**Ephesians Commentary**

**Ephesians Chapter 1**

Eph 1:1

**“by the will of God.”** God placed the members in the Body of Christ where it pleased Him (1 Cor. 12:18). People do not choose their ministry in the Body, but they can choose how they exercise it and what they do, or they can choose to ignore God’s calling and live as they please, but that will not turn out well for them. Note that Paul did not go to “apostle school” to learn to be an apostle. God called him to his ministry just as God calls every person to their own particular ministry. God places each person in the Body of Christ where He wants them (1 Cor. 12:18). Therefore, it is imperative that each person find out what area of service God has given to them and start to function in that area. It is futile to envy someone else’s ministry because we cannot transform our God-given ministry into another ministry. Each Christian will be happiest and most effective if they focus on finding the ministry—the area of service—that God has given them and then start to serve in that area.

**“holy.”** The Greek is *hagios* (#40 ἅγιος). It is an adjective but used as a noun and best translated “holy ones.” Over the ages, the word “saints” has acquired a meaning that is not biblical, and thus it can be confusing, especially to new Christians. Every Christian is a “holy one” because each Christian has God’s gift of holy spirit sealed inside them. For more on why the Christian is called a “holy one,” see commentary on Philippians 1:1.

**“faithful.”** The Greek is *pistos* (#4103 πιστός). In this context, it can mean “faithful” or “believing,” and the scholars disagree about which meaning is meant here in Ephesians 1:1. The meaning “believing” would make *pistos* another descriptor for those who believe, the Christians, and that is what most scholars think. However, scholars such as John Lightfoot make a case that “faithful” is the correct meaning here. Both meanings are possible, and both have some merit.

God certainly meant for Ephesians and Colossians (cf. Col. 1:2) to be read by all Christians, and so in that light, we can see *pistos* as a way of referring to “those who believe,” i.e., believers. On the other hand, however, the content and meaning of Ephesians and Colossians are advanced enough that Christians who have been faithful will be able to understand them much more fully than lukewarm Christians will be able to. Whereas Romans and Galatians are much more foundational to the Christian Faith, Ephesians and Colossians contain truths that require some previous knowledge and understanding to fully grasp. Furthermore, there is a lot about God, Jesus, and spiritual matters, including who we are and what we have in Christ, that cannot be fully understood on a purely intellectual level; they have to be experienced to be fully understood.

Jesus taught that there was truth that had to be lived and experienced to be understood: “If anyone is willing to keep doing his [God’s] will, he will come to know about the teaching, whether it is of God….” (John 7:17), and “If you continue in my word, *then* you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth….” (John 8:31-32). We actually see in Ephesians 1:18 an example of how prior knowledge and experience allow one to have a more complete experience of what God wants for a person than someone without that prior experience can have. Ephesians 1:17-18 shows that it is because a believer has already had the eyes of their heart enlightened (Eph. 1:18) that they are able to receive from God “a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him” (Eph. 1:17).

Given the subject and content of Ephesians and Colossians, and the uniqueness of the addition of the word *pistos* (believing; faithful) to the greeting, there is certainly reason to believe that “faithful” means “faithful” and not just only “those who believe.”

**“in Ephesus.”** The words “in Ephesus” are not in some of the important Greek texts and some of the Church Fathers testified that they are not original. Thus, they are in brackets in the modern Greek critical texts, indicating that they are “doubtful.” That is not to say that this epistle was not intended for Ephesus, because it was—and for a lot more places than just Ephesus. It seems that what we know as “Ephesians” was an encyclical intended for a lot of churches. This makes sense because the Word of God is intended for all Christians. In fact, every epistle is intended for the whole Church, even if the epistle started its journey by being addressed to one specific congregation.

Eph 1:2

**“Grace…peace.”** This is a very Christian greeting and is found in many of Paul’s letters (cf. Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:2). It is not a Greek or Hebrew greeting, but combines elements from both, but not exactly. Thus, Paul’s standard Christian greeting is like the Christian Church itself: composed of a combination of Greeks and Hebrews, but in a way that changes them and unites them, not divides them.

The word “grace” is a typically Grecian greeting, but the Greeks usually used *chaireō*, whereas the new Christian greeting used the typically Christian word for grace, *charis*. This is not a mere technicality, because in all standard greetings, the meaning of the words fade into obscurity and the dictionary meaning of the words becomes less important than the fact that the greeting is spoken at all. For example, the English greeting, “How do you do?” has long ago lost any association with asking an important question and getting—or even expecting—an honest answer. This is so much the case that if anyone replied, “I’m glad you asked,” and began to tell us how they were actually doing we would be surprised. Similarly, the Greek *chaireō* had faded into just being recognized as a greeting with no actual meaning of “grace.” The new Christian greeting, *charis* and *eirēnē*, besides being an important truth in and of itself, would get people’s attention and bring their focus on the actual grace and peace that came from God.

The word “peace” is representative of the Hebrew greeting *shalom*, however, the Greek word “peace” (*eirēnē*) is more limited in scope and meaning than *shalom*, which refers to “well-being” and includes all that it takes for prosperity and health. However, since “peace” was not a standard Greek greeting and *shalom* was a standard Hebrew greeting, the point of the Greek word *eirēnē* would not be lost on the Christian audience, nor would its association with the Hebrew language and culture.

It is quite possible that Paul, a Jewish rabbi called to be an evangelist to the Gentiles, was the first to use this distinctive and important Christian greeting. The order of “grace” and “peace” never changes, and rightly so since all human well-being rests on God’s grace.

Eph 1:3

**“Blessed be.”** Ephesians 1:3 starts a very powerful 12-verse doxology that sets forth what God planned and has done for the Church, ending with Christians being to the praise of his glory.

**“Blessed...has blessed...blessing.”** This is the figure of speech polyptoton,[[1]](#footnote-21831) or “many inflections,” in which the same root word is being used in different parts of speech. The polyptoton emphasizes the blessing that each part has. “Blessed” (*eulogētos*; #2128 εὐλογητός) is an adjective; “has blessed” (*eulogeō*; #2127 εὐλογέω), is a verb (participle); and “blessing” (*eulogia*; #2129 εὐλογία) is a noun. This is the only verse in the Bible that has “blessed” three times. Here in verse 3, the Greek word for “blessed” is *eulogētos* (#2128 εὐλογητός), and it means “blessed, or praised.” It is an adjective, and so “blessed” is the better translation here, especially in light of the fact that the word is used three times in the verse.

**“in *union with* Christ.”** The word “in” is translated from the Greek preposition *en* (#1722 ἐν), whose most common meaning is “in.” Ephesians 1:3 is the use of *en* that Greek grammarians refer to as the “static *en*,” which defines a relationship or sphere of influence. We need to understand the static use of *en* because, although we understand how a person can be “in” a room, English does not typically use “in” to describe a relationship, such as “in Christ” or “in the Lord.”

The preposition *en*, like all prepositions, has many different meanings and shades of meaning, depending on the context. In fact, BDAG says of *en*: “The uses of this preposition are so many and various, and often so easily confused, that a strictly systematic treatment is impossible. It must suffice to list the main categories, which will help establish the usage in individual cases.”[[2]](#footnote-11881)

Christians have been blessed “in Christ,” and it is only by virtue of being “in Christ” that we are blessed. We are not good enough to deserve the blessings we have from God apart from Christ. To fully understand what it means for the Christian to be “in” Christ we must first understand the basic meaning of the “static *en*,” and then see how being “in Christ” after the Christian Church began on the Day of Pentecost differs from being “in Christ” before the Day of Pentecost.

In the case of Christians being “in Christ” (or its equivalent phrases such as “in the Lord” or “in him”) the “static *en*” can be understood to mean “in connection with,” “in association with,” or “in union with.” The BDAG *Greek-English Lexicon* says:

“Especially in Paul or Johannine usage, to designate a close personal relation in which the referent of the ἐν-term is viewed as the controlling influence: *under the control of, under the influence of, in close association with...*In Paul the relation of the individual to Christ is very often expressed by such phrases as ἐν Χριστῷ [in Christ], ἐν κυρίῳ [in *the* Lord], etc.,...*in connection with, in intimate association with, keeping in mind.*”

Bratcher and Nida translated the phrase in verse 3: “For in our union with Christ he has blessed us by giving us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly world.”[[3]](#footnote-24674) They go on to say, “‘In our union with Christ’: this much-used phrase in the Pauline letters (literally, ‘in Christ’) is generally taken to indicate the believer’s union with Christ. Here it states that condition existing for the blessing which God gives to the believer.” Bratcher and Nida are correct that the basis for the blessings of God in the life of a Christian is the fact that the Christian is “in union with” Christ.

Jesus used the vocabulary of being “in” another person at the Feast of Dedication, which fell in December (John 10:22). However, at that time he only spoke of him being in the Father and the Father in him (John 10:38). Some months later, during Passover time at the Last Supper, Jesus again spoke of his being in the Father and the Father being in him (John 14:10-11, 20), but he also spoke of believers being in him and the Father, and he and the Father being in believers (John 14:20; 15:4-7; 17:21, 23, 26). Before the start of the Christian Church, the extent of Christ being in the Father and believers being “in” Christ was that they would be unified and in connection with each other due to an intimate relationship, and believers would be unified with Christ by obeying him and walking in love. That certainly was the context of John chapters 14 and 15.

The static *en*, used of relationship and union, is not just used of our union with Christ. For example, 1 Corinthians 15:22 says, “For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.” Every human except Jesus was “in” Adam, that is, in union with Adam due to our common nature and sin nature, and so all humans age and die. However, not all humans are “in” Christ; only those people who have accepted him as Lord and are born again are “in” Christ, and indeed, all of those people will be made alive and live forever.

When we speak of being “in Christ” or “in union with Christ,” this is not a “symbolic union,” but a “mystical union,” a union in the spiritual world, and it is a very real union. We are used to things we can see and touch, but the only way to explore and truly understand the spiritual world is to read and study the Word of God and mine the insights that it gives us.

When the Christian Church started on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), it became available to be “in” Christ in a totally new way: by being part of his Body, the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ is the spiritual entity that consists of every person who is born again (1 Cor. 12:27; cf. Romans 12:4,5; 1 Cor. 10:16; 12:12-20; Eph. 1:23; 3:6; 4:4; Col. 1:18; 3:15). Like our physical body, this spiritual body is comprised of many members, and Jesus Christ is its head (Eph. 5:23). The Body of Christ is unique to the Administration of Grace (cf. Eph. 3:2), and is never mentioned outside the Epistles to the Christian Church.

Because Christians are spiritually united with Jesus and part of the Body of Christ, when Christians are said to be “in Christ,” there is more than just a connection due to us obeying and following Christ; we have an actual spiritual union with Christ. The Christian was circumcised with Christ (Col. 2:11); baptized with Christ (Rom. 6:3); crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20), died with Christ (Rom. 6:8; 2 Tim. 2:11), buried with Christ (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12), raised with Christ (Col. 3:1), and is now, in God’s eyes, seated with Christ in heaven (Eph. 2:6). Thus, in most cases, it is appropriate to think of our relationship with Christ as a union with him, although sometimes the idea of “in connection with” or “in association with” seems more appropriate. For the purpose of the translation of the New Testament, however, in many cases, it seems better to understand that the phrase “in Christ” means “in union with Christ” or “in connection with Christ” rather than to keep translating it “in union with Christ (but see Rom. 6:3 REV).

So today Christians are “in Christ” (“in union with Christ) by virtue of being part of the Body of Christ, and it is important that we also are “in Christ,” that is, “in union with Christ” because we obey him and lead godly lives. When we read a phrase such as “in Christ” or “in him,” we must pay careful attention to the context to see if it refers to our spiritual union due to being part of the Body of Christ, or whether it refers to our being in union with Christ because of our obedience and godliness, or if both meanings apply in that given context.

Several English versions besides the REV use the word “union” in Romans 6:3 and/or Ephesians 1:3 to express the relationship that exists between Christ and the believer who is “in” Christ, and many of them add the word “union” in other places in the New Testament as well.[[4]](#footnote-26067)

Christians have many blessings because of being “in union with” Christ that are not blessings due to our own works. We have already seen that we were crucified with Christ, died with Christ, were buried with Christ, and were raised with Christ. Some of the other blessings that Ephesians lists as our having by virtue of being “in Christ” are: blessed in Christ (Eph. 1:3); chosen in him (Eph. 1:4); being to the praise of God’s glorious grace (Eph. 1:6); redeemed (Eph. 1:7); claimed as God’s possession (Eph. 1:11); sealed with the promised holy spirit (Eph. 1:13); raised up and seated in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6); created (Eph. 2:10); made near (Eph. 2:13); created into a new man (Eph. 2:15); being built into a sanctuary of God (Eph. 2:21, 22); Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members, and fellow partakers of the promise (Eph. 3:6); and, forgiven (Eph. 4:32). All of these blessings and more are by virtue of us being “in union with” Christ because we are part of his Body.

Far too often, Christians fail to understand the blessings they have “in Christ.” The blessings of God “in Christ” in our lives are an accomplished reality: we do not work to get them; we already have them. Now we give our lives to God in thanksgiving for the blessings He has given us.

It is important to note that the Christians are “in Christ” and not “in Jesus.” We can be in union with Jesus only due to the fact that he has been exalted and empowered as God’s Messiah. Although Jesus is still a man, God made him “Lord and Christ,” gave him all authority in heaven and earth, and made him head of “the Body of Christ,” and that is why Christians are “in Christ.”

[For more on “in” and the relationship it refers to, see commentary on John 10:38. For more information on the Greek preposition *eis* sometimes having the same meaning as *en* and referring to a relationship, see commentary on Rom. 6:3. For information on salvation and the blessings of God which accompany salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.”]

**“spiritual blessing.”** This is the only use of “spiritual blessing” in the Bible, and it is important that we pay attention to it because Christians have been blessed, but often we do not seem to directly experience those blessings in our physical life. Nevertheless, the spiritual blessings are real, even though in some cases the fullness of those blessings will only be realized in the future. For example, we have a guarantee of salvation (Eph. 1:14; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5), which is surely a blessing, but we have to trust God, that He will really give us what He promised, to enjoy it at this time. If we doubt God’s Word, then we will not be able to have the fullness of the joy and peace that are available to us if we trust Him.

**“heavenly places.”** The Greek is *epouranios* (#2032 ἐπουράνιος), a plural adjective. Similar to the fact that the word “heaven” is always plural in Hebrew because it is a plural noun, this could be the plural of majesty for “heaven.” The word *epouranios* occurs 5 times in Ephesians. They are all adjectives and all plural, and we have translated all of them as “heavenly places.”

There are versions that read “blessed us…in the heavenly realms,” and there are versions that read “blessed us…with every blessing in the heavenly realms.” The blessings are with God in heaven, conferred upon us here on earth. It is not that we in the heavenly realms are blessed, because we are on earth. (Although some would argue that Eph. 2:6 says we are in heaven, that is the idiom of the prophetic perfect; see commentary on Eph. 2:6, “raised…seated.”)

Eph 1:4

**“us.”** It is very important to understand that the “us” is a plural pronoun. It is common to hear a Christian say that God personally chose him or her for salvation and use this verse to prove that point. But it is important to fully understand the implications of making that statement.

This verse has been central to the Calvinist-Arminian debate for centuries. John Calvin (1509-1564) taught that God chose who would be saved and who would not be—that the individual could not make that choice, God made it for each person. James (Jacob) Arminius (1560-1609) disagreed with Calvin’s teaching and emphasized man’s free will. The debate between the basic theology of Calvinists and Arminians has continued now for centuries.

Ephesians 1:4 does not say God “knew” who was going to be saved, but that He “chose us” before the foundation of the world. If this verse is referring to individuals, as many people believe, then it is saying that before the foundation of the world, God chose some people to be saved while leaving others unsaved. That is exactly what Calvinists teach: that it is God who chooses who will be saved and who will be damned—it is not a free will choice that we ourselves can make; rather the choice was made for us before the foundation of the world. Calvinists claim that God chose people for salvation even before the foundation of the world, and then gives them His “irresistible grace” such that they are never able to refuse salvation. This is why churches that follow the Calvinist doctrine, such as Presbyterian churches, do not have altar calls and ask people to come forward if they would like to be saved. In those denominations the doctrine is that the individual cannot make the choice to be saved: it is made for him, so there is no point to having an altar call.

In contrast to the Calvinists, the Arminians and those people who believe in free will assert that people make their own choice to be saved or not. They point out that in verses such as Ephesians 1:4, the pronouns are plural. In other words, it was not individuals who were being chosen to salvation, but “us,” the group, the Body of Christ, the Church. In other words, before the foundation of the world, God planned to have a “Christian Church,” “the Body of Christ,” and planned that those people who joined the Church would be saved. God knew that there would be some people who would get saved and join the Church—there have always been people who follow after God. But He did not choose who would join and who would reject Him. It is the individual’s choice whether or not to get saved and be a part of the Church.

A rough analogy to the Arminian position would be a college that does not have a basketball team but decides to form one. Long before a single player is chosen for the team, university staff get together and plan things out. They build the arena and court, practice area, and locker rooms. They hire the coach and staff. After all that, they make it available to play ball, and individual athletes begin to choose to play for the school. It can rightly be said that the “team” was chosen before the court was ever built. They were not chosen as individual players, but the team was chosen to play for the school and represent the school. In the same way, God chose the Church and planned for it before the foundation of the world, and now believers make the individual choice to join the Church and play for God’s team.

The fact that God wants people to love Him, and genuine love requires the ability to choose to not love, supports the Arminian position and shows that God did plan for a special group on which He would pour His grace, and He planned for that group before the foundation of the world.

[For more on the Calvinist position, see Appendix 9: “On Calvinism and Predestination.”]

**“in him.”** This phrase refers to our spiritual union with Jesus Christ. See commentary on Ephesians 1:3, “in *union with* Christ.”

**“foundation.”** This refers to the foundation of our earth today, even before Adam and Eve were created. It does not seem to make as good sense to translate it “overthrow,” because the destruction of the Genesis 1:1 creation is not so much in mind as the simple fact that in God’s mind, His Church even predates his creation of mankind. Also, “overthrow” would not refer to Adam’s sin and the Fall in the Garden of Eden, because God had to have thought of a plan for the redemption of mankind before Adam’s sin. That is why God could speak of a redeemer immediately after the Fall; in Genesis 3:15.

**“world.”***kosmos* (#2889 κόσμος).

**“to be holy.”** There is a lot packed into this phrase due to the fact that the attributes of holiness and being without blemish have both a physical and spiritual meaning and dimension to them. We were chosen by God “to be holy” and the Greek verb “be” is in the infinitive mood, which Robertson notes as the infinitive of purpose,[[5]](#footnote-25201) in other words, God’s purpose was that we be holy, and that means both spiritually and physically.

From a spiritual viewpoint, Christians are “holy” in God’s sight right here and now by virtue of the sacrifice of Christ and the gift of holy spirit that God has given to each Christian. When the Christian is born again of God’s “holy spirit,” they have a new holy nature (2 Pet. 1:4) and thus are spiritually holy. This is why Christians are said to be “saints” (“holy ones”) in the opening of the various Church Epistles.

However, God also wants Christians to live holy lives. Each Christian is spiritually holy, but God did not make us that way with the idea that we then would ignore our flesh and fulfill the passions it produces in us (Eph. 2:3). In fact, almost the entirety of the last three chapters of Ephesians are directions on how to live so we are holy in the flesh as well as being holy by virtue of the holy spirit born inside us. We are holy spiritually, now God wants that inner holiness to be reflected outwardly in our lives (1 Pet. 1:15-16).

**“without blemish.”** “Without blemish” is translated from the Greek word *amōmos* (#299 ἄμωμος), which appears eight times in the NT. All of them can be related to the perfection an offering to God had to have, and all could be translated “without blemish.” In this context, “without blemish” is similar to “holy” here in Ephesians 1:4 in that it has both a spiritual and physical dimension. A sacrifice “without blemish” was acceptable to God, and due to the work of Christ, Christians are acceptable to God. Far too many Christians have an internal dialogue or self-talk about how unacceptable to God they are due to one reason or another. That is not true! Every Christian is “in Christ” and every Christian is without blemish and therefore acceptable in God’s sight, and we need to remind ourselves of that. Yes, we should do our best to be acceptable to God in our flesh as well as spiritually, but if we make mistakes, sin, and do otherwise unacceptable things in our flesh, we are still acceptable to God. Paul wrote that nothing good lives in our flesh (Rom. 7:18), and when we sin in God’s sight, “it is no longer I who acts *this way*, but sin that lives in me” (Rom. 7:20). If we can see ourselves as God sees us, acceptable in His presence, we will find that we have energy and enthusiasm that will help us live powerful lives that will be a true blessing to us, others, and God. We are “without blemish” in God’s sight and have the guarantee of everlasting life.

It is important to do our best to live an unblemished life, but we are human and we will fall short of perfection, so we must learn to think of ourselves as God sees us in spite of failure. Some people are more successful than others at living an unblemished life, and one of the requirements for Christian leaders is to be unblemished, which does not mean to be without failure, but certainly more successful than unsuccessful at it (1 Tim. 3:10; Titus 1:6-7).

**“in His presence.”** That is, “before God.” The phrase “before God” (or “before the LORD,” etc.) is used throughout the Bible and was commonly understood by the ancient cultures. If a person was “before” someone else, they were in that person’s presence or mind, and thus the meaning of “before God” was “in the presence of God” or “in the sight of God.” For example, when God said, “You must have no other gods before me” (Exod. 20:3 CEB), He does not mean “ahead of me,” as if we could have other gods but none more important than Yahweh. He means “no other gods in my presence; in my sight,” and thus “no other gods except me.” That the Christian would be holy and without blemish “before God” means holy and without blemish in God’s sight.

Eph 1:5

**“deciding in advance.”** The Greek word is *proorizō* (#4309 προορίζω), and in Ephesians 1:5 it is an aorist participle. The basic meaning of the word is to “decide upon beforehand,” or to decide in advance. Bratcher and Nida have, “having decided ahead of time.”[[6]](#footnote-17997) *Proorizō* is a good example of a word whose meaning has to be defined from the context and scope of Scripture. In a context like this, *proorizō* could possibly refer to God choosing ahead of time the people He will save and the ones He will condemn, with the individuals having no choice in the matter, and many theologians think that is what the verse is saying. However, in Ephesians 1:5 *proorizō* can also refer to God’s deciding how He will save people; His choosing the path or plan to salvation. In this case, God decided in advance that He would save people by way of faith in Christ.

This latter explanation is the understanding of the verse that those denominations that believe in salvation by free will choice hold to, and we believe it to be the proper one. In that sense, some versions have translated it “plan.” The Phillips New Testament reads: “He planned, in his purpose of love, that we should be adopted as his own children through Jesus Christ.” Ann Nyland also uses “plan.”[[7]](#footnote-12505) David Stern’s translation, although not using “plan” makes it quite clear that the “plan” (i.e., what God determined in advance), was salvation through Christ. Stern’s translation reads, “He determined in advance that through Yeshua the Messiah we would be His sons....”[[8]](#footnote-14109) The meaning of the verse could be expressed in the translation, “having determined beforehand, for Himself, that we would be adopted *into His family* through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will.”

Much of the problem in understanding this verse is caused by reading it in phrases instead of seeing the whole sentence. Notice that what God did was mark us out “to adoption...through Jesus Christ.” The New English Version reads, “and he destined us—such was his will and pleasure—to be accepted as his sons through Jesus Christ.” What is being “destined” is that salvation would come through Christ, and people would become saved when they accepted Christ.

We have to remember that, in the context of Ephesians, the “us” is plural and refers to the Church, not to individuals. God did not choose who would be saved and who would not—that is our choice—God decided that there would be a group of people who He would save by faith in Jesus Christ, and we now decide if we want to join that group.

[For more information on Calvinism and Predestination, see Appendix 9: “On Calvinism and Predestination.”]

**“we.”** The “we” is plural and refers to the Church, the Body of Christ. It does not refer to God choosing individuals, but rather God choosing the Church. See commentary on Ephesians 1:4, “us.”

**“would be adopted.”** The Greek is *huiothesia* (#5206 υἱοθεσία), and it only occurs five times in the New Testament, all in the Church Epistles (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). Although *huiothesia* was used in the Greco-Roman world, it does not appear in the Septuagint or anywhere in the New Testament except in the Pauline Epistles. According to W. E. Vine, it means, “the place and condition of a son given to one to whom it does not naturally belong.”[[9]](#footnote-31533) The Greek Lexicon by Louw and Nida says: “to formally and legally declare that someone who is not one’s own child is henceforth to be treated and cared for as one’s own child, including complete rights of inheritance.”[[10]](#footnote-12563) *Huiothesia* literally means, “to place as a son.”

“Adoption” clearly indicates that a Christian is a member of God’s family. In the Greco-Roman culture, the adopted son had some major changes: a new relationship with a new father, which involved being under the direction of that new father and allegiance to that father; a change of name: his old name was set aside and he was given a new name by his new father; a change of home; he was now part of a different family and this included the cancellation of all his old debts; a change of family in the sense that he was now on equal standing with all of the other sons in the new family.[[11]](#footnote-24986)

William Ramsay also points out that there was a difference between Greek and Roman adoption in that in Greek adoption the new son was automatically an heir, that is, he actually inherited from the new father, but while that was usually the case in Roman adoption, the father could decide not to pass on any physical inheritance to the son.[[12]](#footnote-32652) This becomes important in Galatians and Ephesians which were more Greek than Roman and where, as Ramsay explains, the Greek idea of adoption was accepted, although that Greek idea of adoption was also in Paul’s mind even when writing to the Romans, and explains why Paul could say, “and if children, then heirs” (Rom. 8:17).

One of the reasons that “adoption” was such an important truth is that the Gentiles had been excluded from being “God’s people.” Ephesians says, “remember that at one time you, the Gentiles in the flesh...that at that time you were without Christ, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and strangers to the covenants based on the promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:11-12). As the New Testament church developed in the decades of the first century, the Gentiles in the Church came to outnumber the Jews. The Jews always felt like they were the people of God, but the Gentiles could easily wonder if they were accepted by God as part of “His people.” Ephesians removes that potential doubt in the opening of the book. God adopts people into His family, and adoption makes people who aren’t family into family. Every Gentile knew that, and what a comfort it must have been to them to hear that God had opened his heart and “every spiritual blessing” to them, and through Christ adopted them and made them part of His family.

Some English versions translate *huiothesia* as “sonship,” but it seems that is not as accurate a translation as “adoption.” While it is true that someone adopted into the family attains sonship (the status of a son), “adoption” is more accurate to the Greek meaning of the word.

Roman customs and laws differed from those of the Jews, and it is by understanding the laws and customs of the time that we see why “birth” is used in Peter and James, while “adoption” is used in Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians. The Greeks and the Romans had very specific laws and cultural norms that governed adoption. In contrast, the Jews did not have formal regulations concerning adoption. It has therefore been assumed by many commentators that Paul’s reference to adoption was strictly Greek or Roman, but that is not the case. While it is true that the Jews had the levirate law that stated if a man died, his wife was to marry the man’s brother but any children they had were considered the children of the first husband (Deut. 25:5-10; Mark 12:18-27), that did not mean that there was no informal adoption occurring in Israel. In fact, the biblical evidence, and our understanding of human kindness, show that if a person’s parents were dead they were taken care of in the homes of relatives or neighbors. The Old Testament has examples of what we today would call adoption (Gen. 15:2-3; Exod. 2:10; 2 Sam. 7:14; 1 Chron. 28:6; Esther 2:7).

Also, God adopted Israel and called the nation “His son” (Exod. 4:22; Jer. 3:19; Hos. 11:1). Israel becoming the “son” of God was an act of adoption, not birth. God chose Israel out of all the nations of the earth to place His special love on them and make them His people (Deut. 7:6-8). Jesus Christ understood that a person did not have to be a son by birth to be called a son, and so he taught his followers to call God their Father. He taught them to pray like he prayed in “the Lord’s Prayer,” which starts out, “Our Father.”

So although when Paul spoke of adoption, he would have been more specifically referring to Greek adoption, which was defined by very specific laws and cultural norms, as a trained rabbi he would have also had in his mind the nation of Israel, which became God’s “son” by an act of adoption. This explains why Romans 9:4 says that to the Israelites belongs the “adoption,” that is, being brought into the family of God, because they too were at one time taken into God’s family.

Galatians 4:5 then says: “[God sent His Son] in order that he might redeem those who were under *the* law in order that we might receive the adoption.” The two “in order that” clauses show that for people to be adopted into God’s family, Christ first had to redeem them, and before Christ redeemed them, they were under the law. Without Jesus paying the redemption price, the adoption spoken of in the Epistles was not possible. Thus, no Old Testament believer was adopted into God’s family in the New Testament sense because that adoption was not available yet. Adoption was available only after Christ died, and God started to bring people into His family by “adoption” and “birth” on the Day of Pentecost, 50 days after Christ died on the cross.

Although the King James Version has “adopted as sons,” the words “as sons” do not appear in the Greek text. If we are adopted, then we are adopted. The phrase “as sons” was apparently brought into the KJV from the Latin Vulgate.

[For more on Christian salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.”]

**“to.”** The Greek preposition is *eis* (#1519 εἰς). Prepositions are very flexible and have many meanings. Bullinger gives some of the ways that the Greeks used prepositions in a mathematical sense, but that only applied in some cases and in math. It is wrong to think that the Greeks were not as flexible with their prepositions as we are. The word “unto” is archaic and unnecessary. “To” is perfectly acceptable.

**“good pleasure.”** The Greek word is *eudokia* (#2107 εὐδοκία). This word is difficult to translate. It contains the idea of good, of pleasure, and of intent. Thus, some translations go with “kindly intent.” We decided to stick with the ASV and let the word “will” carry the fact of intention.

**“His.”** Here, it refers to God. The REV keeps pronouns that refer to God in lowercase except in a few contexts. The primary reason for this is that there are places in the text where it is unclear who “his” refers to.

Eph 1:6

**“to.”** The preposition *eis* can denote purpose or result. In this case, result is the primary meaning, although God also purposed it for that end.

**“the praise of His glorious grace.”** The Greek is more literally, “the praise of the glory of his grace” but in this context, the noun in the genitive (“glory”) is used as an adjective. The word “glory” has many meanings and changed meanings throughout history. If we are going to more fully understand glory related to God, since God does not change, we must include both Hebrew and Greek concepts. In this context, the word “glory” refers to manifest excellence, and the “glory of his grace” is the manifest excellence of God’s grace.[[13]](#footnote-27857)

Harold Hoehner writes that glory “expresses the ‘divine mode of being’ referring to divine honor, splendor, power, and radiance. ...Basically, doxa has the idea of the reflection of the essence of one’s being, the summation of all one’s attributes, whether it refers to God or a human being. The essence of one’s being makes an impact, whether good or bad, on others; this impact of one’s essential being is that of one’s reputation or glory.”[[14]](#footnote-13340)

It is interesting that God wrote “for the praise of the glory of His grace” rather than, “for the praise of His grace” or “for His praise.” That the praise is to God’s glory takes the direct focus off of God and places it on His manifest excellence, His revealed splendor and power, in other words, on God’s essence and character rather than just on God Himself. One reason that is so important is that it is one thing to just “praise God,” and another to praise God with an understanding that the praise is due to the way God is—His character, and the way He shows up in the world. We may not be able to be God, but we can be like God in that we can imitate His character. The believer can be an imitator of God, just as Ephesians 5:1 says.

**“He.”** This “he” refers to God. Although the REV does not normally capitalize pronouns that refer to God, in this section of Ephesians the pronouns can be so confusing that the pronoun for God is capitalized to provide clarity.

**“graciously gave us”** The root of this phrase is “grace,” and the Greek has a wonderful word-relation: “his grace, in which he graced us” (cf. Gal. 3:18; Phil. 1:29).

**“in the Beloved One.”** This phrase refers to our spiritual union with Jesus Christ. See commentary on Ephesians 1:3, “in *union with* Christ.”

Eph 1:7

**“In *union with* him.”** This phrase refers to our spiritual union with Jesus Christ. See commentary on Ephesians 1:3, “in *union with* Christ.”

**“redemption.”** See commentary on Colossians 1:14.

**“transgressions.”** This is a difficult word to exactly translate. The Greek is *paraptōma* (#3900 παράπτωμα) which is to “misstep,” “to fall by the wayside.” This “misstep” is not necessarily intentional, although it can be. Thus, in life, “transgressions,” are much more common than “sins.” Meanings of *paraptōma* include: “faults,” “deviations from truth,” “lapse,” “error,” “mistake,” “wrongdoing.” We went with “transgressions.” Often we transgress from a lack of wisdom and experience. It is a blessing to know that Jesus not only forgave our intentional sins and faults, he forgave us our transgressions as well.

**“riches.”** The Greek word is singular, but the plural translation is okay because “riches” is a singular reality. We could have gone with “wealth” but that has too strong a connotation of money.

**“of his grace.”** This is God’s grace, as in Ephesians 1:6. It took an immense amount of grace for God to do what He did for us—including have His Son die for us—when we did so little for Him and deserved so little.

Eph 1:8

**“lavished on.”** The phrase that is more literal, “made to abound toward us” is awkward for the modern reader. We went with “lavished on,” as do a number of the modern versions.

**“with all wisdom and insight.”** God lavished His grace upon us, and when He did, His grace was accompanied by wisdom and insight. In other words, the believer does not have just grace, but the wisdom and insight (or understanding) that comes with the grace. Of course, the wisdom and insight are not automatic, the believer has to exercise it and grow in it.

The various commentators and English versions are divided about this phrase. Some think that it is God who gave us grace in a wise and insightful way, but since God always uses wisdom that does not seem to be what the verse is saying. Also, some versions end the sentence with “us,” and make this phrase the first phrase of Ephesians 1:9, which would mean that God made known to us the Sacred Secret with wisdom and insight. But there are reasons that option is not strong. For one thing, as was just stated, God always uses wisdom and given that Paul ended the chapter praying for the believer to receive wisdom, the fact that God gave us grace along with wisdom fits with Paul’s prayer. Also, in this section, qualifying phrases follow the verbs and participles.[[15]](#footnote-11260)

**“insight.”** The Greek is *phronēsis* (#5428 φρόνησις), and both Louw-Nida and BDAG agree: insight, intelligence, understanding.

Eph 1:9

**“has made known.”** “making known” is better translated “has made known,” especially in light of the context, which is past.

**“sacred secret.”** The Greek is *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον) and is best translated “secret” rather than mystery. The Greek word *mustērion* means a “secret” in the religious sphere. A secret can be known if it is revealed, while a mystery denotes something unknowable.[[16]](#footnote-24060) The *mustērion* was revealed. This fact can also be seen within Scripture itself. Ephesians 1:9 says that God “**made known** to us the *mustērion* of His will.” God made His “secret” known to us when He revealed it in His Word. By definition making known a mystery would be impossible. Versions of the Bible that translate *mustērion* as “secret” include The New English Bible, The International Standard Version, the Complete Jewish Bible by David Stern, The Bible by James Moffatt, J. B. Phillips New Testament, The New Testament in the Language of the People by Charles Williams, The Better Version of the New Testament by Chester Estes, Young’s Literal Translation, and The Emphasized Bible by Joseph Rotherham.

[For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Eph. 3:9.]

**“He planned.”** The Greek word translated “planned” is *protithēmi* (#4388 προτίθημι) and it means, “to have something in mind beforehand; plan, propose, intend.”[[17]](#footnote-10108) God “planned” ahead of time for the Administration of the Sacred Secret and all it includes, including that Christians would be members of His family through Jesus Christ.

**“in *connection with* him.”** This is not “himself.” It refers to Christ, as does the “in him” in Eph. 1:4, 7, 10, 11, and 1:13. Although there are some versions that go with “in himself,” the middle voice (of “he purposed”) is already reflexive, so saying “in himself” would be redundant and unnecessary.

Eph 1:10

**“the administration *that occurs* at the fullness of times.”** The Bible is not clear about what the administration of the fullness of times is except it is a future administration. The choices are the 1,000-year Millennial Kingdom, the Everlasting Kingdom (Rev. 21-22), or both. The scope of Scripture seems to favor that it is the Everlasting Kingdom because that is when all things will be united together and Christ will be the undisputed head. During the Millennial Kingdom, there will still be unbelief and death, and even though Christ will reign, the kingdom will have natural people in it who have a sin nature. Thus, not everyone will be a willing subject, which is why Jesus will have to rule the Millennial Kingdom with a rod of iron (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15).

[For more on unsaved people in the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Matt. 25:32. For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“to unite under one head.”** The Greek word translated by the phrase “to unite under one head” is *anakephalaiomai* (#346 ἀνακεφαλαίομαι). The way *anakephalaiomai* is used in classical Greek is “to sum up,” as one would sum up an argument, and the only other time it is used in the New Testament, Romans 13:9, it is used that way. It is used in a couple of Septuagint manuscripts with the meaning “gather together,” and is used of gathering the prayers of David (Ps. 72:20; “collection” NET). It also likely includes the idea of “head up,” from the word *kephalē*, head, but that is disputed by some who think that the word comes from *kephalaion* (“main point” or “summary”). Harold Hoehner points out that the Church Father and Archbishop of Constantinople Chrysostom (c. 349-407) said the word referred to “union.”[[18]](#footnote-17917) Hoehner then goes on to conclude that Paul’s use of *anakephalaiomai* in Ephesians combines the meanings, and that does fit the context and what God will do in Christ, and he uses the translation “to unite under one head” in his commentary.

There has been division, rivalry, discord, and even hatred among God’s creation even before human beings were created. When envy first filled Satan’s heart and he rebelled against God the practical unity of God’s creation was broken, and it only took one human generation for the jealousy between humans to lead to murder. So for thousands of years now, God has wanted unity without seeing that desire realized, but it will be realized in the future when God’s creation unites under the headship of Jesus Christ.

**“in the heavens.”** This is the literal Greek, which takes the form of the Hebrew text, in which “heaven” is always plural (prob. a plural of majesty to emphasize the largeness of the heavens, cf. commentary on Eph. 1:3).

Eph 1:11

**“in *union with* him.”** This phrase refers to our spiritual union with Jesus Christ. See commentary on Ephesians 1:3, “in *union with* Christ.”

**“we.”** The word “we” refers collectively to the Church, the Body of Christ, not to individual Christians. See commentary on Ephesians 1:4, “us.”

**“were claimed as *God’s* possession.”** This whole phrase is translated from the one Greek verb *klēroō* (#2820 κληρόω). There is disagreement among scholars and translators as to whether this verse is speaking of believers receiving an inheritance from God or the believers themselves being God’s inheritance. The decision about the meaning of the verse and how to translate it is made more difficult because this particular verb only occurs in this one place in the New Testament. To understand the verb *klēroō*, it helps us to understand the noun, *klēros*, which was a “lot” (as in casting or drawing “lots”). In the biblical culture, casting lots was a common way to make decisions. The “lot” could be dice, bones, stones, etc. For example, the soldiers who crucified Jesus did not want to cut up his robe, so they cast lots to see who would get to keep it.

In Greek culture, the verb *klēroō* was used in several ways. The basic meaning was simply “to cast lots” or “to determine something by casting lots.” However, that basic meaning was expanded so that *klēroō* also came to be used for that which was assigned by lot. A third meaning that is harder to articulate but vital for the understanding of this verse is that *klēroō* was used such that the thing chosen or won was itself the “lot.” In that usage, *klēroō* meant, “to make a ‘lot,’” in other words, that something would become a possession, heritage, portion, or private possession as if won by lot. In Ephesians 1:11, the believer becomes God’s chosen possession, His “lot.”

It is important to realize that the word *klēroō* was used for someone or something that was a possession even when a “lot” was not specifically cast. We today do the same thing, and use words that have roots that were once meaningful but are now just part of the word. For example, we can have an “auspicious occasion” even though there was actually no “auspice,” no “favorable sign” that preceded the occasion. Similarly, God did not actually “cast lots” for us as if by chance some people were chosen to be His and some were not. The word *klēroō* was used to emphasize the point that we became God’s chosen possession.

The commentators and the translations are divided as to how to translate *klēroō* in this verse. Is the verse saying that in Christ we *received* an inheritance (ESV, HCSB, KJV, NASB, NRSV)? Or is it saying that in Christ we *became* an inheritance, i.e., became God’s chosen possession (NAB, NET, NIV, Rotherham, Williams)? Part of the problem in deciding the meaning of the verse is that, to some extent, both interpretations are true—believers receive an inheritance in Christ, and believers are an inheritance in Christ.

Nevertheless, we believe that for the sake of translation into English, the stronger position is that in Christ the believer is claimed as God’s possession. In the Old Testament, Israel was God’s possession (Deut. 4:20; 7:6; 9:26, 29; 14:2; 32:9). Deuteronomy 32:9 is very well-known: “Indeed, Yahweh’s portion is his people.” Also, us being made God’s possession fits the flow of the sentence better. It makes more sense to say that we became God’s possession so that we will be to the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:12), than to say that we received an inheritance so that we will be to the praise of his glory. Also, although in the context of Ephesians 1 the “inheritance” relates to our salvation, there are uses of inheritance in the New Testament that are about rewards, and our rewards are earned and not guaranteed. Lastly, in his commentary on Ephesians, Harold Hoehner also lists some grammatical reasons that support the reading that in Christ we become God’s portion.[[19]](#footnote-28291)

In conclusion, we would say that the primary meaning in this verse and context is that we become God’s possession, but also part of what is being said is that in Christ we receive an inheritance.

**“chosen in advance.”** God planned for the Church, the Body of Christ, before the foundation of the world. This is not “predestination,” even though many versions use that word.

[For being “marked out beforehand,” see Appendix 9: “On Calvinism and Predestination.”]

**“according to the plan of the one.”** The phrase “according to” is the Greek preposition *kata*, which when used with the accusative case, as it is here, points us to the standard God used when He “decided in advance” to claim the Church as His possession. Here in Ephesians 1:11, we see that God’s standard for how He claimed the Church was His own purpose—the end result He desired—and then He is accomplishing His purpose by working out His plan. He is working to have a family that lives forever with Him in His kingdom.

**“the one.”** This refers to God the Father.

Eph 1:12

**“we.”** The “we” refers to Paul and his fellow workers; the “you” (Eph. 1:13) refers to the believers in Ephesus, whom Paul did not even reach until late on his second missionary journey, but then only visited them very briefly (Acts 18:19-21). Paul did not spend a long time in Ephesus until his third missionary journey (Acts 19:1-20:1).

**“who first hoped in Christ.”** The translation “first hoped” makes sense in the greater context of the first century. The “we” who first hoped would be the Jews, including the apostles and Paul, and they took the message to the Gentiles. Markus Barth writes: “as observed earlier, those addressed in Ephesians are all of Gentile origin. They have been “apart from the Messiah, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, strangers to the covenants … bare of hope and without God” (Eph. 2:12).”[[20]](#footnote-15350)

**“would be *God’s possession*, to the praise of His glory.”** This is the praise of God’s glory, as it is in Ephesians 1:14. This phrase goes back to Ephesians 1:11, that we “were claimed as God’s possession”...“to the end that we”...“would be to the praise of His glory.”

The phrase “to the praise of His glory” occurs twice in the New Testament, Ephesians 1:12 and Ephesians 1:14, and Ephesians 1:6 has “the praise of His glorious grace.” Although some commentators suggest that this is simply a doxology of sorts, Markus Barth points out that there is no equivalent in the Septuagint or the rest of the New Testament, and if it were a blessing or benediction, then we would expect to see it more often and without variation.[[21]](#footnote-28650)

That “we” (Eph. 1:12) and what God has done (Eph. 1:14) is to be “to the praise” of His glory points to the importance of praise to God. God has given His creation the ability to spurn Him, but He wants—and deserves—praise, and praise pleases Him. This is an important point because sometimes we, His creation, are so consumed with what we want in life and don’t have in life that we spend more time complaining and asking than we do praising. But God blessed us, redeemed us, and claimed us as His own “to the end” that we would be to His praise—that we would praise Him. Not only are we to praise God, but “we” are to be to the praise of God’s glory. We are to live our lives in a way that brings praise and glory to God, in a holy and blameless manner (Eph. 1:4). Living a holy and godly life is a powerful way to praise God.

In the phrase “to the praise of His glory,” the word “glory” has several points of emphasis, and thus does not have a single simple meaning. In classical Greek, the word *doxa*, “glory,” carried the idea of “opinion,” either one’s own opinion or “reputation,” i.e., the opinion of others. However, *doxa* occurs over 250 times in the Septuagint and most of them are the translation of the Hebrew word *kabod* (#03519 כָּבוֹד), and the New Testament uses “glory” with more the meaning of the Old Testament use than the classical Greek use, which makes sense because most of the New Testament writers were Jewish. In the Old Testament and thus in the New Testament, the idea of “glory” carried the meaning of the Old Testament “glory.”

