1-2003

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Article by: Kent L. Yinger, Ph.D.

For: *The Bible Translator*

Date: February 12, 2001

Title:

Translating καταβαρυνέτω [“disqualify,” NRSV] in Colossians 2.18

Position:

Available lexical evidence argues for a translation such as ‘condemn,’ ‘injure,’ ‘victimize,’ rather than with glosses connected to athletic imagery as in most translations, commentaries, and lexical aids.

Translating καταβραβεύεω in Col 2.18

According to a continuing tradition in translation and interpretation the notion of a “prize” (or “reward”) is to be retained when rendering Col 2.18a. The Greek text reads simply μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς καταβραβεύετω which the NIV translates, “Do not let anyone . . . disqualify you for the prize,” and the NAB, “Let no one rob you of your prize.”¹ Others make a reference to games imagery possible though ambiguous (“Do not let anyone disqualify you” NRSV), while still others depart entirely from this athletic metaphor (“Do not allow yourselves to be condemned by anyone” TEV). To what degree, then, does the compound verb καταβραβεύειν (only here in the NT [*hapax*]) retain an implicit reference to a prize (βραβεῖον) or to the image of athletic competition with an umpire (βραβεύς)? This study will show that linguistic and contextual factors render dubious any translation retaining a connection with athletic games.

Major lexical tools can be cited in support of these competing translations. For instance, the new third edition of Bauer’s *Lexicon* (BDAG) suggests “decide against (as umpire), and so **rob of a prize**, condemn τινά” (bold print in original). The first two suggestions retain the games metaphor; the third moves in a forensic direction. The findings are similar in LSJ, though some of the occurrences assigned an athletic meaning in BDAG are here given a non-athletic interpretation. The *PGL* omits any reference to a “prize” (“give unjust judgement against, defraud”), though one may assume the games imagery remains.² Louw and Nida’s *Lexicon* (L&N) places this entry under the semantic domain “think” (#30) and suggests “disqualify” or “judge that you should not receive the prize” (1.365). The known attestation of this verb is relatively scarce and has allowed contrasting interpretations.³

Five discrete understandings of this verb appear in commentaries and translations, with mixtures occurring in some commentators.

- (1) “rob of a prize.”
- (2) “award a prize unjustly.” Both (1) and (2) retain the athletic metaphor, but they differ as to whether the implied subject of the verb, the umpire, takes away something already possessed by the victor (1), or makes a wrong decision regarding the recipient of the award (2).
- (3) “disqualify.” Although the English term is also used in non-athletic contexts, it would appear that the athletic metaphor is meant to be understood here (disqualify from the race or from reception of the prize; see the NIV).
- (4) “condemn.” This assumes a forensic background.
- (5) “injure, mistreat, victimize.”

The most thorough treatment arguing strenuously for the notion of a “prize” (#1 above) is that by Heinrich A. W. Meyer.⁴ Opposing Meyer’s understanding are Frederick Field and Thomas K. Abbott (both taking meaning #4 above), while Ernst Percy argues for meaning #5.⁵ More recent commentators add no new lexical evidence and

¹ Additional translations retaining the notion of a “prize” include the NASB, NJB, and KJV (“beguile you of your reward”).

² MM makes no suggestion for a gloss. There is no article on this verb in *TDNT*, but in a note E. Stauffer suggests “to decide against someone” (1.638, n.2).

³ To conclude from extant attestation that καταβραβεύειν was a rarely used or peculiar verb in Hellenistic Greek is more than the evidence allows. It is found in eight Greek texts not directly related to Col 2.18, dating from the fourth century BCE to the twelfth century CE, not to mention the numerous comments in Greek writers related to Col 2.18. The scholia in Demosthenes Ἀἰῶ καταβραβευθέντα: found nowhere else in Demosthenes” (*Scholia Demosthenica* [2 vols.; ed. M. R. Dilts; Leipzig: Teubner, 1983-1986] 2.199, [in Oration 21, 93]) Ἀἰῶ could be taken as an indication that this was an uncommon verb, but probably refers simply to its character as a hapax in Demosthenes.

⁴ *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Philippians and Colossians and to Philemon* (trans. John C. Moore; rev. and ed. William P. Dickson; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1983; orig. 1874).

