accusations are false. Somehow, though, these slanderous Gentiles “may glorify God on the day of visitation” (1 Pet 2.12). Such a statement is incongruous with its context and needs further explanation.

“On the day of visitation” (1 Pet 2.12) is an allusion to Isa 10.3 (so also Achtemeier 1996, 178 n. 82, and Jobes 2005, 172). In LXX Isa 10.3, τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς ἐπισκοπῆς is “the day of punishment” (as CSB, ESV, NASB, and NRSV translate *הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה*).<sup>6</sup> This punishment lies in the near future for Judah (Motyer 1993, 111, and Gentry 2015, 240). Nevertheless, from the perspective of Isaiah, the punishment does still lie in the future, as it does from Peter’s perspective. The verb translated “may glorify,” *δοξάσωσιν*, is an aorist subjunctive, which “deals with something that *might* take place in the future” (Köstenberger, Merkle, and Plummer 2016, 202). Furthermore,

<sup>5</sup> I refer to the author of 1 Peter as Peter because he identifies himself as such (1 Pet 1.1). The consensus among critical scholars is that 1 Peter is pseudonymous (e.g., Achtemeier 1996, 1–43). However, other credible scholars have demonstrated that available historical and literary evidence does not unequivocally support pseudonymity (e.g., Jobes 2005, 14–19).

<sup>6</sup> KJV renders this phrase as “the day of visitation.” NIV has “the day of reckoning,” and EHV reads “the day . . . to settle accounts.” In all of these translations, the surrounding context reveals that the visitation, reckoning, and settling of accounts will amount to punishment for the humans involved.

the phrase “the day of punishment” elsewhere in the Bible, Second Temple Jewish works, and early Christian writings, does not “refer to the time of the conversion of the nonbelievers” but “points rather to the time of the final judgment” (Achtmeier 1996, 178).<sup>7</sup> Indeed, each time the word ἐπισκοπή occurs in the LXX of Isaiah, it refers to an act of divine judgment (Isa 10.3; 23.17; 24.22; 29.6). Peter’s use of a phrase that elsewhere occurs only in Isa 10.3 shows that he is using the phrase similarly: to indicate a future expression of God’s judgment. Following the first coming of Christ, the next day of God’s judgment would be the day of Christ’s return, which “1 Peter (1.5, 7, 13; 4.7, 13, 17; 5.1) often mentions” (Jobes 2005, 172).

How, though, will enemies of Christians glorify God at the final judgment? This question must be answered to determine how ἐν ᾧ functions in 1 Pet 2.12. Most scholars contend that these enemies will glorify God as Christians at the final judgment, having repented after seeing Christians’ good works. This possibility, however, is unlikely, since repentance language does not occur in or around 1 Pet 2.12. Some scholars consider this verse to be a free rendition of Jesus’ teaching elsewhere preserved in Matt 5.16 (Michaels 1988, 119; Schreiner 2003, 123; and Zeller 2013, 166–67 and 206–7). Since Jesus speaks of non-Christians praising God after seeing Christians’ good works, that must be what Peter likewise means if he is alluding to Jesus’ teaching. Numerous Petrine scholars also find a parallel between non-Christians seeing Christians’ good works in 1 Pet 2.12 and non-Christian husbands being “won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct” in 1 Pet 3.1–2 (Michaels 1988, 118; Elliott 2000, 471; and Schreiner 2003, 124). Finally, Elliott considers “glorify” to be possible only by experiencing salvation, not by experiencing judgment (2000, 471). These arguments, however, fail to support the contention that Christians’ erstwhile enemies glorify God themselves by converting before the final judgment.

Zeller makes the most sustained argument that 1 Pet 2.12 makes the same point as Matt 5.16. The “purpose clause” of 1 Pet 2.12 “come[s] directly from Jesus’s teaching in the S[ermon on the] M[ount]. This relationship is clear from the parallels in thought, in structure, and in specific language between 1 Pet 2.12 and Matt 5.16” (Zeller 2013, 166–67). Zeller finds three verbal parallels and five thematic parallels between these two texts, each of which is a command for Christians to have good conduct before unbelievers, so that they may both see the good works of Jesus’ disciples and glorify God (2013, 206–7). However, these parallels do not mean that Peter must be making the same point as Jesus. Rather, significant differences between

<sup>7</sup> Achtmeier cites the biblical texts Isa 10.3; Jer 6.15; and Luke 1.68; 19.44; Second Temple Jewish texts Wis 3.7–8 and 1QS III 18; IV 6–8, 11–12, 18–19; CD MS. A VII 9; CD MS. B XIX 10; and the early Christian text *1 Clement* 1.3 (1996, 178 n. 82).

