

From “salvationbygrace.org” in their Q & A section

You might remember Jim McClarty who came and spoke at our Fall retreat. He is the “Jim” referenced and this is his church’s website. I found this on Oct. 25, 2022

Regarding the HINA clause...(I used the bold to highlight the thought to be presented)

**Q** – Also, the word “might” and “may” are used quite a bit throughout scripture. When I use the word “might” I do so in the sense that I “might or might not” do something. In scriptures it appears to mean “be made able to”. Does it mean that someone or something “will do”? Or does it mean that someone or something is made “able to do”? Could you translate the meaning of the Greek word for “might” in the following scriptures and elaborate:

*Romans 15:4 – For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

*Romans 7:4 – So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.*

*Galatians 3:14 – He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.*

*2 Thessalonians 2:14 – He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*

*1 Timothy 1:16 – But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.*

*1 John 4:9 – This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.*

Thank you for helping me work through this,

**Jim:** What you have bumped into here is what’s called a “hina” clause in Greek grammar. Essentially, that is a “purpose” clause that follows a subjunctive participle. **The “purpose” clause changes the subjunctive mood (which we think of as possibility or probability) to a statement of definite result.** It’s the difference between saying “I might come over later if the feeling strikes me” and “I brought food to the hungry that they might eat.” The first statement is a possibility. But, the second statement contains a purpose, so in Greek grammar that changes the mood, letting the reader know that the participle (in this case “might” or “may”) has a more definite force.

Each of the verses you’ve cited above contains a “purpose” clause. Consequently, the weight of the participle shifts from probable to definite. For instance, in Romans 15:4 the purpose for “everything written in the past” was “to teach us, so that ... we might have hope.” The purpose of the writing was to produce hope in the reader. So, in Greek grammar, that “hina” clause gives the impression of definite result.

Our best English translations chose the terms “might” and “may” in order to accurately convey the subjunctive mood of the particular, very common Greek participle the New Testament authors employed. What we cannot convey accurately in the English language is the “mood” change directed by the “hina” (or “purpose”) clause. Expanded translations usually attempt to convey this change of mood, but word-for-word or “Formal Equivalence” translations struggle to accurately represent what the original readers of the Greek text would have clearly understood.

Unfortunately, contemporary critics of Reformed theology often cite verses such as you’ve listed above in order to argue that God’s purposes and decrees are not as solid as we portray them to be. Whenever I hear someone argue from the “might’s and may’s” of Scripture I realize that they have not done sufficient homework in the original languages and are over-emphasizing the English limitations in order to support their suppositions.

Let me close by offering this explanation of the “hina clause” rule written by Colin Smith and posted on the Alpha and Omega website. I hope this helps clear things up.

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### The Subjunctive and hina Clauses

The subjunctive in Greek is a mood that is often used to communicate possibility or probability. It can be used alone or in conjunction with other particles to add particular nuance of meaning. One particle that is often used with the subjunctive is the particle hina. **When hina is used with the subjunctive, the mood changes from one of possibility or probability, to one of purpose or result.** It appears from the evidence of the New Testament that hina clauses (as such constructions are called) are not intended to imply uncertainty, even though they use the subjunctive mood, which, when used alone or with other particles, can indeed convey uncertainty.

The best way to understand this is to look at some examples of passages that use hina clauses. The parts of the following passages in bold type are the parts that are translating hina clauses:

“And a man was there whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”— so **that they might** accuse Him.” (Matt 12:10 NASB)

There was no doubt that the Jewish leaders wanted to accuse Jesus, so their question was asked with this intent. “Might” here is not meant to represent uncertainty with regard to their intentions. Rather, “might” is an idiomatic way of conveying such intent in English.

“The Son of God appeared for this purpose, **to destroy** the works of the devil.” (1 John 3:8 NASB)

This passage itself declares that the subordinate clause is indicating purpose. The infinitive (“to destroy”) is used to translate hina and the subjunctive. Again, this is a perfectly legitimate way to indicate intent in English, and it translates the meaning of the verb adequately. Jesus’ purpose was not to attempt to destroy the devil’s works if He was able to do so. There is no question about Jesus’ ability to destroy the devil’s works. Rather, Jesus appeared for the purpose of destroying the devil’s works.

“Now the day was ending, and the twelve came and said to Him, “Send the crowd away, **that they may go** into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place.” (Luke 9:12 NASB)

Again, the hina clause indicates the purpose behind the suggestion to send the crowd away: to enable them to find lodging and food.

The New Testament is replete with such examples. Therefore, when we come to Galatians 2:16, we see the same use:

“nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so **that we may** be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.” (NASB)

Again, “may” here is an idiomatic way of translating purpose in English. The purpose of belief is justification. Indeed, one can also see here the hina clause being used to indicate result. Paul, by using the subjunctive, is not intending to communicate any kind of uncertainty with regard to justification. Rather, by using the subjunctive in a hina clause, he is proclaiming that our faith in Christ has its purpose in our justification, and also has its end result in our justification.