⁵ F. Field, *Notes on the Translation of the New Testament* (Cambridge: University Press, 1899) 196-97; T. K. Abbott, *Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1903) 265-66; E. Percy, *Die Probleme der Kolosser- und Epheserbriefe* (Skrifter Utgivna Av Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundet i Lund 39; Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1946) 143-45.

rely largely on past studies while vacillating between the meanings noted above.⁶ Most wish to retain at least something of the athletic metaphor in the meaning of καταβραβεύεω.⁷ Thus, since the major treatments are somewhat dated, do not consider all of the lexical evidence now available, and are not in agreement in their interpretation of evidence, and since modern lexicons, translations, and commentators evince continued uncertainty, a renewed study of καταβραβεύειν is in order.

Use Without Reference to Col 2.18

The only available pre-Christian literary text containing the compound verb is Demosthenes' oration "Against Meidias" (4th cent. BCE). "For this reason we know that Straton was condemned [καταβραβευθέντα] by Meidias and disfranchised [ἀτιμωθέντα] contrary to all justice."⁸ Following Meidias' failed bribery attempt, two witnesses now know that Meidias had mistreated Demosthenes and that Straton, the arbitrator, was "condemned" (or "victimized") and "disfranchised" (punished with loss of civil rights) unjustly. The action referred to by καταβραβευθέντα results in expulsion and the loss of Straton's rights, but is itself presumably something other than that loss.⁹ It is compared in the larger context to a judicial accusation [κατηγορῶν], and our verb is replaced in a similar context by a more common indictment [εἰσαγγέλλειν] (Athenian Constitution, §53.6). It seems less likely that καταβραβεύειν refers to Meidias himself "judging" or "condemning" Strato, since Meidias was not pronouncing judgment, but merely seeking an indictment. Hence, the action described by καταβραβευθέντα probably focuses on the abusive treatment itself, and may be translated with "injure," "mistreat," "abuse," or "victimize." In any case, no hint is given that this is an athletic metaphor or that a referee is falsely awarding or defrauding one of a prize; the word is at home here in a forensic context.

The perfect participial form of the verb [καταβεβραβευμένοι] is present in a fragmentary papyrus inscription dating to about the 2d cent. BCE.¹⁰ The text appears to deal with a dispute over an inheritance but is too broken to decipher the meaning of the verb. In the associated dictionary this occurrence is glossed with "verurteilen" (condemn), but the reasons are unclear.¹¹ Neither Preisigke nor the fragment, in any case, give any support to the inclusion of "prize" in the translation of Col 2.18.

Moving chronologically, the next occurrence of the verb is found in an astrological text of Vettius Valens (2d cent. CE). "As we observe, the earth itself seems to have power over all things [καταβραβεύειν τῶν λοιπῶν] as the originator and can condemn the rest" (*Vettius Valens* "Anthology" 9,7).¹² The point in context has to do with an

⁶ Niclas Förster incorrectly asserts that he has discovered in Jerome's writings a hitherto overlooked reference ("Sprach Paulus einen kilikischen Koine-Dialekt?" *ZNW* 88/3-4 [1997] 316-17). However, both Meyer and Abbott make reference to Jerome's thesis of a Pauline Cilician dialect and correctly reject such an assertion in light of wider usage of καταβραβεύειν.

⁷ See, for instance, the commentaries by Eduard Lohse (1971), Joachim Gnllka (1980), and James D. G. Dunn (1996); also Angela Standhartinger, *Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte und Intention des Kolosserbriefs* (NovTSup 94; Leiden: Brill, 1999) 187-89. Different: Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (WBC 44; Waco, Texas: Word, 1982) 141.

⁸ Translation by Douglas M. MacDowell, *Demosthenes, Against Meidias (Oration 21)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) 145 (§93). The LCL translates, "Strato was victimized by Meidias" (*Demosthenes* [LCL vol. 3; trans. J. H. Vince; Cambridge: Harvard, 1935] 66-67). On the scholia, which also contains the verb, see note 3 above.