1 Pet 2.12 and Matt 5.16 remain. The full Greek text of each verse is below for comparison:

οὕτως λαμψάτω τὸ φῶς ὑμῶν ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ὅπως ἴδωσιν ὑμῶν τὰ καλὰ ἔργα καὶ δοξάσωσιν τὸν πατέρα ὑμῶν τὸν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. (Matt 5.16)

τὴν ἀναστροφὴν ὑμῶν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἔχοντες καλήν, ἵνα ἐν ᾧ καταλαλοῦσιν ὑμῶν ὡς κακοποιῶν ἐκ τῶν καλῶν ἔργων ἐποπτεύοντες δοξάσωσιν τὸν θεὸν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἐπισκοπῆς. (1 Pet 2.12)

Jesus' teaching does not envision any resistance on the part of unbelievers, but unbelievers' opposition to Christians (καταλαλοῦσιν ὑμῶν ὡς κακοποιῶν) is foregrounded in 1 Pet 2.12. Peter seems to be elaborating on Jesus' teaching, not repeating it verbatim. The Christians to whom Peter is writing are experiencing the slander of non-Christians. Their good works are not resulting in non-Christians praising God. Peter is indicating to his audience that even if their enemies do not glorify God by converting to faith in Christ in this life, they will glorify God on the judgment day after experiencing his judgment.

Likewise, enemies seeing Christians' good works does not necessarily have the same outcome as unbelieving husbands seeing their Christian wives' pure conduct. The differences between 1 Pet 2.12 and 3.1-2 are most evident in the following representation of each verse:

ἵνα ἐν ᾧ καταλαλοῦσιν ὑμῶν ὡς κακοποιῶν ἐκ τῶν καλῶν ἔργων ἐποπτεύοντες δοξάσωσιν τὸν θεὸν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἐπισκοπῆς. (1 Pet 2.12)

Ὅμοιως αἱ γυναῖκες, ὑποτασσόμεναι τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν, ἵνα καὶ εἴ τινες ἀπειθοῦσιν τῷ λόγῳ, διὰ τῆς τῶν γυναικῶν ἀναστροφῆς ἄνευ λόγου κερδηθήσονται ἐποπτεύσαντες τὴν ἐν φόβῳ ἀγνῆν ἀναστροφὴν ὑμῶν. (1 Pet 3.1-2)

Both 1 Pet 2.12 and 3.1-2 feature complex purpose clauses, but the different verbal aspects of ἐποπτεύω in each verse are significant. In 1 Pet 2.12, ἐποπτεύοντες is a present participle, which "marks imperfective aspect, where the end points of the action are not in view" (Buth 2016, 275).<sup>8</sup> Since ἐποπτεύοντες is imperfective, it more naturally modifies the similarly imperfective καταλαλοῦσιν rather than δοξάσωσιν, which has perfective aspect, as an aorist verb (against Elliott 2000, 560). When a participle follows the verb it modifies, it "elaborate[s] the action of the

<sup>8</sup> Some later manuscripts have ἐποπτεύσαντες in 1 Pet 2.12, as NA28 acknowledges. However, "the stronger witness (P<sup>72</sup>, X, B, C, a number of minuscule) reads it as the present participle ἐποπτεύοντες" (Achtmeier 1996, 172 n. 5). Furthermore, "the variant aorist participle . . . probably was substituted to clarify the logical priority of observance to the main verb, *glorify*" (Elliott 2000, 468).

main verb . . . by adding more detail . . . to the main verb” (Runge 2010, 262). The participle ἐποπτεύοντες adds more detail to the main verb καταλαλοῦσιν by conceding that Gentiles are slandering Christians as they see some of the Christians’ good works.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, ἐποπτεύσαντες is an aorist participle, which “marks a perfective aspect. The event or state of affairs is presented as an undifferentiated whole, as complete, including the end points. Prototypically, the time of the aorist participle is prior to the main event” (Buth 2016, 275).<sup>10</sup> Indeed, in 1 Pet 3.1-2, the unbelievers have already seen their Christian wives’ pure conduct, and they later “may be won without a word” (so also Michaels 1988, 158). In this context, ἐποπτεύσαντες is not only temporally sequential but also causal (so also Achtemeier 1996, 210).<sup>11</sup> The Gentiles who slander Christians in 1 Pet 2.12 are different from the husbands who are won to Christ in 1 Pet 3.1-2. The Gentiles keep slandering Christians though they see their good deeds, but some non-Christian husbands convert in part because of their wives’ pure conduct.

