



## The Theology of Perseverance in Philippians 1:29 and Its Role in Strengthening the Spiritual Competence of Christian Educators: Evidence from SD Negeri 16 Pasaran 1

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the theology of perseverance in Philippians 1:29 and its role in strengthening the spiritual competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers within the context of SD Negeri 16 Pasaran 1, Samosir. Grounded in Pauline theology, this research understands perseverance not merely as psychological endurance, but as a divine gift that accompanies faith and shapes vocational identity, spiritual resilience, and professional commitment. The study aims to explore how perseverance is interpreted, embodied, and practiced by a CRE teacher in a public elementary school environment characterized by limited institutional support and religious minority conditions. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving one CRE teacher and 78 Christian students. The findings reveal that perseverance functions as a foundational dimension of spiritual competence, integrating theological understanding, vocational identity, emotional resilience, and pedagogical practice. The study further demonstrates that the teacher's perseverance has a formative influence on students' spiritual attitudes, fostering resilience, trust in God, and a practical understanding of faith in everyday life. These findings highlight that spiritual competence in Christian education is not limited to doctrinal knowledge but is expressed through lived faithfulness and vocational endurance. The study concludes that integrating the theology of perseverance into Christian education strengthens both professional identity and spiritual formation, offering a meaningful framework for sustaining Christian education in pluralistic and resource-limited public school contexts.*

**Keywords:** *Spiritual Competence, Christian Religious Education, Perseverance*

### INTRODUCTION

Spiritual competence is increasingly recognized as a foundational dimension of teacher professionalism in Christian Religious Education (CRE), particularly in contexts where faith

formation must be nurtured within complex social, cultural, and educational realities. Beyond pedagogical skills and subject-matter mastery, CRE teachers are called to embody spiritual maturity that is reflected in perseverance, faithfulness, and resilience in the face of challenges. In many public schools in Indonesia, where Christian students often constitute a minority, the spiritual competence of teachers plays a decisive role in sustaining students' faith identity and encouraging consistent Christian character development (Knight, 2006; Groome, 2011). Within Christian theology, perseverance is not merely a psychological trait but a deeply theological virtue rooted in participation in Christ's suffering and mission. Philippians 1:29 explicitly frames perseverance within the paradoxical language of divine grace: "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him." This verse situates suffering and endurance not as accidental hardships, but as part of God's gracious economy for shaping mature believers. Scholars of Pauline theology emphasize that the Greek term *echaristhē* ("has been granted") derives from *charis* (grace), indicating that perseverance in suffering is understood as a gift that contributes to spiritual formation and Christlikeness (Oropeza, 2015; Fee, 1995). Perseverance is closely linked to spiritual growth, character formation, and participation in Christ's redemptive narrative. Paul consistently presents endurance as a pathway through which faith is refined and strengthened, leading to maturity and hope (Rom. 5:3-5; Phil. 3:10). Contemporary biblical interpretation affirms that Philippians 1:29 reflects a theology in which suffering and perseverance are integral to discipleship and spiritual identity, rather than signs of divine absence (Fee, 1995; O'Brien, 1991). This perspective challenges triumphalist views of Christian faith and instead emphasizes a spirituality shaped by faithful endurance and trust in God's purposes. In the field of Christian education, spiritual competence refers to a teacher's capacity to integrate personal faith, theological understanding, and spiritual practices into professional identity and classroom engagement. Parker Palmer (2007) argues that authentic teaching flows from the "inner landscape" of the teacher, where integrity, faith, and spiritual depth shape educational practice. Similarly, Groome (2011) highlights that Christian education is inherently formational, aiming not only at cognitive understanding but also at the cultivation of lived faith through relational and narrative pedagogy. Within this framework, perseverance becomes a visible marker of spiritual competence, as teachers model faithful endurance, patience, and hope amid institutional, relational, and contextual challenges. Recent studies in Christian pedagogy further demonstrate that spiritually competent teachers significantly influence students' resilience and faith commitment. Research in Indonesian public school contexts indicates that CRE teachers who embody perseverance through prayer, reflective practice, and consistent Christian witness foster stronger spiritual engagement and faith stability among students, particularly in minority-Christian environments (Saragih, 2025). Such findings suggest that perseverance is not only a personal virtue but also a pedagogical resource that shapes classroom climate, teacher-student relationships, and long-term spiritual outcomes. In the specific context of SD Negeri 16 Pasaran 1, Samosir, where there are 78 Christian students and only one CRE teacher, the demands on spiritual competence are particularly significant. The teacher is required to function not only as an instructor but also as a primary spiritual role model and mentor for students. In such settings, perseverance becomes essential for sustaining consistent Christian instruction, maintaining spiritual vitality, and supporting students' faith development amid limited institutional and