Harold Hoehner writes:

“In the NT the word [*doxa*] is used 166 times, seventy-seven times by Paul, and eight times in Ephesians. Rather than following the Greek usage, the NT follows the LXX [Septuagint] in the sense of “reputation” and “power” and further it also expresses the ‘divine mode of being’ referring to divine honor, splendor, power, and radiance. Although there are references to a human’s glory (e.g., Matt. 6:29; 1 Cor. 11:7), predominantly it refers to God’s. Basically, *doxa* has the idea of the reflection of the essence of one’s being, the summation of all of one’s attributes, whether it refers to God or a human being. The essence of one’s being makes an impact, whether good or bad, on others; this impact of one’s essential being is that of one’s reputation or glory.”[[22]](#footnote-11492)

The idea that “glory” in some contexts communicates the essence of one’s being can be seen to some extent in both the Old and New Testaments in that when the “glory of God” appears, it does not appear without God, but God is actually personally present in His glory. So, when the glory of God appeared in Moses’ Tent of Meeting, it was because God was personally present. The same was true when the glory of God filled Solomon’s Temple, and the priests could not minister. Many times the glory of God appeared, and it appeared because God was personally present (cf. Exod. 16:7, 10; 24:16-18; Lev. 9:23-24; Num. 14:10; 16:19, 42; 20:6; 1 Kings 8:10-11; 2 Chron. 5:13-14; 7:1-3). So to the praise of His [God’s] glory was also in a sense saying, to the praise of God.

Eph 1:13

**“In *union with* him.”** This phrase refers to our spiritual union with Jesus Christ (see commentary on Eph. 1:3, “in *union with* Christ”).

**“you also.”** The Good News came to the Jews first, then later to the Gentiles. The addition of this phrase, “you also,” shows that the majority of Paul’s audience was Gentile. This makes sense because Ephesus was the Roman capital of the province of Asia, which started as a pagan center, then Ephesus was conquered by the Greeks, then the Romans. The Jews were a distinct minority in the Church by the time Ephesians was written, likely AD 61 or 62.

The “you also” is important because, until the Administration of the Sacred Secret that started on the Day of Pentecost, the Gentiles were not fully included in all the blessings promised to the Jews. Ephesians 1:3-14 is a very long sentence in the Greek text, but in it Paul recounts God’s purpose and many of the blessings of God, and then emphasizes that the Gentiles—“you also”—were included when they became saved by believing in Christ.

According to Ephesians 1:3-14, the Christians were blessed with God’s spiritual blessings because God, for His own good pleasure, chose to bless them and make them holy and without blemish in his presence, claiming them as His own possession, adopting them into His family through Jesus Christ, forgiving their sins and ransoming them from death through the blood of Christ and making known to them the Administration of the Sacred Secret, the full effects of which will only be seen in the Administration of the Fullness of Times at which time all things will be united under the headship of Jesus Christ to the end that they would be to the praise of God’s glory. As Ephesians 1:3-14 nears its end, God makes sure the Gentiles know that they are included. The phrase “in whom” refers to being in union with Christ. Thus, “In union with Christ, you [Gentiles] also…were sealed with the promised holy spirit that is the down payment of everlasting life in the future.

**“when you heard...and when you believed in him, were marked with a seal.”** This verse is a great key to properly understanding salvation, the New Birth, and receiving the gift of holy spirit. Every Christian receives (is “baptized in”) holy spirit the moment he or she has faith in Christ. The individual may not outwardly manifest the holy spirit by things like speaking in tongues or prophecy at that time (in fact, they may never outwardly manifest the spirit), but they have been marked with God’s seal, which is the gift of holy spirit.

The King James Version can confuse people about the timing of believing and being sealed with the holy spirit. It reads, “In whom ye also trusted, **after that** ye heard the word of truth...in whom also **after that** ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.” The two times the phrase “after that” is used in the KJV can confuse the modern reader and make them think that people are sealed with holy spirit at some future time after they believe. That is not the case. R. C. H. Lenski states the truth quite succinctly: “The moment we come to faith, the sealing occurs. The thought is not that we must believe a while, and that sometime later in the course of our believing the Spirit is bestowed.”[[23]](#footnote-10641) The reason for what is now a misleading translation in the King James version is that 400 years ago when the King James version was translated, in the English language and idiom of the time, the phrase “after that” was sometimes used to mean “when” (cf. Mark 8:25; Acts 1:8; Gal. 3:25; Eph. 1:13; 1 Thess. 2:2; Titus 3:4). The confusion caused by the use of the phrase “after that” does not occur in the modern versions, because they do not use that phrase.

The phrase “marked with a seal” is from the verb *sphragizō* (#4972 σφραγίζω), which has several different primary meanings (BDAG gives five), but two primary options for what it means here in Ephesians 1:13. Those two are either “to seal up, to close up tight” or “to mark with a seal as a means of identification.”[[24]](#footnote-10073)

If the meaning in this context is “to seal up, close up tight,” it could be translated as, “when you believed in him, were sealed up with the promised holy spirit.” This verse would then support (but not demand) the idea that a person cannot forfeit their salvation. It is worth noting, however, that although BDAG gives “seal up” as a definition of *sphragizō*, it does not give any examples of that definition being used in the New Testament; all of the examples come from secular Greek or the Septuagint.

The second primary translation option is “to mark with a seal.” If that option applies (and BDAG says it does), the verse would be translated, “and when you believed in him, you were marked with a seal—the promised holy spirit. This would denote that God figuratively put a seal on Christians to mark them out as His own. The word *sphragizō* is used this way quite often in the ancient Greek papyrus in the context of marking animals. The owner would *sphragizō* their animals, putting a “seal” (or “brand”) on them so that people would know who owns them, similar to the way cattle are branded today to indicate who owns them. In the context here in Ephesians, the holy spirit would be what God is “sealing” Christians with, thereby marking His rulership and protection over them as His children. If the concept of “sealing” to indicate ownership was more common in the modern world, the translation “sealed with holy spirit” would be acceptable and not too confusing, but since we don’t “seal” things very often today to indicate our ownership, “sealed with holy spirit” is too confusing to put in the text. Perhaps a paraphrastic version of the Bible that used more jargon and colloquial English could say “when you believed you were branded with the promised holy spirit,” and that would get the point across, but that translation would not work in most modern Bibles.

Of the two possible meanings of *sphragizō*, the context better supports the idea that Paul is using *sphragizō* to signify ownership. In the surrounding context, in Ephesians 1:11 and Ephesians 1:14, Christians are described as God’s “possession,” and Paul also uses the term “adoption” (Eph. 1:5) to describe the Christian’s identity as belonging to God—being part of His family. Paul has in mind God’s ownership of Christians and how He loves his children like any good father would (Eph. 1:3-4, 6-8). Therefore, when arriving at Ephesians 1:13, the contextual evidence supports that Paul is using *sphragizō* to signify God’s ownership over his children, how He “marked them with a seal—the promised holy spirit.” The ISBE says this, “God by His Spirit indicates who are His, as the owner sets his seal on his property; and just as documents are sealed up until the proper time for opening them, so Christians are sealed up by the Holy Spirit ‘unto the day of redemption’ (Eph 1:13; 4:30; 2 Cor 1:22).”[[25]](#footnote-21825)

In contrast to marking ownership, the language of “sealing” in order to make something secure[[26]](#footnote-32220) does not fit the context. There is no indication in the context that God is trying to state that the Christian is “sealed up.” Given the evidence, the best understanding of the phrase is, “and when you believed in him, were marked with a seal—the promised holy spirit.” In the end, this verse is not concerned with the question of can you forfeit your salvation. Rather, Paul is teaching that God has set a seal of identification on his children, namely, the holy spirit (cf. Rom. 8:14).

**“the message of truth.”** This same idea is found in Colossians 1:5.

**“promised holy spirit.”** The Greek text is very idiomatic and reads more literally “the spirit of the promise, the holy [spirit].” In the Greek text, the word “holy” is moved to the end of the sentence for emphasis, to emphasize the holiness of the spirit from God. We would translate that more literally as “the holy spirit of promise,” in which “holy spirit of promise” is a genitive of relation, and means the holy spirit that was promised, thus the translation “the promised holy spirit.” The gift of holy spirit that Christians have today was promised in the Old Testament in verses such as Isaiah 32:15 and Joel 2:28. The Old Testament prophets and Jesus foretold its coming, saying it would be a new spirit that would be “poured out” (i.e., given in fullness) into all the believers (Ezek. 11:19-20; 36:26-27; Joel 2:28, 29; John 14:17; cf. Isa. 32:15; 44:3-5; Ezek. 37:12-14; 39:29; John 15:26; 16:13). That the gift of holy spirit Christians have today was promised in the Old Testament and by Christ explains why in Acts and the Church Epistles it is referred to as the “promised” holy spirit (cf. Acts 2:33, Gal. 3:14, Eph. 1:13).

As the Bible reveals, the gift of holy spirit is given by God to Jesus Christ, to be administered or given to others (Luke 24:49; John 15:26; Acts 2:33; Titus 3:6). John the Baptist also said it would be Jesus that would baptize in holy spirit (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16).

It is very confusing to some Trinitarians that the holy spirit was promised, because if “the Holy Spirit” is an eternal member of the Trinity, how can he be promised for the future? Realizing that “the holy spirit” is the gift of God and not a member of the Trinity clears up that difficulty.

It is also important for Christians to understand that although the holy spirit that Christians have was promised, it was not promised “to” Christians. It was promised in the Old Testament and Gospels to be given in the future, but a study of the verses in the Old Testament that speak of the coming of the gift of holy spirit refer to the Millennial Kingdom. God, by grace, gave to Christians today the gift of holy spirit that He promised to give to people in the future Millennial Kingdom.

It is also important to realize that believers today do not have the same gift of holy spirit that God gave to Old Testament believers such as Moses or Deborah. Christians have a different holy spirit than what the believers in the Old Testament had, which is why Christians have the additional manifestations of speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues that were not available in the Old Testament (cf. 1 Cor. 12:10). What Christians today have is the firstfruits of the gift of holy spirit that God promised to pour out in the future Millennial Kingdom.

During the Old Testament and Gospel periods, God gave the gift of holy spirit in a very limited way: it was upon only certain selected people, and He gave it conditionally and by measure. However, God promised much better things for Israel’s future. He promised that in the Millennial Kingdom, He would “pour out” holy spirit in abundance to everyone who believed. Furthermore, what God promised to Israel, He has now given by grace to the Christian Church, which explains why holy spirit in Christians is called “the promised holy spirit” (Eph. 1:13), and the “firstfruits of the spirit” (Rom. 8:23). Therefore, the things about holy spirit that were foretold for the Millennial Kingdom apply to Christians also, even though holy spirit was not specifically foretold to be for Christians.

Jesus spoke to his disciples about the promised holy spirit in Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4. In the Old Testament, God promised to give holy spirit to Israel, not the Church. No one knew there was going to be a Christian Church, because it was part of the Sacred Secret that God hid in Himself (see commentary on Eph. 3:9). God promised that holy spirit would be poured out in the Kingdom of Christ, but because He has given it to Christians, Scripture calls what we have the “firstfruits” of the spirit (Rom. 8:23).

The Old Testament foretold some important things about the holy spirit that God would give in the future. For example:

* Isa. 44:3-5. The new holy spirit would influence people to obey God
* Ezek. 11:19-20. The new holy spirit would be “in” people so that they would obey God
* Ezek. 36:26-27. The new holy spirit would cause people to walk in God’s rules (there would be no sin nature in the resurrected people to battle with the spirit).
* Ezek. 39:29. The new holy spirit would give an intimacy between God and people that did not exist before.
* Joel 2:28-29. Spirit will be poured out and people will be moved by the spirit. The holy spirit will enable manifestations of the spirit.
* Jeremiah 32:37-40. The spirit never leaves (this is not directly stated but is implied in the context).

BEFORE HIS RESURRECTION, JESUS SPOKE OF THE COMING SPIRIT

* John 7:37-39.
* John 14:15-17; 15:26; 16:7-15. The Last Supper: the coming Helper. This “Helper” will be “in” them “forever” (John 14:16).

AFTER HIS RESURRECTION, JESUS SPOKE OF THE COMING SPIRIT

* Luke 24:49. I will send the promise of my Father
* John 20:22. Jesus breathed on them and said, “Receive holy spirit.”
* Acts 1:8. The holy spirit would give believers power
* Acts 1:4-5. The holy spirit did not come until after Jesus ascended

ACTS AND THE CHURCH EPISTLES – THE PROMISED HOLY SPIRIT

* Acts 2:33.
* Gal. 3:14. The promised spirit.
* Rom. 8:23.
* Eph. 1:13.

There are some major differences between the gift of holy spirit that God gave in the Old Testament and the gift of holy spirit God promised to give in the Millennial Kingdom, which we today get by grace.

**1) In the Old Testament and Gospels, holy spirit was upon only a few believers, but in the Millennial Kingdom, it will be in all believers.** Even though there were millions of Israelites who lived during Old Testament times, only a few were blessed to receive the gift of holy spirit. In contrast to that, in the Millennial Kingdom, God will pour out the gift of holy spirit on every believer. Verses such as Joel 2:28, 29, and John 7:38 make that very clear. Today, in the Administration of Grace, every believer gets holy spirit just as will happen in the Millennial Kingdom.

**2) In the Old Testament and Gospels, God gave holy spirit in a limited way, by measure, but in the Millennial Kingdom, it will be poured out in abundance.** In contrast to the limited measure of holy spirit God gave in the Old Testament and Gospels, He promised to give holy spirit in abundance in the Millennial Kingdom. We read that Joel said, “…I will pour out my Spirit [spirit] on all people” (Joel 2:28; cf. also Isa. 32:15; 44:3). The words “pour out” are significant, and indicate great abundance. There is no place in the OT or Gospels that God’s gift of holy spirit is said to be “poured out,” but that is the promise for the Millennial Kingdom. It needs to be noted, however, that even though God promised He would give people an abundance of holy spirit, He did not specifically promise that they would be filled, even though that is clearly implied. In contrast, it is clear in Scripture written to the Church that every Christian is filled with holy spirit.

**3) In the Old Testament and Gospels, God gave holy spirit conditionally, and the recipient could lose it.** King Saul is an example of a person in the OT who lost the gift of holy spirit because of his disobedience to God (1 Sam. 16:14), and David prayed that God would not take it from him (Ps. 51:11). In the Millennial Kingdom, holy spirit will be given permanently, and by grace we receive it permanently also. It is vital to understand this aspect of the gift of holy spirit. For Christians, it is the presence of holy spirit inside them that makes them a Christian. When an unbeliever today confesses Christ as Lord, he gets the gift of holy spirit at that instant. The presence of holy spirit inside that person makes him a “holy one” (often translated “saint,” cf. Rom. 1:7, etc.), is the “seed” that is in him (1 Pet. 1:23), is why he is said to be “born again” (1 Pet. 1:23), is why he is called a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17), and is why he is said to have a “down payment” of salvation (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14). In the Old Testament, the gift of holy spirit was said to be “upon” people, but in contrast, God promised that when He gave holy spirit in the Millennial Kingdom, it would be in them (cf. Ezek. 11:19; 36:26, 27; 37:14). Jesus thoroughly knew the Old Testament and its promises, and made sure his followers knew that holy spirit would be “in” people (John 14:17). Throughout the Old Testament and Gospel periods, the gift of holy spirit was upon people conditionally, and God could therefore take it back. In contrast to the way God gave holy spirit in the Old Testament, in the Millennial Kingdom He will give holy spirit permanently to those believers who had been raised from the dead, brought into the Kingdom, and settled in the land (Ezek. 37:12, 14; Isa. 59:21). The permanence of the relationship between the Millennial Kingdom believer and God is the basis for many promises of the OT, such as when God said of resurrected Israel believers that He would “no longer” hide His face from them (Ezek. 39:29). He told them he will give them a “new heart,” taking away their heart of stone and giving them a heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:26), and all the people will know Him (Jer. 31:33-34).

**4) In the Old Testament and Gospels, it is never stated that holy spirit would influence a person to live a godly life. However, Scripture promises that in the Millennial Kingdom, holy spirit will influence people toward godliness.** One of the most exciting things about the gift of holy spirit that God promised to give in the Millennial Kingdom was that it would help people live godly lives. There is no evidence in the Old Testament or Gospels that a purpose or characteristic of the gift of holy spirit that they had was that it produced a positive transforming influence, helping them become more godly. Certainly, people such as Moses or Elijah, who walked in great spiritual power, were aware of God more acutely and thus would have worked hard to live godly lives, but there is no statement in the Old Testament or Gospels that one of the purposes of the gift of holy spirit that God gave in those times was to help transform people toward godliness. However, the gift of holy spirit in the Millennial Kingdom (and for us today) is that the promised holy spirit is specifically stated to help people live godly lives. Jesus even called it the “helper” on many occasions (cf. John 15:26; sometimes this is translated “comforter,” or “encourager”). In Ezekiel, God promised that when holy spirit is poured out on resurrected people in the Millennial Kingdom, they will be able to talk with Him directly and intimately, and not be hidden from His “face” anymore (Ezek. 39:29). Having holy spirit does not remove free will or force a person to obey God, and we all know that Old Testament believers who had holy spirit, and Christians (who all have holy spirit) disobey the commandments and sin. Nevertheless, holy spirit, as it is given in the Administration of Grace to Christians, and will be given to believers in the Millennial Kingdom, does have a very powerful influence on the person.

Ezekiel 36:27 says the holy spirit will “cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.” Isaiah 44:3-5 also testifies to the godly influence of holy spirit. The Church Epistles testify to the godly influence that holy spirit has in the life of a believer, as it fights with the sin nature that lives in us (Gal. 5:17).

[For more on the promised holy spirit, see commentary on John 7:39. For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.” For more information on what the holy spirit is, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For much more complete information on the gift of holy spirit we Christians have, see Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, *The Gift of Holy Spirit: the Power to be Like Christ*, and Appendix A of that book, “The Administration of the Sacred Secret.”]

Eph 1:14

**“which.”** The word “which” is the translation of the Greek relative pronoun *hos*, which is generally translated as “who,” “which,” “what,” or “that,” depending on the context, although *hos* has other less common meanings as well.[[27]](#footnote-23029) The context, in this case, is the promised holy spirit. Since most English Bibles are translated by Trinitarians who believe that “the Holy Spirit” is a person, they translate the *hos* as “who.” However, in this context, the holy spirit is not God but the gift of God that is given to people who believe in Jesus Christ and get saved (Acts 2:48). “The Holy Spirit” is a name for God, while the “holy spirit” is the gift of God’s nature that is born in people when they are born again. Believers are sealed with the holy spirit, the gift of God, so Ephesians 1:14 should start with “which,” not with “who.”

[For more on the difference between Holy Spirit and holy spirit, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**“the down payment.”** “Down payment” is translated from the Greek word *arrabōn* (#728 ἀρραβών), which refers to a “deposit,” “first installment,” or “pledge” that represents that payment-in-full would follow. The “down payment” is not the full payment; it is only an agreement that full payment will be made in the future. The *arrabōn* is “a part given in advance of what will be bestowed fully afterward.”[[28]](#footnote-22311) In other words, the gift of holy spirit is a down payment that verifies that in the future, the believer will receive the promised inheritance God has for His people, but the believer has to bring the full payment—trust (1 Pet. 1:5). The word *arrabōn* only occurs 4 times in the New Testament, and only in the Church Epistles (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14).

Does Paul’s use of the word *arrabōn* mean that a Christian’s salvation is permanent and cannot be undone? Many translations translate *arrabōn* as “guarantee” and thus certainly imply that one’s salvation is permanent (cf. CJB, ESV, NIV, NKJV, NLT, and RSV). However, the Greek word *arrabōn* does not necessarily mean “guarantee” in our modern sense of the word that assures that something “guaranteed” will absolutely happen. In speaking of *arrabōn,* Markus Barth says, “Papyri quoted by J. A. Robinson show that the first installment was lost if the buyer defaulted on the later payments; if, however, the vendor was unable to deliver the promised goods he had to pay back double the amount of the earnest.”[[29]](#footnote-18641) Additionally, the ISBE specifies that, “The term is mercantile and comes originally from the Phoenicians. Its general meaning is that of a pledge or token given as the assurance of the fulfillment of a bargain or promise. It also carries with it the idea of forfeit, such as is now common in land deals, only from the obverse side.”[[30]](#footnote-32272)

So, the *arrabōn* was given conditionally. It was not an absolute guarantee that the one who received the down payment would also receive the full inheritance later. Both commentaries quoted above note that the *arrabōn* could be forfeited if the conditions of the deal were not met by one of the parties. Since the *arrabōn* was forfeitable, what this means is that Christians have to hold up their end of the deal in order to receive the promised inheritance, it does not mean that Christians should be unsure if God will hold up His end of the deal, of course He will because He keeps His promises (Josh. 23:14; Psa. 145:13; Heb. 10:23). What is the Christian’s obligation? To believe (trust) in Christ Jesus (Rom. 10:9; Acts 16:31), and to endure in that belief (1 Cor. 15:1-2; Col. 1:23; 2 Tim. 2:12; 1 Pet. 1:5; 2 Pet. 2:20). If Christians do not continue in belief, then we have forfeited our salvation and inheritance. That is why 1 Peter 1:5 says that it is through “trust” that we are being guarded by the power of God for our future salvation.

When Christians get “born again,” they get the gift of holy spirit inside them until the day of redemption, and that holy spirit is an *arrabōn*, a down payment, or first installment, that they will get the full payment (Eph. 1:13-14). The full payment includes everlasting life, rewards (2 Cor. 5:10), and getting a new body like Christ’s glorious body (Phil. 3:20-21).

So, we Christians did our part of the deal when we obeyed Romans 10:9, and at that time, God gave us a “down payment” of what we would have in the future. But even though we only have a “down payment” of what is coming to us in the future, we still went through immense changes when we took Christ as Lord. We were born again (1 Pet. 1:23), and became children of God (1 John 3:1-2). We were also marked with a seal—the holy spirit (Eph. 1:13-14); got a new, holy nature (2 Pet. 1:4); became a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17); became a part of the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23); and we entered into a spiritual union with Christ such that we were circumcised with him, baptized with him, crucified with him, died with him, buried with him, raised from the dead with him, and now are seated in heaven with him (Rom. 6:1-10; Eph. 2:5-6; Col. 2:10-13). Now we are waiting for Jesus to Rapture us, and when he does, God will fulfill the rest of what He has promised, given we have continued in our trust in Jesus. We will get a new body like Christ’s body, and then we will live forever on a newly restored earth.

[For more about Christian salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For more about the future Kingdom of Christ on earth that we are guaranteed to be a part of, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“until *our* redemption as *God’s own* possession.”** The Christian is marked with a seal—the holy spirit “until *our* redemption as *God’s own* possession,” that is, until the Rapture when Christ comes and Christian redemption is fully realized.

The literal phrase in the Greek is “until the redemption of the possession.” However, in translation, the question that must be asked is, “What is the possession that is being redeemed?” In the context, Christians are described as God’s possession (Eph. 1:12), whom he adopted (Eph. 1:5) and redeems (Eph. 1:7). Therefore, Christians are the possession that is being redeemed. The objective genitive in the Greek occurs when the genitive (“of the possession”) is the direct object of the head noun (“redemption”). Thus, redemption is happening to “the possession.” This is exactly what is happening in this context, which makes the objective genitive appropriate. Since Christians are God’s possession that He will redeem, the REV has translated this genitive phrase as “*our* redemption as *God’s own* possession.”

Right now, Christ has paid the price for redemption—which is why we are God’s *purchased* possession—but the redemption itself has not been fully realized. To “redeem” is to “buy back” or “buy freedom by the payment of a ransom.” Christ has paid the price to buy people back from the power of sin and death, but a Christian’s redemption has not been fully realized. It will be realized when Christians are in their new everlasting bodies and they no longer live under the curse of sickness or death.

It often happens when something is redeemed or the payment of a ransom is made that it takes some time after the payment is made before the captive is released. That is the case with Christians. Jesus Christ made the payment to release us from sin and death when he died, but the full release has not come yet; it is still future. But God has not left us in doubt that our redemption will be fully realized. This is very important because sometimes in business deals, a person pays for something, but for some reason—perhaps the seller was a crook—the buyer never receives what they paid for. But in the case of salvation, Christ paid the ransom, and the believer receives the gift of holy spirit as a down payment that the product, which is complete redemption from sin and death, will be delivered—God will keep His part of the deal, so now to complete the deal Christians must do their part and continue in their trust of Christ..

**“to the praise of his glory.”** See commentary on Ephesians 1:12.

Eph 1:15

**“Because of this.”** Ephesians 1:15-23 (nine verses) is one sentence in the Greek text. This nine-verse prayer follows after the 12-verse introduction (Eph. 1:3-14), which is also one sentence in Greek. The fact that immediately following the introduction is a prayer helps establish the importance of prayer, which is vital to successful Christian life, both for the Church as a whole and individuals in the Church. The world is a battlefield between the forces of good and evil, and believers cannot wage a successful fight without God’s help. Prayer elicits that help, which is why believers are told to pray in so many places in the Epistles (cf. Rom. 12:12; 1 Cor. 14:15; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:17; 1 Tim. 2:1, 8) and why Paul sets the example and mentions how much he prays for the Church (cf. Rom. 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:7, 9; Eph. 1:16; Col. 1:3, 9; 1 Thess. 1:2; 3:10; 2 Thess. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:3; Philemon 1:4). One of the great weaknesses of many Christians is that they do not pray, and one of the great failures of many Churches is that they do not teach people to pray or emphasize the importance of prayer. Ephesians 6:12 makes it clear that the war we wage is not against humans, “flesh and blood,” but against spiritual powers. The only successful way to fight in that arena is with the help of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and we invite them into our battle by prayer.

The Greek starting Ephesians 1:15 is *dia touto* (#1223 διά #3778 τοῦτο), which means “because of this,” “for this reason.”

Eph 1:16

**“do not stop.”** This is the meaning of the Greek.

**“remembering *you*.”** The REV has “remembering you.” Although some versions have “mention,” to “mention” in English has come to mean that something is not very important and is more of a side issue or afterthought, and that is not at all what Paul is saying here. He makes an effort to remember the believers in his prayers. Kittel pointed out that the Greek expression could be idiomatic.

That Paul would remember the believers in his prayer shows that Paul knew it was important to pray for others. Prayer is powerful and it really does make a difference in people’s lives and in the world.

Eph 1:17

**“spiritual wisdom.”** This phrase has caused commentators much trouble. A primary problem has been caused by the doctrine of the Trinity, and some scholars thinking that the “spirit” here is the third person of the Trinity, “the Holy Spirit.” Many other scholars think that the spirit here refers to “the human spirit” or qualities of the mind. So, for instance, Harold Hoehner writes, “Thus, this view contends that in the present context it refers to the attitude or spiritual disposition toward insight and the openness to revelation.”[[31]](#footnote-31442)

Harold Hoehner believes Paul is praying for a specific manifestation of the “Holy Spirit” and writes that Paul “is praying for a specific manifestation of the Spirit so that the believers will have insight and know something of God’s mysteries as a result of the Holy Spirit’s revelation.”[[32]](#footnote-16393) By the time that Paul wrote Ephesians, most likely in AD 62, it was well-known in Christian circles that the word “spirit” was used for a manifestation of the spirit, especially a prophecy. The Corinthians were “zealous for spirits” (1 Cor. 14:12); “the spirits [prophecies] of the prophets were subject to the prophets (1 Cor. 14:32); the Thessalonian congregation was not to be troubled by “a spirit,” a prophecy (2 Thess. 2:2); and we Christians are to test “the spirits,” the prophecies, “because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Furthermore, Jesus will destroy the wicked one by the “spirit,” the prophetic words, that come out of his mouth (2 Thess. 2:8).

However, in contrast to those positions, it seems that the simplest and clearest meaning of the phrase is simply “spiritual wisdom,” and several English versions read that way (e.g., NET, NLT, TLV, The Source New Testament). There does not seem to be any reason to narrow “spirit of wisdom” down to a specific manifestation. Spiritual wisdom can come from many sources, including direct revelation, the Bible, and wise people. Paul was interested in the spiritual maturity of the people, so it makes sense that he would pray for them to have spiritual wisdom and also revelation to help and guide them.

**“revelation.”** For what “revelation” is, see commentaries on Galatians 1:12 and 1 Corinthians 12:8.

Eph 1:18

**“since the eyes of your heart have been enlightened.”** This is a statement inserted in the sentence about what the believers have already experienced—they have already come to believe in Christ. Now, in full recognition that the eyes of their hearts have been enlightened and they are saved, Paul prays for them that they will grow in the Faith and get to know the hope to which they have been called, the rich inheritance God has in store for them, and the power that we believers have in Christ.

**“know.”** The Greek word “know” in this verse is in the aorist tense, and has the force of an ingressive aorist, “get to know.” The believer should be growing in knowledge and wisdom (cf. Eph. 4:15; 2 Pet. 3:18). This is expressed in the English versions in different ways. Many say, “that you may know” (ASV, ESV, HCSB, NAB; cf. NASB), or “so that you will understand” (CJB), or “so that you can see” (NJB; cf. NLT). The point is that the believers in Ephesus do not have the full knowledge that Paul is praying for them to have. There is so much to learn that all of us can stand to grow in the Christian Faith and in our knowledge of what God has in store for us.

**“the hope to which He has called you.”** The Greek is literally “the hope of his calling,” using the genitive phrase “of his calling.” Scholars differ on exactly what genitive this is (subjective genitive, genitive of production, etc.), and thus they differ on an exact translation of the phrase. Ideas include “the hope based on his calling,” “the hope produced by his calling,” “the hope that comes from his calling,” and “the hope belonging to his calling.” But many scholars and translators arrive at the same conclusion about the meaning. For example, Markus Barth translates the phrase, “the hope to which he is calling you” and writes: “Paul prays that God grant the saints discernment among the various hopes that are possible. They are to become aware which hope is decisive for them. Not any hope or number of hopes, but just ‘one hope’ is held and confessed by the Christians (Eph. 4:4). Ephesians 1:18 and 4:4 specify the one prospect as ‘the hope of your calling,’ or ‘the hope to which you have been called.’”[[33]](#footnote-22053) Andrew Lincoln writes that in Ephesians 1:18, “it is the object of hope, that which is hoped for, which is in view.”[[34]](#footnote-26602)

The REV has translated the genitive in Ephesians 1:18 more clearly into English as “the hope to which he has called you” (cf. AMP, CJB, ESV, NIV, NRSV; cf. also, The Source New Testament, and The New Testament by Charles Williams, and “the hope that belongs to his call” (NAB). On the other hand, we do not agree at all with scholars who take the “hope” in this context as “confidence” and translate the phrase such as the GW translation: “the confidence that he calls you to have” (cf. NLT).

The significance of Paul praying that believers would “know the hope to which he has called you” cannot be overstated. The Christian’s hope is the anchor of their soul (Heb. 6:19), so it is vital that Christians not be unclear about what their hope is. It involves having new bodies like Christ’s body, living in the Kingdom of Christ here on a newly regenerated earth, and enjoying the rewards that one has earned for obedience to God. Knowing our hope helps us maintain a godly walk no matter what is happening in our lives and the world around us. Margaret MacDonald is exactly correct when she writes: “here the emphasis is on the hope as shaping the present lives of believers.”[[35]](#footnote-30967) Paul’s prayer that we “know” the hope is a prayer for more than just “head knowledge,” that is, the knowledge of one more interesting fact. Christians are to know and understand the hope in a way that anchors their soul to the things of God and shapes the way they live. A knowledge of the hope that is alive and well inside a believer helps them make godly decisions and live a godly life.

The Devil knows that an accurate knowledge of the hope energizes believers and helps them focus their lives on God and godly activities, so he is always working to destroy the accurate knowledge about the hope. Sadly, he has done a great job of destroying the truth of the hope in orthodox Christianity. Instead of people believing they will live on earth with Christ and be rewarded in proportion to how they have served God, orthodox Christianity has a vague concept of “going to heaven when you die” and no concrete knowledge at all of what life there is like, so that vague hope provides no genuine motivation to live a godly life beyond just getting saved. We need to learn what our hope is and then, like Paul, pray that others learn it too.

[For more on the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more about rewards in the coming kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.” For a more complete understanding of our hope, see the book, *The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul* by John W. Schoenheit.]

**“the riches of His glorious inheritance.”** In the Greek text, this phrase is a dual genitive construction: “the riches of the glory of his inheritance,” and a number of versions keep that literal phrase (cf. KJV, NASB, Rotherham). But although the dual genitive phrase is very hard to understand in English, it is also problematic to translate it into an English phrase that is more easily understood because grammatically there are two different but legitimate ways to translate it. The phrase can be translated as, “the glorious riches of his inheritance” (HCSB; cf. NJB), or as “the riches of his glorious inheritance” (ESV, NET, NIV, NLT, NRSV, RSV). We have gone with “the riches of his glorious inheritance” for reasons given below.

We believe that although there is value in leaving the original dual genitive of the Greek text because the “riches” actually apply to both the glory and the inheritance, that is so difficult to see in English, and more or less implied anyway, that the better choice is to translate it as the “riches of his glorious inheritance.”

We have gone with “the riches of His glorious inheritance” rather than “the glorious riches of his inheritance” based on the Old Testament, which speaks quite directly about the glory of the inheritance but not of the “glorious riches” of the inheritance. What Paul wrote in Ephesians is rooted in the Old Testament. The descriptions of the believer’s inheritance can be found there, and those descriptions are glorious indeed. When Jesus comes back to earth and sets up his kingdom, the world will be made like the Garden of Eden again. The blind will see; the deaf will hear; no one living in Zion will be sick, (Isa. 33:24); there will be no war; the wolf will live with the lamb and the lion will eat grass like the ox; there will be more than enough food for everyone; and there will be great joy. Given all that, and more, it is no wonder that Isaiah 11:10 says the Messiah’s resting place will be glorious (Isa. 11:10) and the earth will be filled with glory (Isa. 6:3). Glory will cover Mount Zion (Isa. 4:5); God’s Temple will be glorious (Isa. 60:7; Hag. 2:7, 9); and even the desert will be given the glory of Lebanon, which was always lush and green (Isa. 35:2; cf. Isa. 60:13). The references in the Old Testament show that the inheritance will be glorious. In fact, the Bible speaks of, or implies, so many different riches in the “glorious inheritance” that believers will receive that it would be quite difficult to catalog all of them.

[For more on the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth that believers will have an inheritance in, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more about rewards that believers can receive in the coming kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

**“His glorious inheritance *that will be shared* among the holy ones.”** We believe this phrase emphasizes the inheritance we believers will receive from God, not something that God receives as an inheritance. We agree with Markus Barth who says the riches “are to be inherited among the saints.”[[36]](#footnote-29945)

There are two primary ways this phrase can be understood in the Greek: Is it an inheritance that God receives or an inheritance that God gives and believers receive? “If the previous reference is to the inheritance believers receive, then αὐτοῦ is a genitive of source (‘inheritance from him’), but if it is taken as God’s inheritance of his people, then it is a possessive genitive (‘his inheritance’).”[[37]](#footnote-20558) Although other places in Ephesians do refer to believers as “God’s possession” almost like an inheritance God will receive (Eph. 1:11, 14), the exact word “inheritance” is not used of something God will receive. In other words, in Ephesians, believers are spoken of as God’s possession, not God’s inheritance.

However, only four verses earlier, in Ephesians 1:14, the word “inheritance” is used for what the believer inherits from God, and it seems that meaning would carry forward in the context. Also, it is well-known that much in Ephesians is parallel with the text in Colossians, and this phrase in Ephesians 1:18 is very similar to Colossians 1:12 (ESV): “the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”

Another reason for understanding this as God’s inheritance that he will give to believers is that it would be quite strange for Paul to pray (Eph. 1:17-23) that the Ephesians would come to know an inheritance that they would never receive. It seems much more likely that Paul would pray for them to know the glory of their own inheritance which they will receive, and that this knowledge would encourage them to keep trusting in God who has great things in store for them.

Furthermore, to us, the flow of the text of Ephesians 1:18-19 makes the more probable meaning to be that Paul is writing of God’s inheritance that is given to the believers. Ephesians 1:18-19 speaks of “the hope to which he has called you,” “his inheritance in [or among] the saints,” and “the surpassing greatness of his power to us who believe.” Given these three phrases, it is clear that the first and third speak of things that God has done for the believer, not what He has in us. It seems less likely that the middle phrase would change the flow of thought and shift to what God has in us, than that the middle phrase would continue the flow of thought and speak of the inheritance we have from God. Thus, we agree with William Hendriksen who writes, “‘His’ inheritance means the one given by him, just like ‘his’ calling was the call issued and made effective by him.”[[38]](#footnote-17768) R. C. H. Lenski agrees and writes, “God has promised us this inheritance for which we hope; we already have the down payment of it (Eph. 1:14).”[[39]](#footnote-14092) The CJB translates the phrase: “what rich glories there are in the inheritance he has promised his people.”[[40]](#footnote-26273)

In considering the two alternatives, the inheritance God gives us, or the inheritance that we are to God, we must ask why people would believe God changed the flow of thought and shifted to thinking the text suddenly referred to the fact that God’s people are His inheritance. A likely reason for that is that most Christians and scholars have little or no idea of what an inheritance given by God to the believer could refer to, so that idea seems strange to them. Most Christians simply believe that believers die and “go to heaven,” and the idea of some kind of “inheritance” there is incongruous since the Bible never speaks in concrete terms of any kind of inheritance in heaven. Thus, their idea of what “his inheritance in the saints” means is colored by their understanding (actually, misunderstanding) of Scripture.

There will not be any inheritance for believers in heaven, because Christians will not make their home in heaven; we will all live on earth in Christ’s earthly kingdom. Christ will come from heaven, conquer the earth, and set up his kingdom, which will fill the whole earth (Dan. 2:35, 44; Matt. 5:5; Rev. 5:10). With the whole earth being the Kingdom of Christ, people will enjoy an inheritance on earth. This inheritance will include rewards (Matt. 19:29; 1 Cor. 3:14) and enjoying the blessings of the kingdom (Isa. 33:24; 35:2). The inheritance is not just one portion of land, but the whole earth, “The meek will inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5).

[For more on the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more about rewards in the coming kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

Eph 1:19

**“immeasurable greatness.”** Paul’s use of superlative terms both demonstrates (if that is possible) the immensity of God’s power and gives the believer confidence that God’s purposes will be accomplished. There are evil powers in the universe, as the people in Ephesus were only too aware due to the magic arts practiced at Ephesus, and those evil powers would stop God’s plans if they could, but their power is limited while God’s power is immeasurably great. God’s power and what He can do far exceeds every earthly and spiritual power (Eph. 1:21). Indeed, God is “the Most High God” as many verses attest (cf. Ps. 78:35; Mark 5:7; Acts 16:17; Heb. 7:1). God will be victorious!

**“his power.”** The power is God’s. It is “his power,” not our power. The Greek word translated “power” is *dunamis* (#1411 δύναμις), and in the New Testament, it almost always refers to power or ability. Although the English word “dynamite” comes from the Greek *dunamis*, that does not mean that the Greeks thought of *dunamis* as explosive or instantaneous because they did not; *dunamis* was simply someone’s power or ability.

It is often taught in the Word of Faith Movement that the power in this verse is our power, that God gave it to us and we now have the power of God to command miracles and healings, and to make things happen. That is not the case. As the verse clearly says, the power is God’s power, but among all the other powerful things He does, He uses it “for” us; for our profit and blessing. While it is true that Christians can access the power of God to do miracles and healings, just as we see in the book of Acts, that is still not “our power” or even God’s power at our command: we must wait for God to give us the revelation to act before we can command miracles, and even then the power that actually does the miracle is God’s power.

[For more on how a Christian works with the power of God to accomplish things such as miracles and healings, see commentary on 1 Cor. 12:9.]

**“for us who believe.”** The “for us,” which is a change in the context from the “you” and “your” in Ephesians 1:15-18, makes the point that the power of God is manifested for all Christians, not just “for you,” the recipients of this letter. God’s power will be exercised to the benefit of every believer.

In the Greek text, the preposition that the REV translates as “for” is *eis*, and in this context, it can mean “to,” “toward,” or “for,” but here *eis* includes all those meanings, which explains why the English versions differ between “for,” “to,” “toward,” “unto,” etc. God’s power is used “for” believers, to bless and help them, and it is “toward” or “to” them in the sense that it reaches them. God’s power for and to believers is not something that “might happen”; it has, does, and will happen, and in many ways.

In the context of Paul’s prayer in Ephesians, the obvious way that God’s power will work for us is in raising us from the dead and fulfilling for us the promises that God has made concerning the Hope. It will be no small feat for God to raise every Christian from the dead, give them a new body like Christ’s glorious body, and give them the inheritance they deserve, but God’s power is immeasurable and He will accomplish that.

But God’s power is also “for” and “to” us on a much broader scale. For example, it is at work in us now so that we ourselves are strengthened by it (Eph. 3:16, 20), and so that we want to do, and can do, what He wants (Phil. 2:13).

**“the same.”** This gives us a standard, and explains and gives great depth of meaning to the phrase “immeasurable greatness of his power.” How great is God’s power to us? It raised Christ from the dead, seated him at God’s own right hand in heaven, and raised him far above all other powers in the universe. And it is that power that is “to us” who believe.

*Dunamis* (#1411 δύναμις) = power; *energeia* (#1753 ἐνέργεια) = energizing; *kratos* (#2904 κράτος) = might; *ischus* (#2479 ἰσχύς) = strength.

Eph 1:20

**“when he raised him.”** God’s statement that he has power that will be used for the benefit of believers is not mere words; it has been demonstrated in mighty acts, including raising Jesus Christ from the dead and seating him in heaven.

**“from among the dead.”** See commentary on Romans 4:24. The word “dead” is a genitive plural adjective, and needs a noun to complete the sense, thus it means “dead people.” The text says that Christ was raised from the dead [people], not “from the state of his being dead.”

Eph 1:21

**“every ruler.”** The Greek is *pas archē* (#3956 πᾶς; #746 ἀρχή), and it can be translated “every ruler” (HCSB), or “all rule” (ESV). In the New Testament, the word *archē* most often refers to a beginning or origin, but it can refer to a person or thing that is the start or beginning of something, or the first thing in a series, or the extremity of something, such as a “corner.” It can also refer to the first in place, and thus a “ruler,” and also to the sphere of the ruler’s authority: his rule or dominion. We can see from the text of the New Testament that when the Bible mentions rulers, they can be either spirit beings (Eph. 6:12) or human beings (Titus 3:1). Interestingly, the word *archē* is used of rule and rulers almost exclusively in the Pauline Epistles—two exceptions are Luke 12:11 and 20:20.

The English versions are divided as to whether the best translation of *pas archē* in Ephesians 1:21 is “ruler,” or his sphere of authority, his “rule.” We felt that translating the phrase “all rule” could be confusing. It might lead some readers to think that if Jesus was “far above all rule,” he was “above the rules” and was a rule unto himself. That is not at all what the text is saying. It is saying Jesus is far above every ruler and authority on earth and in heaven, human or spirit. Although in the Greco-Roman world, it may have been more common to use the word “rule” to speak of the authority of a ruler apart from the ruler himself, it is not common in English to speak that way and so it seems awkward and unclear. “Ruler” seemed clearer and more natural, but stronger than that is the fact that the word is used numerous times to refer to rulers, so that is the way it is translated in the REV. The same basic phrase, *pas archē* (every ruler or “all rule”), also occurs in 1 Corinthians 15:24 and Colossians 2:10.

[For more on the use of “rulers” and “authorities” in the New Testament, see commentary on Eph. 6:12.]

**“and...and...and...and.”** The repetition of “and” is the figure of speech polysyndeton (“Many ands”). The repetition of “and” emphasizes each part of the list.

**“dominion.”** This is a metonymy for those who exercise dominion, whether a human, an angel, or a demon.

[See Word Study: “Metonymy.”]

**“name that is named.”** This refers to Jesus being above every other power and authority in the world. In the ancient world, it was believed that the names of divinities had power, and there was truth in that because both God and demons respond to those who invoke their name. Modern witches still use the names of Satan and the names of demons in their spells, and Christians use the name of Jesus Christ in their prayers and, by revelation, when they command miracles and healings to come to pass. In Luke 10, the 72 men Jesus sent out to the cities of Israel returned and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name!”

In contrast to Christians who use the name of Christ, people involved in witchcraft of all types use the names of demons in their spells and incantations. The Jewish rulers knew the apostles were doing miracles, but could not bring themselves to believe that the miracles were done by the true God. Acts 4:7 records that they called in the apostles and asked, “By what power, or in what name, have you done this [healed the crippled man]?” The Jewish exorcists used the names of Abraham, Solomon, and other Patriarchs, and that was considered orthodox. However, witchcraft was condemned by the Sanhedrin, and this inquisition in Acts 4 was not about the miracle—no one could deny that—but about the “name” or “power” that was used to accomplish it.

Acts 19:13 records that there were Jews who were exorcists who thought they could use the name of Jesus to cast out demons even though they rejected Jesus as the Messiah. “But also some of the Jews, exorcists who traveled from place to place, attempted to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had the evil spirits, saying, ‘I charge you under oath by Jesus whom Paul preaches.’” The result of this action was disastrous, because the demons had no regard for the name of Jesus being used by unbelievers, and wounded the men trying to cast them out.

The city of Ephesus was well-known for magic and witchcraft, and when Paul’s ministry touched many people, “a number of those who practiced the magic arts brought their scrolls together and burned them in the sight of everyone, and they counted the price of them, and found they were *worth* 50,000 pieces of silver” (Acts 19:19; a drachma was a day’s wage for a laborer, so at today’s wages of perhaps $8 an hour, or $64 per day, the amount would be over 3 million dollars). Since Ephesus was so steeped in magic, it is appropriate that it was to the believers in Ephesus that the Word tells us that Jesus is “far above” every name that is named. There is no magic, spell, or witchcraft that is more powerful than Jesus. The believers in Ephesus did not have to fear that someone would try to cast a spell or curse on them using a more powerful name than Jesus, because there is no name more powerful than the name of Jesus.