Lastly, glorification-by-judgment is a preferable interpretation to glorification-by-salvation in 1 Pet 2.12 because those condemned by God at the final judgment nevertheless glorify him in their condemnation. According to Elliott, “the notion expressed in [1 Pet] 4.17-18 that at the final judgment there are only the family of God and non-believers who remain obdurate sinners rules out any possibility of some of the latter glorifying God at *that* time” (2000, 471). However, this wrongly presupposes that only Christians can glorify God. At least one other text in the New Testament shows that even non-Christians will glorify God at the final judgment:

The conclusion of the traditional hymn in Philippians (2.10-11) points to a similar universal eschatological glorification of God. Because the reference is to the final day of judgment, the argument that the author sees here a missionary purpose to the Christians’ good works is robbed of some of its force. (Achtemeier 1996, 178 n. 83)

<sup>9</sup> I follow Achtemeier (1996, 178) in a partitive interpretation of the phrase ἐκ τῶν καλῶν ἔργων, but I disagree with his causal interpretation of the participle ἐποπτεύοντες. I rather interpret ἐποπτεύοντες as a concessive participle.

<sup>10</sup> Some MSS read ἐποπτεύοντες rather than ἐποπτεύσαντες at 1 Pet 3.2. “This variant perhaps has been conformed to the same present tense of the verb in 2.12” (Elliott 2000, 559).

<sup>11</sup> Against Schreiner, who “think[s] it is doubtful that we should stress that the aorist participle emphasizes ‘after seeing.’ Moreover, the participle could be construed as causal, temporal, or means” (2003, 152 n. 138). Buth has affirmed that an aorist participle usually describes an event prior to the main event of the verb it modifies (2016, 275). Furthermore, the temporal force of ἐποπτεύσαντες supports an instrumental and causal force. After (temporal) the husband has seen his wife’s good deeds (instrumental), he therefore (causal) is won without a word.

Zeller has argued against this argument for an eschatological judgment interpretation of ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἐπισκοπῆς because “in Phil 2.11, all are compelled to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ for the glory of God, but this is an indirect acknowledgement, not the active idea conveyed by δοξάσω-σιν” (2013, 174). However, ἐξομολογήσεται in Phil 2.11 refers to the speech of every person’s “tongue,” which will be, “Jesus Christ is Lord.” That confession is more than indirect acknowledgement. Furthermore, the goal of this confession is the glory, δόξαν, of God (cognate to the verb δοξάσω-σιν). “At the time of final judgment nonbelievers will be brought to the realization that the Christians did what they did at God’s behest and with God’s approval, and thus be led to glorify God” (Achte-meier 1996, 178). As Achtemeier contends, non-Christians’ glorification of God even in their condemnation is consistent with NT theology.<sup>12</sup>

In 1 Pet 2.11-12, Peter tells his audience, “Beloved ones, I am urging you, as foreigners and sojourners, to abstain from the works of the flesh, which wage war against your soul, by having your conduct among the Gentiles be good, so that, though they are slandering you as evildoers as they see some of your good works, they may glorify God on the day of visitation” (my translation). Non-Christian Gentiles are presently slandering Christians as evildoers, even though they are witnessing Christians doing good. Their glorification of God is not happening at present but must happen at the final judgment, when these unrepentant Gentiles will be condemned for their disobedience to the word of Christ, exemplified by their mistreatment of Christ’s people. In 1 Pet 2.12, ἐν ᾧ should be translated concessively as “though” in order to make clear the logic at work in this short, dense paragraph.

