

Word Study on “Holding On” or “Holding Forth” Philippians 2:16

1. Compare the translations of the NET Bible, NASB, NIV, NKJV, and NCV and categorize how each version renders this word.

In Philippians 2:16, the single Greek word “epecho” is translated differently in multiple translations (Strong, 1996). The NASB agrees with the NKJV, translating the word as “holding fast,” while the original KJV translates it as “holding forth.” The NIV renders the word as “[to] hold out.” The NET reads, “holding on to,” and the NCV differs the most, translating it as “[to] offer.” This is reflected in Table 1 (Herrick) (O'Brien, 1991, p. 297).

Table 1 - Translation Comparison

Agreement with O'Brien's Conclusion	Agreement with Herrick's Conclusion
NASB, NKJV – “Holding fast”	KJV – “Holding forth”
NET – “Holding on to”	NCV – “Offer”
	NIV – “Hold out”

2. Write down the transliteration and semantic range for this word.

The transliteration for the Greek word used here is “epecho.” A few definitions listed for the semantic range of the word are to “give heed unto,” “stay,” “hold forth,” and “take heed unto” (Strong, 1996).

3. What are Herrick's conclusions for the translation of this word and his reasons for holding it?

The phrase “epechontes” rarely means to “hold on to,” as it is translated to in the NET bible, but usually tells someone to “hold out” something. In this case, Herrick says, Paul is encouraging the Philippians in the way they should show the light of Christ; that is, they should let their light shine boldly. How? By holding *out* the Word of Life (Herrick)!

Herrick also points out that the word directly in front of the phrase “epechontes” is the Greek word for world, which implies evangelism. This would again imply that the Word of Life is the tool the Philippians are to use, holding it out, to witness to the world (Herrick).

4. What are O'Brien's conclusions on the translation of this word and his reasons for holding it?

O'Brien takes a different approach to the Greek than Herrick does. He looks at the Greek phrase "epechontes" and says it should be translated to mean to "hold fast" to the Word of Life. He points to the fact that Paul is encouraging the Philippians to live a certain way, as lights *to* the world *for* God, and that the way they can do this is by holding fast to God's words (O'Brien, 1991, p. 297).

5. Briefly explain the meaning of this verse for each translation option.

If you accept Herrick's conclusions and translate the word to mean to "hold out" the Word of Life, this passage can be meant to promote the spreading of God's loving message; it can be a passage to encourage people to witness (Herrick).

Contrarily, if you accept O'Brien's conclusions and translate the word to mean to "hold fast" to the Word of Life, this passage can be meant to encourage believers in a way to strengthen their own spiritual walk. According to O'Brien's conclusions, this passage has no meaning leading towards evangelism (O'Brien, 1991, p. 297).

6. After having interacted with these lexical and commentary resources, what do *you* think this word means in this passage and why?

I believe Paul's intentions were to encourage the Philippians to be a witness for Christ, holding forth the Word of Life as their basis for Faith. This is evident, I believe, in agreement with Herrick's conclusions, as well as by Paul's strong encouragement for evangelism in other passages. Paul is a firm believer in getting the message of Jesus Christ out, not simply sitting by idly. I believe evangelism was his intention with the passage (1 Corinthians 1:18-31, Philippians 2:12-30, 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16).

Works Cited

Herrick, G. *Exhortation to Unity - A Final Word Concerning Obedience (Philippians 2:12-18)*. Retrieved March 27, 2008, from Bible.org:
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