**“one to come.”** The Greek is *mellō* (#3195 μέλλω) and refers to the age that was close at hand, the Messianic Age. This is more than a simple future. The Greek almost certainly expresses an imminence that is very difficult to translate into English.

Eph 1:22

**“and he put all things in subjection under his feet.”** This verse continues to describe the effect of God energizing and glorifying Jesus, the Christ, which started in Eph. 1:20 (Eph. 1:15-23 are one sentence in the Greek text). This is a good example of a proleptic statement, which is when something that will absolutely happen in the future is written about in the past tense (see commentary on Eph. 2:6, “raised…seated”).

The “all things” (#3956 πάντα) that Paul mentions here in Ephesians 1:22 is related to the “all things” that were reconciled to God in Colossians 1:20. Both the “all things” which were reconciled (Col. 1:20) and the “all things” which will be in subjection under Jesus’ feet (Eph. 1:22) are the “all things” in the new creation. The term “new creation” is a theological word like “Rapture” or “eschatology,” and it refers to anything created relating to and after Christ’s atoning work, but particularly what is coming in the future. However, in a broader way, the “new creation” can refer to things that are created after the resurrection of Christ. For example, the Christian is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17) because of the holy spirit dwelling in them which is given through belief in Christ’s atoning work. Jesus’ resurrected body is also part of the new creation, hence, he is called “the firstborn of all creation” (referring to the new creation; Col. 1:15), because Christ’s resurrection body is incorruptible (1 Cor. 15:42), unstained from the corrupted flesh that has dwelt in humankind since Adam fell into sin (Gen. 3:19; Rom. 5:19). Also part of the “new creation” is the Body of Christ, with Christians being individual members and Christ being the head of the Body—the Body of Christ did not exist before Christ’s resurrection and ascension. Also part of the new creation is the Christian Church and the structure of the Church, complete with the equipping ministries of apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and all the myriad of other ministries as well (e.g., Rom. 12:6-8).

Paul uses the same language in Colossians 1:16 (“dominions, rulers, and authorities”) as in Ephesians 1:21. One major reason to take the reference to “all things” as referring to the new creation is that the timeframe in view in both passages is after Jesus has been resurrected and exalted to God’s right hand (Eph. 1:20). Therefore, Paul is talking about the new creation in both passages, Colossians 1:15-20 and here in Ephesians 1:20-23, not the Genesis creation.

[For more on the “new creation” in Ephesians and Colossians, see commentary on Colossians 1:16.]

**“*related to* the church.”** The phrase “the church” is simply a dative in the Greek, meaning there is no preposition used that would help clarify the meaning of the phrase. The dative is typically translated as “to,” i.e., “to the church,” however, it is not proper to use that translation in every context. The context determines how the dative should be translated. It is most likely that the dative of respect/reference is Paul’s intended usage here, which can be translated as “head over all things *concerning/related to* the church.” As Daniel Wallace comments, “An author will use this dative to qualify a statement that would otherwise typically not be true.”[[41]](#footnote-14751) That usage fits this context well. Jesus Christ is currently not the acting head over all things, such as Satan and his demons, or non-Christians, because they do not submit to him (although one day they will bow down to him; Phil. 2:9-10). But Jesus currently is, and always will be, over all things related to the church, because he is the head of the church (Col. 1:18; Eph. 4:15; 5:23).

Eph 1:23

**“which is his body.”** When a person gets born again, they become part of the Body of Christ. The “Body of Christ” is a spiritual reality. Jesus is the “Head” of the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:19) and each Christian is an individual part of the Body. The Body of Christ is a spiritual entity that consists of every person who is born again (1 Cor. 12:27; cf. Romans 12:4,5; 1 Cor. 10:16; 12:12-20; Eph. 1:23; 3:6; 4:4; Col. 1:18; 3:15). Like our physical body, this spiritual body is comprised of many members: each born-again person is in the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13-27). Furthermore, the “Body of Christ” did not exist until the Christian Church started on the Day of Pentecost and the New Birth became available. It is unique to the Administration of Grace, and it is never mentioned outside the Epistles to the Christian Church.

It is because every Christian is part of the Body of Christ that each Christian is therefore “in Christ” or as it is often expressed, “in union with Christ.” Being “in Christ” or “in union with Christ,” is not a “symbolic union,” but a “mystical union,” a union in the spiritual world that we in the flesh do not fully comprehend, but it is a very real union nevertheless (see commentary on Eph. 1:3).

The “Body of Christ” started on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) when it was first available to be “born again,” and thus being “in Christ” started then too, and is only mentioned in the Epistles to the Christian Church (Romans-Jude). The phrase “in Christ” does not occur in the Old Testament, Gospels, or book of Revelation, and the first use of the phrase in reference to being in union with Christ is Romans 3:24. That is because Christians are only “in Christ” or “in union with Christ” because they are part of the Body of Christ, and the Body of Christ is unique to the Administration of Grace, which started on Pentecost and will end with the Rapture. Thus, to become “in Christ” is also unique to the Administration of Grace (Jesus spoke of being “in” the Father and the believers being “in” them at the Last Supper, but that had a different meaning than being “in Christ,” see commentary on Eph. 1:3).

Being part of the Body of Christ and therefore being in union with Christ means that from God’s viewpoint, whatever happened to Christ happened to each Christian. That is why the Bible says that Christians were circumcised with Christ (Col. 2:11), crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20), died with Christ (Rom. 6:8; 2 Tim. 2:11), buried with Christ (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12), and were raised and seated in the heavenlies with Christ (Eph. 2:6). It is worth pointing out again that none of these things is ever said of any believer before the Day of Pentecost or after the Rapture; they are unique to the Church Age, the Administration of Grace.

Being part of the Body of Christ and in union with Christ gives each Christian tremendous privileges. For example, just as the human head is in intimate and immediate contact with every part of the human body, and the body is in contact with the head, so too, Jesus is in contact and communication with his Body, the Church, and the members of the Church are in contact with him. As the Head of the Body, the Lord Jesus is actively involved in guiding and sustaining each Christian, and each Christian should be in contact with Jesus, requesting his help and guidance. That each Christian is part of the Body of Christ is one reason the Bible says that every Christian can fellowship with Jesus (1 John 1:3).

Ephesians 4:12 mentions the building up of the Body of Christ, the Church. The Body of Christ is built up in many different ways, and it gets built up as the people with equipping ministries equip believers who then go forth and do the work of the ministry. One obvious way that the Body gets built up is when believers tell unbelievers about Jesus and those unbelievers get saved and added to the number of believers. But the Body is also built up, “edified,” when believers help each other, which happens in myriads of different ways. Christians are to be especially good to each other (Gal. 6:10) and support “one another.”

[For specific ways we are to support and love one another, see commentary on Gal. 5:13; For the New Birth and being born again starting on Pentecost, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” That John 3 is about the resurrection from the dead and not Christian New Birth, see commentary on John 3:3.]

**“the fullness of the one who fills all things.”** Jesus Christ does not spatially, or physically, fill all things; rather, it is his “body,” the Church, which fills all things.

[See commentary on Ephesians 4:10 under “in order to fill all things” for more information on this.]

**Ephesians Chapter 2**

Eph 2:1

**“Dead due to your transgressions and sins.”** Although most English versions read “dead in your trespasses and sins,” the Greek text does not have the word “in.” The Greek text is simply the adjective *nekros*, “dead” followed by the nouns “trespasses” and “sins,” which are in the dative case. The effect of the dative is to make the point that it is “due to,” or “because of,” your trespasses and sins that “you” are dead. In his commentary on Ephesians, R. C. H. Lenski correctly observes: “the datives are causal: ‘due to your trespasses and sins.’”[[42]](#footnote-30691) Heinrich Meyer writes, “The dative connotes the *causa efficiens*, ‘efficient cause’ of the death.”[[43]](#footnote-14055)

We can see that the word “dead” is used in a figurative sense because the verse itself and the next few verses make it clear that the people Paul was writing to were very much alive. But if “dead” is being used in a figurative sense, what is that figurative sense? Actually, it seems clear that “dead” has two figurative meanings, a primary one and a secondary one. The primary meaning is proleptic; it is speaking of the future result of unforgiven sin, which is everlasting death. The secondary meaning is that the person who is not born again and sealed with the gift of holy spirit is “spiritually dead,” meaning the person has no spiritual life.

“Spiritual death” is a way of figuratively speaking of a person not having the gift of holy spirit. There are commentators who say “spiritual death” is literal. But “spiritual death” is not “literal,” it is figurative because the spirit is not “dead,” it has not been created in the person yet. The phrase “spiritual death” only makes sense because we understand actual physical “death” and actually, the phrases “spiritually dead,” or “spiritual death,” do not occur in the Bible.

We will now take the time to examine these primary and secondary meanings. The primary meaning of “dead” in Ephesians 2:1 and 2:5 is proleptic, meaning the event (the person’s death) is actually future, but it is spoken of as if it is a present reality. Meyer correctly observes:

The expression νεκροὶ [“dead”] is proleptic: ‘when ye were dead through your sins,’ i.e., when you had through your sins drawn upon you death, had become liable to eternal death, so that in this way the *certo morituri*, ‘those who are surely to die,’ are designated as νεκροὶ [“dead”].[[44]](#footnote-29745)

Markus Barth speaks of “dead” as having a “prophetic tone.”[[45]](#footnote-16244) Understanding the word “dead” as a prophecy of a future event—the person’s everlasting death—is the same as understanding it proleptically, but it is perhaps easier for some people to understand the concept of prophecy. A future event being spoken of as something that has already occurred is often called “the prophetic perfect,” although the phrase “prophetic perfect” is properly applied to verbs in the past tense (see commentary on Eph. 2:6, “raised…seated”).

A major reason the Bible says the people are dead now (“being dead;” *ovtas nekrous*; present tense) is for emphasis. Saying something that will happen in the future has already happened is a biblical way of emphasizing the point, which in this case is emphatically saying that the unsaved will die in the future. To make sure the reader understands that the person is not dead yet, but only spoken of as being dead for emphasis, it is important to note that there are many verses in the Bible that are literal, and say that the death of the unsaved has not happened yet. For example, 1 Corinthians 1:18 says, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing,” and 2 Corinthians 4:3 says, “But even if our Good News is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.” The unsaved are in the process of perishing, because day after day they grow closer to everlasting death—a death that is certain unless they get saved.

That the word “dead” is proleptic, a future reality being spoken of as a present reality, fits with the two other concepts in the Greek sentence (Eph. 2:1-7) that are also proleptic. The proleptic use of “dead” at the beginning of Ephesians 2:1 fits with the proleptic use of “made us alive together with Christ,” and “seated us with him in the heavenly places,” which occur later in the Greek sentence. The sentence says we are “dead,” but we are not literally “dead” yet, just as the sentence says we are made alive together with Christ, even though we have not died yet nor been raised like Christ in our new, everlasting bodies. Furthermore, we have not yet been seated with Christ in heaven, but we will be in the future when the Rapture occurs. So the whole thrust of the sentence—the death of the unsaved, the resurrection of the saved, and the saved being seated in heaven—is future, but is grammatically placed in the past tense for emphasis.

It was common in Semitic languages, and in the language in the Bible, to express the certainty of a future event by speaking of it as having already occurred, so saying the unsaved are “dead” when they will be dead in the future is not unusual. Romans 7:10 says, “and I found that the commandment that *was given* for life actually resulted in death.” Is Paul saying that people died when they sinned? Of course not. He is using the term “death” proleptically, that unforgiven and unatoned sin will result in everlasting death. But the result, “death,” is so certain that he speaks of the death as a present reality. Similarly, in Romans 7:24 Paul asks, “Who will rescue me from this body of death?” Paul refers to his body as being dead even though it is alive, and he notes that being rescued from his dead body is a future event, as evidenced by the future verb “will rescue.”

A secondary meaning of the word “dead” in Ephesians 2:1 is that it refers to a person being unsaved and without the gift of holy spirit. This is described as being “spiritually dead.” In saying that a person is “dead” in sin, the Bible expresses a couple different realities. Certainly, the future death of the unsaved is being powerfully expressed, but also the reality that the person has no holy spirit, something Christians refer to as being “spiritually dead.” The problem with the theological phrase “spiritually dead” is that it is not in the Bible, and the figurative use of the word “dead” has to be gained from scope and context. “Death” or “dead” is used figuratively in several places in the Bible, including Romans 8:13; 2 Corinthians 4:12; Colossians 3:5, and 1 John 3:14. The phrase “dead in sin” describes a spiritual state of being, but the exact nature of that state is understood differently by different people. We assert that it refers to the state of the unsaved person who has not been born again of the holy spirit of God, and thus is separated from God and headed for everlasting death.

[See Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.”]

In contrast to “being dead” being figurative, the theology that is broadly described as Calvinism (after John Calvin) understands “dead” and “spiritually dead” in a different way than just separated from God and headed for death. According to Calvinist theology, since the Bible says the unsaved person is “dead,” he cannot believe on his own but must be given life by the “Holy Spirit” in order to believe in Christ. That is why Calvinism teaches that it is God who picks who will be saved and who will not. According to Calvinist theology, God empowers the dead people He selects for salvation by giving them His “Holy Spirit” so that they can believe. Once empowered by the “Holy Spirit,” the person can believe and get saved.

There are many problems with that interpretation of the verse and of Calvinism in general. One problem is that it denies (or significantly modifies) the meaning of “dead.” The unsaved person is not really dead, as we can see even from the sentence itself, because the “dead” people in the verse lived and acted upon their emotions and feelings (even Calvin himself freely admitted these “dead” people were physically and mentally alive). That forces the Calvinist to say that the unsaved person is alive both physically and mentally, but cannot make the choice to do anything against his “dead” and unholy nature, such as get saved, unless empowered by the “Holy Spirit.” But there is no proof for that assertion.

It misses the point of the verse to say that because a person is “dead in sin,” he cannot believe and get saved because he is “dead.” For one thing, as we have seen, the person was not actually dead. It is going far beyond the meaning of the verse, and imports a theology that is not part of the verse itself, to say that a person who is “dead in sin” cannot believe and be saved. It is part of the “nature” of mankind to survive and even to try to improve one’s circumstances. Thus, when presented with the opportunity to survive forever on the basis of faith alone, it is well within the “nature” of mankind to make that choice. Unsaved people do have the survival instinct to believe in Jesus and receive everlasting life. Calvinism denies that, which is why there are thousands of pages of commentary and debate written on the subject between Calvinist and non-Calvinist theologians. To us, it is evident that unsaved people can and do make their own decision to believe in Christ and then consequently receive the gift of holy spirit (cf. Acts 2:38; Eph. 1:13).

A very good reason to believe that Ephesians 2:1 is primarily to be taken in a proleptic, prophetic sense is the wording of the verse itself. The verse says that the unsaved people are dead “due to,” or because of, their sins. But dead people do not sin, so these people have to be alive enough to have original sin and to sin themselves. A quite literal translation of the verse is: “And you, being dead due to your transgressions and sins,….” Interestingly, Calvinist theology readily admits that the people of Ephesians 2:1 are “dead” due to their sin (or “in” their sin, which is still in part the sin they committed), but in doing that, they admit these “dead” people actually are alive. For Calvinist theology to work, the “dead” people in the verse can sin because they are alive, but cannot believe and be saved because they are dead. This is very fuzzy thinking.

According to Calvinist theology, the unsaved “dead” people have never been alive because they have never been given life through Christ. But if a person has never ever lived, never been alive at any time, he cannot have sin. At that point, the Calvinist shifts his definition of death and says that the people are alive enough to sin, so they are in fact deserving of burning in Gehenna, but they are not “spiritually alive,” so they are incapable of having faith in Christ. We reject that reasoning and assert that the verse is actually quite simple. It points out both that the unsaved person is separated from God, and that his sin will result in his eternal death. Beyond that, we believe other verses in the Bible say these people, who can freely sin, can also freely have faith in Christ and receive everlasting life. It is not necessarily a desire to be Christ-like or holy that lures most people to salvation, but the chance to live better on earth as well as survive forever.

The point of Ephesians 2:1 is not just to tell us about the fate of the unsaved, but to produce profound thankfulness in the believer for what God has done in saving him. The Greek phrase “being dead” (*ontas nekrous*) refers to the believer’s state before he got saved. We can see this from the context because Eph. 2:5 uses the same Greek as Eph. 2:1 but exchanges “you” (plural) for “we.” We can also see it from the grammar itself, because the participles show peoples’ state before God granted them salvation.

[Good books that assert people’s ability to believe and get saved include: *What Love Is This* by David Hunt and *Against Calvinism* by Roger Olson. For more information on Calvinism and some of the problems with that theology, see Appendix 9: “On Calvinism and Predestination.”]

Eph 2:2

**“you once.”** This is a good translation of *pote* (#4218 ποτέ). The idea is that we formerly, or previously, walked according to the world.

**“according to the ways of this world.”** The Greek is “according to the *aiōn* (#165 αἰών) of the *kosmos* (#2889 κόσμος)*.*” When a person walks in accord with the *aiōn* of this *kosmos*, he walks in a way that conforms to the world in its present fallen and corrupt state. The Greek word *aiōn* gets translated “age,” most of the time, but it is important that we think of “age” the same way the Greeks did. Generally, when we think of “age,” we mean a period of time. Although the word did refer to a period of time, it referred to the thinking and attitudes that existed in that age. Trench writes that *aiōn* refers to “All that floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations, at any time current in the world, which it may be impossible to cease and accurately define, but which constitutes a most real and effective power, being the moral, or immoral, atmosphere which at every moment of our lives we inhale, again, inevitably to exhale,—all this is included in the *aiōn*….”[[46]](#footnote-17413)

Just as the owners of a Mexican or Chinese restaurant in the United States work hard to create an “atmosphere” that represents their home country, the Adversary works hard to make sure that this world has an “ungodly atmosphere,” and that “atmosphere” is the *aiōn* of this world (*kosmos*). The unsaved and the ignorant Christians do not even notice that the “atmosphere” of this world is ungodly, and they follow the culture without thinking much about it.

Because the word *aiōn* includes the idea of time and behavior, in this verse the behavioral aspect was being emphasized because of the verb “walk,” and the REV went with “ways.”

**“ruler.”** The Greek is *archōn* (#758 ἄρχων), “ruler.” The translation of *archōn* as “prince” started early in the English translations, especially the King James Version, primarily due to the Septuagint, which used *archōn* in Old Testament passages that referred to a prince (cf. Gen. 34:2 KJV). In modern English, the word “prince” can be misleading because it almost always refers to the son of the king, and that is not the meaning of *archōn* when it refers to the Devil, and therefore, the word “ruler” is better.

**“domain.**” The Greek is *exousia* (#1849 ἐξουσία), which typically carries the meaning of “authority” or “power.” However, in this context, if it was translated “authority” the verse would be rendered, “in which you once walked...according to the ruler of the authority of the air.” This would imply that there is some unknown authority of the unseen realm essentially second-in-command to Satan, because “the ruler” would correspond to Satan and “the authority” would correspond to this unknown entity. Yet, the identity of this second-in-command entity remains a mystery and is not spelled out anywhere else in Scripture. Other places the Devil is called the “ruler of the demons” (Matt. 12:24) but nowhere is a second-in-command demon specified. Thus, it seems unlikely that this meaning is what Paul intended for *exousia*.

Another meaning of *exousia* is “the sphere in which power is exercised” or simply, “domain.” This is the meaning BDAG chooses for *exousia* here in Ephesians 2:2,[[47]](#footnote-11952) and it seems most fitting. Paul would be describing the Devil as “the ruler of the domain of the air,” the one who rules over the evil spiritual forces in the air (Eph. 6:12), the authority of darkness (Col. 1:13).

**“of the air.”** The “air” can be literal because the Devil controls and to some extent lives in the air. However, the “air” can legitimately refer to the “atmosphere” of evil that exists in the world, which is part of the understanding of *aiōn.* This may be an excellent example of the figure of speech, amphibologia, double meaning. Both meanings are true and can be textually supported by the vocabulary.

[See Word Study: “Amphibologia.”]

In the war between God and the Devil, the Devil works to use the “air,” the weather, against God’s people whenever he can. In Job 1:19, the Devil influenced the weather and a powerful wind came from the desert and killed Job’s children (Job 1:19). When the people of earth ignore God and His commands, the Devil has more active ability to affect the weather and afflict mankind. When God’s people are being obedient to God, then God can protect them and the weather is a blessing to people. Many verses in the Old Testament show the weather is greatly affected by the godliness or wickedness of the people (Lev. 18:24-25; Deut. 11:13-17; 28:1-40; Ps. 107:33-34; Jer. 3:2-3; 12:4; 23:10; Amos 4:6-10).

**“at work.”** The Greek is *energeō* (#1754 ἐνεργέω), a verb that means “works” or “energizes.”

**“those who are disobedient.”** Literally, “sons of defiance,” or “sons of disobedience.” The Greek is *apeitheia* (#543 ἀπείθεια) and refers to willful disobedience.

Eph 2:3

**“cravings.”** The Greek word *epithumia* (#1939 ἐπιθυμία) refers to a strong desire. If a sexual nuance is intended, then the word “lust” works well. But if it refers to generic human desires, then “cravings” seems to capture that idea better.

**“carrying out.”** “Doing” would be more literal but difficult, and in slang, colors the meaning. “Pursuing” is more to the point, which is following the whims of the flesh. The flesh and mind have carnal desires that flow from the sin nature, but they also have desires based upon the fact that we are frail human beings. For example, the flesh may “desire” more sleep than is necessary or sleep when it is not appropriate. God has gifted humankind with the mental ability—and the responsibility—to override what the flesh and mind desire if it is not appropriate or godly. Unsaved people and carnal Christians often give in to their sinful and fleshly desires, but wise Christians rule their lives in accord with God’s will.

**“mind.”** This word is more accurately “thoughts” (plural), but it does not make good sense in English to say “the desires of the thoughts” since the thoughts are the desires.

**“wrath.”** “Wrath” is a good translation; see Bullinger.[[48]](#footnote-10841) It has the idea of desire for revenge or justice. It is in the mind, not in the action, so “anger” could be a good translation, but given the scope of the NT, “wrath” is better.

Eph 2:5

**“when we were dead.”** This is a participle in the Greek text, but translating it more literally as “being dead” seemed to make the reading awkward, and so we translated it as many other versions do in a way that is still accurate but reads more smoothly in English: “when we were dead.”

**“due to.”** See commentary on Colossians 2:14.

**“transgressions.”** The Greek is *paraptōma* (see commentary on Eph. 1:7)*.*

Eph 2:6

**“*because we are* in *union with* Christ Jesus.”** This usage of “in Christ” is one of Paul’s more complicated uses. The text in the more literal Greek ordering is, “He raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” As is often the case, Paul puts the phrase “in Christ” in various places in his discussions of what is true for the believer. The phrase “in Christ” has a wide variety of possible meanings. Perhaps one of Paul’s most frequent uses is the static “*en*” (εν), which is often translated “in *union with* Christ” or “in *connection with* Christ.” That is likely the meaning Paul is intending here in Ephesians 2:6. Because we are in union with Christ (by trust; Eph. 2:8), God has “spiritually” treated us like Christ, not literally. It is as if we have been raised with him (Christ) and seated with him in the heavenly places, even though that literally has not happened to any believers yet.

[For more on “in *union with* Christ,” see commentary on Ephesians 1:3, “in *union with* Christ.”]

**“raised…seated.”** The words “raised” and “seated” are the idiom of the prophetic perfect in which a future event is said to have already occurred in the past to emphasize the certainty that it will happen. We are not seated in heaven yet, but we will be.

In the Hebrew and Aramaic languages in which much of the Bible was written, when something was absolutely going to happen in the future, it was sometimes spoken of as if it had already occurred in the past. This is apparently due to the fact that it is sometimes hard to express that a future event is certain to happen. Many times, when we simply say that something “will” happen, it does not happen. One way the Semitic languages avoided that was by idiomatically saying something already had happened even though the event was actually still future. That is the case in Ephesians 2:6 and some other verses in the New Testament—a future event is put in the past tense for emphasis.

In Ephesians 2:6 the verb “seated” is in the aorist tense, as if the seating had already occurred, even though actually we have not yet been seated in heaven. This is a figure of speech, in this case, an idiom that comes under the general category that some scholars refer to as the “prophetic perfect,” and in this specific case is a “futuristic aorist” (also sometimes called a “proleptic aorist”). We have not yet been seated in heaven, but the fact that we are born again guarantees that we will be when the Rapture occurs, so that fact is expressed by the idiom and we are said to be “seated” in heaven.

Hebrew scholars are familiar with this idiom and refer to it as “the prophetic perfect,” “the historic sense of prophecy,” the “perfective of confidence,” and in the NET text note on Obadiah 1:2, it is referred to as “the perfect of certitude.” It is also referred to by some scholars as the “here now, but not yet” or “already—not yet.” We should not be surprised that different scholars refer to the idiom by different names because idioms in languages do not have specific names; they are just the way people in that culture speak.

E. W. Bullinger recognized that a future event was sometimes referred to in the past tense as if it had already occurred, and instead of referring to it as an idiom of the language, referred to it as a figure of speech called heterosis (“The past for the future”).[[49]](#footnote-16233)

The average Christian has no knowledge of the idiom because most of the time when it occurs in the Bible, the translators have not translated it literally, but instead have changed the tense of the verb so the English is easy to read and understand. Thus, the “prophetic perfect” is rarely apparent in English Bibles. In fairness to the translators, because the English language seldom uses anything like the prophetic perfect, most Christians would only be confused if the idiom was translated literally into English. For example, the Greek text of Jude 14 says that the Lord “came” with thousands of his saints (cf. NASB). Scholars of the biblical languages recognize that Jude was simply using the prophetic perfect to indicate the certainty of the Lord’s coming in the future with thousands of saints. But if they translated the verse literally, the average Christian would probably become confused and wonder, “When did the Lord come with thousands of his saints? The first and only time he came, he had only a small group of apostles and disciples.”

Although the idiom of the prophetic perfect is originally a Semitic concept, it occurs in the New Testament Greek. Often, the idioms of the Hebrew language and culture come over into the New Testament text. E. W. Bullinger explains that the idioms of the Hebrew language and culture are reflected in the Greek text:

The fact must ever be remembered that, while the language of the New Testament is Greek, the agents and instruments employed by the Holy Spirit were Hebrews. God spake “by the mouth of his holy prophets.” Hence, while the “mouth” and the throat and vocal chords and breath were human, the *words* were Divine. No one is able to understand the phenomenon; or explain how it comes to pass: for Inspiration is a fact to be believed and received, and not a matter to be reasoned about. While therefore, the *words* are Greek, the *thoughts* and *idioms* are Hebrew. Some, on this account, have condemned the Greek of the New Testament, because it is not classical; while others, in their anxiety to defend it, have endeavored to find parallel usages in classical Greek authors. Both might have spared their pains by recognizing that the New Testament Greek abounds with *Hebraisms*: i.e., expressions conveying Hebrew usages and thoughts in Greek words.”[[50]](#footnote-15728)

When the Hebrew idiom of the prophetic perfect is brought into Greek, it is expressed in several different ways, because the Greek tenses are structured differently than the Hebrew tenses. Thus, technically in Greek, under the category of the prophetic perfect idiom, there is the prophetic perfect (the perfect tense used to express a future event), and proleptic aorist (the aorist tense used to express a future event).

The prophetic perfect and proleptic aorist are vital idioms for students of the Bible to understand, because of the important meaning they bring to the text. By writing about a future event in the past tense, God is emphasizing that the event will absolutely come to pass. If God simply used the future tense to write about future events, the aspect of absolute certainty that the idiom communicates would be lost. Here in Ephesians 2:6, for example, God could tell us, “we **will** be seated in heaven with Christ.” However, there might then be mitigating factors that would keep us from going to heaven. But saying that Christians are already in heaven is one of the ways God says that our salvation is not in doubt; we Christians will absolutely be with God.

There are many examples of the prophetic perfect in the Bible. For instance, God told Noah to build the ark. After telling him how to build it, the Hebrew text, translated literally, reads that God said, “And you **have come** into the ark” (Gen. 6:18). The ark was not even built at that time, but Noah would absolutely be inside it in the future. Another is when God said to Abraham, “To your descendants I **have given** this land” (Gen. 15:18; cf. NASB). This promise was made to Abraham before he even had any descendants to give the land to, but God states His promise in the past tense to emphasize the certainty of the event. Later, when Abraham was bargaining with God to save Sodom, God told Abraham that if 50 righteous people could be found in the city, He would spare it. To make His point clear, God used the prophetic perfect and said, “If I find at Sodom 50 righteous people, I **have spared** the whole place” (Gen. 18:26). Another example occurs when Joseph interpreted Pharaoh’s dream and foretold that there would be seven years of plenty and seven years of famine. When mentioning the years of famine, Joseph used the prophetic perfect for emphasis and said, “And there **have arisen** seven years of famine” (Gen. 41:30). The prophecy of the coming Messiah given by the prophet Balaam is placed in the prophetic perfect for emphasis. Although it would be more than 1,400 years before the Messiah would come, the Hebrew text has, “A star **has come forth** out of Jacob and a scepter **has arisen** out of Israel” (Num. 24:17). Although Isaiah wrote more than 700 years before the birth of Christ, the Hebrew text reads, “To us a child **has been** born, to us a son **has been** given, and the government **has been** on his shoulders, and he **has been** called …” (Isa. 9:6). There are many, many examples of the prophetic perfect in the Bible (cf. Prov. 11:21).

Wallace explains the proleptic aorist as follows: “An author sometimes uses the aorist for the future to stress the certainty of the event. It involves a ‘rhetorical transfer’ of a future event as though it were past.”[[51]](#footnote-14751)

Other examples of the proleptic aorist besides Jude 1:14 that was mentioned above are John 3:31 and Hebrews 2:5.

The way to tell that the Bible is not describing an actual past event but is using the prophetic perfect idiom is that the event in question is written about as both a past and future event, and the scope of Scripture makes it clear that the event is future. A good example is Jude 1:14, about the return of Christ. There are many scriptures that say Christ’s return is future, so when the Greek text of Jude 1:14 says it is in the past, we can tell that is the prophetic perfect idiom and emphasizing the fact that he absolutely will come back.

The Bible uses both the prophetic perfect idiom and the literal truth when speaking of a number of spiritual matters. For example, there are verses stating that Christians have already been saved (Eph. 2:8), and there are verses stating that our salvation is still future (Rom. 13:11). The verses that say our salvation is still future are literal because we are not “saved” (“rescued”) yet, which is why we all still suffer and die now. That our salvation and redemption are still future is why the Bible says we have a “guarantee” of our salvation and everlasting future (Eph. 1:14; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5). In the future we will be “saved” and at that time, suffering and death will be no more. The verses in the New Testament that say we are already saved are the Semitic idiom of the prophetic perfect, and they are making the point that we will absolutely—without any doubt—be saved in the future.

Similarly, the Bible says Christians are already redeemed (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14), but it also says we are still awaiting our redemption (Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14; 4:30); it says believers have been adopted into God’s family (Rom. 8:15), but it also says we are still awaiting our adoption (Rom. 8:23); it says that we are glorified (Rom. 8:30), but it also says our glorification is still future (Rom. 8:17; Col. 1:27). The verses that speak of our salvation, redemption, adoption, and glorification as past events are the prophetic perfect idiom, assuring us that one day we will all have those things. The verses that say our salvation, redemption, adoption, and glorification are future are literal, which is why now we have the “hope” of salvation (1 Thess. 5:8).

A different idiom, but one that is very closely related to the prophetic perfect, is the prophetic present. It is very similar to the prophetic perfect, which, as we have seen, was used when an event was certain to happen. However, the prophetic present also usually indicates that the event being referred to was close at hand.

[For more information on the prophetic perfect and how it influences our concept of salvation, adoption, redemption, and glorification, see commentary on Eph. 2:8. For more information on the prophetic present, see commentary on Luke 3:9.]

[For a more detailed explanation of the Prophetic Perfect with quotations about it from linguists and grammarians, see John W. Schoenheit, *The Christian’s Hope: the Anchor of the Soul*, Appendix E. Grammarians that mention the idiom include: Kautzsch, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*; Davidson, *Hebrew Grammar*; Waltke and O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*; Seow, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*; Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*.]

Eph 2:7

**“so that.”** The Greek *hina* (#2443 ἵνα) usually indicates either a purpose, “in order that,” or a result, “so that.” Leaving the word “that” in the text gives the reader the flexibility to decide what God means.

**“the immeasurable riches of his grace.”** Although the first thought sparked in many people’s minds when they hear “riches” is money, this phrase has nothing to do with money. The Greek word translated “riches” is *ploutos* (#4149 πλοῦτος), which can mean “wealth” (financially) or it can mean an “abundance” of something.[[52]](#footnote-20853) Here in Ephesians 2:7, it is not that God’s grace comes from His immeasurable amount of money, or something along those lines. Rather, this phrase “immeasurable riches of his grace” refers to the tremendous “abundance” of His grace. In other words, God has saved us (Eph. 2:5) out of an act of pure grace, to show us how immeasurably gracious He really is. The REV has chosen to preserve the translation “riches” because it is a fairly common phrase in Paul’s letters (e.g., “riches of his kindness,” Rom. 2:4), and a consistent translation helps students of the Scriptures recognize this pattern (cf. Eph. 1:7, 18; 3:8; Rom. 9:23; Col. 1:27).

**“in the ages to come.”** This phrase is significant because it helps us, as interpreters, recognize that Paul is using the prophetic perfect idiom throughout this passage. The actual act of kindness that God will show Christians (raising to life) will happen in the ages to come.

In Greek and Hebrew, the prophetic perfect idiom occurs when the author talks about an event as if it already occurred (in the past tense) even though it is a future event. Typically, this is done to express how certain the author is that this will happen. In this passage, Paul has said that God has “made us alive” (Eph. 2:5), “raised us up with him” (Eph. 2:6), and “seated us with him” (Eph. 2:6), yet, none of these events has actually happened to Christians. They have happened to Jesus, and because of our union with Jesus (by trust), Paul is so certain these things will happen to us, he can speak of them in the past tense.

[For more information on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

**“by being kind.”** The Greek preposition *en* (#1722 ἐν, “by”) is being used in the instrumental sense. In the future, God will show how gracious He is, by being kind to us Christians who do not deserve His kindness. The future act of kindness that God will do is explained throughout the context. Primarily, Paul has in mind salvation (Eph. 2:8) and the resurrection of Christians to everlasting life (Eph. 2:5).

Eph 2:8

**“have been saved.”** Here in Ephesians, the Bible speaks of our salvation as if we already had it, even though the fullness of our salvation is future. This is the idiom of the prophetic perfect. The “prophetic perfect” is an idiom that was part of the Semitic languages such as the Old Testament languages of Hebrew and Aramaic and was somewhat used in New Testament Greek as well. In the Semitic languages, in order to express the fact that a future event was certain to happen, it was written about in the past tense, as if it had already happened.

[For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

The prophetic perfect idiom in large part explains why the New Testament sometimes says that “salvation,” “redemption,” “glorification,” and “adoption” are an accomplished reality in some verses, but in other verses says those things are still future. There are verses stating that we Christians have already been saved (Eph. 2:8, “you have been saved by grace through *your* trust”), verses that state we are in the process of being saved now (1 Cor. 1:18, “But to us who are being saved, it [the cross] is the power of God”), and verses stating that our salvation is still future (Rom. 5:10, that we “will be saved”; Rom. 13:11, “now our salvation is nearer than when we *first* believed”; and 1 Thess. 5:8, which says that the “helmet” of the Christian is the “hope of salvation”). So, which is it? Are we saved now or is salvation something we have to wait and hope for? The prophetic perfect idiom gives us a window into understanding that question.

No one, Old Testament or New Testament, is saved now in the sense that they are already rescued from death and the consequences of sin in this world. We all still wrestle with sin and death. Although God is working out the process of our salvation now, our complete salvation is still future. We *will* have new bodies, we *will* be rescued from death, and we *will* be freed from sin and sickness. But right now, we Christians have God’s gift of holy spirit born inside us, and that is “a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession” (Eph. 1:13; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5). The fact that our future salvation is *guaranteed* means that, in the idiom of biblical language, it can be spoken of as if it were already accomplished. Thus, we Christians refer to ourselves as “saved” even though we struggle with sin, sickness, and death in our day-to-day lives. But when we are finally “saved,” we will have new, glorified bodies (Phil. 3:21), and will no longer struggle with sin and death. We will have been finally rescued (saved) from the afflictions of this life by the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are other things that Christians will absolutely have in the future that are spoken of in the Bible in both the past and future tense. The Bible says the believer is already redeemed (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14), but also awaiting redemption (Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14; 4:30). We are said to have been adopted into God’s family (Rom. 8:15, translated “sonship” in the NIV), and yet we are still awaiting adoption (Rom. 8:23). We are said to be glorified (Rom. 8:30), but our glorification is also said to be future (Rom. 8:17 and Col. 1:27 say we have the “hope” of glory). We are spoken of as already having been declared righteous (Rom. 5:1), but Galatians 5:5 says, “For by the spirit *and* based on trust, we eagerly wait for the righteousness for which we hope.” These examples all show the interplay between the reality that our salvation, redemption, and glorification are future, with the reality that because they are guaranteed to us, they can be spoken of in the idiomatic language of the Bible as accomplished realities.

Christians who do not understand the idioms in the Bible such as the prophetic perfect and are not careful to rightly divide God’s Word can end up like the six blind men arguing about what an elephant was like (cf. the poem “The Blind Men and the Elephant” by John Saxe). In the poem, each blind man had grabbed a different part of the elephant and was vigorously defending his position. The man who had the leg declared the elephant was like a tree, the one who had the ear said he was like a fan, the one who had the trunk asserted he was like a snake, and so forth. So too, Christians can grab different verses in the New Testament and begin arguing—as if the Bible could contradict itself. That is not how to establish truth in the Christian world. The Bible is God-breathed and does not contradict itself. It uses words according to the language, culture, and idioms used in biblical times. Paul did not finish writing the Church Epistles and walk away saying, “Ha! They’ll never figure *that* out.” Certainly not. He wrote using words and phrases that reveal truth. The truth revealed by the prophetic perfect idiom is that the Christian does not need to worry about his salvation, redemption, or glorification. Although these things are not yet fully realized, the presence of the holy spirit in the Christian and the sure word of prophecy guarantees them when the Lord returns.

A great challenge and opportunity that each Christian has is to live his life in the confidence that the great things such as salvation, redemption, and glorification are an accomplished reality from God’s point of view; they just have not been fully given to us yet. It is like a child who is awaiting a birthday that has not yet come, but his new bicycle has already been bought and is hidden away in the garage. But God has even done better than that for us because He has given us the gift of holy spirit—something we can enjoy now—as a guarantee and “part” of what we will have in fullness in the future. We do not have to earn or be “good enough” for any of the things that have been bought for us by Jesus Christ. We need to live in the confident reality that they are ours because God will never go back on His guarantee.

[For more on our salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.”]

**“trust.”** The Greek is *pistis* (#4102 πίστις), a noun. In both ancient secular Greek and in the Bible *pistis* means “confidence, trust, assurance.” When the people of the first century got the letters of Paul, for example, they did not say, “What is *pistis*?” as if Paul had invented a new word. *Pistis* was in common use in the Greek language, and had been for centuries. It is in the writings of the Greeks, including Aristotle, Plato, Herodotus, etc. The first definition of *pistis* in the Liddell and Scott *Greek-English Lexicon* is “trust in others.”

When the Greek New Testament was translated into Latin, *fides* was the natural choice as a translation of *pistis*, because *fides* means “trust, confidence, reliance, belief.” As the English language developed, the word “faith” came from the Latin word *fides*. There should be nothing mysterious about *pistis*, *fides*, or “faith.” We know what trust is. *Merriam-Webster* defines it as “assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something.”

It needs to be clearly understood that the ancient and biblical definition of *pistis* differs completely from the modern definition of “faith.” If both *pistis* and *fides* mean “trust,” how did “faith” come to be defined in our modern culture as “firm belief in something for which there is no proof”?[[53]](#footnote-12082) The actual historical process is long and tedious, but the concept is simple. The Church asked people to trust doctrines that were neither logical nor clearly backed up by Scripture. For example, the doctrine that the “host” (bread) and wine that are used in Roman Catholic Mass become the body and blood of Christ is not backed up with solid Scriptural exegesis, nor is it logical. Priests know this, and so they ask people to “Take it by faith,” meaning, “Believe this even though there is no proof.” Over time, belief in something for which there is no proof became the accepted definition of “faith.” This is harmful because people then import that made-up definition of “faith” back into the Bible, although that is not what “faith” means when used in the Bible.

There is nothing wrong with “take it by faith (trust)” if there is actually something, such as a promise of God, to trust. When Jesus told the blind man that if he washed in the Pool of Siloam he would be healed, the blind man had faith in, trusted, Jesus and his promise, washed, and was given sight by a miracle. However, if there is nothing to trust in and nothing “trustworthy” to believe, then to ask people to “take it by faith” is wrong, and contributes to the misunderstanding of God and the Bible. Biblical faith is neither magic, unreasonable, nor illogical. It is simply *trust*.

Ephesians 2:9-10 make it clear that “trust” is not “works.” We are saved by grace through trust, not by works. This is God’s definition of terms. Thus, by God’s definition, “trust” is not a work.

When a person trusts that Jesus is Lord and that God did raise him from the dead (Rom. 10:9), then God responds to that trust by giving the person salvation. The trust does not make salvation happen, God does, but He does it when the individual trusts Him. It is because God gives the salvation, rather than the trust “takes” the salvation, that salvation is a “gift.”

When a person trusts in Jesus, he gets “born again” (1 Pet. 1:3, 23), and what is born inside him is the gift of holy spirit. That is why Galatians 3:14 says we get the promise of the spirit by trust. At the moment a person trusts in Jesus Christ, he gets born again and the guarantee of salvation, and also receives the gift of holy spirit.

[For more on *pistis* meaning “trust,” see Appendix 2: “‘Faith’ is ‘Trust.’” Also, see commentaries on 2 Cor. 5:7 and Heb. 11:1.]

**“this.”** “This” is the Greek word *touto* (#5124 τοῦτο), and it is a nominative neuter pronoun. There is quite a bit of discussion as to exactly what it refers to, but the bottom line is that it refers to our salvation. Bratcher and Nida write: “…it seems more likely that the Greek neuter pronoun refers to the whole preceding event, that is, salvation by God’s grace through faith…”[[54]](#footnote-26472) Andrew Lincoln concurs, and writes: “*Touto* is probably best taken, therefore, as referring to the preceding clause as a whole, and thus to the whole process of salvation it describes, which of course includes faith as its means.”[[55]](#footnote-21865) In other words, our salvation is not from ourselves, it comes from God. Thus, the verse could be expanded to read, “…you have been saved through faith, and this salvation is not of yourselves….” The verse is not saying that the faith does not come from us, because it does. The word “saved” is in the passive voice, for it is the Lord Jesus who saves us when we have faith. Our part is to have faith, at which point the Lord saves us, we do not save ourselves by our faith.

Some Calvinist commentators say that “this” refers to the word *pistis* (trust, faith) in the first clause, which would make our faith come from God. Although it is true that there are cases where the gender of the pronoun *touto* does not agree with the noun, Robertson[[56]](#footnote-23975) writes that in general it does, and there does not seem to be any reason in this context that the general rules of grammar would not be followed. Thus, because *pistis* is a feminine noun, it should not be linked with the neuter pronoun. Lenski writes: “The neuter *totou* does not refer to *pistis* [faith] or *charis* [grace], both of which are feminine, but to the divine act of saving us”[[57]](#footnote-30334) (Robertson agrees).[[58]](#footnote-18662)

Calvinists assert that a person cannot have faith unless God gives it to him, but we disagree. It is clear that unsaved people can have trust (even Calvinists agree with that statement in general), and trust is what we must have to get saved. It seems incongruous to us that a Calvinist would agree that an unsaved person can trust another person, or trust that they would fall if they jumped off a cliff, but not be able to trust Jesus Christ without God’s giving them that trust. They can trust in Jesus based on the evidence they gather from the world around them, just like they build trust for other things. Our trust does not save us, it is simply what God is looking for from us such that He moves and saves us. Bratcher and Nida write: “Faith, therefore, may be described technically as ‘contributing circumstances,’ for without faith on man’s part God will not impose his grace and salvation.”[[59]](#footnote-28223) We believe Robertson is correct when he writes: “‘Grace’ is God’s part, ‘faith’ ours.”[[60]](#footnote-11873)

Eph 2:9

**“so no one can boast.”** From a strictly ability-based point of view, anyone can boast about anything. But in this context, Paul is making the point that since people are saved by grace and not by works, “no one can boast,” i.e., no one can legitimately boast.