### The use of ἐν ᾧ in 1 Pet 3.16

As noted above, 1 Pet 2.12 is grammatically complex. Few scholars (most notably Achtemeier and Jobes) have interpreted unbelievers’ glorification of God as referring to their condemnation at the final judgment. Even Achtemeier and Jobes did not translate ἐν ᾧ concessively in 1 Pet 2.12. However, 1 Pet 3.16 is more clear than 1 Pet 2.12, and there is more substantial scholarly agreement about its overall message. The similarities

<sup>12</sup> It is also consistent with OT theology and the Second Temple Jewish milieu in which NT letters like 1 Peter were written. In Josh 7.19, Joshua tells Achan to “give glory to God” before he and his family experience God’s judgment. (I am thankful to the peer reviewer who made me aware of this reference.) Both those who are saved and those who are condemned glorify God. In Wis 5.1-4, the author speaks of “the unrighteous” being “shaken with dreadful fear” at the final judgment, when “they will be amazed at the unexpected salvation of the righteous. They will speak to one another in repentance, and in anguish of spirit they will groan, and say, ‘These are persons whom we once held in derision and made a byword of reproach—fools that we were! We thought that their lives were madness and that their end was without honor’” (cited in Green 2007, 69).

between 1 Pet 2.12 and 3.16 are evident when they are presented sequentially, as below:

τὴν ἀναστροφὴν ὑμῶν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἔχοντες καλήν, ἵνα ἐν ᾧ καταλαλοῦσιν ὑμῶν ὡς κακοποιῶν ἐκ τῶν καλῶν ἔργων ἐποπτεύοντες δοξάσωσιν τὸν θεὸν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἐπισκοπῆς. (1 Pet 2.12)

ἀλλὰ μετὰ πραΰτητος καὶ φόβου, συνείδησιν ἔχοντες ἀγαθὴν, ἵνα ἐν ᾧ καταλαεῖσθε καταισχυθῶσιν οἱ ἐπηρεάζοντες ὑμῶν τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφῆν. (1 Pet 3.16)

Both of these texts use ἐν ᾧ as part of a purpose clause (ἵνα) that is dealing with Christians being slandered (καταλαλέω) despite their good conduct (ἀναστροφῆν). Both verses lack an antecedent for ᾧ. Furthermore, just as 1 Pet 2.12 continued a sentence begun in 1 Pet 2.11, 1 Pet 3.16 continues a sentence begun in 1 Pet 3.15. The participle ἔχοντες in 1 Pet 3.16 modifies the plural aorist imperative ἀγιάσατε of 1 Pet 3.15. In 1 Pet 3.16, Peter is telling his audience how to honor Christ the Lord as holy (1 Pet 3.15): by “having a good conscience.” The purpose of honoring Christ with a good conscience is “so that” (ἵνα) “those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame” (1 Pet 3.16). How does the prepositional phrase ἐν ᾧ, attached to the present passive indicative καταλαεῖσθε, relate to the main aorist subjunctive, καταισχυθῶσιν, of the ἵνα clause? Christians’ slandering at the hands of non-Christians most naturally functions as the grounds of the non-Christians’ shame at the final judgment.

The aorist subjunctive καταισχυθῶσιν refers to the final judgment. As an aorist subjunctive, it “deals with something that *might* take place in the future” (Köstenberger, Merkle, and Plummer 2016, 202). Christians’ hope is that they will not face shame, as expressed by οὐ μὴ καταισχυθῆ in 1 Pet 2.6, at the final judgment. At the second coming of Christ, Christians will rather receive “praise and glory and honor” from God (1 Pet 1.7). Petrine scholars often interpret 1 Pet 3.16 eschatologically, that unrepentant slanderers of Christians will experience shame at the final judgment (Michaels 1988, 190–91; Elliott 2000, 632–33; Schreiner 2003, 176–78). In 1 Pet 3.16, the revilers’ slander of Christians (καταλαεῖσθε) is the grounds of these revilers’ shame at the final judgment (καταισχυθῶσιν). The only phrase that is grammatically capable of expressing this causal relationship is ἐν ᾧ.

Though the relationship between slander and shame is causal, Petrine scholars who affirm the eschatological interpretation of 1 Pet 3.16 nevertheless translate ἐν ᾧ temporally in this verse. Michaels translates the purpose clause of 1 Pet 3.16, “so that in a situation where you are accused, those who denounce your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame” (1988, 183). Elliott translates the clause similarly, “so that, when you are slandered” (2000, 630). Finally, Schreiner quotes NRSV approvingly: “The situation addressed is

‘when you are maligned’ (NRSV)” (2003, 176). CSB and ESV also render ἐν ᾧ as “when” in 1 Pet 3.16.<sup>13</sup> Such a temporal translation, however, is logically confusing. “When” identifies the slandering as contemporaneous with being put to shame, but that is illogical, since the slander is present but the shame is future, at the final judgment. It is more likely that ἐν ᾧ functions causally in these verses to show that the non-Christians’ slandering of Christians is the grounds for their final judgment by God. Of modern English translations, EHV alone translates this occurrence of ἐν ᾧ as “because.”<sup>14</sup> In 1 Peter 3.16, ἐν ᾧ should be translated with “because of this,” as in 1 Pet 1.6 and 2.12.