⁹ Meyer's argument relies heavily on this text, but confuses the larger context in the passage with the meaning of καταβραβεύειν. He also contends that the verb means "to bring it about to the injury of some one, that not he, but another, shall receive the prize from the βραβεύς" (*Handbook*, 315). But this seems surely to read in too much; there is no thought in the context of a prize or a referee. Even if one were inclined to retain some notion of "robbing of one's rights," this is a *result* of the action represented by καταβραβευθέντα, and not a description of that action itself.

¹⁰ F. Preisigke, *Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Ägypten I* (Berlin: 1915) 4512 B, 57.

¹¹ F. Preisigke and E. Mayser, *Wörterbuch der griechischen Papyrusurkunden mit Einschluss der griechischen Inschriften, Aufschriften, Ostraka, Mumienbilder usw. aus Ägypten* (3 vols.; Berlin: 1925-1931) 1.744.

¹² Translation from E. Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 117, n.26. To my knowledge no modern translation has yet been made of the entire work. The Greek text can be found in David Pingree, *VETTI VALENTIS ANTIOCHENI ANTHOLOGARUM LIBRI NOVEN* (Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana; Leipzig: BSB B.G. Teubner Verlagsgesellschaft, 1986).

observation regarding the four principal elements (earth, fire, air, water). Each of these proves useless if alone, and would be unable to “take advantage of, have power over [πλεονεκτεῖ]” the other unless combined or allied with another of them. If allied, however, each element “will perform temperately, always using but being consumed by none.” The last sentence of the section, that which contains καταβραβεύειν, gives an observable example of this principle. Namely, the earth seems to exercise power over [καταβραβεύειν] the rest of the elements, since it is the originator of the four.¹³ To render with “rob of their prize” has no contextual justification in this instance. The verb is contextually parallel with πλεονεκτεῖ, and thus may reasonably be translated “have power over” or “take advantage of.”¹⁴

In a Christian text unrelated to Col 2.18 Eusebius cites a pastoral letter from the 3d century in which Paul of Samosata is said to have been formerly penniless, but “has now come to possess abundant wealth, as a result of lawless deeds and sacrilegious plunderings and extortions exacted from the brethren by threats.” This description is then followed by two participles which expand on the nature of his extortions: “For he deprives the injured of their rights [καταβραβεύων τοὺς ἀδικουμένους], and promises to help them for money” (*Hist. eccl.* 7.30.7, LCL, Oulton). A few lines later Eusebius provides an insight into this mistreatment of the brethren by Paul, who “breaks his word with these also, and with a light heart makes his harvest out of the readiness of persons engaged in lawsuits to make an offer, for the sake of being rid of those that trouble them.” Thus, when hapless Christians came accused before Paul as magistrate, he would lead them on with promises of help, but then settle in their favor only when they were prepared to give him a healthy sum as a bribe. It is this injurious behavior which is termed καταβραβεύων τοὺς ἀδικουμένους, perhaps best rendered with “victimize” or “take advantage of” (rather than “deprive of rights” as in the LCL).

A sermon falsely attributed to John Chrysostom (4th cent. CE?) contains an anomalous use of this verb. “[A]nd entering in to the disciples, he [κατεβράβευσεν] peace to them” (*In ascensionem*, sermon 4). This cannot be translated with any of the normally adopted renderings for the verb since καταβραβεύειν is always a negatively charged activity, whereas here it must be positive. If we take our cue from the similar account in John’s gospel—Jesus “came and stood in [the disciples’] midst” and said to them, “Peace be unto you” (Jn 20.19-23, par. Luk 24.36-43)—it would have to mean something like “impart,” “announce,” or “grant,” none of which, however, is attested elsewhere.

Hesychius of Alexandria (5th cent. CE) lists the meaning of the verb in his *Lexicon* as κατακρίνεται (“condemn”) or καταγωνίζεται (“conquer, defeat, overcome”), thus seeing a forensic or even military context, but not an athletic one.¹⁵

A final occurrence in a Greek text without relation to Col 2.18 is found in Eustathius’ commentary (12th cent. CE) on Homer’s *Iliad*. Poseidon’s own son, Briareus, renders aid to Zeus and opposes his father’s designs. Eustathius comments: “Thus the legendary Briareus does not feel kindly toward his father, but takes part against him [ἀλλὰ καταβραβεύει αὐτόν], as the ancients said, committing himself to justice above the physical bond.”¹⁶ The verb is set here in clear antithesis to the idea of kindly feelings toward someone [φίλα φρονεῖ τινι], and justifies the translation (with Percy) that Briareus is “taking part against” his father, or, in keeping with a forensic idea, that he would “decide against him (contrary to expectations).”