Eph 2:10

**“his.”** The “his” is emphasized in the Greek text, but it is difficult to do in English. A more literal translation would be, “His handiwork are we.…”

**“created.”** The Greek verb is an aorist passive participle, which means that our creation in Christ was a one-time event, not an ongoing action. The Christian was “created in union with Christ Jesus” the instant he or she got born again. The gift of holy spirit was created in the person and became part of them, giving them a holy nature (2 Pet. 1:4), and that act of creation made the Christian a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17).

**“in *union with* Christ Jesus.”** This phrase refers to our spiritual union with Jesus Christ. See commentary on Ephesians 1:3, “in Christ.”

**“so that we would walk in them.”** That Christians are “created in Christ Jesus to *do* good works” shows that God “created us” in Christ Jesus (by putting holy spirit in us) with a purpose, and that purpose was to do good works; to do works that assisted God in His work. Titus 2:14 makes the same point but is worded differently. It says that Jesus died for us in order to redeem us and cleanse us so we would be a people “zealous for good works.” God did not just give people everlasting life so they could live any old way they pleased. He saved people so they could do “good works,” i.e., God’s work on earth. In fact, we are not only to “do” good works, we are to be zealous to do them.

The phrase “so that we would walk” starts with the Greek conjunction *hina*, which is most often “that,” “so that,” or “in order that.” The verb is subjunctive; hence, most literal versions say “may walk,” “should walk,” or “could walk.” However, the conjunction *hina* before the verb forces the verb to be grammatically subjunctive whether the sense and context require a subjunctive verb, which means we must translate the verb according to the context. In this case, God did not prepare good works so we “might” walk in them; He prepared them for us to walk in. “Walk” is idiomatic for something we do regularly. Since walking was an essential part of biblical life, our “walk” with God was something that was daily. It was part of life. Similarly, good works are supposed to be something that we do daily, as part of life.

Eph 2:12

**“without Christ.”** The Gentiles did not have a “Christ,” a Messiah. This is one place where “without Christ” could also well be translated “without a Messiah” (cf. CJB, HCSB). With no Messiah, the Gentiles had no example, no guide, no Deliverer, and no hope. It was not that Gentiles could not be saved, because they could be. After all, Abraham was a Gentile and he was certainly saved. But as the concept of the Messiah became clear as the Jewish Scriptures were being written, the Gentiles did not have a Messiah with all the great things the Messiah did for them.

**“excluded.”** Being alienated implies that there once was a relationship, but in fact, there never was any such relationship. Hence, “excluded” is a better translation.

**“citizenship.”** The Greek word is *politeia* (#4174 πολιτεία), and the commentators, and versions, are divided on its meaning in this verse. Although it has several meanings, the two most likely in this context are “commonwealth” (i.e., a state) or “citizenship.” There is truth in both meanings, which is a major reason that the commentators and versions differ. In a very real sense, the Gentiles were excluded from the state of Israel and also excluded from citizenship in that state. So the Greeks of the first century did not have to make the tough decision that today’s English translators have to make; the word *politeia* carried both meanings. We felt “citizenship” fit the context better than “commonwealth” or “state” because the context is not referring to the Gentiles getting to be accepted into the theocratic state of Israel, but rather that they would be together with the citizens of Israel. Now, by the blood of Christ, the “in” Jews and the “out” Gentiles are both one group, not by virtue of the Gentiles being accepted into the state of Israel, or because the Jewish state is disbanded in Christ, but rather that the Jews and Gentiles are now both citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20) and are “one” in Christ (Eph. 2:14).

**“covenants based on the promise.”** “The promise” is the collective promises of the OT. Thus, “covenants” is plural while “promise” is singular.

**“without God**.” The Greek is “godless,” but the English word “godless” means ungodly, not “without God,” which is what the author is trying to communicate and does communicate in the Greek language.

Eph 2:13

**“in Christ Jesus.”** The phrase “in Christ Jesus” here in Ephesians 2:13 refers to our spiritual union with Jesus Christ (see commentary on Ephesians 1:3, “in *union with* Christ”).

**“far away…near.”** The word “near” can be confusing to the modern reader because it was used idiomatically in the Judaism of the time of Christ. In Christ, Gentiles are not just “near” to God, they are “part” of the people of God. They are “one” with the believing Jews (Eph. 2:14), “one new man” in Christ (Eph. 2:15), and “fellow members of the Body of Christ (Eph. 3:6). So why does the Bible say they are “near” when actually they are “included?” Andrew Lincoln[[61]](#footnote-14329) points out that in the Old Testament, “near” and “far away” were words that were used to describe and contrast the Jews and the Gentiles, and at the time of Christ they were used of proselytes, Gentile converts to Judaism. Lincoln writes: “Often in the OT, the Gentile nations can be described as “far off” (*rahoq*…Deut. 28:49; 29:22; 1 Kings 8:41; Isa. 5:26; Jer. 5:15), while Israel is thought of as “near” (*qarob*) to God (cf. Ps. 148:14). These terms, ‘far’ and ‘near’ later occur frequently in discussion about proselytes.” Lincoln writes that to bring a non-Israelite “near” to God was to accept him as a proselyte, while to hold him at a distance (keep him far away) was to reject him as a proselyte. In summary, then, to be “near” was to be accepted as part of the community of God, while to be “far off” was to be rejected from the community and considered apart from it.

There were many Jews in Ephesus, and many scattered throughout the Roman world in general, so the Jewish concepts of “far away” and “near” would have been well-known to the Gentiles. That is why Paul could use them in Ephesians, and the fact that Ephesians says that the Gentiles are now “near” by the blood of Christ would have had a huge impact on the Gentiles reading Ephesians. They would have immediately known they were accepted into the community of God.

Sadly, there is no way to retain the literal translation “far away” and “near” in English and completely understand the sense of the passage without knowing some background about how the words were used in the first century. If we do not translate the words literally, but translate their sense, the verse could read like this: “But now in Christ Jesus you who were formerly not part of the people of God are included in the people of God, by the blood of the Christ.”

There is great depth to the concept of being “far” or “near.” With no long-range communication in the biblical world such as telephones, getting to be “near” someone so that you could see them, hear them, and get access to them was a privilege and honor. This was certainly true when it came to the average Israelite in their relation to God, but is often veiled in translation. For example, even the average Israelite was separated from God by walls and curtains, and could only regularly even “come near” to Him with an offering or sacrifice. For example, in most Bibles, Leviticus 1:2 speaks of people “bringing” an offering to God, but the word “bring” can be translated “come near” and the verse could be translated “If any man of you comes near with an offering.” So even the average Israelite was kept “far” from God by curtains and walls. Now, because of the work of Christ, people who were “far” from God are brought “near” (Eph. 2:13), and every believer can approach the throne of grace and be “near” to God (Heb. 4:16). There are many verses in the Old Testament that highlight the importance of “near” versus “far” (cf. Lev. 1:2; Num. 3:10; Josh. 8:35; 9:7, 16, 22).

Eph 2:14

**“peace.”** The Greek is *eirēnē* (#1515 εἰρήνη, pronounced ā-'ray-nay), meaning “peace, tranquility,” but behind it is the Semitic concept of *shalom*, total wellness of being and therefore mental and physical peace.

In this context, Jesus is specifically said to be our (Christians’) “peace” because he has put an end to the hostility (and suspicion, hatred, and enmity) between Jews and Gentiles and allowed anyone to become part of God’s people. There was hostility between the two groups before, but now, because of the work of Christ, we are at peace. This peace is not our doing, it is the work of God through Christ, and so he is our peace. Even more globally, Jesus is the peace between those who are, and those who are not, God’s people, partly because he has made it available for everyone to be part of the people of God, and, in a wider sense, partly because we are to love our enemies, at least as far as Christians can make peace work (cf. Rom. 12:18).

**“the dividing wall that separates *us*.”** The literal Greek is “the dividing wall of partition,” where “of partition” is the genitive form of *phragmos* (#5418 φραγμός). The genitive form simply communicates relation, namely, that the dividing wall is in some way related to “the partition.” Although there are quite a few legitimate ways to take the genitive, it is most likely used to communicate that the dividing wall separates, similar to how Louw-Nida suggests, “a wall to divide.”[[62]](#footnote-19101)

Although identifying the “dividing wall” is a large source of debate, one good possibility is that the “dividing wall” being spoken of was a wall inside the Temple complex that divided the “Court of the Gentiles” from the area close to the “the Court of Israel” and the sanctuary itself. Gentiles were allowed to go into the Temple complex and worship, as long as they stayed in the Court of Gentiles and behind the dividing wall, which had very prominent signs that any Gentile who went beyond the wall would be killed and was responsible for his own death. Jesus broke down that middle wall and opened the Temple to both Jews and Gentiles, thus signifying that they were equal in God’s eyes. We should not confuse this dividing wall with the veil of the Temple that was torn when Jesus died (Matt. 27:51). That veil divided the Court of the Priests from the outer room of the sanctuary, the Holy Place, which had the menorah and Bread of the Presence. So, if the dividing wall was referring to this wall inside the Temple complex, Paul would be speaking metaphorically, because no literal wall fell in the Temple when Jesus died. So, Jesus did not literally break down the dividing wall, but figuratively, through his death, by uniting both Jews and Gentiles into one Body (Eph. 2:16), he has figuratively broken down the dividing wall.

**“*He ended* the hostility *between us.*”** The Greek text of Ephesians 2:14-15 is very difficult to bring into English, as anyone reading multiple English versions can easily see. The primary difficulty is whether or not the word “hostility” (“enmity” in some versions), goes with and describes the dividing wall, the Law, or if it stands on its own and a verb must be added, which is what the REV has chosen.

If the dividing wall is the hostility, then the translation is like the HCSB or ESV: “the dividing wall of hostility.” This position is supported by Greek heavy-hitters such as *The Expositor’s New Testament*, A. T. Robertson’s *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, and Vincent’s *Word Studies in the New Testament*. If, on the other hand, the hostility is due to the Law with its commandments and regulations, the translation is like that of the ASV, New Jerusalem Bible, and NASB: “abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances….” That position is supported by commentators such as R. C. H. Lenski, Andrew Lincoln [WBC], E. K. Simpson, and F. F. Bruce [NICNT]. If the phrase “the hostility by his flesh” is supposed to stand alone, a verb would need to be added, like in Barth’s suggestion, “in his flesh *he has wiped out all* enmity.”[[63]](#footnote-30106)

The fact is, that although the Greek is unclear, English translators have to make a decision as to how to translate the Greek into English. The biggest problem with the first option, namely, understanding the dividing wall to be the hostility, is that it is extremely strange for the noun “*tēn echthran*” (the hostility) to be separated from the word it is modifying “*to mesotoichon*” (the dividing wall) by the participle “broken down” (“*lusas*” from “luō” #3089 λύω). Nouns in apposition are almost never separated by verbs or participles. This reading also creates complications with what to do with “*phragmos*” which some translations do not even translate because if they did, it would be rendered, “the dividing wall—the partition— of hostility.” This translation would be quite clunky and confusing. Thus, for these reasons, the first option is not preferable.

There are also two problems with the second option, that “the hostility” is meant to be in apposition to “the law” and be related to the later participle “nullified” (v. 15). The first, “is the equation of the law with ‘enmity’ (hostility).”[[64]](#footnote-12750) This would be a strangely negative way for Paul to speak of the Law, whereas in other places he calls the law good and holy (Rom. 7:12; 1 Tim. 1:8). The second problem is with the ordering of the words in the Greek text. The Greek wording is this, “the hostility in his flesh, the law,” but in this second translation option the phrase “in his flesh” does not modify either of the two nouns surrounding it (“the hostility” or “the law”) rather it modifies the participle which occurs later in the Greek text, “nullifying.”[[65]](#footnote-11759) The translation being, “nullifying in his flesh the hostility, *which is* the Law.” This is an extremely strange Greek word order if that is what Paul meant to communicate. For these reasons, this second option seems unlikely.

Due to certain oddities with the Greek grammar, the REV sees the strongest reading being one in which the phrase “the hostility by his flesh” is meant to stand alone and not modify what comes before or after, thus, it is translated, “*He ended* the hostility *between us* by his flesh.” What is clear from the text is that Jesus ended this hostility between Jews and Gentiles by his death because he removed this division between Jews and Gentiles which came about from the Jewish Law and culture.

The hostility between Jew and Gentile was certainly epitomized by the dividing wall in the Temple between the Jew and Gentile, but it was the Law that made the wall necessary, and it was the Law that divided Jews and Gentiles most of the time. It is safe to say that the vast majority of Gentiles who came in contact with Jews all over the Roman world never went to Jerusalem and never saw the actual dividing wall. But the wall was clearly there in the following of the Law. In general, the Jews’ feelings toward the Gentiles ranged from dislike to absolute abhorrence. Because the Jews were “chosen” and given the Law, they considered Gentiles unrighteous before God. They considered them dogs (Matt. 15:26) and unclean, and would not even eat with them (Acts 10:28; 11:3). The Gentiles reciprocated and hated the Jews for different reasons, including their arrogance, their separatism, and the fact that they would not participate in festivals and sacrifices that were believed to bring the favor of the gods upon the Empire.

When he died on the cross, Jesus did away with the Law, and slew the hostility on the cross (Eph. 2:16). Now there is one Body of believers, the Law has been made of no effect, and he has figuratively destroyed the wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles.

Eph 2:15

**“nullified.”** The Greek word is *katargeō* (#2673 καταργέω, pronounced cat-ar-'geh-ō), and it means “to render idle, unemployed, inactivate, inoperative, to disempower, deprive of force, influence, or power, to loose from someone or something, to end, terminate, abolish.” When it comes to the Law, “abolish” is not the best translation because there are many parts of the Law that are still in effect and Christ spoke of not abolishing the Law but fulfilling it. It must be said, however, that when the Bible mentions the Law, sometimes it is only referring to parts of the Law, and it seems clear that in this context, there are parts of the Law that are not in effect anymore, and parts that are. Simpson and Bruce write: “In one or two cases in the papyri it [*katargeō*] appears to signify ‘to bring to a standstill’ or ‘put out of gear.’ Here it might be rendered ‘to invalidate’ or to nullify, annul, quash.’ The clumsy word ‘depotentiate’ [un-power] would nearly represent the general sense of this peculiarly Pauline verbalism.”[[66]](#footnote-23364)

Jesus did not “abolish” the Law. In fact, Romans 7:12 says the Law is holy, righteous, and good. Furthermore, many of the commandments in the Law are in the Church Epistles: do not lie, steal, envy, commit sexual immorality, and so forth. So why is the Law “of no effect?” Because it cannot get anyone saved. It cannot make us holy and righteous before God. Jesus does that when we get born again. All the things the Law cannot do, Jesus does in us when we trust him. The Law is now “of no effect” for our righteousness and salvation,” but it is not abolished.

“**law (consisting of commands *expressed* in regulations).”** This is either a genitive of apposition, i.e., “the Law, that is to say, the commandments expressed in regulations,” or a genitive of content, i.e., “the law consisting of….” The meaning is the same: that the Law is made up of commandments that are expressed as regulations. For “regulations,” the Greek is *dogma* (#1378 δόγμα); see commentary on Acts 16:4.

**“in himself.”** This phrase refers to our spiritual union with Jesus Christ. See commentary on Ephesians 1:3, “in Christ.”

Eph 2:16

**“by which.”** Ironically, Christ used the cross, which was used to put him to death, to put to death the enmity. The Greek phrase *en autō*, “by which,” is masculine in Greek because it refers to the masculine noun “cross.”[[67]](#footnote-15849)

Eph 2:17

**“he proclaimed good news of peace.”** The meaning of this phrase has been debated by scholars because Jesus Christ did not proclaim the good news of peace in the way it is being presented here in Ephesians 2:11-16. Jesus certainly did not teach that he would dismantle the wall of partition in the Temple or that the Jews and Gentiles would be one body. But those things are a development of the peace that was mentioned at the time of Jesus and that he almost certainly spoke about, that the Gentiles would be blessed through him, and that “through him we both have access by one spirit to the Father” (Eph. 2:18).

The Old Testament proclaimed in many places that the Gentiles would be blessed through the Messiah and have access to God. For example, foreigners who love God would not be separated from God’s people (Isa. 56:3), and the Temple, instead of being an exclusive place for the Jews, would be “a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isa. 56:7). At the birth of Christ, the angels proclaimed that there would be peace on earth among people with whom God was pleased (Luke 2:14). Then, during Christ’s earthly ministry, although he made no secret of being sent to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:24), he did heal some Gentiles and Samaritans, and traveled through the region of the Decapolis, which was Greek, and taught there (Mark 7:31).

Paul is not saying that Jesus taught the same thing that he was now teaching: that the Jews and Gentiles were one Body. But he was saying that Jesus proclaimed peace to those who were near and those who were far because by one spirit both groups had access to the Father through him (Eph. 2:17-18), and Paul was showing that his doctrine about the One Body was built upon, and a development of, the teaching of Christ. Jesus showed that both Jews and Gentiles had peace with God, and Paul’s message developed that, showing that the Jews and Gentiles were at peace with each other, because they were now One Body, and also at peace with God.

**“to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.”** This is an allusion to Isaiah 57:19, which reads, “‘Peace, peace,’ to the far off, and to the near” (YLT). Ephesians 2:17 is not an exact quote of either the Hebrew text or the Septuagint text of Isaiah, and Isaiah is not referring to the same situation as Ephesians. For these reasons, the text of the REV is not bold in Ephesians 2:17. Actually, the Rabbis are divided over the meaning of Isaiah 57:19; exactly who is “near” and who is “far off?” Some say the near and far refer to location, and some say time.[[68]](#footnote-19490) In any case, no one reading Isaiah thought Isaiah was saying that it was the Gentiles who were “far off.”

Although Ephesians 2:17 is not an exact quote of Isaiah 57:19, it is clearly a reference to it. In fact, one of the reasons Paul may not have exactly quoted Isaiah 57:19 was so that people would not be confused into thinking that Paul thought the Gentiles were the ones whom Isaiah was speaking of. By making Ephesians close enough to the text of Isaiah to be recognized as an allusion to it, Paul could make his point that people (the Gentiles) who were once “far off,” were now, after the death and resurrection of Christ, able to have access to God (Eph. 2:18). Thus, God’s mercy upon the Jews, that God would give them the blessing of “peace peace,” was inarguably extended by God to include the Gentiles.

Eph 2:19

**“foreigners.”** Indicates someone who is in the land but is not a citizen.

Eph 2:20

**“cornerstone.”** There is no actual word for “chief” as the KJV has. The Greek text has *akrogōniaios* (#204 ἀκρογωνιαῖος), which is the “far corner” or “extreme corner,” thus being the “cornerstone.”

[For more on the “cornerstone,” see commentary on Matt. 21:42, although the Greek is different here than in Matthew.]

Eph 2:21

**“In *union with* him.”** This phrase refers to our spiritual union with Jesus Christ. See commentary on Ephesians 1:3, “in *union with* Christ.”

**“being fitted together.”** The Greek word has more to it than just the concept of “joined” together. It has overtones of the pieces being chosen so that they “fit” together, after which, of course, they are joined together. Especially in the context of a Temple, which was constructed of stone, “fitting” the pieces together was of utmost importance. The stones in the foundation wall at the Temple in Jerusalem, although thousands of years old and weighing many tons, are “fitted” so well that a knife blade will not go between them.

**“sanctuary.”** The Greek word translated “sanctuary” is *naos* (#3485 ναός), which means the inner sanctuary, and then, occasionally, by association, the Temple building that houses the inner sanctuary. Then, by metonymy, the Greek word *naos* is used of the body.[[69]](#footnote-26892) In contrast, the Greek word *hieron* (#2411 ἱερόν) means the Temple building along with its vestibules, outer courts, and all associated outbuildings. Interestingly, the *hieron* is never used figuratively in the Bible, it is always literal. In Jerusalem at the time of Christ, Herod’s *hieron* (ἱερὸν) was a massive complex enclosing some 37 acres. The 35-page article “Temple, Jerusalem” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* has drawings and diagrams of Solomon’s Temple (*hieron*), as well as that of Ezekiel and Herod.

The need for the distinction between the *naos* and the *hieron* was necessitated by God’s Old Testament regulations concerning the Tabernacle, and then the Temple. God placed an important distinction between the outer courts, where all the priests could minister, and the inner sanctuary, i.e., the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place (KJV, “Holy of Holies”). This distinction came to be supported by vocabulary, and the inner rooms came to be called the *naos* (and, as was stated earlier, eventually by association the Temple building proper that contained it), while the *naos* along with the outer courts came to be referred to as the *hieron.*

We use the word “sanctuary” to translate the word *naos*, and “Temple” or “Temple complex” to translate the word *hieron*.

**“in the Lord.”** Use of “in the Lord” in this verse is explained in Word Study: “In the Lord.”

Eph 2:22

**“in *union with* him.”** This phrase refers to our spiritual union with Jesus Christ; it is called the static “*en*” (#1722 ἐν) in Greek, which is very common in Pauline literature. See commentary on Ephesians 1:3, “in *union with* Christ.”

**“you also...where God dwells through the spirit.”** In the previous context of Ephesians 2:19-21, Paul is using a metaphor of a house to explain the Church. The foundation of this house is the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ is the Cornerstone, and individual Christians live in the house. In other words, individual Christians make up the true Church. Yet, Paul takes the metaphor a step further here in Ephesians 2:22. Not only are Christians members of this metaphorical house, and not only does God dwell in the Church (“holy sanctuary”; Eph. 2:21) as a whole, but God actually dwells inside of each Christian. Each Christian is a sanctuary, a “place where God dwells” (Eph. 2:22). How does God dwell in us? By His spirit. If the spirit of God dwells in us, then God dwells in us.

Paul’s teaching here in Ephesians parallels what he teaches in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 when he says, “your body is a sanctuary of the holy spirit that is in you.” How marvelous a truth this is. God is present with believers through his holy spirit, producing fruit in us such as love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness (Gal. 5:22-23).

[For more information on the Holy Spirit, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**Ephesians Chapter 3**

Eph 3:2

**“Surely you have.”** The Greek word *ei* (#1487 εἰ, pronounced as a long ā), usually translated “if,” does not always have the conditional meaning of our English word “if.” In certain circumstances, the Greek word *ei* is used even though the condition is understood to be fulfilled, and should be translated “since;” “surely you have;” or something similar. In some cases, it is translated “indeed.” In those circumstances, translating the Greek *ei* as “if” can confuse the English reader who does not understand that the Greek *ei* is not always equivalent to our English “if.” To avoid confusion and carry the sense of the Greek in this context in Ephesians, we translated the *ei* as “surely you have.” For more information on *ei* being used in a sense that is not conditional, see Dana and Mantey.[[70]](#footnote-15717)

That *ei* has a sense that is conditional, and one that is not conditional, depending on the context and the mood of the verb it is associated with, is one reason that it does not work to try to translate each Greek word into English in the same way.

A good example of a use of *ei* that is not conditional is in John 7:4. Jesus’ brothers knew he was doing miracles, so the verse should read (and does in versions such as the NIV), “since you are doing these things….” In his note in his commentary of 1 Thessalonians 4:14, Lenski calls this “the condition of reality” (and 1 Thess. 4:14 is another good example of the sense of *ei* that is not conditional). In Ephesians 3:2, there was no doubt about the Ephesians having heard of the Administration of the Sacred Secret. Paul had been there for more than two years teaching (Acts 19:10). Other good examples of this grammatical construction are 1 Corinthians 15:12 and 15:44. If the context of the verse makes it clear that the “if” is meant as a “since,” we may leave the translation as “if” in the REV. However, if the context may confuse the reader, as here in Ephesians 3:2, we translate it “surely you have” to help the English readers understand the text. We could have gone with “since” in the verse, as we have in a couple of other places, but in this case, “since” implied that a reason for something would follow, and that is not the case in this context. The NIV uses the same translation as the REV.

**“administration of the grace of God.”** This is the administration in which we live, which is called “the administration of the grace of God” (often shortened in Christian discussions to “the Administration of Grace”) and also “the Administration of the Sacred Secret” (Eph. 3:9). It began on the Day of Pentecost and will end at the Rapture of the Church.

At different times in the past, God changed the rules He gave people to live by, and He will change them again in the future. Even a cursory study of Scripture shows that God has “administered” people differently at different times. Many theologians call the specific rules of a specific time period an “administration” or “dispensation.” The term “dispensation” refers to God “dispensing” His rules and justice to mankind. Similarly, “administration” refers to Him “administering” His rules and justice. There is a systematic theology that recognizes different administrations or dispensations and is referred to as “Dispensationalism,” and there is a huge theological battle as to whether or not it is correct.

This is not the place to expound the differences between Dispensationalism and its theological opponents, primarily the doctrine called “Covenant Theology.” Instead, it is helpful to realize that even theologians who hold to what is known as “Covenant Theology” recognize that God has changed the rules for mankind from time to time. In its entry under “Covenant Theology,” the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter Elwell, says, “...the covenant of grace includes various dispensations of history….” Then, under the entry “Dispensationalism,” we read, “Some covenant theologians…use the concept of different dispensations, but as part of the covenant of grace.”[[71]](#footnote-16717)

It is to the advantage of both camps (and those of neither camp) to realize that God does in fact change the rules for mankind, and examples of that abound in Scripture. The label “Dispensationalism” and the words “dispensation” or “administration” are good to explain the fact that there are rules and regulations that God wants to be obeyed in any particular period of time. It is also worth noting that not all dispensationalists agree on the definition of dispensationalism, how many dispensations there are, or exactly when each of them starts and ends.

The word “administration” (cf. REV, HCSB, NIV, Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible) and “dispensation” (cf. RV, KJV, YLT), is from the Greek noun *oikonomia* (#3622 οἰκονομία), which means “the management of a household.” *Oikonomia* is from the verb *oikonomeō* (#3621 οἰκονομέω; “to be the manager of a household”), which is from *oikonomos* (#3623 οἰκονόμος; “the person who manages the household”), which is a compound word built from *oikos*, “house,” and *nemō*, “to distribute, deal out, or apportion.” God “manages His household” in different ways at different times, and He does so by changing the rules He gives to people.

Examples of God changing the rules from administration to administration abound. For example, when it comes to food, in the Garden of Eden, God told Adam and Eve to eat plants only (Gen. 1:29). After the Flood, God changed the rules and allowed people to eat meat also (Gen. 9:3), and He still allows us to eat meat today. Another clear example concerns the Sabbath. Before the Mosaic Law, there was no specific law concerning the Sabbath. When God gave the Law to Moses, He changed the rules and established a set Sabbath, and commanded that anyone who broke the Sabbath should be put to death (Exod. 31:14). Today, in the “Administration of the Grace of God” (Eph. 3:2), God has changed the rules again, and it is not a sin to work on the Sabbath (Rom. 14:5; Col. 2:16-17). A third example of God changing the rules involves animal sacrifice. Before the Mosaic Law, there was animal sacrifice, but it was not tightly controlled. When God gave the Mosaic Law, He gave lots of new rules about it and commanded the death penalty for breaking some of them. Today, in the “Administration of the Grace of God” (Eph. 3:2), animal sacrifice has stopped because Jesus Christ was the one-time sacrifice for sin.

When Christians do not recognize or understand the administrations in the Bible, they cannot resolve its apparent contradictions and thus can become confused as to which commands to obey and which to not obey. It is of the utmost importance that Christians who want to obey God’s instructions understand the administrations in the Bible. If they do not, they may well end up obeying a command that was not written to them. For example, what if a Christian married more than one wife, saying that the Bible said it was okay to do so, and quoted Exodus 21:10? Can a Christian marry more than one wife just because a verse in the Bible says it is allowable? No, because we must consider where the Bible says that, and to whom God was addressing that regulation. In the case of marriage, in the Old Testament, God allowed a man to have more than one wife. But now He has changed the rules and has a one-husband-to-one-wife rule (1 Cor. 7:2) and even says that if a person has more than one wife, he cannot be a leader in the Church (1 Tim. 3:2).

Another example would be that if a person has psoriasis (sores and flakes on the skin), does he have to wear torn clothes, not brush his hair, cover his mouth with cloth, live outside of town, and cry “Unclean” when he walks down the street? That is what the Bible says to do (Lev. 13:45-46). Thankfully, those commandments were part of the rules God gave to the Jews under the Law, and God has given the Christian Church different rules to live by. Neither do we have to wear tassels on the outside of our garments (Num. 15:38), nor do Christian men have to go to Jerusalem three times a year (Deut. 16:16). Jews under God’s Law were commanded to do these things, but now God has changed the rules, and we live in a different administration, the Administration of Grace. If we want to obey God, we must obey the commands of God that apply to us. Martin Anstey wrote: “In this matter, the golden rule is, ‘Distinguish the dispensations and the difficulties will disappear.’”[[72]](#footnote-29012)

Dispensationalist scholars do not agree on the number of administrations there are in the Bible, or when they begin and end, but they do agree on some basics. For example, when it comes to the number of administrations, it is agreed that Paul speaks of an administration in which we now live that is different from the one before it (Col. 1:25, 26; Eph. 3:2), and that Paul also writes of a future administration (Eph. 1:10). Also, there is the administration in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. That makes four administrations, and it seems clear that in the time before our administration, there were at least two: the Law and the administration before the Law. That makes six that all dispensationalists agree on. (It is much easier to see the administrations in versions such as the KJV, which uses the word “dispensation,” or Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible, which uses “administration,” than it is in versions such as the ESV, which do not consistently translate the word *oikonomia*, or translate it by words such as “stewardship”).

Many people recognize eight administrations in the Bible, and knowing exactly when they begin and end, and the rules distinctly associated with each, is indispensable in explaining many of the apparent contradictions in Scripture. The eight administrations are:

1. **Original Paradise** (Creation of Adam and Eve to their Fall and banishment from Eden)
2. **Conscience** (Fall to the Flood)
3. **Civil Government** (Flood to the Mosaic Law)
4. **The Mosaic Law** (the giving of the Law until Pentecost)
5. **The Administration of the Grace of God** (from Pentecost until the Rapture)
6. **Tribulation** (from the Rapture to the end of Armageddon)
7. **Millennial Kingdom** (lasts 1,000 years)
8. **Everlasting Kingdom** (Final Paradise—will last forever)

The Administration of the Grace of God, in which we live today, began on the Jewish holiday of Pentecost (Acts 2), when the gift of holy spirit was born inside everyone who believed. This new administration is called by two different names. It is called the Administration of God’s Grace (Eph. 3:2. We usually simply call it “the Administration of Grace”), and it is also called “the Administration of the Sacred Secret” (Eph. 3:9, *Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible*). God had specific reasons for using the names that He did. He calls it the Administration of “Grace” because Christians enjoy the grace of God in a manner and to an extent that was not given to people of previous administrations. God has always given grace to mankind, but He has so abounded in His grace to the Church that He calls the very time we live the “Administration of the Grace of God” (Eph. 3:2). God also calls this administration the “Administration of the Sacred Secret,” because He kept the knowledge of the blessings and grace that we have today a secret, and did not reveal it until the Epistles of Paul were written.

When we understand the administration in which we live, we can see why God called it “the Administration of Grace.” God, for His own purposes and for our benefit, gave Christians grace in a way that He had not done before. That is why He says in 2 Corinthians that the administration of the Law has “no glory” now in comparison to the glory that God has given the Church. What is this glory that God has given the Church, which is based on so much grace that God calls the very administration in which we live “the Administration of the Grace of God”? There are many aspects of the grace that God has given us, but a huge one is salvation by New Birth (for more information, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation”). Another is the fullness of the gift of holy spirit, and all its nine manifestations (see commentaries on 1 Cor. 12:7, 8, 9, 10 and 14:5).

It is easy to see what the text means when it says that Paul was given “the Administration of the Grace of God.” The context makes it clear that Paul was given the revelation about this new administration, which he then passed on to the Church. However, many of the modern versions do not recognize the different administrations of God, and their translations reflect their theology. For example, the ESV of Ephesians 3:2 reads, “…you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you.” What would that mean? That God had somehow given Paul the special right to steward God’s grace for the benefit of the Church? That hardly seems correct, and does not seem to fit with the context. Also, if God did give Paul special grace to steward for the benefit of the Church, and then from the rest of the Epistles we learn that this grace involves the New Birth, a new and greater glory, “Christ in you,” and being seated in the heavenlies, does that not indicate that God has done something new and once again changed the rules He wants His people to live by? That puts us right back where we started: that God had a new “administration,” a new way of doing things, a new set of rules, for the Church, and it all started on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

When it comes to dispensational theology, there are a lot of “straw men” arguments out there from people who do not believe in dispensationalism, and there are also so-called arguments that are actually misrepresenting dispensationalism. For those people wanting to know more about dispensationalism, the book *Dispensationalism* by Charles Ryrie is excellent. Also excellent is the article in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter Elwell. That article is short and accurate, and says that “Dispensational theology grows out of a consistent use of the hermeneutical principle of normal, plain, or literal interpretation. ...dispensationalists have taught and do teach that salvation is always through God’s grace. The *basis* of salvation in every dispensation is the death of Christ; the *requirement* for salvation in every age is faith; the *object* of faith is the true God; but the *content* of faith changes in the various dispensations” (emphasis original).[[73]](#footnote-22062)

Eph 3:3

**“sacred secret.”** We translate the Greek word *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what *mustērion* actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm.

[For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Eph. 3:9.]

**“revelation.”** For what “revelation” is, see commentaries on Galatians 1:12 and 1 Corinthians 12:8.

**“I have already written *about* briefly.”** Paul had mentioned the Sacred Secret in earlier Epistles but had not described it the way he does in Ephesians. For example, Paul mentions the Sacred Secret in Romans 16:25 and in 1 Cor. 2:1, 7-10. Usually, Paul wrote about things that pertained to the Sacred Secret without specifically using the words “Sacred Secret” or “Administration of Grace.” For example, he said there was neither Jew nor Greek and neither male nor female in Christ (Gal. 3:28), and there are no special days of the week (Rom. 14:5-6), and these are all attributes of the Administration of the Sacred Secret, but Paul did not specifically say that in his early epistles.

Eph 3:4

**“you will be able to understand my insight.”** The Greek word *noeō* (#3539 νοέω), translated “understand,” has as its first definition in Louw-Nida: “to comprehend something on the basis of careful thought and consideration….”[[74]](#footnote-20197) It is the action that occurs in the *nous* (#3563 νοῦς), the mind. It is more than a simple perception, but not necessarily a full comprehension. We felt “understand” was an appropriate translation, as in the NASB.

The Greek word *sunesis* (#4907 σύνεσις), translated “insight,” but often translated “understand,” is often the result of understanding. Louw-Nida says, “that which is understood or comprehended.”[[75]](#footnote-19372) Zodhiates says, “the word denotes the ability to understand concepts and see relationships between them.”[[76]](#footnote-20357) We have gone with the English word “insight” (again, as the NASB) because when a person sees the relationship between the facts and concepts in the world around him we say he has “insight.”

**“sacred secret.”** The REV translates the Greek word *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what *mustērion* actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm.

[For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Eph. 3:9.]

Eph 3:5

**“people.”** The text uses the idiomatic phrase “the sons of men,” which means humankind, or “people.”

**“as it has now been revealed.”** The essence of the word “as” in this verse means “as clearly as” or “as fully as.” The “as” makes the point that, although there were things in the Old Testament that have turned out to be similar to things in the Sacred Secret, the actuality of what people have in the Sacred Secret was never revealed. So, for example, the Old Testament said the Gentiles would be blessed in the Messiah (cf. Gen. 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Ps. 72:17; Isa. 11:10; 49:6; 60:3; Amos 9:11-12), but it never even hinted that the Gentiles would be joined together with Israel as the people of God, and be joint heirs, joint members of one Body, and joint partakers of the promise (Eph. 3:6). The “as” does not mean, “in the way that,” or “in the manner that,” because the Word of God in both the Old Testament and the New Testament was given to people by revelation.

Eph 3:6

**“fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise.”** This verse makes it very clear that “in Christ,” (that is, in union with Christ Jesus, which happens when a person is born again), the Gentiles partake in all the blessings the Jews get to partake in. The Greek text uses the prefix “*sun*” (pronounced “soon”), before “heirs,” “members,” and “partakers.” In this context, *sun* means “together with,” and thus is translated “fellow” (ASV, NASB), “joint” (CJB, DBY, Rotherham), “same” (GNV, GW, NJB), “together” (NIV), and, although the Greek prefix is the same before “heirs,” “members,” and “partakers,” many versions do not use the same word, but use different words to translate *sun* (cf. HCSB: “coheirs,” “same body,” “partners”).

The point Scripture is making is that now, in union with Christ Jesus, Jews and Gentiles are the same. This was a new revelation and part of the Administration of the Sacred Secret. The Old Testament had foretold that the Gentiles would be blessed by the Messiah (Ps. 102:15; Isa. 2:2-4; 19:23-25; 42:6; 49:6; 51:4-5; 56:3-7; 60:3; 66:18-21; Ezek. 39:21, 27; Mic. 4:2; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 8:22), but it never said that the Gentiles would be “fellow heirs” and “fellow partakers of the promise.” In fact, the Old Testament seems to make the point that the Gentiles would serve the Jews, not be fellow heirs with them (Isa. 14:2; 60:3-6; 61:5-6). That great revelation was reserved for the Administration of the Sacred Secret.

The fact that the Gentiles would be the same in God’s eyes as the Jews is stated most clearly here in Ephesians, but it is stated in other places as well (cf. Rom. 10:12; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11).

[For more on the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Eph. 3:2.]

**“fellow members of the body.”** The “body” is the “Body of Christ.” Jesus Christ is the head of the Body of Christ, and each believer is a part of that Body (see commentary on Eph. 1:23).

**“through the good news in *connection with* Christ Jesus.”** These two prepositional phrases appear at the end of the sentence in the Greek text. However, when we translate the phrases into English the way they appear in Greek, the sentence becomes somewhat confusing. That is due to the fact that in English, when a prepositional phrase is added at the end of a list, our natural tendency is to think that the added phrase only refers to the last item in the list. Thus, when we read a version such as the NASB, for example, “that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,” most people do not think of “in Christ Jesus” as going with “fellow heirs” and “fellow members.” Instead, they tend to read the phrase “partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus” as a unit, and wonder what “the promise in Christ Jesus” is. The problem could be remedied by putting “in Christ Jesus” with each blessing, and have: “that the Gentiles are fellow heirs in Christ Jesus, and fellow members of the body in Christ Jesus, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus, all by way of the gospel,” but while that translation is very clear, it is not best to add that much to the text when there is no need for it.

The phrase, “in Christ Jesus,” refers to our being in union with him, or being associated with him (see commentary on Eph. 1:3). We do not have the blessings of God on our own, but only by virtue of being “in Christ.” Furthermore, the phrase “in Christ” applies to each of the blessings in the verse. It is only because we are in union with Jesus Christ that we are “fellow heirs,” “fellow members of the body,” and “fellow partakers of the promise.”

While the prepositional phrase, “in Christ” refers to locale (“in Christ”), “through the Good News,” shows the means by which we gain the blessings. We get them “in Christ,” and we get to be “in Christ” “through the Good News,” i.e., by believing the Good News that we heard.

Eph 3:7

**“by the gift of the grace of God.”** It was as a gift and by the grace of God that Paul was given the ministry he had, and the same is true for every Christian. We have different gifts, but they are by God’s grace.

**“by the working of his power.”** It was God’s power at work that resulted in Paul having the ministry that he did.

Eph 3:8

**“less than the least.”** The Greek word translated “less than the least” is *elachistoteros* (#1647 ἐλαχιστότερος), which only occurs here in the Bible in this form. Harold Hoehner points out that “it is a comparative formed on the superlative”[[77]](#footnote-32377) and given the fact that Paul is comparing himself to other Christians, “less than the least” is a good translation and used in many versions (cf. BBE, DBY, RV, KJV, NET, NIV, NJB, NKJV, Rotherham).

Paul is in touch with the fact he sins and feels that pain very deeply. So his statement reflects his feelings, which is a common one among Christians. Many Christians feel they are worse than other Christians even when they live a comparatively godly life.

[For more on Paul’s feelings, see commentary on 1 Tim. 1:15, where Paul refers to himself as the worst sinner.]

**“unfathomable riches.”** The Greek word translated “unfathomable” is *anexichniastos* (#421 ἀνεξιχνίαστος), and it means not able to be searched out or tracked, and it was also used to mean impossible to understand or comprehend.[[78]](#footnote-22264) As it is used here in Ephesians 3:8, it has a compound meaning. It certainly means “unsearchable, untrackable,” because the Administration of the “Sacred Secret,” which began on Pentecost in Acts 2 and will end with the Rapture, was not revealed before the day of Pentecost. God did not tell people about it, and even the Devil did not know about it (cf. 1 Cor. 2:8). The Lord told Paul about it by revelation (Eph. 3:3). What we have today as Christians is so glorious that in comparison the Old Testament had “no glory at all” (2 Cor. 3:10). The Old Testament reveals many things, but it does not reveal the Administration of the Sacred Secret, that our salvation includes “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27), the Rapture of the Church, and more.

[For more on the Administration of the Sacred Secret, see commentary on Eph. 3:9.]

The other meaning of *anexichniastos* is “incomprehensible,” and that meaning also applies when it comes to the riches of Christ. They are so vast, and his God-given power so great, that we cannot fully comprehend all that he can do or will do, or how he does what he does.

Eph 3:9

**“bring to light.”** The Greek verb is *phōtizō* (#5461 φωτίζω). Robertson says that it is a later Greek verb, “to turn the light on.”[[79]](#footnote-17385) Thus, it was used as “to bring to light,” “to give light,” “to light up,” “to inform, teach, give understanding to.” The Sacred Secret was hidden in God until God told Paul and he in turn instructed others about it, so “to bring to light and teach about” would be a good understanding of the fuller meaning of the verb in this context.

There is a textual variant in this verse. Several important manuscripts do not have the direct object “all” after the verb *phōtizō*, but it seems the manuscript evidence favors it being in the original text, which is why most English versions include it. *Phōtizō* occurs 11 times in the New Testament, and of those occurrences, Ephesians 3:9 is the only place where it does not have either a direct object, is used passively, or has an implied direct object by way of a prepositional phrase such as in Revelation 22:5. So, even though there is textual variation in Ephesians 3:9, it does appear that the direct object should be there (or be implied by the figure ellipsis) and so the verse should be translated something like, “enlighten all people” or “bring to light for everyone.”

The Greek word *tis* (“what”) can be either an interrogative pronoun or an indefinite pronoun, and these are distinguished by the accent mark used as well as the context. In the Greek New Testament, *tis* has an acute accent in this verse which makes it an interrogative pronoun, which is consistent with the context as well, and would be translated in this case as who? Which (one)? Or what? As the Greek reads, it is almost as if the verb *phōtizō* has two direct objects, one being the men who are enlightened and the other the substance of the message being the administration of the mystery. However, grammatically the words “administration” and “sacred secret” in the phrase “what is the administration of the sacred secret” are in the nominative case so the phrase cannot function as a direct object.

As far as translating it with something like “what” versus an alternative, Tyndale’s translation translates it with a “what” phrase, the Wycliffe translation translates it with a “which” phrase which is functionally equivalent to a “what” phrase, the KJV obviously translates it this way and the New American Standard up through their 1995 revision translates it this way. Thus, “what” has about a 700-year history and is a very literal rendering of the Greek text. Perhaps an alternative translation would be, “to enlighten all men about the administration of the mystery.” This simpler English is consistent with English idiom in general and does not vary significantly from the text.

The Administration of Grace, which includes what we have in Christ, and what Gentiles have as “fellow heirs,” “fellow members of the body,” and “fellow partakers of the promise,” was not known until God revealed it to Paul by revelation. It was his job to bring to light the Administration of the Sacred Secret.

**“administration.”** The Greek word we translate as “administration” is *oikonomia* (#3622 οἰκονομία), the administration of a household, etc.

The “administration” in this verse is “the Administration of the Sacred Secret,” which is the administration of God’s grace (Eph. 3:2), which is the time period of the Christian Church. The Church started on the Day of Pentecost when the gift of holy spirit was poured out (Acts 2), and will end with the Rapture of the Church (1 Thess. 4:15-17).

There are some Greek texts that read “fellowship” of the Sacred Secret instead of the “administration” of the Sacred Secret. However, the evidence shows that reading to be a later change to the Greek text. Bruce Metzger writes: “The Textus Receptus, in company with a scattering of late minuscules, replaces οἰκονομία [administration] with the interpretative gloss κοινωνία (hence AV “fellowship”). The true reading is supported by p46, all known uncials, almost all minuscules, all known versions and patristic quotations.”[[80]](#footnote-30994) It can be easily understood that as the understanding of the administrations in Scripture declined, “administration” was replaced in some texts with the more easily understood, “fellowship.”

[For a more complete understanding of the Administration of the Sacred Secret, and an explanation of administrations in the Bible, see commentary on Eph. 3:2, and Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, *The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be like Christ*, Appendix A, “The Administration of the Sacred Secret.”]

**“sacred secret.”** In this verse, the administration of the Sacred Secret refers to the Administration of Grace, which began on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), and will end with the Rapture of the Church (1 Thess. 4:15-17).

God rightly calls the Administration of Grace the Administration of the Sacred Secret, because the fullness of what Christians have today in Christ was indeed a secret, hidden in God and unknown in the Old Testament. Besides calling it what it is, a “sacred secret,” God says over and over that it was hidden and people did not know about it until God revealed it after Pentecost (Rom. 16:25, 26; 1 Cor. 2:7-10; Eph. 3:4, 5; Col. 1:26).