Other commentators consider non-Christians to experience shame immediately according to 1 Pet 3.16, but their arguments for immediate shame rather than eschatological shame are not persuasive (e.g., Achtemeier 1996, 236–37; Feldmeier 2008, 197). Both Achtemeier and Feldmeier note 1 Pet 2.12 as a parallel passage to 1 Pet 3.16, but they consider 3.16 to present shame as an immediate consequence to non-Christians learning that “the truth of Christian behavior is known through the account of their action given by Christians” (Achtemeier 1996, 236). However, the parallel with 1 Pet 2.12 must be allowed to guide the proper interpretation (and translation) of 1 Pet 3.16. Williams has demonstrated, “while doing good might occasionally result in a positive outcome such as the conversion of unbelievers (3.1), it normally produced adverse responses and therefore only further exacerbated the problems with outsiders (2.20; 3.14, 16, 17)” (2012, 268–69). Finally, Peter’s earlier use of “shame” language (κατασχύνω) in 1 Pet 2.6 in reference to the final judgment suggests that it would likely refer to the same time in 1 Pet 3.16. In 1 Pet 3.16, as in 1 Pet 2.12, ἐν ᾧ functions causally to show that non-Christians’ present slandering of Christians will have appropriate eternal consequences: the glorification of God (1 Pet 2.12) and the shame of those unrepentant non-Christians (1 Pet 3.16).

### The use of ἐν ᾧ in 1 Pet 3.19

The phrase ἐν ᾧ next occurs in 1 Pet 3.19, in the midst of the interpretive crux of the letter, 1 Pet 3.18–20. For ease of reference, these verses are printed in full below:

ὅτι καὶ Χριστὸς ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἔπαθεν, δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων, ἵνα ὑμᾶς προσαγάγῃ τῷ θεῷ θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκί, ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι· ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν ἀπειθήσασίν ποτε, ὅτε ἀπεξεδέχετο ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ μακροθυμία ἐν ἡμέραις Νῶε κατασκευαζομένης κιβωτοῦ εἰς ἣν ὀλίγοι, τοῦτ’ ἔστιν ὁκτὼ ψυχῶν, διεσώθησαν δι’ ὕδατος. (1 Pet 3.18–20)<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The NIV translation of 1 Pet 3.16 does not account for ἐν ᾧ.

<sup>14</sup> KJV renders ἐν ᾧ in 1 Pet 3.16 as “whereas,” which communicates contrast in addition to cause.

<sup>15</sup> Poetic line breaks from the formatting of NA28 have been removed.

These verses raise a number of exegetical questions. According to the order in the Greek text, they are as follows: (1) What is the meaning of πνεύματι (1 Pet 3.18)? (2) How does ἐν ᾧ function (1 Pet 3.19)? (3) Who (or what) are the imprisoned spirits to whom Christ preached? (4) What is the content of Christ's preaching? (5) When did Christ preach to these spirits? Answering these questions in full is beyond the scope of this article, and the final three questions are not germane to this article's argument.<sup>16</sup> To determine how ἐν ᾧ functions in 1 Pet 3.18, though, the πνεύματι of 1 Pet 3.18 must first be identified.

Many Petrine scholars interpret both σαρκί and πνεύματι in 1 Pet 3.18 as datives of respect or sphere. Jesus was put to death in the realm of the flesh but made alive in the realm of the Spirit (so Michaels 1988, 204–5; Dalton 1989, 138–42; Elliott 2000, 646–47; Jobes 2005, 237–42). The parallelism of θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκί, ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι supports this contention. It suggests that both datives should function in the same way. If σαρκί is a dative of respect, then so is πνεύματι.