In all of these Greek texts (except the unusual Chrysostom text), and unrelated to any comment on Col 2.18, καταβραβεύειν speaks of injuring or victimizing another. In forensic contexts this can take the form of seeking the condemnation of another, while in non-forensic contexts it can speak of taking power over or against another. While the objects of this verb are occasionally deprived of certain rights, such loss is not indicated by καταβραβεύειν but is part of the larger context of that action. In none of these cases is the word used as part of a larger athletic image, meaning that translations 1 through 3 above receive no substantiation.

¹³ If one were to accept E. Schweizer’s thesis that the στοιχεῖα of Colossians are the four elements (earth, water, air, fire), there is then a parallel between what the Colossians are not to allow the false teachers to do to them (καταβραβεύειν) and what one of these elements does to the others (“Slaves of the Elements and Worshipers of Angels: Gal 4.3, 9 and Col 2.8, 18, 20,” *JBL* 107/3 [1988] 455-68).

¹⁴ Percy translates similarly: “auf Kosten anderer das Übergewicht gewinnen” (*Probleme*, 144). “Rule over” is suggested in MM when used with the genitive case as here.

¹⁵ *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*, ed. Ioannem Albertum and Mauricius Schmidt (2 vols.; Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1965 [repr. of 1860 edition]) 2.420. Suidas glosses similarly somewhat later (see below).

¹⁶ *Il.* 402sq. (author’s translation). See esp. Percy, 197.

(Christian) Use With Reference to Col 2.18

What follows are brief comments on Greek texts by Christian authors who remark in some way on the use of καταβραβεύτω in Col 2.18. These texts date from the 4th through the 12th cent. CE. While the authors' knowledge of the Greek language is normally of high quality, it is also possible that an interpretive tradition surrounding Col 2.18 has influenced their comments.

In his *Commentary on Colossians*, homily 7 [ad loc. Col 2.18], John Chrysostom uses this verb four times (the first is simply a citation of Col 2.18) and claims it is synonymous with ἐπηραζέτω (“insult, threaten, mistreat, abuse”).¹⁷ Of course, it is difficult to know whether Chrysostom is here trying to define the term καταβραβεύτω, or rather to expand on its implications. In any case, it is not so much any loss, but rather the insult caused which is foremost in Chrysostom's interpretation.

At one point in this text Chrysostom does connect the verb with games imagery. “For καταβ. is when the victory belongs to one, and the prize [τὸ βραβεῖον] to another, when having conquered you are mistreated [ἐπηραζέτῃ].” The etymology of the term is clearly in view—the reference to the prize [βραβεῖον] awarded to the victor. However, Chrysostom again appears to understand the verb itself to refer primarily to mistreatment or victimization [ἐπηραζέτῃ], while the etymological background provides him with further practical theological implications.¹⁸

Finally, Chrysostom notes the emotive force of the verb, saying that Paul “filled them with anger through saying καταβραβεύτω . . .” The verb carries a negative and insulting connotation.

Next, after citing Col 2.18 the 5th century church father, Theodoret, explains καταβραβεύτω. “The judges of the athletes they call umpires [βραβευτάς]. For these cast the vote for the victors. So καταβραβεύειν is ‘to decide unjustly’ [τὸ ἀδίκως βραβεύειν]” (*Interpretation of Paul's Epistles*, author's translation). He understands καταβραβεύειν to refer to the unjust decision or award of an umpire in the games.

Written around 1000 CE the lexicon attributed to an otherwise unknown “Suidas” gives glosses and a comment on καταβραβεύειν as found in Col 2.18.

Καταβραβεύετω· αἰτιατικῇ Ἐγκαταλογιζέσθω, κατακρινέτω, καταγωνιζέσθω. Τὸ ἄλλου ἀγωνιζομένου ἄλλον στεφανοῦσθαι λέγει ὁ Ἀπόστολος καταβραβεύεσθαι.

[Καταβραβεύετω: accuse; reckon, condemn, conquer.