collegial support. The theological vision of perseverance in Philippians 1:29 thus provides a critical biblical lens through which the spiritual competence of Christian educators can be understood and evaluated. This study seeks to explore how the theology of perseverance in Philippians 1:29 functions as a foundational framework for strengthening the spiritual competence of Christian educators at SD Negeri 16 Pasaran 1, Samosir. By integrating Pauline theology with contemporary theories of spiritual and professional competence in education, this research aims to contribute to the growing discourse on how biblical virtues inform and shape the identity, resilience, and effectiveness of CRE teachers. In doing so, the study positions perseverance not merely as a response to adversity, but as a central theological and pedagogical resource for holistic Christian education.

## METHODS

A qualitative research design was used in order to explore in depth how the theology of perseverance in Philippians 1:29 is understood, embodied, and practiced as a foundation for the spiritual competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers. A qualitative approach was chosen because the focus of the study is not on measuring variables statistically, but on interpreting meanings, experiences, and theological reflections as they are lived and expressed in educational practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This design allows for a rich, contextualized understanding of how perseverance is integrated into the professional and spiritual identity of Christian educators. Specifically, the study adopted a qualitative case study approach, as the research was bounded within a particular institutional and social context, namely SD Negeri 16 Pasaran 1, Samosir. Case study methodology is appropriate when the researcher seeks to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life setting and when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018; Stake, 1995). Through this approach, the study aimed to capture the unique dynamics of spiritual competence formation in a setting where Christian education is delivered by a single CRE teacher serving a relatively small Christian student population. The research was conducted at SD Negeri 16 Pasaran 1, located in Samosir Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The site was selected purposively because it represents a public elementary school context in which Christian Religious Education is provided with limited human resources. At the time of the study, the school had 78 Christian students and one Christian Religious Education teacher who was responsible for delivering CRE instruction and providing spiritual guidance for these students. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a strategy commonly employed in qualitative research to identify information-rich cases that can provide deep insight into the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015). The primary participant was the CRE teacher, who served as the key informant due to their central role in implementing Christian education and modeling spiritual perseverance. In addition, a small number of Christian students were included as supporting participants to provide perspectives on how the teacher's perseverance and spiritual competence were perceived and experienced in the learning process. This multi-perspective approach strengthened the credibility of the findings by allowing for triangulation of viewpoints (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data were collected through multiple qualitative techniques to ensure depth and trustworthiness of the

findings. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the CRE teacher to explore personal theological understanding of Philippians 1:29, experiences of perseverance in professional practice, and perceived challenges and sources of spiritual strength. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they provide a balance between guiding the discussion and allowing participants to express their own meanings and narratives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Classroom observations were carried out to document how perseverance and spiritual competence were enacted in everyday teaching practices. The observations focused on teacher-student interactions, expressions of faith, responses to challenges, and the integration of biblical values into instructional and relational practices. Observational data allowed the researcher to examine the alignment between articulated beliefs and actual pedagogical behavior (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All interview transcripts, observation field notes, and documents were organized and coded systematically. Initial open coding was conducted to identify significant statements, concepts, and recurring patterns related to perseverance, spiritual competence, faith practice, and professional identity. These initial codes were then grouped into broader categories through axial coding, allowing for the identification of relationships among themes (Saldaña, 2016). Subsequently, selective coding was used to refine and integrate the major themes into a coherent interpretive framework that connects Pauline theology of perseverance with practical expressions of spiritual competence in Christian education. Throughout the analysis process, constant comparison was employed to ensure consistency across data sources and to deepen interpretive rigor (Charmaz, 2014). To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed. Credibility was supported through triangulation of data sources (interviews, observations, and documents) and member checking, in which preliminary interpretations were shared with the primary participant to verify accuracy and resonance (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability was addressed by providing thick description of the research context, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings to similar educational settings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative analysis revealed several interrelated themes that illuminate how the theology of perseverance in Philippians 1:29 functions as a foundational element in shaping the spiritual competence of the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher at SD Negeri 16 Pasaran 1, Samosir. The data indicate that perseverance is not merely conceptualized as passive endurance, but is understood and practiced as an active, faith-driven commitment to calling, responsibility, and spiritual witness. The major themes that emerged from the data include: perseverance as a divine calling rather than a personal choice, perseverance as spiritual identity and professional vocation, perseverance in the face of structural and contextual limitations, modeling perseverance as spiritual pedagogy, and perseverance as formative influence on students' spiritual attitudes and resilience. These themes collectively demonstrate that spiritual competence is not only expressed through doctrinal knowledge or ritual practices, but is deeply embodied in the lived spirituality of the teacher, particularly through faithful endurance, commitment, and trust in God amid challenges. This aligns with the Pauline theology in Philippians 1:29,