This majority interpretation of πνεύματι is preferable to alternatives. Achtemeier contends that the phrase ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι most naturally reads as instrumental: Christ was “made alive by the Spirit” (1996, 250). However, his argument falters because it does not make sense to interpret σαρκί as referring to the people who crucified Christ. Schreiner has tried to overcome this difficulty by arguing that “the two dative nouns are not used in precisely the same way; the first is a dative of reference, and the second is a dative of agency. Christ was put to death with reference to or in the sphere of his body, but on the other hand he was made alive by the Spirit” (Schreiner 2003, 184). Schreiner, however, only cites 1 Tim 3.16 as another instance in which Jesus' bodily existence (ἐν σαρκί) contrasts with his vindication by the Spirit (ἐν πνεύματι) (2003, 184). Nevertheless, other Pauline scholars argue convincingly that in 1 Tim 3.16, ἐν σαρκί and ἐν πνεύματι both function as datives of sphere or reference (Dalton 1989, 139, 141; Marshall and Towner 1999, 524–25; Mounce 2000, 227–28). These scholars specifically mention that sequential, parallel datives should function the same to be most comprehensible to the original recipients of the writing.

In 1 Pet 3.19, ἐν ᾧ elaborates on πνεύματι from 1 Pet 3.18. The antecedent of ᾧ is πνεύματι (so also Kelly 1969, 152; Dalton 1989, 144–45; Achtemeier 1996, 252; Schreiner 2003, 190). Both Kelly and Dalton observe that early church fathers, for whom Koine Greek was their first language, understood

<sup>16</sup> As will become evident in this section, I disagree with Elliott's interpretation of ἐν ᾧ in 1 Pet 3.19. However, I agree with his interpretation with regard to the final three exegetical questions, as do many other commentators subsequent to him (see Elliott 2000, 693–705; Jobes 2005, 242–47, 256–58; Pierce 2011, 204–22). The function of ἐν ᾧ in 1 Pet 3.19 is therefore irrelevant to subsequent interpretive cruxes in 1 Pet 3.19–22.

πνεύματι to be the antecedent of ᾧ. Furthermore, “when there is a relative, ‘in which,’ following immediately after a noun, ‘spirit,’ it is difficult to see how they can fail to be united in meaning” (Dalton 1989, 145). Other scholars interpret ἐν ᾧ in 1 Pet 3.19 as a circumstantial conjunction (whether temporal or causal) without a grammatically specific antecedent, as in 1 Pet 1.6, 2.12, and 3.16 (Fink 1967, 36–37; Michaels 1988, 206; Elliott 2000, 652; Jobes 2005, 242–43). Elliott argues against πνεύματι as the antecedent of ᾧ because datives of respect are rarely the antecedent of a relative pronoun in the New Testament (Acts 2.8; Eph 2.2, 3; 2 Pet 1.4; 3.1). These examples that Elliott mentions, however, only increase the probability of πνεύματι being the antecedent of ᾧ, especially since the author of 2 Peter claims to have written 1 Peter (2 Pet 3.1).<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, “there seems to be no reason why an adverbial dative cannot be used, like any other dative, as the antecedent for a relative pronoun” (Dalton 1989, 145). As argued above, the successive datives σαρκί and πνεύματι are both datives of respect. By that logic, the phrase ἐν ᾧ is also a dative of respect. The conjunction καὶ communicates that not only was Jesus raised in the spiritual realm but he also preached in that spiritual realm to disobedient, imprisoned spirits.<sup>18</sup>

The phrase ἐν ᾧ in 1 Pet 3.19 referring to πνεύματι from 1 Pet 3.18 has implications for how to translate these verses. Numerous modern English translations render 1 Pet 3.19 as beginning with “in which he also [or also he] went” (CSB, EHV, NASB, NRSV). KJV interprets ἐν ᾧ instrumentally: “by which also he went.” Schreiner follows this instrumental interpretation (2003, 190). However, as noted above, Schreiner’s arguments for understanding successive datives to have different syntactical functions does not have adequate support elsewhere to be persuasive. More likely, 1 Pet 3.18–19 presents σαρκί, πνεύματι, and ᾧ as successive datives of respect in order to portray Jesus as crucified, risen, and preaching to imprisoned spirits upon his resurrection and ascension to heaven (so also Dalton 1989, 144–45).<sup>19</sup> NIV translates ἐν ᾧ as “after being made alive,” which shows that the translation committee understood ᾧ to refer to the process of being made alive (ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι), and this translation does not account for καὶ. ESV similarly does not translate καὶ, but in so doing, it seems to understand the antecedent of ᾧ as πνεύματι, as argued above.