The apostle says καταβραβεύεσθαι when one contends and another is crowned.]¹⁹

Suidas clearly includes in his comment on Col 2.18 the crowning of the wrong competitor. However, his previous glosses support the meaning “condemn” or similar, without games imagery. Although Suidas understands Paul's use of the verb in Col 2.18 to have implications for Christian rewards, it is less clear that the verb itself carried this meaning for him. It may be that the interpretive tradition known to Suidas brought this implication.

Theophylact's *Commentary on Colossians* uses our verb five times, the first two simply in citation of Col 2.18. The archbishop states: τουτέστιν, ἐπηραζέτω. Καταβραβεύειν γάρ ἐστιν, ὅταν ἕτερος μὲν νικᾷ ὁ ἄλλος δὲ λαμβάνῃ τὸ βραβεῖον. (That is, “mistreat.” For καταβραβεύειν is when one wins but the other receives the prize. [author's translation]) Thus, he wishes to gloss with ἐπηραζέτω (non-athletic term), but explains the background as from the games and having to do with the reception of a prize. This combination of athletic and non-athletic terms and images is typical of later Christian commentators on Col 2.18. Then, in commenting on the next phrase (θέλων κτλ.) he emphasizes the negative, angering character of the verb. “When he had angered them, by showing that they were being mistreated [καταβραβεύονται] and abused [ἐπηραζονται] . . .” These comments are little more than a reproduction of Chrysostom's commentary (above), which is not surprising in light of Theophylact's known tendency to reiterate Chrysostom, Theodoret, and others. Thus Theophylact's usage may not be an independent

¹⁷ The *PGL* glosses ἐπηραζέω with (1) “abuse, misuse; insult, blaspheme against” [+ accus.], (2) “cast in one's teeth,” or (3) “injure” (p. 516). See also, *LSJ* (p. 620), and *Luk* 6.28; *Mt* 5.44 v.l.

¹⁸ Victor Pfitzner refers to “the lavishness with which the athletic image is used in the writings of Chrysostom,” and he accuses Chrysostom of “a decided overinterpretation . . . as far as the metaphorical character” of καταβραβεύειν is concerned (*Paul and the Agon Motif: Traditional Athletic Imagery in the Pauline Literature* [SupNT 16; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967], 155). See further, E. Eidem, *Pauli bildvärld I, Athletae et Milites Christi* (Beiträge zur Religionswissenschaft der religionswissenschaftliche Gesellschaft zu Stockholm 1; Lund: 1913); and J. A. Sawhill, “The Use of Athletic Metaphors in the Biblical Homilies of St. John Chrysostom” (Diss., Princeton, 1928).

¹⁹ *Suidae Lexicon*, Ada Adler [ed.] (5 vols.; *Lexicographi Graeci, Recogniti et Apparatu Critico Instructi* Vol. 1; Stuttgart: Teubner, 1989-1994) vol. 3, p. 486 (author's translation).

witness to the meaning of the verb and should not be given too much weight. The final instance in this passage gives little insight into the meaning of the verb.

Finally a 12th century comment attributed to the Byzantine canonist, Zonaras, shows the continuing connection of the verb with sports imagery. After citing Col 2.18 he expands. “Let no one defraud you of the prize of faith [τοῦ βραβείου τῆς πίστεως] and of true life (for καταβραβεύειν means that the victor is not considered worthy of the prize, but it is given to another, wronging the victor)” (Canon 35, MPG 137, author’s translation). Zonaras understands καταβραβεύειν to be synonymous with ἀποστερέω (“to rob” or “defraud”), resulting in giving the prize to the non-victor and wronging the true victor. This is confirmed in his *Lexicon* which glosses καταβραβεύεω with “παράλογίζεσθω· ἢ κατακρινέτω.”²⁰ The first term means “deceive, delude, defraud,” and could be used in the sense of “defraud of [a prize].” However, Zonaras is also aware here that this may be a forensic intensification meaning “condemn.”