The Greek word *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον) is translated as “sacred secret” in the REV Bible (and *Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible*) because that is what *mustērion* actually means and refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm.

Although many English versions translate *mustērion* as “mystery,” that is not a good translation. Actually, “mystery” is not a translation of *mustērion* at all; it is a transliteration of it—simply bringing the Greek letters into English and not translating the word at all. The English word “mystery” is a mistranslation of *mustērion* because in English, a “mystery” is something that is incomprehensible, beyond understanding, and unknowable. The orthodox Church refers to things such as the Trinity or transubstantiation as “mysteries” because they cannot be understood. In contrast to a “mystery,” a “secret” is something that is known to someone but unknown to others. The password on a computer is a “secret,” not a “mystery,” because the owner of the computer knows it. Similarly, God has revealed his “sacred secrets” to the Church via the Bible, and Christians are expected to know them. They are not “mysteries.”

Translating *mustērion* as “mystery” in English Bibles has caused many problems in the Church. The biggest problem is that many false and illogical doctrines have been foisted upon Christians, who are told not to try to understand them because they are “mysteries.” Another problem is that people who are convinced that the things of God are mysterious quit trying to understand them and so remain ignorant of many truths that God wants every Christian to know. Christians need to be aware of the difference between a mystery and a contradiction. For example, saying Jesus is 100% God and 100% human is not a “mystery,” it is a contradiction, and furthermore, it is never stated in the Bible; it is an assumption made by theologians and then supported by calling it a mystery

That *mustērion* refers to a “secret” and not to a “mystery” is well documented by Greek scholars, as the following selection of sources shows.

* James Strong writes: “*Mustērion:* In the NT it denotes, not the mysterious (as with the English word), but that which, being outside the range of unassisted natural apprehension, can be made known only by divine revelation, and is made known in a manner and at a time appointed by God” (*The New Strong’s Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words*, 1247).
* The *New Bible Dictionary* says: “But whereas ‘mystery’ may mean, and in contemporary usage often does mean, a secret for which no answer can be found, this is not the connotation of the term *mysterion* in classical and biblical Gk. In the NT, *mysterion* signifies a secret which is being, or even has been, revealed, which is also divine in scope, and needs to be made known by God to men through his Spirit” (Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 795. Marshall uses a “Y” to translate the Greek letter upsilon, usually translated by a “u”).
* William Smith writes: “But while the *mustērion* thus implies something hidden, and inaccessible to the unaided reason, and usually also of weighty import, it by no means necessarily denotes anything strictly mysterious and incomprehensible. The fact or truth, though requiring to be *revealed*, may, when revealed, be of a very elementary character” (*Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 3:2047).
* *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* says, “Mystery in the NT does not deal with the unknowable, but with what is imparted by revelation” (Merrill Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible,* 4:330).
* The *Holman Bible Dictionary* says, “The mystery of the New Testament has been described as an ‘open secret’; matters previously kept secret in God’s eternal purposes have now been or are being revealed (Eph. 3:3-5; 1 Cor. 2:7-8)” (Trent Butler, ed., *Holman Bible Dictionary*, 998).
* Robert Thayer writes: “In the New Testament, God’s plan of providing salvation for men through Christ, which was once hidden but now is revealed (*Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*).

Numerous other sources could be cited, but the point is that the Greek word *mustērion* does not mean “mystery” and should not be translated that way. Although God kept His sacred secrets as secrets for years, He has now made many of them known, as the following verses show.

* Matthew 13:11 (KJV): “it is given unto you to know the mysteries [*mustērion*] of the Kingdom of Heaven.”
* 1 Corinthians 2:7, 8, 10 (KJV): But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery [*mustērion*], *even* the hidden *wisdom*,…Which none of the princes of this world knew…But God hath revealed *them* unto us by his Spirit.”
* Romans 16:25-26 (NIV84): “the mystery [*mustērion*] hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known.”
* Ephesians 1:9 (NIV84): And he made known to us the mystery [*mustērion*]
* Colossians 1:26 (NIV84): the mystery [*mustērion*] that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.

Now that we have seen that *mustērion* does not mean “mystery,” and that a *mustērion* can be understood once God reveals it, it is important to better understand why we translate *mustērion* as “sacred secret.” The Greek language uses *mustērion* for secrets in the “sacred” or religious sphere, but has another word, *kruptos*, for secrets that are in the secular realm. The word *kruptos* appears in many places in the New Testament, including when Jesus said to give alms in secret (Matt. 6:4 KJV); Jesus teaching that every secret thing will be brought to light (Mark 4:22 KJV); Jesus’ going to Jerusalem in secret (John 7:10 KJV); Scripture saying that God will judge men’s secrets (Rom. 2:16); and that prophecy reveals the secrets of the heart (1 Cor. 14:24-25).

The noun form *kruptē* is found in Luke 11:33, where some translations have “cellar.” It refers to a “hidden place” or crypt. The adjective is *kruptos*, and the verb is *kruptō*, “to hide.”

Not only does the adjective *kruptos* appear in the New Testament, the verb *kruptō* appears many times as well, often translated as “hid” or “hidden.” Examples include: a city on a hill cannot be hidden (Matt. 5:14); the wicked servant hid his talent in the ground (Matt. 25:25); a Christian’s new life is hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3); and, Moses’ parents hid him after he was born (Heb. 11:23).

From the above information, we see that something that is described with *kruptos* is something done in “secret,” and so also translating *mustērion* as “secret,” which some versions do in some places, clouds what the Greek text is saying. Anyone reading the Greek New Testament immediately understands whether God is speaking of a secular secret (*kruptos*) or a sacred secret (*mustērion*), and a good English translation will bring out that difference also. Thus, versions such as the REV and Rotherham use “secret” for *kruptos*, and “sacred secret” for *mustērion*.

We must never think that just because the word *mustērion* occurs in the text, that it always refers to the Administration of the Sacred Secret, although it often does in the New Testament. There are many “sacred secrets” in Scripture. For example, Paul uses the plural of *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον) and refers to “sacred secrets” in 1 Corinthians 4:1: “regard us as… stewards of the sacred secrets of God.” (1 Cor. 13:2 has another usage in the plural). Other sacred secrets spoken of in the New Testament include: the sacred secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven/God (Matt. 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10); of Israel’s partial hardening (Rom. 11:25); the content of speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 14:2); of new, transformed bodies at the return of Christ (1 Cor. 15:51); of Christ’s relationship to the church (Eph. 5:32); the sacred secret of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:7); and of godliness (1 Tim. 3:16); as well as several “sacred secrets” in the book of Revelation (Rev. 1:20; 10:7; 17:5; 17:7). A major “sacred secret” in Acts and the Epistles is the dispensation, or “Administration” of Grace, called “the Administration of the grace of God” (Eph. 3:2), which is also referred to as the “Administration of the Sacred Secret” (Eph. 3:9).

A study of *mustērion* shows that it is used to refer to the “Administration of the Sacred Secret,” as it is here in Ephesians 3:9, but God has other “sacred secrets” as well, and in fact, the Devil has secrets in the religious sphere as well (2 Thess. 2:7).

[For more information on the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Ephesians 3:2. For more information on Jesus not being God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

**“who created all things.”** God created all things. Some later manuscripts and minuscules add “by Jesus Christ,” but the simple reading “who created all things” is “decisively supported” by the early manuscripts and the quotations of the early Church Fathers.[[81]](#footnote-10577) Almost all modern versions omit the phrase (cf. ASV, BBE, CEB, CJB, CSB, DBY, DRA, ERV, ESV, NAB, NET, NIV, NJB, NLT, NRSV, RSV, RV).

Eph 3:10

**“multifaceted.”** The Greek reads, *polupoikilos* (#4182 πολυποίκιλος). “Pertaining to that which is different in a number of ways—‘many and diverse, manifold, many-sided.’”[[82]](#footnote-19160) “This is the only occurrence in the NT, and it has the idea of ‘most varied,’ or ‘(very) many sided.’ It alludes to the variegated facets of God’s wisdom…”[[83]](#footnote-19690) “God’s wisdom is one, yet it can be termed ‘multifarious’ because it weaves a thousand apparently tangled threads into one glorious pattern. So out of the most diverse elements, where the strongest opposites clashed, where men saw only impossibilities, God, coming with means which looked hopelessly inadequate to men, worked out results which no man would have dreamed, and no angel could have foreseen.”[[84]](#footnote-21626)

**“rulers and authorities.”** In this context, the “rulers” and “authorities” are demonic powers, just as they are in Ephesians 6:12 and as the “ruler” is in Ephesians 2:2 (see commentary on Eph. 6:12).

Eph 3:11

**“purpose throughout the ages.”** The literal reading is “purpose of the ages,” but in this case, it refers to God’s purpose that spans the ages and which has now been accomplished in Christ Jesus. Although many versions read, “eternal purpose,” that may assume too much. We know that God had the same purpose since the creation of mankind and even before He created mankind, but we do not know how long before that God had that purpose in mind.

Eph 3:12

**“In *union with* him.”** On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), being “born again” of God’s spirit first became available, and Christians became part of the Body of Christ and identified with him (crucified with him, died with him, buried with him, and raised with him). Today, Christians are “in Christ” (“in union with Christ”) by virtue of being part of the Body of Christ, and it is important that we also are “in Christ,” that is, “in union with Christ” because we obey him and lead godly lives. When we read a phrase such as “in Christ” or “in him,” we must pay careful attention to the context to see if it refers to our spiritual union due to being part of the Body of Christ, or whether it refers to our being in union with Christ because of our obedience and godliness, or if both meanings apply in that given context. A lot of the blessings that Christians enjoy today are due to the fact that we are in union with Jesus Christ.

[For more on being in union with Christ, see commentary on Eph. 1:3. For more information on the Christian’s identification with Christ, see commentary on Rom. 6:5.]

**“through *our* trust in him.”** The Greek can read “through *our* trust in him,” or it can read “through his [Jesus Christ’s] faithfulness. We think that the possible double meaning was done on purpose because both things are vital when it comes to our access to God. What Christ accomplished will do us no good if we do not act, but our action would be worthless without what he accomplished. Nevertheless, we side with the majority of commentators that the meaning with the most relevance and emphasis here in Ephesians 3:12 is our trust in Christ, which is why the REV has translated the verse the way it has.

Eph 3:13

**“my hardships on your behalf.”** This verse is somewhat similar to Colossians 1:24, in which Paul speaks of “my sufferings for your sake.” Although Colossians is developed differently, the idea of Paul suffering and having hardships is common to both epistles. Paul speaks and writes often about the suffering involved in this life (cf. Acts 14:22; Rom. 5:3; 8:18, 35; 2 Cor. 1:4-8; 4:8-9; 7:4-5; Eph. 3:13; Col. 1:24; 1 Thess. 3:4; 2 Tim. 2:9). In this particular context, we know that he was in Rome and chained to a guard, which had to be challenging. Nevertheless, he was “an ambassador in chains” (Eph. 6:20) for a reason: it was because of the Good News that he taught, which brought light to the world and wonderful blessings to those who believe.

**“are your glory.”** A number of ideas have been set forth as to what this phrase means. The best seems to be that here in Ephesians 3:13, the word “glory” is being used with the meaning of “honor, reputation.”[[85]](#footnote-16314) In other words, the fact that Paul would suffer for others was actually an honor to them, showing their worth in a similar way that Christ’s suffering for us is a reflection of our worth.

Eph 3:14

**“For this reason.”** Paul repeats the phrase that he had used in Ephesians 3:1 and now concludes the idea he had begun there but not finished.

It is likely that Paul’s use of “for this reason” points forward, just as it does in Titus 1:5 in which the grammatical structure is, “For this reason...so that.” Here in Ephesians 3:14, there is the exact same structure of “For this reason...so that,” the difference is simply that Paul’s thought extends all the way throughout Ephesians 3:14-19. Paul lists multiple reasons why he bows to the Father, signaled by the Greek word *hina* (#2443 ἵνα), or “so that.” The reasons Paul prays are so that (*hina*) God would grant the Ephesians to be strengthened with power (Eph. 3:16), and so that (*hina*) the Ephesians (along with every Christian) would be able to comprehend the vast love of Christ which surpasses knowledge (in other words, it cannot fully be comprehended).

[For more information on this paradox of “comprehending” the “incomprehensible,” see commentary on Eph. 3:19.]

**“I bow my knees to the Father.”** The phrase “bow my knees” can be a general one for worship and submission, but here it refers to bowing the knee in prayer, which we can tell by the context: Paul starts his prayer in Ephesians 3:16, which is Paul’s second prayer in Ephesians (Eph. 1:15-23 was his first prayer). Most Westerners do not get on their knees when they pray to God, but perhaps it should be done more regularly, because it certainly tends to remind us of the fact that we frail humans must rely on God if we are to be successful in life.

Eph 3:15

**“from whom.”** We might naturally think that “by whom” would be more natural than “from whom” because the families would be named “by” God. However, “from whom” is both the meaning of the Greek text and can be seen to be the more powerful meaning in the biblical culture. God was the “Father” of the families, so the name would come from God, who He was and what He did, not just be given by Him. Further, as Andrew Lincoln points out, the ability and authority to name something implied power and dominion over that thing—for example, Lincoln points out that God naming all the stars showed Him as their creator and Lord.[[86]](#footnote-16257) God is, after all, the creator of everything and the “Most High” God.

We also see the authority and dominion implied in naming things in the fact that when one entity had power over another, the one in power often changed the name of the lesser. Thus, we see God changed Abram’s name to Abraham, Sarai’s name to Sarah, Jacob’s name to Israel, etc.

[For more on changing the name of another person, see commentary on John 1:42.]

**“every family.”** “Every family” is a much better translation of the Greek in this context than “the whole family” (KJV, YLT, NIV84); the NIV 2011 changed it to “every family.” From God the Father comes every single family, lineage, in all creation. The universe consists of many different types of beings. There are spirit beings and flesh beings. We know there are thousands of different families of animals, but we don’t know about many spirit beings. Nevertheless, we get a glimpse of them by knowing there are angels, cherubim, seraphim, and “living creatures” (Rev. 4:6). We also know that at least some of these beings have different sexes. Obviously, humans and earthly animals do, but Zechariah 5:9 shows us there are female spirit beings; the “women” in Zechariah seem to be “good” spirit beings working for God. There is a female demon (“Lilith”) in Isaiah 34:14, but she is poorly understood, so although some versions have her name, “Lilith” (CJB, NAB, NJB, NRSV), many versions do not; cf. “screech owl” (KJV, HCSB); “Night monster” (NASB); “night creatures” (NIV); “night hag” (RSV); “vampires” (Moffatt). This tells us that in Satan’s rebellion, when he got angels to defect with him and become God’s enemies, both “male” and “female” angels defected—but we know nothing about the gender roles they fulfill; we just know the Bible describes them in male and female terms.

When God created the Universe, He populated it with many different “families.” In 1 Corinthians 15:39-40, God tells us of the different families of humans, animals, fish, and birds and tells us there are “heavenly bodies” and “earthly bodies.” Just as there are many different kinds of earthly bodies, we can assume there are many different kinds of heavenly bodies (spirit beings).

**“is named.”** The phrase “is named” does not just mean the family is given a name, but the meaning of “name” comes from the Old Testament (Semitic) idea that a person’s “name” was a description of who they were and what they did. Thus, when God changed Abram’s name to “Abraham” (“father of a multitude”) it was not just a name but a description of his calling, destiny, and authority. God created the families in heaven and on earth and invested them with a calling, destiny, and authority to carry out their calling.

Eph 3:16

**“he would grant you to be strengthened with power in *your* inner self through his spirit.”** This prayer started in Ephesians 3:14, and this is the first part of the prayer in which Paul is praying for something for the believer. Paul is praying that the minds of the believers (their “inner self”) would be strengthened by God’s gift of holy spirit.

The “outward self” (2 Cor. 4:16) is the body of flesh, which grows older and weaker as the years go by. The “inner self” (or “inner person,” “inner being,” or “person within”) is the real “you,” the “you” that can talk with yourself. It is the invisible self that thinks and plans, that has desires and aspirations, that has emotions, and feels great joy in some circumstances but great pain in other circumstances. It is the “inner self” that makes decisions about what to do. Paul speaks of the inner self in Romans 7:22-23; 2 Corinthians 4:16; and Ephesians 3:16. In Romans 7:22-23, Paul refers to his “inner self” and calls it “my mind.”

It is sometimes taught that the “real you” is the holy spirit residing in the born-again believer, but that is not accurate and can be shown from all three verses in which Paul uses the phrase “inner self.” Ephesians 3:16 makes it clear that the “inner self” is not spirit because the inner self is strengthened “by the spirit.” Furthermore, in the last part of the sentence in Romans 7:22-23, Paul describes his “inner self” as “my mind.” Also, in 2 Corinthians 4:16, the “inner self” is “renewed” every day, whereas the holy spirit does not need to be renewed. It is the mind that needs to be “renewed,” as Romans 12:2 states (and the Greek word translated “renewed” is the same in Rom. 12:2 and 2 Cor. 4:16, except in Romans it is a noun and in Corinthians, it is a verb).

The “inner self” is the self that makes the decisions and drives the thoughts and actions that people will be judged for on the Day of Judgment.

Here in Ephesians 3, Paul prays for the believers and asks that their “inner self” be strengthened with power by the gift of holy spirit. Indeed, a person’s mind and willpower can be strengthened in many ways as the spirit works in them. God works in the believer both to want to do and to do His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13), and very often that working is through the gift of holy spirit in the believer. It is through the gift of holy spirit that God and/or Christ often gives revelation to the believer (Acts 11:28; 1 Cor. 2:10, 12:8). Also, Christians can “feel” the presence of holy spirit when they speak in tongues and interpret or prophesy, or occasionally feel the holy spirit actually empowering their body. All these activities of God, and more, work in the believer and can strengthen their mind. As the believer becomes confident of the presence and power of God and Christ in their life, their mind, their “inner self” is strengthened to stand firm in the Faith and do the work God has for them.

[For more on the “inner self,” see commentary on 2 Cor. 4:16. For more on speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:5.]

Eph 3:17

**“so that Christ would live in your hearts through trust.”** Every believer has “Christ in them” (cf. Col. 1:27) because they have the gift of holy spirit born in them. But not every believer has Christ “dwelling,” *katoikeō* (#2730 κατοικέω; living, residing), in their heart because they really trust him. In fact, sadly, many Christians feel quite distant from Jesus Christ. Furthermore, for most Christians, simply having an intellectual knowledge about the Bible and Jesus Christ does not produce the fullness of trust in Christ that is really satisfying to the soul. That kind of real depth of trust cannot be attained by just study, but by knowledge combined with action and experiencing God’s power. No wonder Paul prays that believers can be strengthened with God’s power so that they will trust Christ to such a degree that he really lives in their heart.

This verse is a prayer and a call for Christians to not be content with just having a “head-knowledge” of Jesus Christ, but having a deep trust in him because of having to rely on his power and seeing it work over and over.

**“being rooted and grounded.”** Paul here is using the figure of speech hypocatastasis (often categorized under “metaphor”) to compare the believer to a tree and to the firm foundation of a building to illustrate how important it is to have roots and a foundation that go deep into the “ground” of love. Love is to be the “soil” that provides stability and strength to the believer and feeds their actions and growth. The foundation of the Christian life is to be love.

The Greek text is a participial phrase composed of two perfect passive participles, which are the words “rooted” *rhizoō* (#4492 ῥιζόω) and “grounded” *themelioō* (#2311 θεμελιόω). It is important for understanding this section of Ephesians to realize that they are describing a condition or state that has been achieved in the life of the believer. God wants every believer to “comprehend…the breadth and length and height and depth, and thus to know the love of Christ” (Eph. 3:18-19). But in order to really grasp the fullness of Christ’s love, a person must be rooted and grounded in love themselves. Love is an intangible that must be experienced to be understood, and it is impossible to understand the love of Christ without first being rooted and grounded in God’s love for us and also in one’s own love for others. So here in Ephesians 3:17, we see that our being rooted and grounded in love is a prerequisite for fully understanding the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.

The idea conveyed by *rhizoō* (rooted) is that of being given a source of life-sustaining nourishment and strength. Like a tree that buries its roots deep into the earth to draw necessary nutrients and to provide it with support to remain upright during storms and wind, believers have their source of life-giving nutrients and strength “in love.”

The word *themelioō* (grounded) in the passive sense means “to be provided with a foundation”[[87]](#footnote-13873) and it is used to describe the way that believers are like a house that has been built upon a sure foundation—immovable and unshakeable. Moreover, this idea is depicted in the Gospel of Matthew where *themelioō* is used to describe the house of the wise person which “did not fall because it had been founded [*themelioō*] on the rock” (Matt. 7:25; cf. Luke 6:48).

Thus, with both horticultural and architectural imagery, Paul is claiming that believers have been firmly planted and established upon a foundation “in love.” With this double metaphor, he is asserting that “love is the soil in which believers are to be rooted and grow, the foundation on which they are to be built.”[[88]](#footnote-22682) In the Greek text, Paul begins the entire phrase with “in love” to accentuate this quality as being the source of a believer’s strength, nourishment, and stability.

[For more on hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

**“in love.”** Paul does not specifically mention whether this love is God’s love in Christ for the believer or the believer’s love for God, Christ, and one another. In the absence of a referent, the reader must determine Paul’s implied meaning here. The scholars argue over whether the love Paul is referring to is God’s love for the believer, something he has mentioned before (cf. Rom. 5:5; 8:35-39), or whether it is the believer’s love for God, Christ, and fellow believers, which Paul has already mentioned in Ephesians (cf. Eph. 1:4, 15; 4:2, 16; 5:2; 6:24).

Since Paul could have easily said what love he was referring to, it seems that scholars like R. Bratcher and Eugene Nida[[89]](#footnote-23209) are most likely correct when they lean toward the understanding of “love in all its aspects, toward God and from God, and toward fellow believers.” Love is the reality that permeates the entire gospel message and provides the secure basis for carrying out the church’s mission in the world. Love is the great motivating factor for Christian faith and service. We love because God loved us first (1 John 4:19), and now we love God and our fellow humans. Since the believer is to be rooted and grounded “in love,” love in all its aspects seems the correct meaning here.

Eph 3:19

**“and thus *are able* to know the love of Christ.”** The Greek sentence has the postpositive conjunction *te*. Harold Hoehner writes, “it can generally be claimed to express an internal logical relationship…and can probably be translated in this context as ‘and so.’”[[90]](#footnote-15812) The *te* logically connects the start of Ephesians 3:19 with Ephesians 3:18 such that verse 19 is a development of verse 18, not a separate request. Thus, Paul prays that Christians will be able to fully comprehend the breadth, length, height, and depth, and by doing so will come to know the love of Christ.

**“to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.”** This is an apparent contradiction, a paradox. How can someone know something that is beyond knowledge? But God’s intention was not to confuse the reader but to expand their thinking. We want to “know” Christ’s love, not just “know about it,” we want to experience it personally. But that love of Christ surpasses knowledge. No matter how much we experience it or study it, we do not grasp or experience all there is of it. This paradox should be very comforting to us because we should be confident that no matter how much we think Christ loves us, he really loves us more than that.

Eph 3:21

**“in the church and in Christ Jesus.”** The textual evidence indicates that this is the correct reading of the text. Had it read, “in the church in Christ Jesus,” that would have indicated that the Church was “in Christ” (cf. Eph. 1:3). But the addition of “and” shows that this is speaking of both the Church and Jesus Christ. We understand God being glorified “in the Church.” But God also gets glory “in Christ.” God is glorified in Christ because without Christ, there would be no Church, indeed, no people of God at all. Everlasting death would reign over all people because there would have been no savior.

**Ephesians Chapter 4**

Eph 4:2

**“bearing with.”** The Greek word translated as “bearing with” is *anechō* (#430 ἀνέχω), and it means to “bear with, forbear, put up with, endure, sustain yourself under, tolerate. Anyone trying to be unified with others knows that in order to do so there has to be some “bearing with,” “putting up with,” and “tolerating.” This is never an easy thing, but it is a Christian virtue that must be developed by any Christian who wants to be mature in the Faith. This same phrase occurs in Colossians 3:13.

**“one another.”** The phrase “one another” occurs in the context of the Christian community, and while we are to be good to everyone, in the context of the New Testament Epistles, the commands toward “one another” are specifically to other Christians. Christians are to be “especially good to the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). It is very important for the richness of our lives together here on earth, for our personal growth here on earth, and for rewards in the next life, that each Christian needs to be “other-focused,” focused on others and how we can help them. The phrase “one another” occurs many times in the New Testament, stating and reinforcing that truth.

[For more on the “one another” commands, see commentary on Gal. 5:13, “one another.” For more on “love one another,” see commentary on John 13:34.]

Eph 4:3

**“unity which comes from the spirit.”** This is the genitive of relation, and refers to the unity Christians have because they all have the gift of holy spirit. E. W. Bullinger explains the genitive of relation and notes that “the manner of expressing the particular relation must be gathered from the context. Frequently, the ‘of’ is equivalent to ‘pertaining to.’ It may be objective, subjective, or both, e.g., 2 Cor. 5:14, ‘the love of Christ,’ which may be the love Christ bears to us (subjective); the love we bear to Christ (objective) or both may be true, and the truth.”[[91]](#footnote-15416)

There are many examples of the genitive of relation in the Bible, and, as Bullinger wrote, the way to understand the relation is to understand the context and subject at hand. For example, “the lilies of the field” are the lilies that grow in the field; “the tree of life” is the tree that pertains to life or that imparts life; “the sure mercies of David” are the “mercies” (promises) pertaining to or made to David, and so forth. Here in Ephesians 4:3, the “unity of the spirit,” refers to the unity that all Christians have by virtue of having the same gift of holy spirit from God.

Every Christian has the same gift of holy spirit given to them by God (1 Thess. 4:8; Rom. 8:15; 1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 1:22). All Christians have all been made to drink of one spirit; all have been baptized in one spirit, in fact, we have all been baptized in one spirit into one Body, the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). The gift of holy spirit in Christians guarantees that they will all live together forever with Jesus in his future kingdom (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14). Christians have spiritual unity because of the gift of holy spirit.

Now the challenge for Christians is to take the spiritual unity that we have because of the gift of holy spirit and manifest that unity out into the physical world. That is why we must “endeavor” to keep the unity of the spirit. We have unity pertaining to holy spirit; now the question is: will we have an outward interpersonal unity that reflects the spiritual unity we have in Christ?

If we Christians are going to be “diligent” (make an earnest and diligent effort) to outwardly “keep” the unity among us that we already have spiritually, based on the gift of holy spirit, we must know what makes people unified. What we discover is that people unify around what they believe. This is well expressed in the commentary by David Anderson. Anderson writes: “OK. Get ready for a shocker: **the basis for Christian unity is not love**. Pretty much all we hear these days is how we are to love one another. That is certainly biblical, but it is not the basis for unity. I can love all kinds of people of different denominations or even different religions or no religion. But that does not mean I can work with them in a Christian project. The basis for Christian unity is not love; **it is what you believe**” (emphasis original).[[92]](#footnote-14576)

Dr. Anderson is certainly correct. We are commanded to love our enemies, but we could not be unified with them. Love does not produce unity. But Christians are very divided when it comes to what they believe, which is why it is important for us to “endeavor” to keep the unity of the spirit. “Endeavoring” is a process, and it can be a challenging process. Christians from different backgrounds and denominations may start with very little practical unity, and the way to “endeavor” to have and keep our outward unity matching our inward spiritual unity is to get together and discuss our differences in doctrine and practice and make an effort to be unified.

People are unified when they believe the same things and think the same way about something. This was why Paul wanted the Corinthian believers to think the same thing: “Now I urge you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be made complete by *having* the same mind and by the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10). Discussions about beliefs and practices can become very personal and heated, which is no doubt why Christians are to endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit “in the bond of peace.” It is the “bond of peace” that enables Christians of differing beliefs and practices to get together and discuss their differences and see if they can come to an agreement on what they believe.

It is also important to note that Christians can be unified about one subject but not unified about another. Christians who are unified about the Hope may not be unified about baptism. Christians who are unified about how to become saved may not be unified about the gift of holy spirit. God wants us to be as unified as possible and especially on major points of doctrine. That is undoubtedly why, immediately after telling Christians to endeavor to outwardly have the unity that pertains to the holy spirit, the Bible has three verses, consisting of seven “ones” that should be the core belief system of every Christian (Eph. 4:3-6).

God has given us a list around which Christians should certainly attempt to unify: the “seven ones” of Ephesians 4:4-6: one body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one Faith, one baptism, one God. There are many great truths in Ephesians that are important, but one thread we can certainly see is how the “seven ones” of Ephesians 4 fit into the grand scheme of Ephesians. A central theme of Ephesians chapter 1 is how God planned and accomplished the redemption of the human race through Jesus Christ and how people who have accepted Christ are blessed now and will be blessed in the future.

Ephesians chapter 2 continues with the process and effect of God’s saving grace—we are saved from wrath by grace and not by works—and then explains that even Gentiles, who were excluded from the covenants and “without hope” in the world are now reconciled to God, and both Jews and Gentiles are now “one” in Christ.

Ephesians chapter 3 gives more details about inclusion of the Gentiles. It shows that it was a Sacred Secret that the Gentiles would be fellow heirs, fellow members of the Body of Christ, and fellow partakers of the promise, and furthermore, that the Church would display God’s wisdom to the principalities and powers of the air. Chapter 3 ends with a prayer that members of the Church would be able to fulfill God’s desire for them by being strengthened with power and fully understanding Christ’s love so they are “filled with all the fullness of God.”

Ephesians chapter 4 follows upon the heels of the prayer that ended chapter 3, and starts with the exhortation that each Christian live a life worthy of that great calling of God. This will take being humble, being willing to learn from others (“meek”), being patient, and being loving. We are united in the one Body of Christ; a unity pertaining to the holy spirit, but now we must bring that spiritual unity to an outward unity. A way to start that is to unify around seven doctrines that are central to the Christian Faith: the “seven ones.”

The fact that God includes the “seven ones” here in Ephesians 4 as something around which Christians can unify means that at least some genuine unity can be accomplished among Christians as to these central points. However, to do that, Christians must put away their assumptions, long-held traditions, and any personal revelations that their beliefs are based on, and study the Bible with an open mind and open heart, using the same kind of honest academic rigor that any scientist uses when dealing with material that he or she wants to be accepted by the world scientific community.

Everyone knows that Christianity is divided into many different denominations and groups that hold to different beliefs. But at the same time, most Christians will acknowledge that at least some of the beliefs they hold are “not certain” or are a “best guess,” or are based in that group’s tradition and not on the solid foundation of Scripture. Often, a tradition or belief started by the founder of a group, such as Luther, Wesley, or Calvin, becomes as important to the group as what the Bible actually says. Of course, God knows about our differences, and even says in Scripture that we should attempt to think the same thing—obviously not about every topic, but certainly about that which is central to the Christian Faith and will produce unity among us. This requires a lot of effort and background learning, but pleasing God by being unified as a Christian community is worth it. Love and the bond of peace are to cover the areas where Christians cannot seem to unify.

In closing, it should be stated that many commentators say that the genitive in the phrase “unity of the spirit” is the genitive of production, meaning *the unity produced by the spirit,*[[93]](#footnote-20366) and that idea can be found in various translations and commentaries (cf. Kistemaker: “unity imparted by the Spirit”). However, that interpretation of the genitive is almost always due to the belief that the “spirit” is the third Person in the Trinity (“the Holy Spirit), who then produces the unity in the Body of Christ. But although the gift of holy spirit is a major factor in why Christians are unified, the gift of holy spirit does not “produce” the spiritual unity that Christians have; our spiritual unity pertains to the holy spirit. Then, the outward unity we are to keep is the natural result of holy spirit being inside each believer because it makes us all children of God, brothers and sisters of Christ, and fellow members of the same Body.

**“by *keeping* the bond of peace.”** The best way to understand the genitive phrase “bond of peace” seems to be a genitive of material, i.e., “the bond consisting of peace.” Different possibilities of the genitive have been set forth, such as the genitive of production, i.e., “the bond produced by peace.” However, peace does not produce the bond, it is the bond, and it allows believers to strive to keep, in an outward and visible way, the unity of the spirit even when they are not yet unified.

Eph 4:4

**“one body.”** “one body” is the first of the “seven ones” of Ephesians 4:4-6, and it refers to the Body of Christ, of which Jesus Christ is the head.

[For more on the purpose of the seven ones, see commentary on Eph. 4:3.]

**“one spirit.”** This refers to the gift of holy spirit that was given to the Church on the Day of Pentecost. The gift of God’s nature, called “holy spirit,” had always been available, and before the Day of Pentecost God put it upon some believers whom He had chosen (cf. Num. 11:17-29; Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 14:6; 15:14; 1 Sam. 10:6; 2 Kings 2:9; Neh. 9:30; Isa. 11:2). A study of the records in which God put His gift of holy spirit upon believers shows that when the spirit came upon them, they had spiritual power. For example, they could prophesy or do great tasks. But the gift of holy spirit in the Old Testament could come and go. God took it back from King Saul (1 Sam. 16:14), and when David sinned, he prayed that God would not take it from him (Ps. 51:11).

God only gave one “spirit” to the Church, and it is the gift of holy spirit. This was an especially important truth when Ephesians was written because the Greco-Roman world had lots of gods and spirits, and many of them were considered to be good or helpful. It was important for the Christian to know that for the Church there was only “one spirit,” God’s gift of holy spirit.

[For more on the gift of holy spirit, see the book, *The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be Like Christ.*[[94]](#footnote-30983)]

**“called.”** This is the Greek verb *kaleō* (#2564 καλέω), “called.” In the New Testament Epistles, the word “called” (in both the adjective and verb forms) is used as a technical term and refers, not to those who have only been “called,” but to those who have accepted the call. Thus, in the Epistles it means, and could even be translated, “the ones who have accepted the call.” Ephesians 4:4 is a good example of this. Believers accepted the call of God and, in association with that, now have the hope of that calling.

[For more on the use of “called” as a technical term for those who have accepted the call of God, see commentary on Romans 8:28.]

**“to one hope.”** The preposition in Greek that is translated “*to* one hope” is the word “*en*” (#1722 ἐν), which can mean “in, in *connection with*, into, with, by, to, etc.”[[95]](#footnote-10749) The phrase “called in one hope” would not adequately capture the idea Paul is trying to communicate here. That translation could be understood that God called us, hoping that we would accept the call (which is how the phrase “in hope” could be taken). While that is true, in this context, Paul is describing realities that are true for the Christian. Each of these “one” instances is about “one” thing Christians have (Eph. 4:4-6). So, the idea is that our calling to become Christians was to have one hope, which is life in the age to come. The Christian’s calling is a calling to “renounce everything he has” (Luke 14:33) but also a calling to have a great hope to which the sufferings in this life cannot even compare (Rom. 8:18). It is a challenging call, but a rewarding one.

The call of God is intimately connected with our glorious future hope. The hope is to be the anchor of the Christian’s soul (Heb. 6:19), so it is vital that Christians be clear about what their hope is. It involves having new bodies like Christ’s body (Phil. 3:21), living in the Kingdom of Christ here on a newly regenerated earth, and enjoying the rewards that one has earned for obedience to God. Christians are to know and understand the hope in a way that anchors their soul to the things of God and shapes the way they live.

[For more on the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more about rewards in the coming kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

Eph 4:5

**“one Lord.”** Jesus Christ is the one true Lord for Christians.

Some Trinitarians propose that if Unitarians use this verse to say that the one God is the Father (Eph. 4:6), meaning nobody else is God, then Unitarians must also say that the one Lord is Jesus, meaning that there are no other Lords. They propose that biblically, “Lord” is applied to God (Gen. 15:8; Deut. 3:24; Matt. 4:7) and to humans (Matt. 10:24; 20:8; 1 Pet. 3:6), thus, there are other “Lords” so then the term “one” must not really mean “one,” and therefore, Unitarians cannot use Ephesians 4:6 to say that there is really only “one” God. However, this logic fails to understand that Paul is not saying there is only one “being” who can rightly be called Lord, but that there is only one “true” Lord over Christians, there is only one person in the position of “Lord” over Christians, namely, Jesus.

Paul essentially answers this refutation directly in 1 Corinthians 8:6. He says, “For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we are for him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and we are through him” (1 Cor. 8:5-6). Paul is teaching that even though there are many beings who are called Gods and Lords, for Christians, there is only one being who is God (the Father), and one being who is in the position of Lord (Jesus).

So in Paul’s mind, there is only one “God” and one “Lord.” This does not mean that the word “Lord” cannot rightly be applied to Yahweh (it is many times: Gen. 15:8; Deut. 3:24; Matt. 4:7) but it means that to Paul, there is only one who holds the title/office “Lord” (Jesus) and only one who holds the title/office “God” (the Father). Just as one could say that there is one President, Abraham Lincoln, while Abraham Lincoln held office in the United States, even though technically there are many presidents of different clubs and organizations, such as the President of the Senate (the Vice President) or the President of a soccer club. Thus, using the term “president” does not mean other people could not rightly also be called president, but it does mean that they are not being called “The President” in reference to the singular position of the top leader of the nation.

This principle is also true for the other things Paul mentions in this list. In the first century there were many gods, many lords, many baptisms (baptism of John, baptism in the cult of Enke, baptism in Judaism), and many faiths (Babylonian, Egyptian, Jewish, Greek, etc.), yet, for Christians, there is only one “true” God, Lord, baptism, faith, and hope. For example, there are many things that a person can “hope” for, such as a job promotion or hoping for one’s child to be safe. While there are many “hopes,” yet for Christians, there is only one ultimate “hope,” namely, life in the age to come.

Therefore, Ephesians 4:5-6 does not mean that God or other people in positions of authority cannot be called “Lord,” because they are (Matt. 10:24; 20:8; 1 Pet. 3:6). Instead, it means that they are not in the ultimate position of being the one true “Lord” over Christians, a title which Paul asserts is reserved for Jesus Christ alone.

**“one faith.”** The “one faith” in Ephesians 4:5 seems to refer both to the confession of Christ as Lord, which is done in faith (“trust” cf. Eph. 1:15), and also to the core body of Christian beliefs, the Christian Faith, not meaning every single belief that a Christian should have, but rather the core and central beliefs that make a person a Christian (cf. Eph. 4:13). The scholars are divided, with some of them taking “faith” to refer to the confession of faith; faith in Christ;[[96]](#footnote-26761) some taking it to be the “Christian Faith,” a body of beliefs,[[97]](#footnote-11573) and some thinking both likely apply.[[98]](#footnote-13543) If both meanings do apply, the subjective meaning—a person’s faith in Christ—certainly is part of what the verse is saying. Part of what all Christians must agree to is that salvation comes by “faith in Christ,” i.e., trusting in Christ.

In the polytheistic Roman world, it was common for a person to have many gods, many different ways to approach and appease those gods, and many different beliefs associated with those gods. That was not to be true for the Christian. The Christian gets saved by faith (trust) in Christ, and then holds some specific core beliefs that unify all Christians. For example, those unifying beliefs would include things that Paul called “his Gospel,” i.e., “that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared” to people (1 Cor. 15:3-5).

Eph 4:6

**“one God and Father of all.”** This is very clear that Jesus Christ is not part of the “one God” mentioned here; he is in the “one Lord” category mentioned in the previous verse, Ephesians 4:5. Paul is clearly defining God in a Unitarian way.

Eph 4:7

**“Now grace was given to each one of us.”** In this context, the grace given to each one of us is the particular ministry that each one of us has and the specific energizing that God and the Lord Jesus give each of us as we work to fulfill our ministries.

Eph 4:8

**“he took captives.”** By using this phrase, Paul likely is referring to how Jesus was victorious over the spiritual forces of evil (Col. 2:15), and “took them captive” when he ascended to the right hand of God, in victory over death.

This phrase is notoriously difficult to translate because it is a polyptoton, which would be more literally translated, “he took the captives captive.” The difficulty lies in that when this phrase is used in the Old Testament, it never refers to ‘taking captives captive’ but rather to ‘taking *someone* captive.’ For instance, in Deuteronomy 21:10, the phrase refers to people who lost a battle who are taken captive, but they were not captives prior to being taken captive. Similarly, in Judges 5:12, the context is referring to Israel defeating their enemies in war and then “taking them captive,” but again, like in Deuteronomy, the people being taken captive were not already captives; they were simply Canaanites (Judg. 4:2-3). The phrase also occurs in Numbers 21:1 and likewise refers to “taking captives,” not to taking people who were enslaved and making them enslaved to you. So, in all of the Old Testament uses, it simply refers to taking people captive.

One other meaning should be addressed. Some translations, such as the KJV, NKJV, Amplified Bible, ERV, and the World English Bible, translate the phrase “led captivity captive.” Not only is this phrase quite confusing at first glance, but this translation does not follow the consistent Old Testament meaning. Thus, it is not to be preferred. Also, what would it correlate to theologically? Where in the New Testament does Jesus “capture” captivity? There is really nothing in the New Testament that one can point to, except perhaps that Christ defeated the power of sin, which held people captive; however, he did not then make “Sin” submissive to him. Thus, the correlation to any New Testament reality is quite weak with the translation “led captivity captive,” and so, for these reasons, it is not to be preferred.

The question must be asked, who was taken captive when Jesus “ascended on high?” Given the earlier allusions to Christ’s “exaltation over the powers”[[99]](#footnote-12248) in Ephesians 1:21-22, and the close parallels with Colossians 2:15, the phrase “took captives” likely refers to Jesus taking spiritual forces of evil captive.[[100]](#footnote-23602) In Ephesians 1:21-22, Paul says that Christ was seated in the heavenly places, “far above every ruler and authority and power and dominion...and he put all things in subjection under his feet.” The “rulers,” “authorities,” and “powers” are in reference to spiritual forces, and Paul relates that these spiritual forces have been subjected to Christ. This very much echoes the idea intended throughout the Old Testament for the phrase “taking captives,” in which an Old Testament king would defeat his enemies and take them captive, thus, they would be submissive to the king. In the context of Ephesians, Jesus has defeated his spiritual enemies, and God has submitted those enemies beneath Christ the King.

Colossians 2:15 also provides great insight into the phrase “took captives” here in Ephesians 4:8. In Colossians 2:15 it reads, “He stripped the rulers and the authorities, *and* He made a public spectacle of them, leading them *as captives* in a triumphal procession in *connection with* him.” Here, Paul makes clear that at Jesus’ exaltation to the right hand of God, Jesus was victorious over the spiritual forces of evil, and they became as “captives” to him. Therefore, it is very likely that this is the connection Paul was intending to make here in Ephesians 4:8, namely, that Christ has taken the spiritual forces of evil captive.

[For more information on why “rulers,” “authorities,” and “powers” are referring to spiritual forces, see commentary on Eph. 6:12.]

“**gave gifts to people**.” Paul purposely modified the Old Testament verse he is quoting in order to fit his rhetorical goal of applying it to Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament context, in Psalm 68:18, the Hebrew text says that “you have received tribute (gifts) from men,” but in the New Testament context, Paul is wanting to elaborate on how Jesus Christ gives spiritual gifts to the Church. So, what does Paul do? He modifies the Old Testament text to fit his rhetorical purposes. He modifies it to say, “he gave gifts to people.” This does not mean Paul does not respect the Old Testament or its grammatical-historical context, but rather Paul is teaching about a New Covenant reality and simply using a text people would have been familiar with (Psa. 68:18) to support this teaching.

The New Testament authors do this sort of reapplication of an Old Testament text quite frequently. For example, in Matthew 2:15, it reads, “Out of Egypt I called my son,” which is a quote of Hosea 11:1. However, the Old Testament context is about how God called Israel (his son) out of Egypt—out of slavery. Yet, Matthew, being familiar with the Old Testament, sees a correlation, because in the New Testament context, Jesus (God’s son) left Egypt to come back to Galilee, so, in a sense, the words “Out of Egypt I called my son,” fit Jesus’ circumstances nicely.

Eph 4:9

**“descended into the lower parts of the earth.”** This is referring to Jesus’ death and burial.

There is much theological discussion about what it means that Jesus descended into the earth, but much of the confusion is due to traditional Christian theology. Some theologians think that “he descended” refers to Christ leaving heaven and coming to earth as a human in the incarnation.

Other theologians believe that Ephesians 4:9 is referring to Christ as a spirit being going down to Tartarus between his death and resurrection and preaching to the spirits in prison. Some of those Christians believe the “spirits” that he “preached” to are the spirits of dead Old Testament believers and that Jesus then led them to heaven, which is not correct. The belief that Jesus went to “the lower parts of the earth,” i.e., “hell” or Tartarus, between his death and resurrection comes from the traditional teaching that dead people are alive in a “spirit” form, which is not correct. Placing the timing of Jesus’ descent into Tartarus between his death and resurrection can be seen in the Apostles’ Creed, which inserts the phrase “he descended into hell” between Christ’s death and resurrection. It reads, “(Jesus) was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead.” That wording implies that Jesus went to Tartarus to preach while his body was dead, because “descended” takes place after “died.” So the Apostle’s Creed insinuates that Jesus’ descending into the earth was not Jesus’ death and burial, but occurred after his body died. If one believes the traditional teaching that a person’s spirit continues to live on without a body after the person dies, then it would perhaps be possible that Jesus’ spirit continued to live and he went to preach to the spirits in prison between his death on the cross and the resurrection. However, Scripture teaches that when a person dies, they are dead in every way and are not alive in any form. Furthermore, the context of Ephesians 4:9 never indicates when Christ “descended into the lower parts of the earth,” but leaves believers to discover the timing of that event from other places in Scripture. Given the fact that Scripture makes it clear that a dead person is dead in every way, and from the scope of Scripture, saying that Jesus “descended into the lower part of the earth” was a way to describe his death and burial, not a separate event after his death. Ephesians 4:9 indicates that Jesus dying for our sins and being buried was part of what qualified him to ascend into heaven as King of kings and Lord of lords. The biblical evidence shows that the spirits that Jesus spoke to were demons who had caused the problems on earth around the time of Noah’s Flood (that interpretation is correct and is supported by the context). Jesus went to the demon spirits in Tartarus after he was raised from the dead.