<sup>17</sup> Even if the authors are different, the author of 2 Peter is trying at least to mimic the style of the author of 1 Peter. Both 1 and 2 Peter discuss the activity of OT prophets (1 Pet 1.10–12; 2 Pet 1.19–21). Furthermore, both letters allude to Noah’s flood (1 Pet 3.20–21; 2 Pet 2.5).

<sup>18</sup> “In contexts where asyndeton is the default means of coordination, as in most of the Epistles and reported speeches, the use of καὶ signals a closer connection of the elements than using [asyndeton]” (Runge 2010, 26).

<sup>19</sup> Elliott interprets ἐν ᾧ in 1 Pet 3.19 as a circumstantial conjunction (2000, 652), but his interpretation of Christ’s preaching to imprisoned spirits (2000, 693–705) can also fit with understanding ᾧ to be a dative of respect.

Against those scholars, then, who understand ἐν ᾧ to function as a circumstantial conjunction in 1 Pet 1.6; 2.12; 3.16, 19 (e.g., Fink 1967, 36–37; Elliott 2000, 652; Pierce 2011, 219–20), ἐν ᾧ functions in 1 Pet 3.19 as a prepositional phrase with a personal pronoun object that has its antecedent (πνεύματι) immediately preceding it. As argued above, ἐν ᾧ functions as a circumstantial (causal) conjunction in 1 Pet 1.6; 2.12; and 3.16. None of these three texts has a grammatically specific antecedent for ᾧ. By contrast, πνεύματι is a readily available antecedent for ᾧ in 1 Pet 3.18–19. Scholars who claim that ἐν ᾧ functions identically in 1 Pet 3.19 and in earlier instances in 1 Peter wrongly assume that ἐν ᾧ is consistently idiomatic in 1 Peter. They do not attend to the grammatical peculiarities of 1 Pet 3.18–19 compared to earlier verses. They also do not give adequate weight to the truth that as a preposition, ἐν “has expressive potential . . . [that] is immense, as the semantic potential . . . is almost inexhaustible” (Porter 2017, 38). Furthermore, “the prepositional group . . . has greater expressive potential than the adverbial group[ , which] tends to realize the circumstances of time, location, and manner” (39). In addition to manner, Porter contends that ἐν can denote “control or power (sphere)” as well as instrumentality (39). As argued above, ἐν ᾧ in 1 Pet 3.19 is best understood as functioning as a dative of respect, like its antecedent πνεύματι (1 Pet 3.18), which contrasts with the preceding dative of respect, σαρκί. Even in a letter as short as 1 Peter, the Bible translator should expect the same prepositional phrase (ἐν ᾧ) to function in various ways.

### The use of ἐν ᾧ in 1 Pet 4.4

The prepositional phrase ἐν ᾧ last occurs in 1 Pet 4.4. It introduces 1 Pet 4.4, as was the case in 1 Pet 1.6. Unlike 1 Pet 1.6, which had a potential antecedent for ᾧ in καιρῷ of 1 Pet 1.5, ᾧ in 1 Pet 4.4 has no specific antecedent possible in its immediately preceding context, 1 Pet 4.3. Rather, the antecedent of ᾧ is the idea of 1 Pet 4.3 as a whole: “For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.” Peter follows this point with 1 Pet 4.4: ἐν ᾧ ξενίζονται μὴ συντρεχόντων ὑμῶν εἰς τὴν αὐτὴν τῆς ἀσωτίας ἀνάχυσιν βλασφημοῦντες. The Gentiles “are surprised (ξενίζονται)” that “you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery (μὴ συντρεχόντων ὑμῶν εἰς τὴν αὐτὴν τῆς ἀσωτίας ἀνάχυσιν).” The nominative participle βλασφημοῦντες comes after the main verb of 1 Pet 4.4, ξενίζονται. “Participles that follow the main verb . . . elaborate the action of the main verb, often providing more specific explanation of what is meant by the main action” (Runge 2010, 262). Non-Christians express their surprise (ξενίζονται) at Christians’ abstinence from common (but sinful) activities by maligning them (βλασφημοῦντες). The prepositional phrase ἐν ᾧ that precedes both ξενίζονται and βλασφημοῦντες communicates the reason

why the non-Christians are surprised. In 1 Pet 4.4, ἐν ᾧ identifies the abstinence of Christians from common pagan activities as the reason for the non-Christians' verbally abusive surprise at Christians' actions.