A number of additional occurrences are found in the early church fathers, but are all simply citations of Col 2.18 without further indication of the meaning of the term.²¹ Also, a quick look at various ancient versions and paraphrases of the letter confirms that early translators knew of both an athletic and non-athletic use of the verb in the context of Col 2.18, as well as adding some new possibilities. Jerome’s rendering is “nemo adversum vos bravium accipiat” [“let no one obtain the prize instead of you”],²² and Theodore of Mopsuestia has, “nemo bravium vestrum tollat” [“let no one take away your prize”]. The Syriac version, on the other hand, reads *damnare*, *condemnet*, “words normally used for κατακρίνειν and καταδικάζειν,” that is, non-athletic images.²³ The Vulgate leads in quite another direction with “nemo vos seducat volens” [“let no one lead you away” or “seduce you”].

Thus, Christian authors show an awareness of athletic imagery behind the use of this verb, but only in connection with Col 2.18 and in two quite different ways. Either the umpire robs someone of the prize, or he awards it unjustly (translations 1 and 2 above). However, Christian authors also show continued awareness that the verb itself simply speaks of injury or victimization, and that it can refer to condemnation in forensic cases; that is, the verb’s meaning is not tied to an athletic metaphor. It is, of course, possible that these Christian authors knew of a metaphorical sense of καταβραβεύειν otherwise lost in the extant Greek evidence. However, because Greek writers (without reference to Col 2.18) do not show knowledge of this particular metaphorical sense, it seems far more likely that Christian writers are reading an interpretive tradition into καταβραβεύεω (so Theophylact above) than that they are revealing an otherwise lost meaning. The source of such a tradition is easy to grasp given the etymological connections of καταβραβεύειν and the prevalence of athletic and prize imagery elsewhere in Paul’s letters.

On Etymology and Context

The influence of etymological arguments has had a strong and lasting impact on the study of Col 2.18. For instance, a recent study concludes that “the basic meaning of [καταβραβεύειν] can be ascertained from the uncompounded form βραβεύειν,” which “designates the activity of an umpire In compound with the prefix κατά implying the hostile sense of against, the verb means to decide against or disqualify someone.”²⁴ However, apart from the fact that etymology is no guarantee of current meaning, the simplex form, βραβεύειν, had widened by the 1st cent. CE to mean “order,” “rule,” or “control.”²⁵ In addition, a prefixed κατά often carries an intensifying or

²⁰ Iohanes Augustus Henricus Tittmann [ed.] (2 vols., Lipsiae, 1808) 2.1175, under letter “k”.

²¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, Bk 3, chap 6, section 51, subsection 3, line 2; John Chrysostom, Comm. on *Romans*. vol 60, pg 630, ln 32; John of Damascus, *Comm. on Paul’s epistles* (ad loc.); Origen, *Contra Celsum*, Bk 5, section 8, line 24.

²² *Epist.*, opera sect. I,3,121,10, *ad Aglas*.

²³ On the Syriac evidence, see Field, 197.

²⁴ Troy Martin, *By Philosophy and Empty Deceit: Colossians as Response to a Cynic Critique* (JSNTSup 118; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) 136. Popular treatments regularly take this tack; see for instance, K. Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies From the Greek NT For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1966) 1.211, 248.

²⁵ So E. Stauffer (s.v. *βραβεύω*; *TDNT*, 1.637-38). See also *BDAG* and Col 3.15 (“let the peace of Christ rule [βραβεύετω] in your hearts”).

perfecting sense, not simply adding a hostile “against” to the meaning of the uncompounded form.²⁶ Thus, while etymology can sometimes be indicative of contemporary meaning, καταβραβεύειν seems by the time of our text to have lost any primary reference to the games, umpires, or prizes.²⁷ The etymological connections of the compound verb apparently led early interpreters to read out of its use in Col 2.18 a reference to Paul’s notions elsewhere of a Christian “prize.” This would explain why no ancient texts attest an athletic metaphor in the verb unless they are commenting on Col 2.18.