where suffering and perseverance are framed as gifts that accompany faith, thereby redefining difficulty as a space for spiritual growth and witness.

### ***Perseverance as Divine Calling Rather Than Personal Choice***

One of the most prominent findings is that the CRE teacher interprets perseverance primarily as a divine calling rather than as a matter of personal preference or convenience. In interviews, the teacher consistently described perseverance as something that flows from obedience to God's call to teach, rather than from external rewards or institutional recognition. This theological framing reflects a deeply internalized Pauline perspective, in which faith and perseverance are inseparable dimensions of Christian discipleship. The teacher articulated that remaining faithful in teaching, despite limited resources and a heavy sense of responsibility, is understood as participation in God's work rather than merely fulfilling a professional obligation. This interpretation transforms perseverance from a burdensome necessity into a meaningful spiritual vocation. The teacher's narrative reveals that perseverance is experienced as part of God's shaping process, where difficulties are interpreted as opportunities to grow in trust, humility, and dependence on divine grace. This finding supports the theological understanding that perseverance is not simply a human effort but a spiritually grounded response to God's initiative. In the context of Christian education, this reframing is significant because it positions teaching not only as a technical profession but as a form of ministry. As a result, spiritual competence is expressed through the teacher's sustained commitment, even when tangible institutional support is minimal. Another key theme is the integration of perseverance into the teacher's spiritual identity and professional self-understanding. The data show that perseverance is not viewed as an occasional response to crisis, but as a stable dimension of identity that shapes how the teacher understands their role, purpose, and relationship with God. The CRE teacher frequently described teaching as a "calling" that requires faithfulness over time, particularly in a context where there is only one CRE teacher responsible for 78 Christian students. This responsibility is experienced not merely as workload, but as spiritual stewardship. The teacher expressed a sense of accountability before God, which reinforces perseverance as a moral and spiritual commitment rather than simply a contractual duty. This integration of perseverance into identity suggests that spiritual competence is deeply relational and vocational. The teacher's sense of perseverance is not isolated from professional practice; rather, it becomes a defining feature of how teaching is approached, how challenges are interpreted, and how success is understood. Success is not primarily measured by external indicators, but by faithfulness, consistency, and integrity in fulfilling God's calling. This finding resonates with Pauline notions of vocation, where believers are called to remain faithful in their assigned roles, regardless of external circumstances. In this sense, perseverance becomes a marker of authentic Christian identity, reinforcing the idea that spiritual competence is expressed through long-term faithfulness rather than short-term achievement.

### ***Perseverance in the Face of Structural and Contextual Limitations***

The data strongly highlight the presence of structural and contextual challenges that require sustained perseverance. These challenges include limited institutional support for Christian education, minimal peer collaboration due to the presence of only one CRE teacher, and the broader context of a public school environment where Christian education is not the dominant religious framework. The teacher described experiencing emotional and spiritual fatigue at times, particularly when facing administrative demands, limited teaching materials, and the expectation to address diverse spiritual needs among students with varying levels of family and church support. Despite these challenges, the teacher emphasized a continued commitment to teaching and spiritual mentoring, interpreting these difficulties as part of the “suffering” that accompanies faith, as articulated in Philippians 1:29. This finding underscores the practical relevance of Pauline theology in educational contexts. Perseverance is not abstract, but is enacted through daily decisions to continue teaching, preparing lessons, praying for students, and maintaining spiritual discipline, even when conditions are less than ideal. The teacher’s endurance is thus not simply a personal trait, but a theological response to contextual realities. This theme also reveals that spiritual competence includes the capacity to reinterpret institutional limitations through a faith-based lens. Rather than viewing constraints as reasons to disengage, the teacher frames them as opportunities to depend more deeply on God. This spiritual reframing enables sustained engagement and reduces the risk of burnout by grounding perseverance in theological meaning rather than institutional validation.