1 Peter 3:19 says that Jesus went and preached to the spirits in prison in his new body after he was “made alive.” He did not go to Tartarus in some disembodied state between his death and resurrection. The text reads, “he was put to death in the flesh but made alive by the spirit, in which *state* he also went and proclaimed *his victory* to the spirits in prison” (1 Pet. 3:18-19).

The evidence from the scope of Scripture shows that this verse is about the death and burial of Christ. Jesus, the Son of God, was a human being and he died on the cross and was dead and buried for three days and nights. Then God raised him from the dead and after being on earth for 40 days, he ascended into heaven. So Jesus died on the cross, was buried (thus he descended into the earth, i.e., the grave), was raised from the dead, and then after forty days ascended into heaven.

[For more on Jesus being fully human, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on the dead people being dead and not being alive in any form, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

Eph 4:10

**“ascended far above all the heavens.”** This is hyperbolic language. God is in heaven, so the phrase is not claiming that Jesus ascended “far above” God. Rather, the phrase is describing Jesus’ ascension to the right hand of God, which is viewed as the highest place in heaven. Thus, to ascend “far above all the heavens” is best understood as ascending to the highest part of heaven, i.e., God’s throne. Also, the Greek word translated “ascend” can refer to “going up” spatially, and it can refer to “going up” in rank, power, or position. Jesus did both. He ascended to God’s right hand, and he was given all authority (cf. Phil. 2:9). Also, “all the heavens” can refer by the figure metonymy to all the beings who live in heaven, the angels, etc. When Jesus ascended into heaven, he also ascended in power and authority over all the other heavenly beings.

**“in order to fill all things.”** As we will see below, it is the church that fills all things. It is Christ’s body, not his literal body, but his metaphorical one; the Body of Christ, which is the Church.

The phrase “in order to fill all things” is taken by quite a few commentators to mean that Jesus is omnipresent and thus, spatially fills all things. One such scholar is Ernest Best, who concludes that since, “τὰ πάντα [all things] is nominal and not adverbial it means the universe (cf. Eph. 1:23; Col 1:16-20; 1 Cor 3:21ff; 8:6) unless an alternative sense is signified (Hodge).”[[101]](#footnote-12304) However, the “universe” does not fit the context or how Paul uses this terminology earlier in Ephesians.

Although “all things” does likely refer to the world rather than the church here in Ephesians 4:10, it does not necessarily mean that Christ himself is physically “filling” the world. He could be “filling” all things in a different way. T. K. Abbott, looking at Ephesians 4:10 and noticing how it speaks of Jesus ascending to heaven, sees the problem with this literal “filling” interpretation and asks, “But how can the occupation of a special place in heaven have for its object presence throughout the universe?”[[102]](#footnote-26393) Simply put, how can Jesus going to one place be interpreted to mean that he is literally filling all places? This means that a physical “filling” interpretation does not fit the verse itself.

The context immediately prior to and following Ephesians 4:10 is that Jesus gave gifts to men (Eph. 4:7-8) and then he goes on to name some of those gifts in Ephesians 4:11. Paul then goes on to talk about how Jesus has given these different gifts to members of the “body” so that they could create a well functioning and growing “body” of Christ (Eph. 4:11-16). One can see how in this analogy Paul is creating a visual metaphor that the people in the Church are intended to be the “body” of Christ, so that when the members are functioning properly, it is as if Christ is doing something, when in reality, it is the Church (his “body”) doing it. Thus, Christ’s literal body is not filling all things, but his “body,” the church, is filling all things, and Christ is equipping his “body” by giving them gifts. Therefore, Christ can be said to be present somewhere, or fill somewhere, where he is not physically, but yet the Church is there physically. With Paul’s interplay between Christ and his “body,” it becomes clear how Jesus moving to one location with authority and handing out gifts to his “body” could result in his metaphorical body, the Church, filling all things.

Paul’s very similar language in Ephesians 1:23 also supports that understanding. In Ephesians 1:22-23 we read, “...the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.” A few things to note: first, Paul directly associates this language of filling all things with the Church. Yes, it says that “the one” (Jesus) fills all things. But how does he do this in the verse? Is it because his physical body fills all things, or is it because the church, which is his body, fills all things? The latter surely is what is meant. Secondly, according to Ephesians 1:23, the church is the “fullness.” This is admittedly a strange phrase, however, one can see the play on words that Paul is making in the Greek. He says, “the church...the fullness (πλήρωμα, *plērōma*) of the one who fills (this is the verbal form of the same word; πληροω, *plēroō*).” So, the church is the “full” thing which Christ fills. Therefore, the church is the thing which fills all things, it is Christ’s body, not his literal body, but his metaphorical one.

Eph 4:11

**“apostles ... prophets ... evangelists ... pastors ... teachers.”** Ephesians 4:11 mentions five specific ministries in the Church that are especially given by the Lord Jesus to prepare and equip Christians for service to God. Scripture does not refer to these ministries collectively by a particular name, so different Christian groups have referred to them in different ways. However, since Ephesians 4:12 says that these ministries are for the equipping of the believers, perhaps calling them “equipping ministries” is an accurate name for them. However, some groups call these five ministries (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers) “gift ministries,” but that is misleading because every Christian has a “gift ministry,” that is, a ministry that is a gift to that person and that specifically enables that person to carry out his or her particular gifting in the Body of Christ. Just three verses earlier, in Ephesians 4:8, the Bible says that when Christ ascended, he gave “gifts” to people—and no believer is left out. Everyone has a particular gift to use in the Body of Christ. The “gift” that anyone has is the gift that is his or her specific way of serving God. The word “ministry” simply means “service,” and every Christian—every Christian—has been specifically enabled and empowered to serve. The Bible mentions quite a few ministries, for example, Romans 12:6-8 says that we have gifts that differ from one another and mentions the gift of prophecy, the gift of serving, the gift of teaching, the gift of encouragement, the gift of giving, the gift of leading, and the gift of showing mercy, but many more “gifts” could be mentioned in the list.

These five ministries have also been called “ascension gift ministries,” but again, after his ascension, Jesus gave each Christian a ministry (Eph. 4:7-8), so in fact, every Christian has an “ascension gift ministry.”

The Word of God says that the purpose for these five ministries is “for the equipping” of the believers (Eph. 4:12; NASB), and many other versions besides the REV recognize that “equip” or “equipping” is an excellent translation in this verse. It is good practice for Christians to use the vocabulary of the Bible whenever possible to describe spiritual realities, and thus a good way to refer to the five ministries in Ephesians 4:11 is to call them “equipping ministries.”

**“prophets.”** For more information on prophets and prophecy, see commentary on Romans 12:6.

**“pastors and teachers.”** The pastor and teacher are two of the “equipping” ministries in the Church that equip the people for the work of the ministry. The term “pastor” is the Greek noun *poimēn* (#4166 ποιμήν) and means “shepherd,” and it is translated as “shepherd” almost every other time it appears in the Bible. It is unfortunate that in the development of the English language, people who preside over congregations are referred to as “pastors” when the Greek word means “shepherd.” It is unfortunate because when we correctly call Jesus the “good shepherd” and the “Chief Shepherd,” but call the people he appoints to shepherd others by the term “pastors,” we lose the wonderful connection between the “Chief Shepherd,” and his “assistant shepherds,” whom he appoints to help him shepherd his flock.

Anyone who works with sheep knows that it is impossible to look after a large flock without help. A large flock always had a “chief shepherd” and other “shepherds” who helped with the work. Understanding that fact helps us understand the parable of the lost sheep (Matt. 18:12ff; Luke 15:4ff). In that parable, the chief shepherd did not leave the 99 sheep out in the wilderness without a shepherd’s care and vulnerable to enemies just so he could save one sheep—that would not have made any sense; he left the 99 with his helper shepherds. All the people who lived at that time and in that culture would have clearly understood that. Like the flock in the parable, the Body of Christ is a very large flock, and the Chief Shepherd needs lots of help shepherding it.

The Body of Christ has millions of individual “sheep,” and Jesus is the Chief Shepherd, and he works closely with his “help,” the shepherds (the “pastors”) he has placed in his Body. That Jesus is called the “Chief Shepherd” should be a great encouragement to anyone who is called to leadership in the Body of Christ, because it is clear that any shepherd can and should look to the Chief Shepherd for help, guidance, support, information, and whatever else is needed to shepherd the flock.

[For more on the relationship between the Chief Shepherd and his flock, see commentary on 1 Pet. 5:4.]

There has been some confusion among scholars as to whether there are four or five equipping ministries listed in Ephesians 4:11. Are there “pastors” and “teachers,” two separate ministries, or is there just one ministry, the “pastor-teacher?” The confusion is due to the fact that each of the ministries is set apart by the Greek separator particle *de*, except for the pastors and teachers, which are connected by the word *kai* (which means “and” and is pronounced kī, like “hi”). Thus, the essence of the text is: apostles *de* prophets *de* evangelists *de* pastors *kai* [and] teachers. Some commentators have concluded from that grammatical construction that there are only four ministries in the verse, the fourth being that of the pastor-teacher. However, the grammar does not demand that the pastor and teacher are only one ministry; the text is simply saying that there are both pastors “and” teachers, and that there is a special connection between them. Meyer correctly points out that in the Church, the apostle, prophet, and evangelist are usually ministries that are more to the entire Body of Christ, whereas the pastor and teacher are more generally tied to one congregation.[[103]](#footnote-14655) Besides that, there is a closer association between the pastor and teacher than often exists between the other ministries, and a closer connection between the function of their ministries. They work very closely together to make their church effective and successful.

What is in the text, and clarified by the experience of the Church, is that there are five equipping ministries, including both the pastor (shepherd) and teacher. Furthermore, there is a clear difference between the pastor and teacher, something that called Pastors and called Teachers are well aware of; in fact, often their ministries can be somewhat at odds with each other. The heart of a pastor is to listen, whereas the heart of a teacher is to teach, so at a fundamental level, there is a difference in orientation between the pastor and teacher.

To be truly effective, a church must have both accurate teaching of the Bible and good pastoral care. A good pastor must always bring people back to God’s perspective and to the Word of God. Pastoral care is not just sympathy, it is helping people find God, and so the pastor is always teaching or working closely with a teacher to bring people to both wholeness and truth. Similarly, the teacher cannot be divorced from the pastoral needs of the congregation. Every teacher knows what it is like to “hit the mark” in a teaching, when the subject matter was biblical and informative, and the teaching also reached into the hearts of the people who heard it. No teacher teaches simply to impart information; the information must bring the people closer to God. Good teachings inform, encourage, and often confront and bring people to a point of decision, and so for a teaching to be fully effective, it often must be followed by personal pastoral care.

In spite of the pastor’s need to teach, and the teacher’s need to pastor the people, because the heart of a pastor is always to help and heal, his or her teachings tend to be on subjects that immediately comfort or encourage the heart. Also, he may tend to ignore or “downplay” certain biblical subjects that can be emotionally challenging for people, as well as subjects that seem to be more “just information.” In contrast with pastors, however, teachers are much more information-oriented, and see more value in the information simply because it is true and is about God or comes from God. Teachers see an inherent value in “knowing,” which fuels the passion they have for their ministry. A teaching that is very informative but not necessarily encouraging may greatly inspire a teacher, but not be the kind of teaching a pastor would teach to his congregation.

To be most effective, a church needs both a teacher and a pastor, and the “and” connecting them in the Greek text makes that point very well, whereas a *de* would correctly point to the fact that the pastor and teacher are two distinct ministries, but would not show their distinct need to work together. Anyone who has seen a pastor-teacher team at work in a church immediately knows the value of each individual ministry in equipping the believers, and so there is good reason for the “and” (*kai*) between pastor and teacher in the Greek text.

Eph 4:12

**“to equip.”** The Greek phrase is *pros ton katartismon* (πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν), which is literally, “for the equipping.” The Greek word *katartismos* (#2677 καταρτισμός) means “a process of adjustment that results in a complete preparedness,”[[104]](#footnote-32456) and can be translated as “equipping, preparing, training, perfecting.” The work that the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers do in the Body of Christ is an ongoing one, both in the individual lives of the believers and in the entire Body as new believers are saved while others fall asleep in the Lord.

**“for the work of ministry.”** This is not “for the work of **the** ministry,” as if the believers were being equipped to do formal church work. Rather, it is for the work of “ministry,” i.e., the act of ministering to each other in such a way that the Body of Christ is built up. Every believer is involved in “ministry,” serving and ministering to people both spiritually and physically in such a way that the Body of Christ is built up and strengthened. One of the sad facts of Christian history is that the true meaning of this verse has been mostly lost in the Church, especially in previous centuries, but even now in many denominations. This verse makes it plain that every believer is to “minister” to others, and through that ministry build up the Body of Christ. Every Christian is a witness for Christ, an ambassador of Christ, a “holy one,” a fellow builder with God, a soldier of the Lord, etc. We are all to spur each other on to love and good works (Heb. 10:24). Sadly, the way this verse has been translated in some versions, and acted out in the Church, is that the clergy does all the work while the average Christian sits in a pew and gives money to support the clergy and church work.

**“with the goal of.”** This phrase translates the Greek preposition eis (#1519 ἐις) and denotes movement toward an object (whether concrete or abstract), and it can be translated as “for” or “in order to” to connote purpose. Hence, in the REV, the phrase has been translated “with the goal of” in order to bring out the purpose or aim of the gifts that Christ gave the church.

Important to understand in this section is that the gifts that Christ gave are not exclusive to only a select few individuals in the church. As Harold Hoehner rightfully points out, “the concept that the ministry belongs to clergy is foreign to this context because every saint is given a gift (v. 7) and every saint is involved in the ministry.”[[105]](#footnote-29292)

**“building up the body of Christ.”** This is a general statement. The Body of Christ is built up in many different ways, and it gets built up as the people with equipping ministries equip believers who then go forth and do the work of the ministry. One obvious way that the Body gets built up is when believers tell unbelievers about Jesus and those unbelievers get saved and added to the number of believers. But the Body is also built up, “edified,” when believers help each other, which happens in myriads of different ways. Christians are to be especially good to each other (Gal. 6:10) and support “one another.”

[For specific ways we are to support and love one another, see commentary on Gal. 5:13. For more on the Body of Christ, see commentary on Eph. 1:23.]

Eph 4:13

**“until we all attain unity in the faith.”** Ephesians 4:13 is about the future. Christians will not attain unity in the faith or grow into full maturity in Christ in this “present evil age” (Gal. 1:4). We will be unified, attain a true knowledge of Christ, and be mature in him in the future, in the Administration of the Fullness of Times (Eph. 1:10). But that does not excuse Christians from working diligently right now toward the goal of being unified in the faith and becoming mature in Christ.

Ephesians 4:7-16 is a beautifully structured blend of fact, exhortation, and comfort. We are told that as Christians we all have been given gifts of grace; ministries in the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:7-8). We are reminded that Christ’s being in heaven and being able to give us those gifts of grace came at a price—he died for us; he descended into the earth. So Christ set for us the ultimate example of service to God and others, and showed us that we are also to use the gifts he gives us to serve others (Eph. 4:9-10).

Then Ephesians tells us that Christ has not left us without people to help and guide us in doing our function in the Body. He has given us the equipping ministries of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers so we can effectively do what we were called to do (Eph. 4:11-12). Next, he gives us a comforting word so that we are not overly frustrated with the seeming inability of Christians to become unified and mature. He tells us that unity and maturity will happen, but in the future—in the Administration of the Fullness of Times—and at that time we will no longer be “children” tossed about by winds of doctrine and tricked by deceitful people (Eph. 4:13-14).

Lastly, Ephesians instructs us how to do our best to become unified and mature in this age (Eph. 4:15-16). We are shown that fundamental to growing up in Christ and thus to Christian unity and maturity is speaking the truth in love. Then we are reminded that it is Jesus Christ who is the source of the unity in the Body. He has provided it with the parts it needs, and it is being fitted together and held together by the supporting ministries he has provided. Also, if every part will work and do its proper function not only will the Body grow, but because it is a living spiritual organism it will lovingly be “building itself up”—the Body helping the Body to grow.

This section in Ephesians is a beautiful picture of Christ’s love and “hands-on” way of dealing with the Church, and now it is our turn to be like Christ and serve God and others by doing our function in the Body of Christ. If Christians will do that, the Body of Christ will be healthy, grow, and mature in the Faith.

***having grown* into a mature person.** The Greek word translated “person” is *anēr* (#435 ἀνήρ), which generally refers to a male (man or husband) in contrast to a boy or female. However, there are times when *anēr* can be used generically of a human being, male or female, and that is the case here; the females in the Body of Christ do not become male in the administration of the fullness of times. In this context, *anēr* is used rather than the common *anthrōpos* (“person”), not in order to point to some masculine characteristic that Paul is expecting believers to adopt and imitate, but rather the emphasis is on arriving at mature adulthood, not any specific gender or attribute of gender.

The word “mature” is the Greek *teleios* (#5046 τέλειος), which in this context connotes being fully grown in the figurative sense of coming to a spiritual maturity that recognizes and lives according to the reality of Christ as the head of the body. Paul is drawing upon the imagery of how a person goes from being a small child to a full-grown adult as they live and get stronger each day, and he is applying the metaphor to the life of the believer to connote the way that every believer is to become a full-grown adult in the faith according to the standard of Christ Jesus himself. Thus, Paul is instructing believers to become “mature adults” in the faith and to attain to the fullness of what is already present in Christ. Paul then immediately contrasts that with being a *nēpios* (“child”) in Ephesians 4:14, which is the opposite of growing up in Christ and reaching full maturity as a Christian. It is interesting that Paul uses the singular “person” and not the plural “persons.” Paul is likely referring to the body of Christ in a collective sense as the one “new man” that all believers are to strive to grow up into, with the head being Christ Jesus.

**“of the full stature of Christ.”** This phrase can be somewhat confusing because it is using the concept of a mature man in a metaphorical way, and so to understand it, we have to get the metaphor. A human being starts out as a baby, grows through childhood, and eventually reaches their “full stature,” their full size, when they are mature. Thus, “full stature” is at maturity, and in this context, it is the maturity that Paul has in mind, not the physical size. Paul is not saying that somehow Christians are all going to be as tall as Christ (actually, by today’s standards, Jesus would have almost certainly been relatively short. People of his generation were generally shorter than most Westerners today, and Isa. 53:2 says there was nothing unusual about his physical appearance). In the future, believers will be fully mature, whereas today we strive to be mature in Christ. Christians should not be content to just be “saved.” We should also work hard to become mature in Christ.

Eph 4:14

**“so that we are no longer children.”** From God’s perspective, every Christian is a child now, and hopefully is making the effort to grow and mature in Christ. The next verse, Ephesians 4:15, tells us that one way we grow up in the Lord is by speaking the truth in love. But in any case, we will not be fully mature in Christ until the future, in the Administration of the Fullness of Times (see commentary on Eph. 1:10; 4:13). At that time we will have new, spiritual bodies (Phil. 3:21) and will be like Christ (1 John 3:2). Today, as children, we get fooled and tossed around by the Devil and his minions, as the verse says, but thankfully, the more mature we become in Christ, the less the Devil is able to do that to us. Part of our wonderful hope is that there is a time coming in the future when the Devil will not be able to fool us or use us.

**“doctrine.”** The Greek word is *didaskalia* (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it were a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. In this verse, the REV considered the word “doctrine” as more fitting than “teaching.”

[For more on *didaskalia* see commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13.]

**“by people’s trickery *and* craftiness.”** The Greek word translated “trickery” is *kubeia* (#2940 κυβεία). Literally, it means “dice playing,” but because the people who played dice often cheated, just as they do today, the word became used for the deceptions brought about by men, or trickery. There is a double prepositional phrase in the Greek that would be more literally translated as “by the trickery of people, by craftiness.” The two phrases have been combined into one by the preposition *en* (“by”), which governs both phrases. For clarity, the conjunction “and” is supplied in English to conjoin the two descriptors. The distributive force of the preposition makes the reading smoother and shows the connection between the two characteristics that Paul is identifying.

Paul is pointing out that people use both “trickery” and “craftiness” in their deceptive schemes to lead people astray with false teaching. Although deceitful people use “trickery and craftiness” in many ways and in many situations, and those apply here, many people use trickery and craftiness to get people to believe their false doctrines.

Eph 4:15

**“we are to grow up.”** The “we” is collective, that is, the Church is to grow up into Christ, but that growth is done individually. Each individual is to speak the truth in love and grow up in every way into Christ. The directive given to Christians to “grow up” places a responsibility on each Christian that will differ from person to person and should not be ignored.

To “grow up” into Christ requires mental and spiritual growth, which takes time and effort. It is a process, not an event. Every Christian has “baggage,” weaknesses, and blind spots that keep them from fully utilizing their ministry and being like Christ. On the Day of Judgment, Jesus Christ will not expect us to be perfect, but he will expect that we have not been content to live with our faults and excuses, but have made a sincere effort to try to live like he did and do our best to be approved by God (2 Tim. 2:15).

The Bible tells us to examine ourselves (1 Cor. 11:28; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 6:4). That means that we should be asking ourselves questions such as “What is my ministry? Am I fulfilling it? Is anything holding me back from being like Christ? What am I not doing I should be doing and what am I doing I should not be doing?” Do I need help, and if so, where should I get that help?”

Judgment Day is no joke, and although making any changes or adjustments to our lives may be uncomfortable in the immediate present, those changes will produce “the peaceable fruit of righteousness” in this life (Heb. 12:11), and great joy in the next.

**“into him.”** The Greek, *eis auton*, “into him,” refers to our relationship with Jesus. We are to grow up in every way in our relation to Christ.

Eph 4:17

**“say this and insist.”** This verb, *martureō* (#3140 μαρτυρέω), almost always means “to testify, bear witness,” however, here it has the meaning of “urging or insisting upon something.”[[106]](#footnote-23859)

**“in the Lord.”** See Word Study: “In the Lord.”

**“walk.”** The word “walk” was used idiomatically for living life. The unbelievers lived their lives “in the futility of their minds.”

**“in their futile way of thinking.”** The “futile way of thinking” refers to the broad pattern of thinking and behavior that is futile, profitless, worthless. This is not a call to turn Gentiles from their worthless thinking (that occurs in other places); this is a call to live life with a purpose.

Eph 4:18

**“hardening.”** The Greek word is *pōrōsis* (#4457 πώρωσις), and it means “a state of dullness or insensibility.”[[107]](#footnote-31731) It is not that the Gentiles were blind and unable to understand God, but rather that their stubbornness and rebelliousness caused them to be ignorant and foolish. They are guilty of their ignorance because it is of their own doing, because they refused the knowledge of God that was available to them.

Eph 4:19

**“lost all sensitivity.”** The Greek word is *apalgeō* (#524 ἀπαλγέω), and it means to stop feeling pain, become callous, become insensitive, “to lose the capacity to feel shame or embarrassment.”[[108]](#footnote-11723) Not having knowledge of God caused the Gentiles to lose all sensitivity to what is right or wrong. The word depicts how the Gentiles are not bothered by the implications or consequences of their actions. They have hardened their hearts to the point that nothing pierces their conscience, and their moral compass does not point in a godly direction. They are open to all manner of pleasure, greed, and violence. It is not surprising that this word is connected to unrestrained behavior, because so much unrestrained behavior is hurtful to others. In fact, many people are so insensitive that they have no idea their behavior is hurtful to others.

**“to engage in.”** This phrase is translated from the Greek prepositional phrase *eis ergasia* (#1519 ἐις; #2039 έργασία), which literally means “for engagement in some activity or behavior with sustained interest.”[[109]](#footnote-19247) *Ergasia* is often translated as “practice” (CSB, ESV, NAB, NET) because that brings out the meaning of sustained involvement in the activity and shows that it is not just a one-time occurrence.

**“impurity.”** The Greek word translated “impurity” is *akatharsia* (#167 ἀκαθαρσία), and it refers to being “unclean” before God. *Akatharsia* is “a state of moral corruption; immorality, vileness, especially of sexual sins”;[[110]](#footnote-26434) “in a moral sense, the impurity of lustful, luxurious, profligate living; used of impure motives in 1 Thess. 2:3.”[[111]](#footnote-15876)

[For more information on *akatharsia*, see commentary on Gal. 5:19.]

Eph 4:21

**“and were taught *the truth* in him.”** The phrase, “taught in him” is not clear in English, so the REV has added “the truth” for clarity. It can mean “in him” in the sense of “in *connection with* him,” or “in his name; thus, concerning him,” which is simplified to “about him” (cf. CEV, CJB). It is hard to determine the exact meaning of the phrase, and due to the parallel phrase at the end of the sentence, “the truth is in Jesus,” the REV has chosen to leave “in him” in the text.

Although the Greek word “*en*” (#1722 ἐν) can mean “by him,” in this context, it does not mean “by him” because Jesus never taught the Ephesian believers. Also, the very next phrase teaches that the truth is in some way “in” Jesus. Therefore, the translation “by him” does not take into account how the term is used in the immediate context.

Eph 4:22

**“old self.”** The more literal reading of the Greek is “old man,” but it is translated “old self” because the phrase is inclusive of both men and women, because both have sin natures inherited from Adam. The same phrase, referring to the same thing, occurs in Ephesians 4:24.

This is a good example of how the same phrase can have different meanings in different contexts. In Ephesians 2:15, Jesus Christ made a “new man,” the Body of Christ, out of Jews and Gentiles. But that new man is not the same as the “new man” (translated “new self”) in Ephesians 4:24, which is the “new self” each Christian is by virtue of being born again of God’s holy spirit and thus having a new divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4).

Eph 4:23

**“renew.”** The Greek infinitive *ananeousthai* (#365 ἀνανεοῦσθαι) is in the middle/passive voice, meaning that it could be either one grammatically. However, this infinitive occurs in the midst of a series of commands regarding things Christians should do. Paul commands them to “put off the old self,” (Eph. 4:22) “put on the new self,” (Eph. 4:24), and “speak the truth to his neighbor” (Eph. 4:25). Therefore, it is much more likely that this infinitive should be taken in the middle voice, meaning that the Ephesian Christian is to “renew themselves” not the passive voice, “be renewed.”

This Greek verb *ananeoō* only occurs here in the entire New Testament, however, a close synonym is the Greek noun *anakainōsis* (#342 ἀνακαίνωσις), used in Romans 12:2.

[For more on “renew,” see commentary on Rom. 12:2.]

**“the thoughts of your mind.”** To understand this phrase in Ephesians 4:23, we must understand that the Greek word *pneuma* (#4151 πνεῦμα), most often translated “spirit,” was also widely used of a person’s thoughts, attitudes, and emotions because they were invisible but exerted a visible influence. Thus, to renew “the *pneuma* of your mind” is to be made new in one’s thoughts, attitudes, and emotions. That meaning is actually stated in some translations. For example, the NIV has “be made new in the attitude of your minds.” Furthermore, although the CEB and NLT misunderstand the function of “spirit” in the verse, nevertheless, the CEB has “renew the thinking in your mind,” while the NLT has “thoughts and attitudes.”

It seems most likely that native Greek readers would simply understand the phrase “the spirit of your mind” to mean the thoughts, attitudes, and emotions of your mind. However, it is also grammatically possible that the construction could be a genitive of apposition, with the meaning, “be renewed in the spirit, namely, your mind,” but it is not likely the Greeks would have thought of the phrase in that more grammatically complex way.

[For more on the uses of *pneuma*, spirit, see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

Eph 4:24

**“and put on the new self.** (Eph. 4:24 is very similar to Col. 3:10). “Putting off” the old self and “putting on” the new self is a very important Christian concept that comes up several times in the Bible (e.g., Rom. 13:14; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:10). We humans have a sin nature that works in us to sin (Eccl. 7:20; Rom. 3:23) and feel broken (Rom. 7:24). Sadly, some Christians are arrogant and by their actions and unwillingness to change their behavior they openly state that the Bible is wrong and they are right. The wise Christian knows that they are a sinner and have a naturally selfish heart, and so they make a concerted effort to obey God, even when it goes against their natural inclinations.

**“new self.”** The phrase “new self,” which literally in the Greek is “new man” but which is generally translated “new self” in many modern versions, points to the total transformation of a person when they get born again. At that time the person gets a new divine nature through an act of creation (2 Pet. 1:4) and they literally become a totally new person, a “new self.” The “new self” here in Ephesians 4:24 is not the same as the “new self” in Ephesians 2:15, which is the “new man,” the Body of Christ, that is made from both Jews and Gentiles.

**“has been created.”** The gift of holy spirit is literally created by God inside the person at the time of their New Birth (see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:3 and 1:23).

**“in the likeness of God.”** The Greek uses the preposition *kata* (#2596 κατά), which here refers to a relationship of likeness or even “image.” Thus, BDAG says that *kata* is used “as a periphrasis to express equality, similarity, or example,”[[112]](#footnote-14983) and Thayer’s has “after the image of God.”[[113]](#footnote-27627) Many commentators agree and expound on the idea of the “new self” being created in the likeness or image of God.[[114]](#footnote-17021) Many versions agree, for example, the HCSB has “created according to God’s likeness”; the ESV has “created after the likeness of God”; and the NET has “created in God’s image.” The idea of nuancing *kata* as “image” in this verse comes from Colossians 3:10, which is very similar to Ephesians 4:24.

Our “new self” has indeed been created in the likeness of God. When a person gets born again, God creates in them His incorruptible seed (1 Pet. 1:23; 1 John 3:9), which is the gift of holy spirit. The holy spirit is the very nature of God, and it gives the believer a new divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). The gift of holy spirit is literally created in the person which is why Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10 say the “new self” has been created, and why 2 Corinthians 5:17 calls the Christian a “new creation.” The new spirit nature of the Christian battles with the old flesh nature of the Christian (Gal. 5:17).

[For more information on the New Birth, see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:3, “new birth.” For more on our new, divine nature, see commentary on 2 Pet. 1:4. For more on the holy spirit, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**“true righteousness and holiness.”** The literal Greek phrase is “in righteousness and holiness of truth,” with “of truth” being a genitive phrase at the end of the sentence. As B. Merkle points out, grammatically this genitive phrase can either be an attributive genitive or a genitive of origin (Merkle calls that a genitive of “source”).[[115]](#footnote-26383)

If the genitive is an attributive genitive, it can be translated either as “true righteousness and holiness” (cf. ESV, REV) or “righteousness and true holiness” (cf. GNV, KJV). Bullinger supports that understanding of the phrase and calls it the grammatical figure antimereia, where a noun is used adjectivally for emphasis.[[116]](#footnote-30852) However, if the genitive is understood to be a genitive of origin, then it would be translated something like “righteousness and holiness that comes from the truth” (cf. CJB, NET).

The evidence of scope and context supports the genitive being an attributive genitive. This is especially the case when we understand that the “new self” that is “created” relates to the gift of holy spirit created in the believer and the New Birth (and very few theologians understand holy spirit or the New Birth). The translation, “true righteousness and holiness,” is based upon the understanding that when a person gets “born again,” God literally creates in them the gift of holy spirit that carries His very nature. The “old self,” made in the likeness of Adam, was not created in true righteousness and holiness. Although people might attempt to be holy, no one can ever actually live a totally holy life. The “old self” is dead in trespasses and sins and doomed to die because the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). But at the New Birth, holy spirit is created inside the person, they come into union with Christ and are alive with him, and they get a new divine nature. Thus, the born-again Christian is truly a “new self” (i.e., new person) that has been created in the likeness of God. Thus, Christians are“holy,” not because of what they do, but because of who they are as God’s children with God’s holy nature inside.

Eph 4:25

**“falsehood.”** The Greek word *pseudos* (#5579 ψεῦδος) can mean a “lie” or “falsehood.” But in this broad context, “falsehood” is better because it includes much more. Whereas a lie is generally a purposeful misstatement of fact, “falsehood” refers not only to lies but to other types of fiction and falsehoods as well. For example, many “polite fictions” are not polite and not helpful. Many “falsehoods” are not criminal or intentionally sinful but are hurtful. For example, many people do not see themselves or others in a true light; they have false impressions. Christians should strive to put away falsehood, which is a lifelong endeavor.

**“we are members with one another.”** All Christians are “individually members with one another” in the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:5; Eph. 4:25).

Eph 4:26

**“Be angry.”** “Be angry and do not sin” is a quotation taken from the Septuagint text of Psalm 4:4, not from the Hebrew text. The Hebrew text reads, “Tremble, and do not sin.” Ephesians 4:26 is one of the places where we have to know the source of the quotation to really understand what the verse is saying. Without the remoter context of Psalm 4, it is hard to understand why Ephesians would say “Be angry and yet do not sin” right after saying we are to speak the truth because we are members of one another.

We get some help from the fact that Ephesians 4:25 starts a new section in Ephesians. Ephesians 4:17-24 is a section that speaks of the lifestyle of the Gentiles and how believers are to not participate in that kind of lifestyle but “put on the new self” (Eph. 4:24). Now, Ephesians 4:25-32 (some scholars say Eph. 4:25-5:2) contains specific exhortations about the believer’s walk, beginning with putting away falsehood and instead speaking the truth.

But why would the second exhortation in the section start with “Be angry”? It seems that perhaps it should say, “Don’t be angry,” and then go on to say, “but if you do get angry, do not sin.” We discover the reason in Psalm 4, in which the psalmist starts out angry and frustrated. People are perverting his stand for God and making it a thing of shame instead of a thing of honor. Furthermore, those people love what is worthless and chase after falsehoods (like the Gentiles in Ephesians 4:17-24). So the psalmist calls out to God in his distress, but he seems to get no relief from the provocations of the godless people. But in fairness to God, there is not much He could do for the psalmist. He cannot remove people’s free will and keep them from denigrating believers, sinning, and chasing vanities. So the psalmist is provoked in life, as are many of us.

But God does answer the psalmist, and His answer is comforting because He does not say to the psalmist—or to us—just be happy and calm in the midst of life’s injustice. Instead, He says it’s okay to be angry when people sin against you and live profligate lives. But it is not okay to let that anger become bitter and sinful, so instead of becoming bitter and defeated, “speak in your heart on your bed,” talk yourself through the situation, and “trust in Yahweh” (Ps. 4:4-5).

The situation in Psalm 4 is reflected in the vocabulary of Ephesians 4:26, because the words for “anger” and “angry mood” are different. “Be angry” is *orgizō* (#3710 ὀργίζω), while “angry mood” is *parorgismos* (#3950 παροργισμός). BDAG says that *parorgismos* is the “state of being intensely provoked,”[[117]](#footnote-22728) and William Hendriksen translates it “angry mood.”[[118]](#footnote-13432) So Ephesians 4:26 pulls meaning from Psalm 4 when it recognized that people get “angry” because they are provoked, but it directs us not to be provoked into an angry mood that goes on and on. The mature Christian learns how to let go of anger, forgive people, and let judgment belong to the Lord. The Law commanded people not to retain their anger (see commentary on Lev. 19:18).

Eph 4:27

**“an opportunity.”** The Greek word is *topos* (#5117 τόπος), and the most basic meaning of *topos* is a place, a space, room, any portion or space marked off or differentiated in some way from surrounding space. It has many nuances and occurs over 90 times in the New Testament. It was used for the “room” or “space” in the guest room of the house where Mary gave birth to Jesus (cf. commentary on Luke 2:7). The Jews used it idiomatically of the “space” occupied by their Temple (see commentaries on Matt. 24:15 and John 11:48). However, in this verse *topos* is being used metaphorically to indicate an “opportunity” or “occasion for acting.” The Devil wants to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10), but sometimes he cannot just move in and do that. He is patient, and will be content for a while if we will just give him a “space” in our lives, a place where he can sit and wait for us to make a mistake. Many people allow themselves to be in “dangerous positions,” where they are not in sin but could easily fall into sinful behavior. This gives the Devil a place or position to influence our lives. Then in the moment of weakness or inattention, the Devil can use the opportunity to act, and he surely will. This word *topos* warns us not to give the Devil any place or opportunity in our lives.

**“Devil.”** The Greek word is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος), which literally means “Slanderer,” but *diabolos* gets transliterated into English as our more familiar name, “Devil.” Slander is so central to who the Devil is and how he operates that one of his primary names is “the Slanderer.”

[For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

Eph 4:28

**“labor.”** The Greek verb is *kopiaō* (#2872 κοπιάω), and it refers to working to the point of being tired or weary. Peter O’Brien correctly notes: “The term for work found here denotes labour to the point of weariness.”[[119]](#footnote-13025) Life is difficult, and profitable labor often involves working until one is very tired, weary, or even exhausted. The world has set up life such that many unscrupulous people avoid that by taking advantage of the labor of others, but that is not God’s way and those people will suffer for their ungodliness on the Day of Judgment.

**“doing honest work.”** The Greek phrase (τὸ ἀγαθόν), often more literally translated as “the good” or “the good thing,” does not refer to making or working to make something good versus working to produce something bad, but rather refers to the kind of work, i.e., “good work” which is understood in this context to be “honest work” (HCSB, ESV, NAB; cf. NJB, NRSV).[[120]](#footnote-22172)

Eph 4:29

**“Do not let corrupting talk come out of your mouth.”** The verb translated by the words “let…come” is present tense, imperative mood, and ties this phrase into the phrase that begins Ephesians 4:30, “do not grieve,” which is also a present imperative. Eph. 4:29-32 are closely tied together, having a lot to do with communication. We are not to let any corrupting communication come from our mouths, as this would grieve God, the Holy Spirit. Instead, as Ephesians 4:31 and Colossians 3:8 say, we are to put away those things that are the source (root) of corrupt communication, bitterness, anger, rage, wrath, malice, etc. Our personal communication is of great concern to God. What comes out of our mouth often comes right from our heart (Matt. 12:34-37; Mark 7:14-23). God is very clear that we should watch what we say very carefully (Ps. 17:3; 39:1; Prov. 13:3; 21:23; Eccl. 5:2; Eph. 5:4; Col. 3:8). We are not to speak just to justify ourselves, but the standard we use is, “Does it benefit the hearer in some way?” What we say is to be helpful in building the other person up. There are many verses in the Bible, especially in Proverbs, about the power of words to hurt or heal (see commentary on Prov. 18:21).

**“corrupting.”** The Greek is *sapros* (#4550 σαπρός), and it means to be rotten or putrefied, like rotten fruit. In this context, it means “unwholesome to the extent of being harmful, bad, evil, unwholesome.”[[121]](#footnote-21934)

Eph 4:30

**“grieve.”** How do we grieve God’s holy spirit? We resist what God is trying to do in our lives via His gift of holy spirit. The context gives us some hints: we allow bitterness, anger, wrath to live in us (Eph. 4:32), and these produce the fruit of communication that corrupts (Eph. 4:29).

**“the holy spirit of God.”** The main question that needs answering is whether the Greek phrase *to pneuma to hagion* (“the holy spirit”) refers to the “Holy Spirit” (another name for God), or to the “holy spirit” (the gift of God).

If the “Holy Spirit” is being used as another name for God, then the genitive phrase “Holy Spirit of God” is a genitive of apposition, and the verse could be translated “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit, namely, God, by Whom you were sealed….” On the other hand, if the “holy spirit” referred to the gift of holy spirit, then the verse would read, “And do not grieve the holy spirit of God, with which you were sealed….”

The arguments for each reading boil down to this: If *pneuma hagion* refers to the gift of holy spirit, then the Greek grammar is common and the reading “the holy spirit of God” is common and supported by many such uses, but the word “grieve” is the figure of speech “personification.”

On the other hand, if *pneuma hagion* is being used as another name for God, then the Greek grammatical structure of the verse is very rare (only here in the entire Greek Bible composed of the Septuagint and the Greek New Testament), and the phrase “the Holy Spirit, namely, God” is also rare, occurring only here in the New Testament. But the word “grieved” would be literal; there would be no need for a figure of speech in the verse. On balance, it seems that the reading, “the holy spirit of God” is the more strongly supported reading.

The argument for the Greek *pneuma hagion* referring to the gift of God consists of a couple of points. One is that in almost every case in the Old Testament when the phrase “spirit of God” occurs, it refers to the gift of God. Although the Old Testament might treat the subject differently than the New Testament, we would need evidence there was a change, and that evidence does not seem to exist. Another argument that *pneuma hagion* refers to the gift of God is taken from Greek grammar. The Greek text reads ἐν ᾧ ἐσφραγίσθητε (*en hō esphragisthēte*), which seems as if it can be translated either as “by whom you were sealed” or “with which you were sealed.” However, if it is translated “by whom,” then the phrase becomes a dative of agency. God is the agent, “by whom” Christians are sealed. While that is grammatically possible, it is not the way the Greeks normally expressed themselves.

Daniel Wallace speaks of agency in the New Testament. He writes: “there are two common ways to express agency in the NT: ὑπὸ [*hupo*] + the genitive is used for the *ultimate* agent; διὰ [*dia*] + the genitive is used for the *intermediate* agent.”[[122]](#footnote-25111) An example of *dia* with the genitive being used to express the holy spirit as an agent is Acts 4:25. When it comes to using the Greek preposition *en* to express agency, Wallace has no examples, and goes so far as to say, “Some have suggested… ἐν + the dative can express personal agency, in the NT. However…this will be seen to be a rare if nonexistent category.”[[123]](#footnote-32111) So, to assert that *pneuma hagion* in Ephesians 4:30 refers to God is to create a grammatical structure that does not exist anywhere else in the New Testament. Thus, the Greek grammar is a strong reason to say that *pneuma hagion* in Ephesians 4:30 is not referring to the Holy Spirit, i.e., God, “by whom” (the agent) you were sealed. Rather, it is saying “the holy spirit with which you were sealed,” which would be using *en* in the instrumental sense, and that is quite common in the New Testament.

Another argument in favor of holy spirit referring to the gift is then Ephesians 4:30 would be saying the same basic thing that Ephesians 1:13 is saying, which is that we are marked with a seal, which is holy spirit. If, on the other hand, Ephesians 4:30 refers to God the Holy Spirit, then Ephesians 1:13 and 4:30 are saying different things, which, while possible, seems unlikely.

The strongest argument against *pneuma hagion* referring to the gift of holy spirit in Ephesians 4:30 is the word “grieve.” This word seems to imply an active, conscious agent that can be affected by our actions. We understand that we could grieve God by our behavior, but can we grieve the gift of God? We can, but to most fully understand how, we need to understand that the gift of holy spirit which God put “upon” people in the Old Testament is different from the gift of holy spirit which is “born inside” Christians and becomes part of their nature (1 Pet. 1:23; 2 Pet. 1:4).

Since the gift of holy spirit born inside Christians is part of their very nature, it works to produce its characteristics in the Christian. In doing that, the New Testament uses vocabulary that ascribes volition and action to the gift of holy spirit. This is the figure of speech personification, in which an animal or thing takes on human characteristics. The figure personification is a very common one that we often use today. A good example in the Bible comes from Isaiah 55:12, which speaks of the trees “clapping their hands.” Also, wisdom is personified as a woman in Proverbs (cf. Prov. 8:1; 9:1). We are used to having “parts” of us referred to as if they were independent people inside us with their own emotions. For example, the heart is part of us and “speaks” to us (Ps. 27:8) or becomes grieved (Ps. 73:21). Our kidneys teach us (Ps. 16:7) and rejoice (Prov. 23:16). Our bowels become “troubled” at what is going on around us (Jer. 31:20; Lam. 1:20). So it is to be expected that the holy spirit, which is part of our nature and our very selves and is at work in us would be referred to as if it were a person.

For example, the apostles were comfortable speaking of the gift of holy spirit as if it were a person who witnessed the death and resurrection of Christ. When the apostles were on trial before the Jewish leaders, they spoke about Jesus and said, “And we are witnesses of these things, and so is the holy spirit that God has given…” (Acts 5:32). The apostles were using personification, but everyone understood what they were saying. In Galatians 5:17, the spirit is personified, and sets its desire against the flesh and opposes it. In 1 Thessalonians 1:6, the holy spirit gives us joy. In 2 Corinthians 13:14, the holy spirit engenders fellowship. In 2 Peter 1:21, the holy spirit is said to have moved, or “carried along” the prophets as they wrote Scripture. Furthermore, Jesus spoke of the new holy spirit at the Last Supper, and in John 14:26, he said that it would teach the apostles and also bring back to their memory what Jesus had said. All of these occurrences use the figure personification, but God works through the gift of holy spirit to do all those things, so it is natural to speak as if the holy spirit did them, and especially so in the biblical culture when the author/agent relationship was used much more often than it is today and was much better understood than it is now.