To translate καταβραβεύω in Col 2.18 with “mistreat, victimize, take advantage of” or even “bring under accusation” also makes good sense contextually.²⁸ With the majority I understand actual teachers to lie behind the false teaching (and not just a general tendency), though scholars are not able to agree on the precise nature or background of this false teaching.²⁹ Paul had already warned the Colossians against being misled by the arguments of the false teachers (μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς παραλογίζεται, 2.4). The phraseological similarity is quite noticeable here (cf. μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς καταβραβεύτω; also 2.16 - μη τις ὑμᾶς κρινέτω). In addition, the false teachers wish to seduce the Colossian Christians or bring them under the power of human regulations and elemental spirits (μή τις ὑμᾶς ἔσται ὁ συλαγωγῶν, 2.8). To combat this form of spiritual oppression, Paul stresses Christ’s supremacy over such elemental spirits and the believer’s freedom and forgiveness in Christ (2.9-15). In two parallel injunctions (vv 16-17, 18-19) the apostle then exhorts believers to refuse such judgmental treatment [μὴ κρινέτω, v 16] and not to allow themselves to be victimized by these deceivers, or perhaps brought under accusation by them [μηδεὶς καταβραβεύτω, v 18]. These parallel injunctions are then followed in each case by reasons for resistance (vv 17, 19). As elsewhere Paul will have none of such spiritual oppression and judgment of other believers based upon human traditions and regulations (cf. Rom 14.1-12, esp. v 3 - μὴ ἐξουθενεῖτω . . . μὴ κρινέτω). Καταβραβεύω was probably chosen as a forceful word perhaps because less common intensification of the idea found in μὴ κρινέτω (v 16).³⁰

Conclusion

Thus, it may be hoped in translating καταβραβεύω at Col 2.18 that future translations, lexical aids, and commentaries will give preference to “condemn,” “injure,” “take advantage of,” or similar (meanings #4-5 above),

²⁶ See Archibald T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1914) 826-28. He notes the following examples:

καίω (“burn,” Jn 15.6) Ἀκατακαίω (“burn up,” Acts 19.19)

λύω (“loosen,” Luk 3.16) Ἀκαταλύω (“destroy,” Mt 24.2)

φεύγω (“flee,” Mt 2.13) Ἀκαταφεύγω (“escape,” Heb 6.18)

κρίνω (“judge,” Jn 5.30) Ἀκατακρίνω (“condemn,” Mt 12.41)

The last example could be translated “judge against” but still demonstrates the intensifying force of the prefix (“condemn”).

²⁷ The same has happened to συνεβράβευσαν at 1 Esd 9.14 (cf. Victor C. Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif*, 156).

²⁸ Meyer argues that the ensuing words (θέλων ἐν . . .) should be translated “while he desires (to deprive you of the prize) by virtue of humility” and that this must refer to an *action* (depriving of a prize), not an *attitude* or a *judgment* (316-17). However, his rejection of a Septuagintalism here (θέλων ἐν = taking delight in) is opposed by most commentators (see Lohse, *Colossians*, 118, n.29), and θέλων does not demand an action rather than an attitude (for instance, Rom 16.19; 1 Cor 7.32; 11.3).

²⁹ For a helpful introduction to identifying the opponents, see John M. Barclay, *Colossians and Philemon* (NT Guides; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) esp. 37-55.

³⁰ Meyer argues that καταβραβεύω is not an intensification of κρινέτω (315), wrongly calls the former “a peculiar form” (while less common, there is no evidence it was considered “peculiar” by ancient authors), and argues in circular fashion that it brings a “new warning.”

Others have suggested that this verb implies “assumption [falsely] of authority” or “officialism” (Field, 197; cf. also MM, s.v. “καταβραβεύειν”), or has a negative, insulting tone (Chrysostom). However, none of these associations can be convincingly shown by the known usage. Nor is Wohlfeil right that Paul avoids κατακρίνειν here because it would impute good motives to the false teachers (L. T. Wohlfeil, “A Few Remarks on Col. 2,18.19a,” *CTM* 8 [1937] 424-33, esp. 428; see Rom 8.34; also Mt 20.18, par.; Mk 14.64).

rather than continuing the lexically questionable route of preferring “rob of a prize” or “disqualify [from the athletic games].” This may at least put an end to the misuse of this verb in disputes over Christian “prizes.”³¹

³¹ For one author Col 2.18 disproves the Reformed doctrine of perseverance, since one can be robbed of the “prize” (J. C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and The Final Significance of Man* [Hayesville, NC: Schoettle, 1992] 209), while for another the text must mean the false teachers only “claimed” to do what (Calvinists know) is impossible (George G. Findlay, “The Reading and Rendering of Colossians II.18,” *The Expositor* 11 [1880] 397).