Recent commentators regularly interpret ἐν ᾧ causally in 1 Pet 4.4 (Michaels 1988, 233; Achtemeier 1996, 283; Schreiner 2003, 369). Elliott classifies ἐν ᾧ here as adverbial or circumstantial (as in 1 Pet 1.6; 2.12; and 3.16), and he says, "This termination of both Gentile-like conduct and Gentile contacts . . . evokes the surprise of the believers' erstwhile cronies" (2000, 725). The word "evokes" shows that ἐν ᾧ functions specifically in a causal manner in 1 Pet 4.4. The relative agreement of NT scholars on the causal function of ἐν ᾧ in 1 Pet 4.4 is felicitous, because it coheres with the frequent causal use of ἐν ᾧ elsewhere in 1 Peter in similar grammatical constructions.

Of modern English translations, EHV again is the only one that translates ἐν ᾧ causally in 1 Pet 4.4: "For this reason, they are surprised." CSB, NIV, and NRSV do not account for ἐν ᾧ in their translations of this verse: "They are surprised." ESV interprets ἐν ᾧ as a dative of respect: "With respect to this they are surprised." However, there is not a significant practical difference between Christians' abstinence being the occasion of non-Christians' opposition and that abstinence being the cause of the opposition. If non-Christians malign Christians when Christians abstain from certain practices, Christians' abstinence in effect is the cause of non-Christians maligning them. In keeping with its translation philosophy, NASB translates ἐν ᾧ as "in *all* this," the italics of "all" indicating that a single Greek word does not account for its inclusion in the English translation. To indicate clearly the causal function of ἐν ᾧ in 1 Pet 4.4, Bible translators would do well to translate ἐν ᾧ as "for this reason," "because of this," or "on account of this."

## Conclusion

Since prepositions are "semantically poor, but very dense" with a "meaning" that has "manifold" nuances (Bortone 2010, 41), Bible translators should not assume that ἐν ᾧ functions identically in each of its five occurrences in 1 Peter. In 1 Pet 1.6, ᾧ is morphologically ambiguous. It may be either a dative singular masculine or a neuter pronoun, but in this context, ᾧ most likely refers to 1 Pet 1.3-5 as a whole (which understands ᾧ to be neuter). Here, ἐν ᾧ functions as a causal circumstantial conjunction and should be translated as "because of this." In 1 Pet 2.12 and 3.16, ᾧ similarly lacks a specific antecedent, and the prepositional phrase ἐν ᾧ in each of these verses precedes the main verb καταλαλέω. In both 1 Pet 2.12 and 3.16, ἐν ᾧ functions as a causal circumstantial conjunction and shows that non-Christians' slandering of Christians will earn God glory and them shame at the final judgment.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> In 1 Pet 2.12, ἐν ᾧ should be translated concessively, though, because of the complex syntax of the sentence.

In 1 Pet 3.19, ἐν ᾧ has an antecedent in the immediately preceding dative of respect, πνεύματι. Like πνεύματι, then, ἐν ᾧ functions to show an additional aspect (καί) of Jesus' being made alive in the Spirit: he preached to imprisoned spirits. Finally, ἐν ᾧ in 1 Pet 4.4 functions as it did in 1 Pet 1.6; 2.12; and 3.16, since it again lacks a specific antecedent. Christians' abstinence from pagan activities (1 Pet 4.3) is the practical cause of non-Christians maligning them (1 Pet 4.4). The various instances of ἐν ᾧ in 1 Peter illustrate how Bible translators must attend to specific grammatical constructions of prepositional phrases in their contexts. These varying grammatical constructions surrounding ἐν ᾧ in each of these instances assist Bible translators in properly translating ἐν ᾧ in each of these occurrences.

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## Abbreviations

- BDAG Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich 1999 (in References)
- CSB Christian Standard Bible (2017)
- EHV Evangelical Heritage Version (2019)
- ESV English Standard Version (2001, 2016)
- KJV King James Version (1611)
- LXX Septuagint
- MS(S) manuscript(s)
- NA28 Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed. (2012)
- NASB New American Standard Bible (1971, 1995)
- NIV New International Version (2011)
- NRSV New Revised Standard Version (1989)