One more thing should be noted about the use of “holy spirit.” In our modern culture, we tend to naturally categorize things and want them cleanly separated and labeled. That was not so much the case in biblical times, something that can be easily seen just by examining the biblical vocabulary for various plants and animals. For example, when it comes to plants, we today identify and name every different kind of plant, whereas in the biblical culture, they did not do that, and lumped the plants of the field together and referred to them as “grass.” The same thing happened with animals. For example, we make a distinction between eagles, hawks, kites, falcons, etc. No such distinction was made in the biblical world.

In following our modern tendencies, we want the Bible to be “neat and tidy,” and use “God” when it refers to God and “holy spirit” when it refers to the gift. However, the people of the biblical culture were much more comfortable with the concept of author/agent than we are, and were not nearly as picky about separating categories. That explains why some verses say God gave us the holy spirit, and other verses say Jesus gave it to us. Jesus was working as God’s agent. It seems that something like that is at work in Ephesians 4:30. Anyone who understands the gift of holy spirit knows it ultimately comes from God, and if we resist what it is doing in us and the revelation we receive through it, we are in fact resisting God. But it should also be easy for us to see that if we were resisting God’s movement in us via holy spirit, someone might well say, “You are resisting the spirit!” Thus, we grieve God when we “grieve” His holy spirit.

We now must look at the translation, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit, God, by whom you were sealed.” The strongest point in favor of this translation is that it removes any problem with “grieve.” Many times, people do things that upset God, and so a command not to grieve God fits the rest of the Bible well. Also, theoretically, the Greek text can be understood as a dative of agency using *en*, even though there are no examples of it anywhere else that we are aware of. Ephesians does have some vocabulary that only occurs in Ephesians, so a lone occurrence of “the Holy Spirit, God” would not be impossible.

When all the evidence is weighed, it best supports that the proper translation of Ephesians 4:30 is, “And do not grieve the holy spirit of God, which is the seal with which you were marked,” but we cannot definitively close the door on the translation, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit, God, by whom you were sealed….” In the end, both translations are factual even if not grammatically supported: we were sealed by God, who is sometimes called “the Holy Spirit,” and we are sealed with God’s gift of holy spirit.

[For more about the gift of holy spirit changing after Pentecost, see commentary on John 7:39. For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.” For more information on the gift of holy spirit, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more information on the figure of speech “personification,” see commentary on Prov. 1:20.]

**“the seal with which you were marked.”** Once a person takes Jesus as Lord and gets born again, they are sealed with the holy spirit all the way until the Day of Redemption, which is the day they are fully redeemed from this life and are with Christ.

The word “until” in the phrase “until the day of redemption” is from the Greek preposition *eis*, which can mean “to,” “for,” or “until” but in this context, “until” is easier to understand. Although we are sealed with the gift of holy spirit “for” the day of redemption in the sense that we are God’s purchased possession (Eph. 1:14) and so we are sealed “for” God and because of His purposes, we are certainly also sealed “until” (or “to”) the day of redemption. Also, the REV has “the day of redemption.” Although the Greek text does not have the definite article “the,” it is not necessary for the Greek to have the definite article after a preposition, in this case, *eis*, and so the article “the” is supplied by context in almost every English version. The “day of redemption” is the day when Christians will fully experience their salvation and have new, everlasting bodies and never again experience weakness, sickness, or death.

[For more on Christian salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For more on being marked with the seal of God’s holy spirit, see commentary on Eph. 1:13. For more on the day of redemption, see commentary on Eph. 1:14. For more on the fact that a noun after a preposition can be definite even if there is no definite article “the” in the Greek text, see commentary on Matt. 1:18.]

Eph 4:31

**“Get rid of.”** In place of the aorist passive imperative, “be put away from you,” the imperative is being translated as an active voice to be more direct and assertive with Paul’s instruction for the Christian believer to remove from themselves these wicked behaviors (cf. CJB, NIV, NLT).

God has our best interests at heart in many different ways, and one of them is protecting our health. Bitterness, anger, and rage can damage us in many different ways. One of them is our physical health. Hristina Byrnes, health editor for the Epoch Times, writes: “In one study, when cardiac patients recalled past injustices, their arteries actually constricted. This could trigger complications like reduced blood flow, which in turn could lead to chest pain, irregular heart rhythm, and even a heart attack. As pioneering forgiveness researcher Robert Enright puts it, resentment is ‘an unhealthy guest in the human heart’ that just keeps hanging around. People prone to anger have a higher risk of heart disease. One study in the American College of Cardiology found that anger and hostility increase heart disease risk by 19 percent. Another study found that anger damages blood vessels.”[[124]](#footnote-15717)

**“slander.”** The Greek noun is *blasphēmia* (#988 βλασφημία, pronounced blas-fay-'me-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation.

[For more on *blasphēmia*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3.]

Eph 4:32

**“one another.”** The phrase “one another” occurs in the context of the Christian community, and while we are to be good to everyone, in the context of the New Testament Epistles, the commands toward “one another” are specifically to other Christians. Christians are to be “especially good to the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). It is very important for the richness of our lives together here on earth, for our personal growth here on earth, and for rewards in the next life, that each Christian needs to be “other-focused,” focused on others and how we can help them. The phrase “one another” occurs many times in the New Testament, stating and reinforcing that truth.

[For more on the “one another” commands, see commentary on Gal. 5:13, “one another.” For more on “love one another,” see commentary on John 13:34.]

**“tenderhearted.”** The Greek word is *eusplagchnos* (#2155 εὔσπλαγχνος) from the prefix “*eu*” meaning “good” (generally in the sense of “healthy” or “strong,” but here meaning more metaphorically, “morally good”) and *splagchnon* (#4698 σπλάγχνον), which is “bowels.” In the biblical world, the bowels were considered the seat and source of emotion, and in this context, “tenderhearted” is a good translation of *eusplagchnos.*

[For more on the bowels and emotion, see commentary on Phil. 1:8.]

**“God has forgiven you.”** The Greek adds a stylistic *kai* (and, also), which does not need to be translated.[[125]](#footnote-16577)

**“in *union with* Christ.”** The phrase “in Christ” means “in union with Christ” (see commentary on Eph. 1:3) or perhaps slightly differently here, “in connection with Christ.” On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), being “born again” of God’s spirit first became available, and Christians became part of the Body of Christ and identified with him (crucified with him, died with him, buried with him, and raised with him). Today, Christians are “in Christ” (“in union with Christ”) by virtue of being part of the Body of Christ, and it is important that we also are “in Christ,” that is, “in union with Christ,” because we obey him and lead godly lives. When we read a phrase such as “in Christ” or “in him,” we must pay careful attention to the context to see if it refers to our spiritual union due to being part of the Body of Christ, or whether it refers to our being in union with Christ because of our obedience and godliness, or if both meanings apply in that given context. A lot of the blessings that Christians enjoy today are due to the fact that we are in union with Jesus Christ.

[For more on being in union with Christ, see commentary on Eph. 1:3. For more information on the Christian’s identification with Christ, see commentary on Rom. 6:5.]

The phrase modifies “you,” not “God.” Lenski correctly states: “The phrase does not modify ‘God.’”[[126]](#footnote-16166)

God is not “in Christ,” we are. It is by virtue of being in union with Christ that we are forgiven. The wages of sin is death, and we died “in Christ” (Rom. 6:8). If we were going to expand the verse, we could say: “and be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also forgave you, because you are in union with Christ.”

**Ephesians Chapter 5**

Eph 5:1

**“as beloved children.”** Christians—those who have accepted Christ as Lord—are beloved children, and so Ephesians 5:1 is admonishing Christians to live that way. The NLT translation expands the verse but gets the sense well: “Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children.” It is important to note that this verse does not say that one has to imitate God to be His child, that is, be born again and be saved, but rather that being a child of God, indeed, a beloved child of God, one should now live in a way that imitates God in holiness and righteousness.

Eph 5:2

**“gave himself up for us.”** Much more strongly supported than “gave himself up for you.”[[127]](#footnote-12378) “Love is best gauged by sacrifice.”[[128]](#footnote-17233)

**“sweet-smelling fragrance.”** This phrase is literally a genitive, “fragrance of a sweet smell,” but this may be an instance of an adjectival genitive, see Lenski.[[129]](#footnote-22954) The OT sacrifices were a pleasing aroma to Yahweh because they covered the sins of the people (cf. Lev. 1:9, 13, 17, etc.).

Eph 5:3

**“impurity.”** See commentary on Ephesians 4:19.

**“or greed.”** The disjunctive “or” separates the list into sins of the flesh such, as sexual immorality and impurity, and then sins of the mind and attitude, such as greed.

**“named among you.”** The exact point that the text is making by the word “named” is unclear, as we can see from the differing English versions, but what is clear is that there are various reasons why such sins might be “named” among the Christian congregations, and the people must work to keep themselves holy in the sight of God so sins are not “named.” Sins of the flesh and mind must not occur among the congregation—they are “utterly inappropriate” and must not be “heard of” (CJB, HCSB, NIV). Also, they must not be “mentioned,” or be the subject of social conversation (NAB, NJB, NRSV). In other words, both sinning and idly talking about the sin are unacceptable.

Eph 5:4

**“obscenity.”** The Greek word translated “obscenity” is *aischrotēs* (#151 αἰσχρότης), and it refers to behavior that goes against moral or social standards. In this case, God is setting the standard, so *aischrotēs* refers to behavior that defies or ignores God’s standards of godly behavior. The three terms in Ephesians 5:4, obscenity (#151 *aischrotēs*), foolish talking (#3473 *mōrologia*), and crude joking (#2160 *eutrapelia*) are individually important in their meaning, but combined, they show us that the emphasis in this verse is verbal behavior that disregards God’s standards. Thus, “obscenity” is a good translation of *aischrotēs* in this verse and appears in many versions and commentaries.[[130]](#footnote-24420)

The Greek word *aischrotēs* itself allows for the wider meaning of “indecent behavior,” and Christians should always avoid such behavior, but in this verse, the emphasis is on verbal behavior. In fact, the three terms, “obscenity,” “foolish talking,” and “crude joking” show that the emphasis of the verse is obscene talk, but especially talk that has some kind of sexual or bodily connotation.

Most Christians do not recognize that the obscene language people have used throughout the centuries has been very similar, and includes references to sex acts and sex organs, bodily waste and noises, and body parts that modest people don’t refer to, as well as a wide range of slang and idiomatic expressions that refer to those things. We all know the words, and we hear them almost every day on the street, so there is no need to specifically list any of them here as examples.

Christians should not be deceived into thinking that every language and culture has its own set of “swear words” that are unique. Whether a person speaks modern English or French, or ancient Latin or Greek, the obscene expressions are basically the same.[[131]](#footnote-18260) Furthermore, the same thing is true for vulgar stories and jokes. Both the literature of the ancient world and archaeological excavations reveal that people told the same kind of “dirty jokes” 2,000 years ago that you might hear in a low-class bar on a Saturday night. Because the Greeks and Romans used the same kind of obscene vocabulary that people use today, it makes sense that Paul’s 2,000-year-old admonition to the believers of Ephesus to watch their language is mirrored by modern pastors, who admonish their congregations to use godly language.

The reason that obscene words and expressions are basically the same through the ages and around the world is that they come from the same source: the Devil and his demons. The Devil is the great adversary to God and the great rebel against Him. It is the Devil who takes what God has made holy and good—the human body and our sexuality—and turns it into something crass and unholy. The Devil pushes his hatred for God into society through the people he can easily influence or control, who then fill the air with their obscenities and rebellion against God. Then the average fallen human picks up what is spoken around him and repeats it. It makes sense that obscene words are considered “vulgar,” from the Latin *vulgaris*, “the common people.” Historically, it was the lower class, “common” people who had little education, lived in mostly miserable conditions, and had no spiritual awareness or defenses, who picked up on the obscenities and repeated them over and over. Eventually, “vulgar” came to mean offensive, coarse, indecent, and uncultured, and today, “vulgar language” is almost exclusively thought of as obscene language.

One interesting piece of evidence that the Devil is behind the obscene language spoken through the ages and around the world is that there is only one proper name that has been known to be widely used as a cuss word: “Jesus Christ.” The ancient Romans did not use the name of any Caesar as a swear word, Buddhists don’t swear using the name of Buddha, and Muslims don’t swear using the name of Mohammad. But people of many cultures and languages swear using the name of Jesus Christ. The Devil hates Jesus, so he works hard to introduce his name into society as a cuss word. You can travel around the world today and hear “Jesus Christ” or some variation of it being used as a swear word in many different countries, but Christians should have no part of that.

As well as not using the name of Jesus as a cuss word, we should also keep in mind that using God’s name as a cuss word is strictly forbidden by the Third Commandment: “You must not misuse the name of Yahweh your God, for Yahweh will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name” (Exod. 20:7). God’s name is holy, and we should treat it as such.

Because of the sin nature that lives in each human, it can be hard even for Christians not to repeat the obscenities that we hear daily in the world around us. The obscene sexual and bodily vocabulary seems to fittingly express how many people feel about life. God says that we are to be loving, kind, giving, forgiving, gentle, and speak words that build each other up, but that takes a lot of heart work and self-control. It is much easier and more “natural” to be angry and harbor resentment and frustration and then express those feelings in angry, obscene outbursts. This has always been true. Almost 3,000 years ago, the book of Proverbs expressed it well: “A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control” (Prov. 29:11 NIV84).

Christians should not be fools. We need to recognize that the Devil is the ultimate source of the ungodly language that attacks God’s wondrously created human body and the sexual acts that give pleasure and build the human family. We need to recognize the rebellion and sin that we are participating in when we use obscenity and tell crass jokes, and that in acting like that, we are aligning ourselves with God’s archenemy. Actually, the Devil has managed to trick a huge percentage of the population into believing that being able to freely use obscenity and shocking language is somehow manly, tough, strong, and a sign of great self-confidence. Exactly the opposite is true. It is never a sign of strength to indulge in sinful words and actions, and it takes no strength at all—just a selfish and uncaring attitude—to give free vent to your anger. On the other hand, it takes immense strength, humility, vision, and persistence to battle the sin nature and purify your heart from anger and selfishness.

Christians need to keep doing the heart work that is required to truly be loving, giving, kind, and focused on others (Phil. 2:4). We don’t want to just “try to keep our mouth shut” no matter how we feel; instead, we want to cleanse our heart of the ungodly anger and selfishness that are the source of ungodly outbursts and expressions (Mark 7:20-23). Jesus Christ did not use obscenity and ungodly language in spite of all the horrible and unjust ways he was treated, and we don’t have to use ungodly language either. Our goal is to have “love that comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere trust” (1 Tim. 1:5). That is what takes genuine strength and pleases God.

How believers express themselves is very important to God, and shows genuine allegiance to Him, so He says a lot about it. For example, what we say is supposed to be true and spoken in love (Eph. 4:15), and it is supposed to build others up, not hurt them in any way (Eph. 4:29). Many verses refer to the way a godly person should talk (cf. Ps. 34:13; Prov. 8:13; 10:32; 11:12; 12:18; 15:28; Eccl. 10:12; Matt. 12:34-37; Rom. 12:14; Eph. 4:25; Col. 4:6; James 1:26; 1 Pet. 3:9).

[For added information on not taking God’s name in vain, see commentary on Exod. 20:7.]

Eph 5:5

**“no person who is sexually immoral, impure, or greedy (who is an idolater).”** Ephesians 5:5 is about people who abandon their belief in Christ and return to a lifestyle of immorality and ungodliness, and thus will not have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. In writing to the Ephesians, Paul is writing to people who used to live ungodly lives without Christ (“at one time you were darkness”), but now they are light (Eph. 5:8). Here in Ephesians 5, Paul warns the believers not to be sucked back in to that ungodly lifestyle. He writes “do not let anyone deceive you...do not participate with them...do not participate in the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph. 5:6, 7, 11). Paul warns the believers, saying that no person who is involved in that godless lifestyle “has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.” The meaning of not having an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God (Eph. 5:5) is equivalent to not inheriting the kingdom (1 Cor. 6:9 and Gal. 5:21; see commentary on Gal. 5:21), and means the person who abandons and rejects Christ and returns to their former lifestyle forfeits their salvation.

We must be careful to understand the relationship between sin, the ungodly lifestyle, and abandoning Christ to the extent that one forfeits their everlasting life. Everyone sins, and some people sin egregiously, but sin does not cause a person to forfeit their salvation. However, if a person ignores the commands of God and defies Him and lives an ungodly lifestyle, they are in danger of having their heart so hardened by sin that they go so far as to renounce their trust and belief in Christ, and at that point, they forfeit their everlasting life. A person gets born again by trusting Christ (Rom. 10:9), and they maintain their salvation by trusting in Christ (1 Pet. 1:5).

“**greedy (who is an idolater).”** The phrase “who is an idolater” refers back to “greedy” both here and in Colossians 3:5. People who are greedy in their thoughts and actions in fact make an idol of what they are greedy for. Harold Hoehner writes, “the relative pronoun refers the reader back to the greedy person, and not to all three of the preceding persons; the singular points to this. This is substantiated in Colossians 3:5, where the relative pronoun (ἥτις) refers only to greed, and not to the preceding vices. To covet is idolatry.”[[132]](#footnote-14277) C. Leslie Mitton adds to that and writes, “Covetousness, whether just greed for money and possessions, or, more widely, as ruthless greed to get whatever one wants without regard for other people’s rights or feelings, can come to dominate a man’s life to the exclusion of all other considerations. It becomes his god, as we say.”[[133]](#footnote-12989)

We can see that Ephesians 5:5 is speaking of the same things as Galatians 5:19-21 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 by simply reading the list of sins in those verses and comparing them—although the list in Ephesians 5:5 is much shorter than at the lists in Galatians and Corinthians (a reason for that might be that Ephesians was written significantly later than Galatians and Corinthians, and therefore the longer, more explicit list might not have been necessary). There is danger in living in sin, and the Bible warns about it. There is the loss of rewards for people whose works are burned up on the Day of Judgment (1 Cor. 3:11-15), but there is the greater loss for people who get so sucked into a sinful lifestyle that they renounce Christ. They can end up forfeiting their salvation and their final end will be worse than if they had never heard and given their life to Christ to begin with (2 Pet. 2:20). It is continued trust in Christ that guards Christian salvation (1 Pet. 1:3-5; and see commentary on 1 Peter 1:5).

**“no person who is sexually immoral...has an inheritance in the kingdom.”** The Greek word translated “inheritance” is *klēronomia* (#2817 κληρονομία), and it is a noun that refers to an inheritance; property that will be received by inheritance; or it can refer to property that is given by one person to another. Ephesians 5:5 uses the phrase, “has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.” From many other verses in the New Testament we can see that having an inheritance in the Kingdom (or “inheriting the Kingdom”) refers to being saved and being in the Kingdom by virtue of having everlasting life (see commentary on Gal. 5:21). Other verses that refer to “an inheritance” include Acts 20:32; 26:18, and 1 Peter 1:4.

Here in Ephesians, Paul sternly warns believers not to abandon Christ and return to living like the unbelievers do. Everyone sins, but that is not what Ephesians 5 is speaking about. It is important to understand this because many people are frightened that they will not be saved because of some sin or sins in their life. But Ephesians 5:5; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, and Galatians 5:19-21 are speaking about people who ignore the fact that they confessed Christ as their Lord and have forsaken him and returned to the pleasures of the flesh. Peter T. O’Brien describes such people: “Those who have given themselves over to immorality, impurity, and greed, even if they call themselves Christian, show that they are excluded from eternal life. The apostle is not asserting that the believer who ever falls into these sins is automatically excluded from God's kingdom. Rather, what is envisaged here is the person who has given himself or herself up without shame or repentance to this way of life.”[[134]](#footnote-23600) Most Christians who sin, even willfully, do so in a way that they feel ashamed of or guilty about it, and they hold fast to their hope and belief that Christ will save them in spite of their sin. Doing that, they are like Paul, who does not do what he wants to do but does what he does not want to do (Rom. 7:14-15), and considers himself to be a “wretched man” (Rom. 7:24) and the worst of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). Although Paul would not dare trust in himself to be saved, he trusted in Christ and because of that he knew his salvation was secure (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

[For more on not having an inheritance in the Kingdom, i.e., not receiving everlasting life, see commentary on Gal. 5:21, “those who practice such things” and “will not inherit the Kingdom of God.” For more on Christian salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For more on salvation vs. rewards, and rewards in the Kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

Eph 5:6

**“Do not let anyone deceive you with empty words.”** Believers are to be so familiar with the Bible that they are not deceived by “empty words,” that is, words that are not true. While it is certainly true that we are not to let people deceive us, the context and the scope of Scripture also tell us to help others to not be deceived (see commentary on Eph. 5:11).

[For more on “empty,” see Word Study: “Fool.”]

**“the wrath of God is coming upon those who are disobedient.”** People who do not obey God are “disobedient” and will suffer the wrath of God. Like many verses in the Bible, Ephesians 5:6 is written with the understanding that there is one God who the Bible reveals in some detail, and that God created humankind (Gen. 1:27) and made the rules for humankind to follow. People who ignore or defy God are “disobedient” and will suffer for it.

Eph 5:7

**“Therefore.”** This “therefore” starts a new section and connects the previous section with what comes now. The wrath of God is coming on people who are disobedient, so “therefore” do not take part with them in what they do.

Eph 5:8

**“you were darkness.”** That an unbeliever or disobedient believer is “darkness” means that he or she is ungodly in their lifestyle and thus aligned with the Devil and his dark agenda.

**“darkness...light.”** These words are idioms for what is wrong or ungodly, and what is right and godly. See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:5, which uses the same kind of idiomatic vocabulary.

**“in *union with* the Lord.”** On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), being “born again” of God’s spirit first became available, and Christians became part of the Body of Christ and identified with him (crucified with him, died with him, buried with him, and raised with him). Today, Christians are “in Christ” (“in union with Christ”) by virtue of being part of the Body of Christ, and it is important that we also are “in Christ,” that is, “in union with Christ” because we obey him and lead godly lives. When we read a phrase such as “in Christ” or “in him,” we must pay careful attention to the context to see if it refers to our spiritual union due to being part of the Body of Christ, or whether it refers to our being in union with Christ because of our obedience and godliness, or if both meanings apply in that given context. A lot of the blessings that Christians enjoy today are due to the fact that we are in union with Jesus Christ.

[For more on being in union with Christ, see commentary on Eph. 1:3. For more information on the Christian’s identification with Christ, see commentary on Rom. 6:5.]

Eph 5:9

**“the fruit of the light.”** Jesus said that we could tell whether people were good or evil by looking at their fruit (Matt. 7:16, 20). Here, the fruit of the light (i.e., being godly and aligned with God) is everything that is good, right, and true. Furthermore, to understand what things are good, right, and true, we must know the Bible.

Eph 5:10

**“discerning what is pleasing to the Lord.”** If we are going to discern what is pleasing to God and Christ, we have to know the Bible. We are fallen people, stained with a sin nature. The Bible says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and is incurable” (Jer. 17:9). So some of what we think is “right” is not right in the eyes of God. We have to educate our heart and our conscience by knowing Scripture, which is the “word” of God, and thus the thoughts of God.

Eph 5:11

**“but instead expose them.”** Exposing darkness and standing against error and evil is often a thankless task. The prophets of old usually suffered for their stand on truth, as is apparent in the Old Testament (cf. Heb. 11:35-38). Christ, though innocent, suffered horribly. Stephen was stoned to death (Acts 7:57-60); Paul spent years in prison; and the list goes on and on. But if Christians are going to follow Christ and be the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13-16), then we have to be prepared to suffer and sacrifice if others are going to come to the truth and be saved and get rewards.

Eph 5:12

**“it is shameful to even speak of the things.”** To reach the ungodly, believers must often encounter things that are sinful, distasteful, shameful. But that is the world of the unsaved. Jesus ate and drank with sinners, and no doubt saw and heard things that were very ungodly. But as he said, “Those who are well do not need a physician, but those who are sick *do*” (Matt. 9:12; cf. Mark 2:17, Luke 5:31). Believers should not be shocked by sin; we are called to rescue those who are caught up in sin.

Eph 5:13

**“For what makes everything visible is light.”** Jesus is the light of the world (John 9:5), and the light of Jesus Christ—his knowledge, truth, and love—shines on people and reveals their sin (Eph. 5:14). Also, Christians are to be lights in the world (Matt. 5:14), so we are to shine our light so people can see their sin and escape it (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

Eph 5:14

**“and Christ will shine on you.”** Since “what makes everything visible is light” (Eph. 5:13), when Christ—the light of the world—shines on us, he makes visible all the dark areas of our life. This allows us to see our dark areas just as God sees them so we can do something about them. We can correct our ungodly thoughts and behavior, and live truly godly lives.

Eph 5:15

**“unwise.”** See Word Study: “Fool.”

Eph 5:16

**“making the best use of.”** The Greek is *exagorazō* (#1805 ἐξαγοράζω), and it means,

1. to redeem by payment of a price, to recover from the power of another, to ransom, buy off;
2. metaphorically, of Christ freeing the elect from the dominion of the Mosaic Law at the price of his vicarious death
3. to buy up, to buy up for one’s self, for one’s use
4. to make wise and sacred use of every opportunity for doing good.

Definition 4 fits here, and the concept is that God asks us to “buy back” the time we have from day to day and use it for His purposes.

**“*your* time.”** The Greek word translated “time” is *kairos* (#2540 καιρός), which generally refers to a portion of time, a fixed or definite time, an opportune time (the “right time”). It is in contrast to *chronos* (χρόνος), which refers to the passage of time and from which we get the English word “chronology.”

To make the best use of the “time,” or perhaps more literally, “buy up the time,” is to take advantage of the opportunities we have. This is expressed as “making the most of every opportunity” in the NIV. Living a wise life certainly involves making good use of one’s time, but it also involves recognizing when an opportunity presents itself and taking full advantage of that opportunity. The context here is more about time, “the days are evil,” which is why “best use of the time” is used here in Ephesians. The context of Colossians 4:5 is dealing with unbelievers, so the same phrase carries the sense of the “opportunity” of time that each person has.

Eph 5:17

**“senseless.”** See Word Study: “Fool.”

Eph 5:18

**“drunk.”** The Greek word translated “drunk” is *methuskō* (#3182 μεθύσκω ), and it refers to being drunk, intoxicated, impaired. Although Ephesians 5:18 specifically speaks of being drunk on “wine,” the word “wine” is being used by the figure of speech synecdoche (of the species)[[135]](#footnote-19343) for all kinds of intoxicating things. It is not necessary that God write a whole list of substances that can make a person intoxicated for us to get the point that God commands us not to become drunk or intoxicated at all. We can learn from the scope of Scripture that God forbids being drunk at all, be it on whiskey, wine, rum, gin, beer, or whatever. It is not the drink or drug that God wants to forbid, it is the effect in the mind that alters people’s thinking. When God says not to get drunk, He is not just forbidding what we refer to as being “drunk” on alcohol, rather He is commanding people not to do things that mentally affect them in such a way that they are not available to serve Him fully and to be good examples to the world.

The word “drunk” refers to the mental state of being drunk, intoxicated, or mentally impaired. For example, both the Greek word *methuskō* and our English word “drunk” refer to being mentally impaired by things other than alcohol; for example, both we and the Greeks have spoken of people being “drunk with power.”

There are many times that, for medicinal purposes, people take drugs that alter their mind. The reason doing that is acceptable with God is that the drug, while altering the mind, allows the person to function and serve God better in other ways. For example, if great pain is keeping a person from serving God, God would rather have the person be able to serve Him, even if the person is a little unclear in his thinking.

However, to get drunk or “high” for pleasure is wrong, and it is wrong for a number of reasons. One is that it makes the person less mentally sharp for God. God expects us to be ministers for Him, and we are not generally mentally sharp or in prayer when we are drunk or “high.” Another reason getting drunk or “high” is wrong is that it can open up the mind to demons. Apparitions are quite common to people who get “high,” and in fact, a study of anthropology shows that in many cultures, the reason people got high was to have a “spiritual experience.” Many times if you open yourself up to a demon by your use of alcohol or drugs, it does not go away when you become sober. Another reason not to get high is that, at least right now, it promotes an industry that is very harmful to society. Much innocent blood has been shed over control and concealment of drugs that people consume illegally for pleasure. Buying the product is a contribution to the sins of the industry.

[For more on being drunk or “high,” see commentary on Gal. 5:21, “drunkenness.”]

**“reckless actions.”** See commentary on Titus 1:6, “reckless actions.”

**“be filled with the spirit.”** When a person gets born again, they receive the gift of holy spirit (Acts 2:8), which is created in them (2 Cor. 5:17) and becomes part of their nature (2 Pet. 1:4). But the New Birth and the indwelling of holy spirit as the gift of God is not what this verse is speaking about.

Also, although the word “spirit” can refer to a person’s attitudes and emotions, this verse is not referring to being filled with a spiritual attitude or emotion (although those things are wonderful). To be “filled” with the spirit in Ephesians 5:18 is to be living in the full expression of the gift of holy spirit, such as the people of Corinth were doing when they were zealous for the power of holy spirit and Paul exhorted them to strive to abound in it and to edify the church (1 Cor. 14:12).

Many people get drunk to “have fun” or to escape a life that is boring or somehow dissatisfying. God’s exhortation is not to get drunk and escape life, but rather engage life in a full and powerful way by walking out in the power of the gift of holy spirit.

[For more on Holy Spirit and holy spirit, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

Eph 5:19

**“singing and making music with your heart to the Lord.”** Believers are to honor both God and Christ in many ways, and singing to them out of the joy and thanksgiving of our hearts is one of those ways. Jesus told us that we were to honor him just as we honor the Father (John 5:23), and one way to honor Christ is to sing to him, and we should sing many different genres of music, including “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.”

We can tell that the word “Lord” in this verse refers to Jesus by reading the end of the sentence, which is in the next verse (Eph. 5:20), because it makes a distinction between God, “the Father” and “our Lord Jesus Christ,” clearly referring to the Father as “God” and Jesus as “Lord.” We again see believers singing to Jesus in Revelation 5:9. It is also possible that the “speaking” praises in Revelation 5:12-13 is actually singing, as per the NET and NRSV, because much early music was more “spoken” than “sung,” but there is no way to confirm that.

There is also evidence from the early Church that Christians honored Jesus with songs and praise. About AD 112, the Roman Pliny wrote to the Emperor Trajan regarding Christians, and said, “…it was their habit on a fixed day to assemble before the daylight and sing antiphonally a hymn to Christ as [to] a god.”[[136]](#footnote-15898) Similarly, Ignatius the Bishop of Antioch (born between AD 35-50, and died between AD 98-117), speaks of Christians singing in praise of Jesus Christ.[[137]](#footnote-13920) Singing to Christ also fits the tenor of Hebrews 1:6, which says that when the Son came into the world, God said, “And let all the angels of God worship Him” (Heb. 1:6 NASB). Hebrews 1:4-7 is about angels, but it does not seem logical that God would tell the angels to worship the Son but forbid humans from doing so. In fact, it seems that if God wanted angels to worship the Son, then He would want humans to worship him too, and singing to him would certainly be part of that.

[For more on our relationship with Jesus and praying to him, see Appendix 13: “Can We Pray to Jesus?”]

Eph 5:20

**“in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** This phrase means, in essence, “by the authority of Jesus Christ.” It is a cultural phrase that refers to the authority a person has due to their relationship with the one being named, who, in this case, is Jesus Christ. In Christian culture, “the name of Jesus Christ” gave the user authority, just as using the name of any other ruler or great person would give the one who used it authority.

[For more on the name of Jesus Christ, see commentary on Acts 3:6.]

Eph 5:21

**“submiting yourselves.”** As to the word “submit,” *hupotassō* (#5293 ὑποτάσσω), Robertson says, “The construction here is rather loose, coordinate with the preceding participles of praise and prayer. It is possible to start a new paragraph here and regard *hupotassomenoi* as an independent participle like an imperative.”[[138]](#footnote-10329) We agree with Robertson and see “submit” as starting a new subject and being a command of God. Ephesians 5:21 sets the tone for the entire section by saying that Christians are to submit to each other—something that gets mostly ignored or overlooked in most discussions on submission. For example, although much has been made of Eph. 5:22, that wives should submit to their husbands, simply reading the text shows that we Christians are to submit to one another (in fact, the word “submit” does not even appear in verse 22, even though most English versions include it in the verse for clarity of reading; the verb is supplied from the previous verse).

If we are to submit to one another, then we have to ask, how is that to be done correctly? The answer to that question is to determine the spheres of authority that we each have and submit according to that authority structure. A common mistake is to see submission in a completely vertical paradigm, where one person, the “leader,” has everyone submit to him in everything, and that structure is followed from the top down, until the lowest person in rank, so to speak, the “low man on the totem pole,” has no one submit to him in anything. The proper way to see submission is like circles of authority in which leadership is “by area” or “by category,” and a person who submits in one area will have authority in another.

A pastor in a church will have authority under his roof in certain areas, but if he visits another church, he will be under the authority of that pastor. If he visits the home of members of the church, they will have authority in their own homes. Also, if the church has a finance committee, he will be under the authority of that committee when it comes to spending money.

**“one another.”** The phrase “one another” occurs in the context of the Christian community, and while we are to be good to everyone, in the context of the New Testament Epistles, the commands toward “one another” are specifically to other Christians. Christians are to be “especially good to the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). It is very important for the richness of our lives together here on earth, for our personal growth here on earth, and for rewards in the next life, that each Christian needs to be “other-focused,” focused on others and how we can help them. The phrase “one another” occurs many times in the New Testament, stating and reinforcing that truth.

[For more on the “one another” commands, see commentary on Gal. 5:13, “one another.” For more on “love one another,” see commentary on John 13:34.]

**“in the fear of Christ.”** This phrase is vital when it comes to submitting to one another, both for the person in charge and for the person who is submitting. Every Christian will stand exposed one day before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), and the way we have treated our fellow humans will be a major point of that judgment. After all, the second greatest commandment is “love your neighbor as yourself.” It is foolish not to have a healthy fear of fire or electricity, and similarly, it is foolish not to have a healthy fear of Judgment Day. The Bible says we are to submit to one another “in the fear of Christ,” and having a healthy fear of Christ that leads to humility and obedience is wise indeed.

Submitting in the fear of Christ is vital for both parties involved in submission. The person in charge must ask, “Am I leading like Christ would?” In other words, the “boss” in the situation must not be overbearing, make unreasonable demands or have unreasonable expectations, or feel they have the right to belittle, berate, or harshly reprove someone who does not meet expectations. Mercy trumps judgment, as Scripture says.

Similarly, the one who is submitting must do so in the fear of Christ. Getting things done on earth means that sometimes we have to do things we do not like or want to do. We certainly see that in the life of Christ. No sooner had he been baptized when the spirit “drove” him into the wilderness (Mark 1:12) where he was in the heat of the day, the cold of the night, fasted, and was tempted in all kinds of ways for 40 days. It was not fun but it was necessary, and Christ uttered not a word of complaint about that or any of the other hardships of his life, including accepting the “cup” of his torture and death from his heavenly father. Anyone who submits eventually ends up submitting to something they do not like, but we should submit like Christ and not be murmurers and complainers.

Eph 5:22

**“Wives *are to submit* to their own husbands as to the Lord.”** To properly understand this verse, we must pay attention to the fact that it is the last half of the sentence that started in Eph. 5:21. Although most versions translate it as a new sentence for clarity of reading in English, even the modern Greek text is punctuated such that it is the last part of verse 21. That is why the word “submit” is missing from the Greek text in Eph. 5:22—because it is in the first part of the sentence, which is in verse 21. Most English versions have to add “submit” in verse 22 because they have made verse 22 into a new sentence. If we read a proper translation, however, we see that the sentence reads, “Submit yourselves one to another in *the* fear of Christ; wives to their own husbands, as to the Lord....” When we read the verse that way, we can see that wives submitting to their husbands as they would to the Lord is just one example of the mutual submission being referred to in verse 21.

Two points need to be made about the submission of the wife. One is that since the wife submits as she would to the Lord, we can see the subject of the verse is submission to godly and loving requests. The wife submits to the husband as she would submit to the Lord Jesus, not as if she were being told to submit to the Devil and ungodly requests. The submission of the wife is not “absolute submission,” but “proper submission.” The second point that needs to be made is that just because this verse points out that wives are to submit to their husbands does not mean that there are no areas where the husband submits to the wife. Again, we must keep in mind that the sentence started with us submitting one to another. 1 Timothy 5:14 says the women are to “manage the household,” and the single Greek word that is translated into that phrase is *oikodespoteō* (#3616 οἰκοδεσποτέω), a compound word built from *oikos*, house, and *despotēs*, a ruler or master (in Scripture, home owners, slave owners, and Jesus Christ are referred to as *despotēs*). Thus, in many household affairs, the Lord has given the woman primary responsibility, and the husband should submit to her in those areas. For more on submission, see commentary on Colossians 3:18.

Eph 5:24

**“their husbands.”** The Greek text reads “the husbands,” which in this context means “their own husbands.” But bringing the Greek literally into English, in this case, might cause some confusion, as if wives were to submit to “the” husbands, meaning any husband.

Eph 5:25

**“your wives.”** The Greek text reads “the wives,” which in this context means their own wives. But bringing the Greek literally into English, in this case, might cause some confusion, as if husbands were to love every wife.

**“her.”** The pronoun is feminine, and the comparison is between a husband and wife, with Christ as the husband and the Church as the wife. Just as Christ moved first to love the believers, in a marriage, the husband is to be the one who moves first to love his wife, and the godly wife responds by respecting her husband (Eph. 5:33).

Eph 5:26

**“make her holy.”** Christ is the husband and the Church is his wife and thus called “her.” The book of Revelation further clarifies that every saved person is part of the collective known as “the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:9; also see Appendix 12: “The Bride of Christ”). Both the verb [“make holy”] and the participle [“having cleansed”] are in the aorist tense, indicating a one-time action. R. C. H. Lenski writes: “When such a participle follows hard upon such a verb, the two are generally simultaneous as to time…In this case, the act of sanctifying and the act of cleansing are synonymous, the one is positive: to separate unto God, the other is negative: to remove sin and guilt.”[[139]](#footnote-22686) When a person confesses and believes that Christ is the risen Lord, at that instant they are saved, born again, and at that instant, they are both made holy and cleansed from their sin, and thus receive the promise of everlasting life.

The verse states that the making holy and the cleansing from sin are actions done by the Lord, not by the believer. When a person gets saved, it is the Lord who makes them holy in his sight and it is the Lord who cleanses the believer from sin. The believer commits themselves to Jesus as their risen Lord, and Jesus makes the believer holy and cleanses them. That the believer is cleansed from their sins is mentioned in Acts 3:19; Hebrews 1:3; and 2 Peter 1:9.

[For more on a person becoming holy, and thus “a holy one” the moment they are born again, see commentary on Phil. 1:1.]

**“washing *her* with water.”** The Greek noun “washing” is *loutron* (#3067 λουτρόν), and it only occurs twice in the New Testament, here in Ephesians 5:26 and in Titus 3:5. In this context, it refers to bathing or taking a bath, which is why some English versions say “bath” or “bathing” instead of “washing” (cf. CEB, NAB, Rotherham, YLT). The more common use of *loutron* in Greek literature was to refer to the place where a bath is taken, but here and in Titus, *loutron* refers to the bath itself. Some commentators have tried to make *loutron* refer to immersion in water, but that is forcing too much meaning into the word. One does not need to immerse oneself to bathe, and besides that, there is good evidence that at least some, if not most, Christian baptism was done by pouring water on the person, not immersing them. This was the way that Christians are “baptized” in holy spirit; it is “poured out” onto the believer (cf. Joel 2:28; Acts 2:33).[[140]](#footnote-26016)

It is worth pointing out that Paul uses *loutron*, bathing, in Ephesians 5:26 and Titus 3:5, but if he meant water baptism it seems he would have used the Greek word *baptismos* (“baptism”) or a related “baptism” word like he did when he spoke of being “baptized” in the spirit, and that he would not have used *loutron*, a word that refers to a bath or bathing place.

The evidence suggests that in the context of Ephesians 5:26, “bathing in water” is metaphorical and refers to the cleansing wash that the person gets the moment they are born again. That is the point of the phrase “with the word.” It is the Word of God, i.e., what it says about Jesus and what the person believes and confesses that results in the person being born again and thus receiving everlasting life. Romans 10:9 gives clear and simple instruction about how to be saved, and it does not mention water baptism, and Romans 3:22, 26, 28, 30; 4:13, 24; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; 3:8, and 3:24 all mention being saved by “trust in Jesus” (“faith in Jesus”), and don’t say a thing about adding water baptism to one’s trust in order to be saved. Also, Ephesians 1:13 outlines the process of salvation: a person hears the word of truth, believes it, and then is sealed with holy spirit until the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30). Added to that evidence is the fact that in the previous chapter in Ephesians, Ephesians 4:5 mentions there being “one baptism,” and that refers to baptism in spirit and not baptism in water.

Some scholars have suggested that in this context of marriage—both of a man and woman and of Christ and the Church—Paul uses the idea about being cleansed by a bath of water because it was customary for a bride to take a cleansing bath before her marriage, and that may indeed be why Paul uses that imagery here. Andrew Lincoln thinks that Ephesians 5:26 likely refers to Christian baptism, but he writes, “Indeed, the language of ‘the washing with water’ is likely to have as a secondary connotation the notion of the bridal bath. This would reflect both Jewish marital customs with their prenuptial bath and the marital imagery of Ezekiel 16:8-14 which stands behind this passage.”[[141]](#footnote-32442)

There is nothing in the New Testament that indicates a person is not fully saved when they confess and believe. Although it is true that most people in the New Testament times were water baptized—that was the common custom that came down from John and even Jesus himself—nevertheless, by necessity, many times a person’s water baptism would have occurred hours or perhaps even days after the person confessed and believed. There is no verse of Scripture that indicates a person who confesses and believes in Jesus is “almost saved” until they are water baptized and then they are saved. Also, it should be abundantly clear from history that a person can be water baptized and not actually be born again. Christian churches have many people who went through the ritual of baptism but were never actually born again because they never really believed and confessed that Jesus was their risen lord.

The “baptism” that accompanies true salvation is the baptism in holy spirit. John the Baptist spoke about it (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:8); Jesus taught about it (Acts 1:5); Peter remembered it being taught (Acts 11:16), and Paul recognized that every genuine born-again believer had been baptized in the spirit into “one body,” which is the Body of Christ: “For we were all baptized in one spirit into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13). It was in speaking about being “baptized in one spirit” that Paul actually used the Greek verb *baptizō* (“baptize”), and it is the baptism in holy spirit, which occurs the instant a person confesses and believes in Christ, that makes the person holy and cleanses them from sin.

Eph 5:27

**“without blemish.”** See commentary on Ephesians 1:4.

**“she would be.”** Greek verbs do not have a gender, but pick up their gender from the context, and in the context, Ephesians 5:25-26, the Church is a woman.

Eph 5:29

**“hates.”** The Greek word is in the aorist tense, which is typically translated as a past tense verb in English, i.e., “hated.” However, there is a category of the aorist called a gnomic aorist, which presents “a timeless, general fact.”[[142]](#footnote-16318) That is precisely what Paul is doing in Ephesians 5:29. He is stating a principle, namely, people do not hate their own bodies, they care for their bodies. Paul then applies this principle to Christ’s love for his metaphorical body, the Church. Just as you love your body, Christ loves the Church and cares for it as if it were his own physical body.

Eph 5:31

The Hebrew text for this verse differs slightly from the LXX. This occurs again in Mark 10:7. Matthew 19:5 is similar, but uses a different word for “joined.”

**“be joined to.”** The Greek verb translated as “be joined to” is *proskollaō* (#4347 προσκολλάω), and Thayer’s Lexicon says, “properly, *to glue, glue to, glue together, cement, fasten together*; hence universally, *to join or fasten firmly together*; in the New Testament only the passive [voice] is found….”[[143]](#footnote-19048) BDAG adds definitions such as “join, adhere to closely,” and gives an example from Josephus where a warrior’s sword was “glued” to his hand by the blood of the slain.”[[144]](#footnote-19729) The verbs *proskollaō* (Mark 10:7; Eph. 5:31) and *kollaō* (Matt. 19:5), are related to the noun *kolla*, “glue,” and they were used of joining oneself to someone or cleaving or sticking to that person, and also to being joined to or with other things as well as people. We still use the idiom of glue today to express extreme attachment and say things such as, “He stuck to his coach like glue” or “He is glued to the TV set.”

The act of sexual intercourse is much deeper and more profound than we understand, in part because what happens in the physical body is not fully understood, and also because what happens to a person physically is only part of what actually happens to the person. The couple becomes “one flesh” and even “members” of each other (1 Cor. 6:15). There is both a physical and spiritual union occurring, which God refers to as being joined, or “glued,” together (Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:7; Eph. 5:31). Thus, although the word “glued” was often used metaphorically for “joined with” as we do in English, there is also a spiritual truth being literally expressed. When two things are glued together, a bond forms that cannot be broken without both pieces suffering some damage. God understands His original intent for the bonding produced by sexual intercourse, and also understands the mental/emotional/spiritual damage that can occur when that bond is broken, which is why He commands that sexual intercourse is for couples who are married to each other.

The Devil knows the importance of the act of sexual intercourse for love, bonding, and family life, and he knows the spiritual, mental, and even physical harm that can come from casual sexual intercourse, so he has an aggressive agenda to cheapen sex and make it “just physical,” but it never is that. God intended sexual intercourse for the committed relationship of a marriage, and when we engage in sex outside of that relationship, we are sinning against God and ourselves in many ways, some of which we do not even understand.