One of the most significant findings is that perseverance functions not only as a personal spiritual resource for the teacher, but also as a form of spiritual pedagogy that is implicitly taught to students. Classroom observations revealed that the teacher frequently models calmness, patience, and faith-based responses to challenges, such as student behavioral issues, learning difficulties, and logistical disruptions. Students are exposed to perseverance not primarily through abstract theological explanations, but through the teacher’s consistent demeanor, commitment, and relational presence. The teacher’s willingness to remain patient, to repeat explanations, to encourage struggling students, and to continue offering spiritual guidance even when students show limited immediate response serves as a living demonstration of perseverance. This modeling aligns with social learning perspectives, in which learners internalize values and attitudes by observing significant role models. In this case, perseverance becomes part of the hidden curriculum of Christian education, shaping students’ understanding of what it means to live faithfully in the face of difficulty. This reflects the incarnational nature of Christian pedagogy, where faith is not only taught but embodied. The teacher’s perseverance becomes a visible expression of Philippians 1:29, making Pauline theology tangible for students. As a result, spiritual competence is communicated not only through words, but through lived example. Supporting student perspectives indicate that the teacher’s perseverance has a formative influence on students’ spiritual attitudes and resilience. Students reported perceiving the teacher as “always patient,” “never giving up on students,” and “still teaching even when things are difficult.” These perceptions suggest that perseverance is recognized and internalized by learners as a meaningful spiritual value. The students’ narratives indicate that they associate faith with consistency, patience, and commitment. For some students, the teacher’s perseverance becomes a

reference point for understanding how Christians should respond to problems. This suggests that spiritual competence has a multiplier effect, extending beyond the teacher to shape the spiritual imagination of students. This finding is significant because it demonstrates that perseverance contributes not only to teacher well-being and vocational faithfulness, but also to student spiritual formation. Students learn that faith is not limited to moments of success or comfort, but is expressed through continued effort and trust in God during hardship. In this way, perseverance becomes a shared spiritual language within the classroom community.

The analysis shows that Philippians 1:29 is not treated merely as a biblical text to be explained cognitively, but as a theological framework that informs the teacher's interpretation of lived experience. The verse's emphasis on faith and suffering as gifts is internalized in a way that shapes the teacher's response to adversity. This theological integration enables the teacher to view difficulties as spiritually meaningful rather than merely frustrating. Such a perspective supports spiritual resilience and reduces the likelihood of interpreting hardship as failure. Instead, perseverance becomes a sign of participation in Christ's path, reinforcing a theology of faithful endurance. This integration illustrates how biblical theology can function as a practical resource for educators, providing interpretive lenses that sustain long-term commitment. It also highlights the importance of theological literacy in shaping spiritual competence. Without a robust theological framework, challenges might be experienced solely as institutional problems; with such a framework, they become spiritually interpreted experiences. The findings suggest that spiritual competence is holistic, encompassing cognitive, affective, relational, and vocational dimensions. Perseverance is expressed not only in belief, but in emotional regulation, relational commitment, and sustained vocational engagement. The teacher's perseverance includes managing frustration, maintaining hope, nurturing relationships with students, and remaining faithful to teaching responsibilities over time. This holistic understanding challenges reductionist views of spiritual competence that focus solely on doctrinal knowledge or ritual observance. Instead, spiritual competence is revealed as a lived capacity to remain faithful, hopeful, and engaged despite adversity. Perseverance thus functions as a core integrating virtue that connects faith, identity, and practice.