Eph 5:32

**“hidden *truth*.”** The REV usually translates the Greek word *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because *mustērion* typically refers to “a secret in the religious or sacred realm.” However, it can also refer to “that which transcends normal understanding,”[[145]](#footnote-12816) which is the meaning in this context in Ephesians 5:32. Paul has just finished quoting Genesis 2:24 (LXX) and then says that “this” is a great *mustērion.* Now, Paul does not mean that Genesis 2:24 in and of itself is a sacred secret. In fact, it was not a secret at all, because it was revealed in Genesis (and by God before Genesis was written). What Paul means is that Genesis 2:24 contains a truth that “transcends normal understanding.” The normal understanding of the passage is that man and woman, in marriage, become one flesh; they become united and as one “body.”

Yet, Paul sees a profound truth hidden in this passage that applies to Christ’s relationship with the Church. Just as a husband and wife become one flesh in marriage, the Church and Jesus Christ form “one body” over which Christ is the Head (Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18). Paul makes parallels between Christ and the Church and a husband and wife throughout the passage. In Ephesians 5:25, he compares a husband’s love for his wife with Christ’s love for the Church. In Ephesians 5:26, Paul compares the cleansing bath a wife customarily took before getting married which made the wife clean to be presented to her husband (for more information see commentary on Eph. 5:26) with the cleanliness that believers will have when they are presented to Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:27). This, of course, is a spiritual and moral purity that believers receive because their sins are wiped clean by the blood of Jesus (Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:22). Therefore, when arriving at Ephesians 5:31-32 it should come as no surprise that Paul makes a parallel between Christ’s relationship to the Church and the unity between a husband and wife (using Gen. 2:24 LXX).

The likely reason Paul teaches this *mustērion,* or profound hidden truth, is to expound on his point in Ephesians 5:29. Paul makes the point that Christ nourishes and tenderly cares for the Church. Why? Because Christ sees the Church as his own body (Eph. 5:30), and no one hates his own body (Eph. 5:29). To further support his point, Paul insightfully points out that the unity that comes about in marriage can be aptly compared to the unity between Christ and the Church. Metaphorically, not literally, Christ and the Church are married, and so Christ sees the Church as he would see himself. Thus, he loves the Church with an immense love.

This idea of a great unity between the believer and Christ is taught earlier in Ephesians as well. Believers are so closely united to Christ that it is as if we were “raised up with him,” and “seated with him in the heavenly places” (Eph. 2:6).

[For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Eph. 3:9.]

Eph 5:33

**“as *he loves* himself.”** Scripture presupposes that every person loves themselves. “For no one ever hated their own flesh” (Eph. 5:29).

**“is to.”** The *hina* (#2443 ἵνα) clause occurs in the second half of the sentence, “the wife is to respect,” and is to be taken as a command in this context, which is a more rare use of the Greek word *hina*. However, because the *hina* is paralleled with the imperative command “each of you is to love his own wife,” the imperatival force becomes clear.

[For more information, see Word Study: “Hina.”]

**Ephesians Chapter 6**

Eph 6:1

**“Children.”** The text now moves on to children. This section of the Bible would have been easier to understand if the men who broke the Bible into chapters in the 1200s AD had made Ephesians 5:21-6:9 a chapter or at least an unbroken section of a chapter. Ephesians 5:21 introduces the concept of submission to each other, and then the text discusses the submission of wives, husbands, children, fathers, servants, and masters, ending with Ephesians 6:9, at which point the text moves on to a new subject.

Children are to submit to and obey their parents “in the Lord.” That the text says “in the Lord” shows that even children are not supposed to obey their parents no matter what without reservation. There are ungodly and unscrupulous parents who would have their children do all manner of ungodly things, and children do not have to morally obey their parents under those conditions. Also, the fact that this section of the text starts in Ephesians 5:21 with submitting to one another means that the parents have to be humble to the fact that a suggestion by the child might be the right thing to do, and in fact, that will be the case more and more as the child matures.

**“in the Lord.”** See Word Study: “In the Lord.”

Eph 6:3

**“so that it goes well with you and you live long in the land.”** This part of the verse is the “promise” that goes with the command to honor your father and mother. The quotation is not exact, but catches the essence of Deuteronomy 5:16 in the Old Testament.

**“you live long in the land.”** This quotation is from Deuteronomy 5:16, and the full sentence in Deuteronomy is: **“**Honor your father and your mother as Yahweh your God commanded you, so that your days may be long, and so that it may go well with you in the land that Yahweh your God is giving you.” Deuteronomy was addressed to Israel, and the “land” spoken of in Deuteronomy is the land of Israel. That fact likely explains why, when Ephesians quotes Deuteronomy, the quotation is not exact but is somewhat modified to better fit the Christian Church. Israel was promised the “Promised Land,” the land of Israel, but the Church will be placed around the world in the Kingdom of Christ and will judge and administer around the world (1 Cor. 6:2; cf. Dan. 7:14 and see commentary on Dan. 7:14 and also see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”).

The promise to “live long” does not refer to getting saved and having everlasting life, because honoring or not honoring one’s parents does not get a person saved. In both Deuteronomy and Ephesians, the promise to live long refers to having a long life here on earth. God designed people to be in families, and even in today’s scattered families, being in a strong family contributes greatly not only to one’s well-being and quality of life but to length of life itself. Furthermore, in many ages and countries, being in a strong family was also one’s best safety from government and outsiders.

Studies show that people who are well connected to others are happier, healthier, and live longer than “loners” who do not have intimate friends. A person who honors their father and mother generally is not only connected to parents but to the whole family, which provides support and connection, but beyond that, due to human weakness and the need to be humble and forgiving to get along together, fosters the development of communication and life skills that greatly contribute to one’s quality of life.

Eph 6:4

**“your children.”** The biblical world, and in particular in this case the Roman world, had a somewhat different idea about children than we do in our modern world. For one thing, in the Middle East, it was common for girls to marry at 12-14, while in Rome, the age was slightly older, usually in the late teens, 16-19, although girls of the aristocracy often married on the young side. Boys in the East usually married in their mid-to-late teens, while many Roman boys went into the army and did not marry until close to 30 (that did not mean they waited to have sex). So, children at the time of Ephesians got out of their parents’ house earlier than many children do today.

That being said, in our modern world, once a child is on their own, the authority of the parent virtually disappears, but that was not the case at the time of Christ in either Rome or the Middle East. The parent had considerable authority over adult children (especially the father and especially in Rome), and so the command not to provoke one’s child was important to the parent and the child long after the child was married and did not live with his or her parents.

**“training.”** The Greek word translated “training” is *paideia* (#3809 παιδεία). It is difficult to bring an exact meaning of *paideia* into English because it has such a wide semantic range. It refers to “the whole training and education of children”;[[146]](#footnote-30100) the “rearing and guiding a child toward maturity.”[[147]](#footnote-12406) Thus, it involves training, instruction, discipline, punishment, correction, and whatever else it takes to bring a child into mature adulthood. If the context narrows the meaning, then a more exact definition is possible, but in an open context like here in Ephesians 6:4, there is no exact English equivalent. “Discipline,” “training,” “instruction,” and “nurture” are translations commonly used in the English versions. To understand what God is saying in this verse requires us to understand the meaning of *paideia* and not just grab onto one particular translation.

**“admonition.”** The Greek word translated “admonition” here in Ephesians 6:4 is *nouthesia* (#3559 νουθεσία) and, according to BDAG, it means, “to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct,”[[148]](#footnote-18368) hence it is usually translated “admonish” or “instruction.” For example, in Titus 2:10, BDAG says, “of quiet reproof about repetition of an improper course of conduct” and thus “admonition” or “rebuke.” Although we might tend to think of this word as being “friendly instruction,” we must be careful not to water down this powerful word. It almost always involves a confrontation over bad or unprofitable behavior. It is important for parents to understand this because far too many parents are more interested in being “good friends” with their children rather than making sure their children become godly adults and individuals who contribute to society. The Bible has examples of even very good people, such as David, who were not good parents because they did not properly discipline their children (cf. 1 Kings 1:6).

[For more information on *nouthesia,* see commentary on Col. 3:16, which uses the verb form, *noutheteō*, #3560 νουθετέω.]

Eph 6:5

**“Servants.”** The Greek word *doulos* can refer to a servant or a slave; it is the context that determines the meaning. The meaning here refers to both servants and slaves. Many servants in the ancient world were just short of being slaves: they lived on the master’s property and did whatever the master or mistress said. Furthermore, the attitude of servants and about servants in the ancient world was not the “I’m here to serve as long as I am treated well and paid well” like exists in our modern world. Servants were to serve, and they did not have much they could say or do about being treated badly.

**“earthly masters.”** Literally, “lords according to the flesh,” see commentary on Colossians 3:22.

**“with fear and trembling.”** Although this is not a reference to Psalm 2:11, the basic message is the same. The earthly masters have a lot of power over the lives of servants/slaves, and so there is an element of fear in serving them. See commentary on Psalm 2:11 and Proverbs 1:7.

**“sincere.”** The Greek is *haplotēs* (#572 ἁπλότης), and the BDAG *Greek-English Lexicon* says, “In our lit. esp. of personal integrity expressed in word or action…simplicity, sincerity, uprightness, frankness… Of simple goodness, which gives itself without reserve, ‘without strings attached’, ‘without hidden agendas.’”

Eph 6:6

**“when they are watching you.”** The Greek is *ophthalmodouleia* (#3787 ὀφθαλμοδουλ(ε)ία), which is “service that is performed only to make an impression in the owner’s presence.”[[149]](#footnote-18805) The REV has added “be obedient” at the beginning of the sentence as the main verb—not only to capture the meaning of *ophthalmodouleia* but also because Ephesians 6:5-8 is one long sentence in the Greek, with one main verb at the beginning of verse 5: “obey.” Since it is helpful in English to break it up into smaller, more understandable sentences, it is necessary to add a main verb to verse 6.

**“soul.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here, “soul” is inclusive of the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the person himself, so many versions have “heart” instead of “soul.” We are not to only work hard when people are watching, but are to work from our very soul, all that we are mentally and emotionally.

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

Eph 6:8

**“he will be paid back the same from the Lord.”** This is similar to Colossians 3:25 (see commentary on Col. 3:25).

Eph 6:9

**“and there is no partiality with him.”** This is also stated in Colossians 3:25.

Eph 6:10

**“Finally.”** This introduces the concluding part of the letter of Ephesians. Ephesians has discussed what the Christian has in Christ and has also spoken about many aspects of the Christian walk. However, if believers are not prepared for the spiritual battle that rages around them, then their effectiveness may be severely limited. Thus, the concluding section of Ephesians has instruction on how to be successful in the spiritual battle.

There is a scholarly debate about whether the Greek logically connects what comes before with what comes after (like “therefore”) or introduces the last member of a series. The REV takes the position that it introduces the last member of a series.

**“be empowered.”** The Greek verb is *endunamoō* (#1743 ἐνδυναμόω), and it is an imperative present passive second-person plural. The form of the verb can be either passive or middle, but the passive voice fits better here. Thomas Winger writes why the “be empowered” should be translated the way it is, as a passive voice, meaning that it is Jesus who does the strengthening, while the believer does what it takes to allow the strengthening from the Lord to occur. Winger says, “The present imperative ἐνδυναμοῦσθε is passive [fn: to take the middle passive form as middle reflexive, ‘strengthen yourselves,’ would be contrary to the context since the strengthening occurs…‘in the Lord that is in his mighty strength’]… Such passives formed from transitive verbs without a stated subject *may* be understood as active intransitives, in which case one would translate the imperative as ‘be strong.’ However, the prepositional phrases that follow imply that the agent, the one who strengthens, is ‘the Lord.’”[[150]](#footnote-17639) Harold Hoehner correctly notes, “The power does not come from the believer, but from an external source,” which would be God or the Lord Jesus.”[[151]](#footnote-22254) What believers must understand is that the Lord will empower them, but they must do what it takes to be empowered, which means they must be humble and obedient, surely, but also ready to act. The Lord’s power shows up as the believer acts decisively to do His will.

**“that is.”** The Greek word *kai* can function in a conjunctive way as “and,” or it can function in an adjunctive way as “also,” or it can function in an explanatory or epexegetical way as “even” or “that is.” The *kai* here is not conjunctive or adjunctive as if being empowered by the Lord and by his mighty strength were two separate things. Instead, *kai* is functioning in an epexegetical way to link the following clause to further describe how we are empowered by the Lord—we are empowered by his mighty strength.[[152]](#footnote-31160)

**“by his mighty strength.”** This is an attributed genitive: “mighty strength.” It could also be genitive of origin: “might that originates from his strength”; or genitive of production: “might produced by his strength.” The Greek reads, “in the might [*kratos*] of his strength [*ischus*].” This one verse places an amazing amount of emphasis on the power that we have in Christ, and the power that we need if we are going to stand for God throughout our lives. This verse contains the word “power” (*dunamis*), which refers to inherent power or ability. It also has “might” (*kratos*), the ability to express or exhibit resident strength (usually spoken of as the resident strength of a nation, for example), and also the exercising of that strength. Thus, we speak of “mighty nations” as those that have a lot of strength they can bring to bear on a situation militarily, economically, or politically. It also has “strength” (*ischus*), which is translated well as “strength.” It is the capability or capacity to exert force or power.

Eph 6:11

**“stand.”** The emphasis in this section of Ephesians is the believer being able to “stand” in the spiritual battle. The words “stand” and “withstand” (stand against) occur four times in Ephesians 6:11-14. Believers cannot kill the Devil or his demons, nor can we completely defeat his plans. But we can effectively stand against him, and rescue people who are being deceived by him. Jesus Christ is the perfect example of how we are to be: Jesus did not seek out the Devil to fight him, he came to heal the sick, downtrodden, and brokenhearted, and set captives free. If we do that, we will have enough fight on our hands without seeking any extra. More evidence that we are not called to “attack” the Devil is that Ephesians 6:12 says we “wrestle.” That is not battlefield language.

**“Devil.”** The Greek word is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος), which literally means “Slanderer,” but *diabolos* gets transliterated into English as the more familiar name, “Devil.” Slander is so central to who the Devil is and how he operates that one of his primary names is “the Slanderer.”

[For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

Eph 6:12

**“we do not.”** Although the literal Greek text reads, “The struggle for us is not against...” the REV more simply translates the phrase as, “we do not wrestle against.” The personal pronoun “we” here is meaningful. Paul does not leave the fighting to others while he is just an armchair critic. He was personally involved in the conflict and is an example to us. Conflict is difficult and distasteful, but people will not be delivered from evil unless someone enters the fight on their behalf.

**“wrestle.”** The Greek is *palē* (#3823 πάλη). The primary meaning of the Greek word is “to wrestle.” The word “wrestle” is a very good translation, even in this context of a soldier’s armor. While it is true that over time the usage of *palē* broadened to include various struggles, which is why quite a few versions say “struggle” instead of “wrestle,” *pale* always retained its undertone of the wrestling contest. Furthermore, hand-to-hand combat was common enough among professional soldiers that being a good wrestler helped a lot on the battlefield.[[153]](#footnote-9999)

Another reason that “wrestle” is such a good translation is that it subtly communicates that we are in a serious struggle, but there is nothing we can do in this life to “end the fight.” Athletes do not kill each other, they continue to fight over and over. A champion wrestler will have fellow athletes that he competes against match after match, year after year. That is why anyone who is going to be victorious over and over has to be mentally prepared and physically conditioned for the “long haul.” Anyone who lives godly in Christ will find himself wrestling against spiritual wickedness his whole life.

**“against...against...against.”** The repetition of “against” is the figure of speech anaphora, and emphasizes each one individually.

[See Word Study: “Anaphora.”]

**“flesh and blood.”** The Greek is “blood and flesh,” but our idiom is “flesh and blood.” We don’t fight people, we fight against spiritual forces.

**“the rulers, against the authorities, against the world-rulers of this *present* darkness.”** In the context of Ephesians 6:12, the “rulers,” “authorities, and “world-rulers” are demonic forces. There is a huge spiritual war going on between God and the Devil, and between good and evil. Every person alive is part of that war whether we like it or not, because there is no “neutral position.” Christ made that clear when he said, “Whoever is not with me is against me” (Matt. 12:30; Luke 11:23). Both the angels and demons vary in power and authority and are organized into a hierarchy of positions, influencing both what they do and where they serve. So, for example, one demon is the ruler of what in the Old Testament times was Persia (cf. Dan. 10:13). Some angels are more powerful than others (Dan. 10:12-14), and some angels are referred to as being “strong” (Rev. 5:2; 10:1).

Designations that angelic, demonic, and human powers are called include: “rulers,” “authorities,” “world-rulers,” “powers,” “dominions,” and “thrones” (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24-25; Eph. 1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10; 2:15; and Titus 3:1). The designations “rulers” and “authorities” occur together nine times in the New Testament (Luke 12:11; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15; and Titus 3:1). Sometimes, as here in Ephesians 6:12, the rulers and authorities are demons. Sometimes, they are human rulers (Luke 12:11; Titus 3:1), and sometimes the designations are more general and refer to all rulers and dominions, both spirit beings and human beings (Eph. 1:21).

**“world-rulers.”** The Greek word translated as “world-rulers” is *kosmokratōr* (#2888 κοσμοκράτωρ), and it only occurs here in the New Testament. It is a compound word built from the noun *kosmos*, the world, and the verb *krateō*, to use strength, to hold on to. The word was used in ancient Greece of world-ruling gods and was also used of the Roman emperor Caracalla.[[154]](#footnote-31410) The demons who are called “world-rulers” are very powerful and exert a tremendous influence on what happens on earth. That Paul would use that word here in the context of who we Christians are fighting against shows that we have formidable adversaries indeed. Christians should never take lightly the spiritual battle we are in.

[For more on the Devil being in control of much of what happens on earth, see commentary on Luke 4:6.]

**“*that is*, against *all* the spiritual *forces* of evil.”** This last phrase is in apposition to the preceding list, not in addition to the preceding list, meaning that everything in the preceding list is a spiritual force of evil. This can be seen by how Paul uses these terms in the closely paralleled books of Ephesians and Colossians (Eph. 1:21; 3:10; Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15). In these books, Paul especially has in mind spiritual forces of evil when referring to rulers and authorities. Lincoln writes that the last item, “serves not so much to designate a separate class of cosmic powers but as a general term for all such powers and an indication of their locality.”[[155]](#footnote-31843)

**“spiritual *forces* of evil.”** The fact that these rulers, authorities, and world-rulers are demons leads to the translation “spiritual forces,” which could just as easily have been “spiritual armies,” or something such as that. Some scholars see this neuter adjective as a substantive, in which case the word “forces” does not need to be in italics, the “forces” would be indicated in the text. The genitive, “forces of evil,” is likely a genitive of character, that is, spiritual beings whose character is evil.

**“in the heavenly places.”** This phrase has been problematic for commentators, but it need not be. As we see in several books of the Bible, including Job, Matthew, and Revelation, evil spirit powers move through the atmosphere and even “heaven,” and yet engage in warfare here on earth. In Job, the Devil visits God in heaven, but causes destructive storms and motivates evil armies here on earth. In Matthew and Luke, the Devil personally engages Jesus in the desert. In Revelation, the Devil is in the throne room of God, accusing the believers. To say these evil forces are “in” heavenly places emphasizes the vast extent of their power and influence. Had the text said “on earth,” we would have thought of their influence being much more limited.

Eph 6:13

**“Because of this.”** That is, because of the powerful enemy we wrestle with, we need the full armor of God.

**“take up.”** The Greek verb is in the active voice. The believer must “take up,” “put on,” the whole armor of God. The armor does not get on the believer by itself, nor does it somehow just “appear” on a believer who does not specifically put it on. For example, to put on the belt of truth, the believer must know the truth. Not the truth about ordinary stuff like how to change a flat tire or bake a cake. The truth about God, Christ, biblical history, angels, demons, the power of God, wisdom, what is godly and what is not, what’s going to happen in the future, and more. The truth is the foundational piece of much of the rest of the armor, and it takes time and focus to learn it. When a Roman soldier put on his armor, he did not just feel around for any old thing and grab it and put it on—like grabbing a bandana and using it for a helmet and expecting it to do the job. The soldier knew his armor, trained to use his armor, and then effectively used it. The believer needs to do the same. Sadly, many believers don’t take up their armor because it takes time and effort and can be inconvenient, but there is a cost for being in the Lord’s army, and the wise believer pays it.

**“stand.”** See commentary on Ephesians 6:11.

**“*this* time of evil.”** The Greek word is *hēmera* (#2250 ἡμέρα) and is often translated as “day,” yet it also carries the meaning of “an extended period.”[[156]](#footnote-32315) This is not a specific evil day, but any time a believer encounters evil. Although there is a sense that because we live in a fallen world every day is evil, it is common knowledge that there are some “days,” some periods of time in life, that are much more difficult than others, and the wise believer is prepared for those evil times. Using the translation “day” would lend itself to misunderstanding that there is one specific day Paul has in mind. However, in this context, the spiritual battle has already started (Eph. 6:12); thus, using the phrase “time of evil” helps communicate the necessity of preparing oneself at all times for the ongoing spiritual battle.

Eph 6:14

**“Therefore, stand *firm.*”** It is important to note that Ephesians 6:14-17 (four verses) are one long verse in the Greek text, and they cover all six pieces of armor that the believer needs to stand against the Devil. The fact that they are all in one verse shows that they all work together to enable the believer to stand, and they are all important. None can be safely left out. Every believer needs the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, their feet shod, the shield of trust, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit.

**“by fastening the belt of truth around your waist.”** The text literally reads “by belting around your waist with truth”. This can be an awkward sentence in English, so the REV has translated the Greek as a couple of other versions have, “by fastening the belt of truth around your waist.” The force of the aorist participle, “by fastening,” is important. The REV is translating it as a participle of means, in which the participle describes how the action is accomplished. Believers are able to stand firm *by* putting on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:13-17). Also, “by fastening” is in the middle voice, as is “by putting on” the breastplate and the shoes, emphasizing the fact that we have to put these things on. They are not “automatic armor” that comes with the New Birth.

**“breastplate of righteousness.”** The Roman soldier wore a breastplate that covered his vital organs. The Christian is to put on the breastplate of righteousness. To fully understand the breastplate of righteousness, we must remember that “righteousness” has two meanings in the Administration of Grace in which we live.[[157]](#footnote-23110) Righteousness is the God-given righteousness, or right standing, that we have before God because Jesus died for our sins, and it is also the right standing we have before God because of right living before God. When Romans 5:17 mentions the free gift of righteousness that Christians have, that is our righteousness due to the work of Christ. When 1 Timothy 6:11 instructs us to diligently pursue righteousness, or 2 Timothy 3:16 says that the Bible provides training in righteousness, that is “right living” before God.

The “breastplate of righteousness” in Ephesians 6:14 includes both meanings. First, no matter how hard we try to live obediently before God, we will sin. If we do not understand that our sins are forgiven, and that due to the work of Christ we stand righteous before God, the weight of that sin on our conscience can be unbearable. Many people have been made ineffective in their lives and ministries, and some have abandoned the Christian Faith altogether, due to the guilt that they feel from not being able to obey God. They have not put on the breastplate of righteousness, and guilt and shame have penetrated their vital organs. The knowledgeable Christian is aware that his sins are forgiven in Christ, and does not hold on to the guilt produced by his mistakes. Freed from that weight, he can stand effectively for the Lord.

The breastplate of righteousness is also the breastplate of our righteous life. Living righteously before God protects the Christian in many ways. There is physical protection, such as from the ravages of alcohol, drugs, sexually transmitted disease, and so forth. Also, the mind is protected from things such as shame and guilt, which are consequences of willful sin. The Bible says that those who practice sin become slaves to sin, and that is true. The savvy Christian puts on the breastplate of righteousness by living righteously from day to day so he can readily stand against the wiles of the Devil.

Eph 6:15

**“by strapping *sandals on* your feet in preparation for *proclaiming* the good news of peace.”** Paul is making a beautiful analogy between real battle and our spiritual battle as Christians throughout this passage. In this verse in particular, he makes the analogy that in order to win our spiritual battle, we must put on sandals (the typical shoes worn during the first century AD), to prepare to share the good news, an essential part of winning the spiritual battle.

This is a notoriously difficult passage to translate because of its strange grammatical construction. It does not follow Paul’s pattern in this context of putting on an item for war, followed by the spiritual reality (in the genitive) that the item corresponds to, such as “breastplate of righteousness” or “shield of trust.” Specifically, Paul gives no object for what the Ephesians are to put on their feet. The text more literally reads, “having your feet fitted,” but the immediate follow-up question is, “With what?” In Paul’s other analogies throughout this passage he supplies an object; here he does not, which complicates things.

Many translations and commentaries see the object of the verb “having your feet fitted,” as “with readiness” (the same Greek phrase the REV translates as “in preparation”).[[158]](#footnote-23462) So, in these translations, the thing that the Ephesians are to strap their feet with is “readiness.” However, the primary reason this translation does not fit well is due to the fact that in the rest of Paul’s analogies, he always gives a tangible object that one is supposed to prepare oneself with: a belt (Eph. 6:14), breastplate (Eph. 6:14), shield (Eph. 6:16), helmet (Eph. 6:17), and lastly, a sword (Eph. 6:17). Therefore, one should expect that the thing being strapped on one’s feet in Ephesians 6:14 is more likely to be something physical and tangible, not something intangible and abstract such as “readiness.”

Many of the difficulties in interpreting and translating this passage dissolve when one simply adds the implied object that is missing, which seems to be “sandals.” Thus, the sentence can be understood that the Ephesians are to put on sandals “in preparation for *proclaiming* the good news of peace.” Just like in Paul’s other analogies in this section, the Ephesians are to put on some piece of equipment or item in order to help them fight the spiritual battle. Although the Greek verb *hupodēsamenoi* (ὑποδησάμενοι #5265) likely refers to sandals,[[159]](#footnote-31199) it could also have reference to military boots that Roman soldiers wore called *caliga*, which were essentially a half-boot used for long marches.[[160]](#footnote-24371)

Although this passage is difficult to translate, Paul’s point can be seen quite clearly. One of the things involved in this spiritual battle, one of the things that the Ephesians must take an active role in doing, is proclaiming the good news of peace. In order to do this, they must put sandals on their feet to prepare to go out into the world.

Today, we as Christians must take an active role in proclaiming the good news. We cannot expect the world to come to us, we must go to the world. “How beautiful are the feet of those who proclaim good news about good things!” (Rom. 10:15)

**“for *proclaiming* the good news*.*”** The Greek is a genitive phrase, which is literally translated as, “in preparation *of* the good news of peace.” However, when translating the genitive case in Greek, using the word “of” does not always communicate clearly the relation that is involved with the genitive and the noun it is modifying (if there is one). The prepositional and genitive phrases could be translated rather clumsily as, “in preparation *some way related to* the good news.” So, translators must use word meanings and the scope of Scripture to determine in what way “in preparation” relates to “the good news.” Due to the fact that the person’s feet need to be “fitted” in order to go do something, it seems most natural from the context to render the genitive as a genitive of advantage using the word “for.” This would make the phrase read, “...strapping *sandals* on your feet in preparation for the good news of peace.”

From the scope of Scripture, it is clear that Paul and other Christians are to go and proclaim the good news (Acts 5:42; 8:4, 12; Rom. 1:15; 1 Cor. 15:1). And so, by having “sandals” (or shoes) on their feet, Christians are better positioned (i.e., have an advantage) to proclaim the good news. This helps to provide the full sense of the phrase, “...by strapping *sandals on* your feet in preparation for *proclaiming* the good news of peace.”

Eph 6:16

**“the shield of trust.”** The “shield of trust” is a genitive of apposition, and means “the shield, that is to say, our trust.” In other words, the shield is our trust. Trust in God does not keep the blows of the Adversary from coming, and having a shield does not mean we will not feel the blows. But our trust in God keeps us from being “killed” by the Adversary; we withstand attack after attack with our love for God and commitment to Him intact.

Shields have long been used in individual combat to protect a fighter from the attack of his adversary, and usually, we think of a shield only protecting the one who holds it. While that individual protection is certainly a large part of the “shield of trust,” the shield also protected other people as well. It would not be lost on the people of Ephesus, and indeed, on Romans in general, that the shield not only protected the one who held it, but comrades as well.

Long before Alexander the Great (356-323 BC), Greek infantrymen were armed with body armor, a round shield, and a thrusting spear, and attacked an enemy by closing in and jabbing the opponent head-on, rather than throwing a javelin from a distance as was done by many of their opponents. On the left arm of these Greek warriors was a round wooden shield about three feet in diameter, the hoplon, and it was from this vital piece of equipment that the infantryman got his name, “hoplite.” When the Greek hoplites were in the phalanx (the line of interlinked soldiers), the hoplon protected the soldier’s left side, but also provided protection for the otherwise unprotected right side of the man to his left in the phalanx. The round shape, however, had disadvantages, and left open upper and lower parts of the body. By Roman times, the round hoplon shield was replaced by a rectangular shield. That shield was the *thureos*, from the word *thura*, “door,” and it was about four feet long by two and a half feet wide. In Roman battle tactics, the legionnaires in the front line linked shields, the soldiers on the sides linked shields to protect from flanking attacks, and the soldiers who formed the middle ranks of this fighting rectangle raised their shields overhead to protect from arrows, spears, and sling balls (or sometimes they put their shields on the back of the soldier in front and pushed, adding force to the forward motion of this “battle rectangle,” and more easily breaking through enemy lines).

The shield of trust not only protects us as individuals, but it can be used to protect the family of God as well, and especially when linked with the trust-shields of other believers, can be a very effective protection against the attacks of the Adversary.

**“arrows.”** The Greek word is generic and can refer to any thrown projectile, such as an arrow or spear. However, since it was the arrows that were generally set on fire, “flaming arrows” makes more sense from a customs point of view. Today’s dart would not generally be of much danger.

**“Wicked One.”** The Greek is *ponēros* (#4190 πονηρός), which BDAG describes as “pertaining to being morally or socially worthless; therefore, ‘wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, and degenerate.’”[[161]](#footnote-11560) *Ponēros* is an adjective, but it is a substantive (an adjective used as a noun).

[For more on substantives, see commentary on Matt. 5:37.]

The Slanderer is the fount and foundation of wickedness. It was in him that wickedness was first found, when he was lifted up with pride and decided to rebel against God. Ever since that time, he has been true to his name, “the Wicked One,” and has been doing and causing wickedness wherever he can, which, since he is “the god of this age,” is a considerable amount of wickedness.

[For more names of the Slanderer (the Devil) and their meanings, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

Eph 6:17

**“take.”** The Greek verb is *dechomai* (#1209 δέχομαι), and it is an aorist imperative. *Dechomai* can have a range of meanings in this context, and the aorist imperative stresses the fact that the helmet and sword are vital to a believer’s defense. The imperative mood of the verb can give *dechomai* the force of “grab,” and it also has overtones of “receive” because the helmet of salvation must be “received” from God, as does the sword of the Spirit.

**“helmet of salvation.”** The “helmet of salvation” of Ephesians 6:17 is more accurately called the helmet of “the hope of salvation” in 1 Thessalonians 5:8. The word “salvation” is used in its general sense in this verse, and is not restricted to only Christian salvation to everlasting life, although that is included. Neither the world nor the Christian is saved at this time. The Bible refers to us as “saved,” and we refer to ourselves that way, due to an idiom in the original languages of the Bible known as the “prophetic perfect” (see commentary on Ephesians 2:6, “raised…seated”). The essence of the prophetic perfect idiom is that if something is absolutely guaranteed to happen in the future, it is often spoken of as if it had already occurred. Because our salvation is guaranteed, we speak as if we have it now, and the salvation of the world from its present distress is guaranteed also.

The entire creation is in bondage and is groaning in pain (Rom. 8:21-22), and Christians are groaning in pain also (Rom. 8:23), and everything in creation needs to be “saved,” “rescued” from the power of sin. Nothing any of us can do will change that now, but God will rescue His creation in the future. The Lord Jesus will descend from heaven and conquer the earth, and the earth will once again become a paradise. God promises that in the future we will live on a beautiful earth in new, energetic bodies, and our lives will be free of sickness, hunger, war, and injustice. God has given us that wonderful Hope for the future, and it can sustain us through our lives, especially in hard times. No matter how difficult our lives get on earth, our hope for a wonderful future shines through the darkness and points to better things to come. Because of this, the Bible refers to the Hope as “the anchor of our soul” (Heb. 6:19). As the anchor of our soul, it is fitting that our hope of salvation for ourselves and creation is referred to as our helmet. Life can be so difficult and discouraging that it is hard to think straight. Each year, vast numbers of people get caught up in the difficulties of life and make unwise decisions. Many people completely lose sight of any value or purpose in their life and commit suicide. The hope of salvation says, “Hang in there, your troubles will not last long, and then things will be better.” The hope of salvation helps protect our minds and helps keep us calm and rational in troubled times, allowing us to keep standing for God. When properly understood, the hope of salvation is a very effective helmet, protecting the thoughts of the Christian and helping him to stand for the Lord year after year.

**“the sword of the Spirit.”** The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God, and is the only offensive weapon the believer has as he wrestles with evil. It is important to remember that the sword is the “sword of the Spirit.” The genitive in this verse is probably the figure of speech amphibologia, encompassing two meanings at once. Thus, the genitive has both the force of a genitive of possession, i.e., that it is ‘the Spirit’s sword,” not our sword, and also the force of a genitive of origin, “the sword given to us by the Spirit,” to use in our earthly lives.

[See Word Study: “Amphibologia.”]

In the Greek text, the verb telling us to take the helmet and sword is in the imperative mood. That means that God is not just stating that we should take these pieces of armor, or asking us if we would like to, He is commanding us to take them and put them on. If we do not put on the helmet and take up and use the sword, we are in effect telling God that we are quite content to not enter into His service in our fullest capacity. One important reason why God would command us to take the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, is that if we do not really understand it, we can unknowingly be used by the Devil against the purposes of God to hurt other people. That has happened many times in history. The Christians who tortured other Christians during the Inquisition, for example, thought they were doing Christ’s work. Although that is an extreme example, the same kind of thing, people working against God when they think they are working for him, happens on a much smaller scale every day. Christians are called to stand for God, and the sword of the Spirit is an essential part of our armor if we are going to be successful at doing that throughout our lifetime.

**“the word of God.”** Here the word for “word” is not *logos*, as might be expected, but *rhēma*. Although often used interchangeably in the Greek language, the word *rhēma* often refers more to the words that are spoken, and that seems to be the case here. Just as a sword is only effective when it is used, the word of God is most effective when it is spoken (even spoken to oneself).

Eph 6:18

**“Be praying.”** Every Christian should develop a faithful prayer life. Many times in Scripture, God tells us to pray (e.g., Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:17).

**“in the spirit.”** There is no definite article “the” in the Greek text but we supply it because this verse makes more sense in English that way. In the Greek text, the definite article “the” is not supplied before “holy spirit” because the preposition *en* can make *pneuma* (spirit) definite without the article. In Greek, if a preposition governs a noun, it is the context that determines whether the noun is definite or not, and therefore whether there should be a “the” in the English translation. Daniel Wallace writes: “There is no need for the article to be used to make the object of a preposition definite.”[[162]](#footnote-25288) A. T. Robertson writes: “...the article is not the only means of showing that a word is definite. ...The context and history of the phrase in question must decide. ...[As for prepositional phrases], these were also considered definite enough without the article.” Robertson then cites some examples that use the preposition *ek*.[[163]](#footnote-12779)

**“every *kind of* prayer.”** There are many different kinds of prayers and petitions, and that is reflected in the text, which says “every *kind of* prayer.” R. C. H. Lenski comments on this verse and writes, “‘Prayer includes all forms…So also Paul says, ‘by means of all prayer and petition,’ not a single kind being neglected or omitted.”[[164]](#footnote-20362) Peter O’Brien writes, “In the first clause, the readers are encouraged to stand firm, ‘praying with every kind of prayer and petition.’”[[165]](#footnote-29986) The use of “every” in Ephesians 6:18 is the Greek word “*pas*” (#3956 πᾶς) which is emphasized in the verse, being repeated four times: pray at “all” times, with “every” kind of prayer, with “all” perseverance, for “all” the believers.

William Hendriksen writes, “The apostle makes a special point of it that the soldier’s communion with his General—the believer’s fellowship with his God—should not be of just one kind.”[[166]](#footnote-25443) Hendriksen then goes on to mention some of the different kinds of prayer: “not only cries for help but also confession of sin, profession of faith, adoration, thanksgiving, intercession,” and there are more than those kinds as well.

Christians understand that things like the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit are part of the armor and weapons used in battle, but we must also understand that prayer is a mighty weapon both for good and against evil. That is why the Christian must become trained and confident in praying all kinds of prayers. The needs on earth are many and varied, and no one kind of prayer, or one “general prayer,” will be as effective as one of the many kinds of prayers spoken at the right time in the right way.

Eph 6:19

**“whenever I open my mouth.”** The Greek is literally “in the opening of my mouth.” The meaning of the phrase is a metonymy referring to the act of speaking. The apostle Paul is praying that when he speaks, God will provide him with the words he should say.

**“sacred secret.”** The REV translates the Greek word *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what *mustērion* actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm.

[For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Eph. 3:9.]

“**sacred secret *that is* in the good news.**” This phrase is a genitive phrase in the Greek, meaning that the sacred secret, in some way, relates to the good news. Well, the question must be asked, “In what way?”

There are three primary translation options. The first is to use the typical genitive translation, with the translation “mystery” for *mustērion,* i.e., “mystery of the good news” (CSB, ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV). However, the downside to this translation is that the “of” is quite unclear, and secondly, the translation makes it sound as if the good news is a mystery that no one can really comprehend, yet *mustērion* does not mean “mystery,” rather, it refers to a sacred secret.

The second possible translation option is for the genitive to be one of apposition, such as “sacred secret—the good news.” Although this translation is possible and would not be grossly in error because 1 Timothy 3:16 seems to teach that the sacred secret is made up of many different components. There is more biblical evidence that the sacred secret, or sacred secrets, only makes up a portion of the good news. Therefore, this translation would not quite accurately convey the meaning of the genitive because the sacred secret is not equivalent to the good news. This brings us to the final translation option to discuss.

Lastly, one great translation option is translating the phrase as an objective genitive, which in this case is describing the place where the *mustērion* resides, namely, “in the good news.” The reason this is the translation chosen by the REV is that this most accurately captures how the two nouns relate. The sacred secret is found in the good news, just like one would find an article inside a newspaper. The entire newspaper is not the article, rather, the article makes up one portion of the newspaper. In the same way, the sacred secret makes up part of the good news, but it is not the entire good news. Paul could have many possibilities in mind when speaking of “the sacred secret”: that the Gentiles are grafted into the promises made to Israel (Rom. 11:25); the content of speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 14:2); that believers will receive new, transformed bodies at the return of Christ (1 Cor. 15:51); Christ’s relationship to the church (Eph. 5:32); the sacred secret of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:7). However, the most likely option is that Paul has his earlier definition in mind when referring to the sacred secret here in Ephesians 6:19, “*This is the sacred secret*: the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise through the good news in *connection with* Christ Jesus” (Eph. 3:6).

Yet, the sacred secret Paul is referring to is not the entire good news. There is more to the good news than just these sacred secrets. There were promises which God spoke through the prophets of the Old Testament, and which God spoke himself, that God’s people had been looking forward to for centuries, that have been fulfilled in the good news of Christ. For instance, the resurrection of believers and life in the kingdom of God were both prophesied about in the Old Testament (Gen. 17:7-8; Dan. 7:27; 12:2; 2 Sam. 7:16), and they were fulfilled through the atoning work of Christ.

Eph 6:20

**“in the way that I need to.”** The Greek literally reads, “as it is necessary for me to speak.” The Greek word *dei* (#1163 δεῖ, pronounced “day”) means “to be necessary, to be right and proper.” Translators try to pick up the sense of the Greek text in different ways: “as I am required to speak” (cf. Col 4:4 HCSB); “as I ought” (KJV); “as I should” (NIV, NET); “as I must” (NAB); “as it is my duty to do” (NEB).

Paul was especially entrusted with the revelation of the sacred secret (Eph. 3:3), so he, more than anyone, needed to proclaim this beautiful knowledge boldly. The sacred secret is that “the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise through the good news in *connection with* Christ Jesus” (Eph. 3:6). It is easy to imagine why Paul would face backlash from the Jews especially, for teaching that the Gentiles now can receive the promises originally made to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 17:7-8). Likely, many of the Jews felt a sense of entitlement to the promises made to Abraham because they are physically Abraham’s descendants, so if someone (Paul) came along saying that people who are not Abraham’s literal descendants can also receive the promises, the Jews would be upset. This backlash from the Jews can be seen multiple times in the book of Acts. In Acts, Paul was slandered by the Jews (Acts 13:45), stoned by the Jews (Acts 14:19), and the Jews set Thessalonica in an uproar against Paul (Acts 17:5). Given the fact that there was already much division and animosity between Jews and Gentiles in the first century (Acts 11:3; John 4:9; Eph. 2:16), this antagonism towards Paul and his message is not surprising.

However, despite the opposition Paul faced throughout his ministry, he goes to great lengths to proclaim the sacred secret and teach that the Gentiles, who have trust in Christ Jesus, have now been grafted into the promises originally made to Israel (Rom. 11:11-36). In the end, Paul needed great boldness to preach this message of God’s grace toward the Gentiles (and Jews) who place their trust in Jesus (Eph. 2:8, 11-13).

Although this verse is not about modern Christians, we can and should take Paul’s desire to be bold as a model for ourselves. Speaking boldly for God and for Christ is something that is extremely difficult at times, but something that is absolutely necessary since we are his ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20). We must speak up on his behalf.

Eph 6:21

**“in the Lord.”** See Word Study: “In the Lord.”

**“how I am doing.”** The Greek literally says, “what I am doing” (*ti prassō*), but this is often an idiomatic expression for denoting “how” someone is doing.[[167]](#footnote-11398) While the literal meaning (“what I am doing”) is certainly possible and some English translations go that way, both the remoter and surrounding context favor the meaning “how I am doing” for several reasons.

For one thing, the believers knew “what” Paul was doing. His activities were very limited. He was under house arrest, chained to a Roman soldier, and was writing letters and speaking to people who came to see him. Asking Paul how he was doing in that situation was much more pertinent.

Also, the clause *ti prassō* is in apposition to the preceding clause, “so that you also will know the things concerning me” (lit. “the things in reference to me”). This means that *ti prassō* is simply restating the prior clause in a different way: to know “the things concerning me” is to know “how” Paul is doing.

Furthermore, in Ephesians 6:22, Paul declares that his purpose in sending Tychicus is so that the Ephesian believers can know “how we are” (*ta peri hēmōn*). If the purpose for Tychicus’ coming is for the Ephesians to know how Paul and others are doing, then that helps to define what Paul means here in Ephesians 6:21. Paul is not sending Tychicus specifically to report to the Ephesians their ministry activities (though that might be included); Tychicus is sent to convey to the Ephesians the state of Paul and his companions and how they are doing.

Eph 6:22

**“how we are doing.”** The Greek literally reads “the things concerning us” (*ta peri hēmōn*), which is much more easily understood when translated by the English phrase, “how we are.” Paul understood the value of keeping people encouraged in the faith. Discouragement is a very real enemy of the energy and focus that it takes to stay strong and faithful in one’s Christian walk, so effective leaders like Paul make an effort to keep people encouraged. Since Paul was in prison, it would be easy for the believers to lose their focus, and Paul knew it was important for him to let people know he was doing okay and was strong in the faith.

**“so that…so that.”** Ephesians 6:22 has a single subordinating conjunction *hina* (#2443 ἵνα), “so that,” which governs two subjunctive verbs (“know” and “encourage”) that are connected with the conjunction *kai* (#2532 καί). The conjunction functions in a distributive way across both verbs, so the REV and some other English versions repeat “so that” twice for clarity, even though the conjunction *hina* only occurs once in the Greek text.

Eph 6:23

**“brothers and sisters*.”*** For more on the translation “brothers and sisters,” see Word Study: “Adelphos.”

Eph 6:24

**“with an undying *love*.”** The word “undying” is *aphtharsia* (#861 ἀφθαρσία), which in this context refers to not being interrupted, thus “incorruptible, undying, everlasting,” etc. The Greek text literally reads “in incorruption” (*en aphtharsia*), and thus a more literal, but more difficult, English translation of the sentence is, “Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption,” that is, they love the Lord in an uninterrupted, undying way.

The word “love” is supplied for clarity and is picked up from the preceding participle *tōn agapōntōn* (“those who love”). The NET First Edition Bible text note offers an apt description of Paul’s intention with this final phrase: “The term ‘undying’ [incorruption] which modifies it [i.e., ‘love’] captures the sense of the kind of love the author is referring to here. He is saying that God’s grace will be with those whose love for Jesus never ceases.”

Thus, Ephesians 6:24 is another verse that points out that there is a conditional aspect to having God’s grace active in one’s daily life. In that sense, it is similar to James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5, which say that God gives grace to the humble. Here in Ephesians, God’s grace is with those who faithfully love the Lord Jesus.

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