The case of SD Negeri 16 Pasaran 1 highlights broader implications for Christian Religious Education in public school settings. The findings suggest that where resources and institutional support are limited, the spiritual competence of the teacher becomes a critical factor in sustaining the quality and continuity of Christian education. Perseverance enables the teacher to remain present and engaged even when systemic conditions are challenging. This underscores the importance of supporting the spiritual formation of CRE teachers, not only their pedagogical skills. Teacher training and professional development programs should therefore include explicit attention to spiritual resilience, theology of suffering, and vocational identity. The findings indicate that perseverance has institutional significance. A single persevering teacher can sustain a meaningful Christian educational presence within a public school, shaping the spiritual experiences of dozens of students. This highlights the strategic importance of investing in the spiritual well-being of CRE teachers as a means of strengthening Christian education more broadly. The results demonstrate that perseverance, grounded in Philippians 1:29, functions as both a

theological resource and an educational practice. It sustains the teacher's spiritual competence, shapes professional identity, and influences students' spiritual development. Perseverance is thus not a peripheral virtue, but a central dimension of effective Christian education in contexts marked by limitation and challenge. This study contributes to the literature by providing empirical qualitative evidence of how Pauline theology is lived out in contemporary Christian educational practice. It shows that perseverance is not merely an abstract theological concept, but a lived spiritual discipline that shapes teaching, relationships, and institutional engagement. In this sense, perseverance becomes a bridge between theology and pedagogy, demonstrating how biblical texts can inform and sustain educational practice. The findings affirm that spiritual competence is most clearly visible not in moments of ease, but in faithful endurance amid difficulty.

## CONCLUSION

This study has explored the theology of perseverance in Philippians 1:29 and its role in strengthening the spiritual competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers within the specific context of SD Negeri 16 Pasaran 1, Samosir. Through a qualitative case study approach, the research has demonstrated that perseverance is not merely an individual psychological trait, but a deeply theological and vocational reality that shapes how Christian educators understand their calling, interpret challenges, and sustain faithful engagement in their professional responsibilities. The findings indicate that perseverance is understood by the CRE teacher as a divine calling rather than a personal choice. This theological framing transforms endurance from a burdensome obligation into a meaningful participation in God's redemptive work. By interpreting challenges as part of the gift of faith and suffering articulated in Philippians 1:29, the teacher is able to maintain a sense of spiritual purpose and identity even in the face of institutional limitations and resource constraints. This supports a theological understanding of teaching as ministry, in which professional practice is inseparable from spiritual vocation. The study reveals that perseverance is a core component of spiritual competence that integrates cognitive, affective, relational, and vocational dimensions. Spiritual competence is expressed not only through doctrinal knowledge or ritual practice, but through sustained faithfulness, emotional resilience, relational commitment to students, and long-term vocational dedication. Perseverance functions as an integrating virtue that connects belief with lived practice, enabling the teacher to embody faith in everyday educational realities. A significant contribution of this study is its demonstration that perseverance operates as a form of spiritual pedagogy. Through consistent modeling of patience, faith-based responses to difficulty, and relational presence, the teacher implicitly teaches students how to live out faith in the face of adversity. This modeling shapes students' spiritual attitudes and contributes to the formation of resilience, trust in God, and a practical understanding of Christian discipleship. In this way, the teacher's perseverance has a formative impact that extends beyond individual spirituality to influence the broader spiritual culture of the classroom. The study also highlights the particular importance of perseverance in public school contexts where Christian education is often marginal and structurally limited. In such settings, the spiritual competence of the CRE teacher becomes a critical sustaining factor for the continuity and

quality of Christian Religious Education. The findings suggest that supporting the spiritual formation and resilience of CRE teachers is not optional, but essential for the long-term viability of Christian education in pluralistic and resource-constrained environments. This research contributes to Christian education scholarship by offering empirical evidence of how Pauline theology is lived out in contemporary educational practice. It demonstrates that Philippians 1:29 provides not only doctrinal insight but also practical spiritual resources for educators facing daily challenges. Perseverance emerges as a bridge between theology and pedagogy, showing how biblical texts can inform professional identity, sustain vocational commitment, and shape educational relationships. This study suggests important implications for policy, teacher training, and future research. Teacher education programs should intentionally integrate theological reflection on perseverance, suffering, and vocation as part of spiritual competence development. Future studies may expand this research by examining multiple sites and comparing different contexts to further explore how perseverance functions across diverse Christian educational settings. Through such efforts, Christian education can be strengthened by a deeper integration of theology, spirituality, and professional practice.

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