Ephesians and Colossians

CHARLES H. TALBERT

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and Colossians

ΠΑΙΔΕΙΑ paideia
COMMENTARIES ON
THE NEW TESTAMENT

Ephesians
and Colossians

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To
M. R. Cherry
from whom I learned a lot
and to whom I owe a lot

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Foreword

Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament is a series that sets out to comment on the final form of the New Testament text in a way that pays due attention both to the cultural, literary, and theological settings in which the text took form and also to the interests of the contemporary readers to whom the commentaries are addressed. This series is aimed squarely at students—including MA students in religious and theological studies programs, seminarians, and upper-divisional undergraduates— who have theological interests in the biblical text. Thus, the didactic aim of the series is to enable students to understand each book of the New Testament as a literary whole rooted in a particular ancient setting and related to its context within the New Testament.

The name "Paideia" reflects (1) the instructional aim of the series— giving contemporary students a basic grounding in academic NT studies by guiding their engagement with New Testament texts; (2) the fact that the New Testament texts as literary unities are shaped by the educational categories and ideas (rhetorical, narratological, etc.) of their ancient writers and readers; and (3) the pedagogical aims of the texts themselves— their central aim being not simply to impart information but to form the theological convictions and moral habits of their readers.

Each commentary deals with the text in terms of larger rhetorical units; these are not verse-by-verse commentaries. This series thus stands within the stream of recent commentaries that attend to the final form of the text. Such reader-centered literary approaches are inherently more accessible to liberal arts students without extensive linguistic and historical-critical preparation than older exegetical approaches, but within the reader-centered world the sanest practitioners have paid careful attention to the extratext of the original readers, including not only

these readers' knowledge of the geography, history, and other context elements reflected in the text but also to their ability to respond correctly to the literary and rhetorical conventions used in the text. Paideia commentaries pay deliberate attention to this extratextual repertoire in order to highlight the ways in which the text is designed to persuade and move its readers. Each rhetorical unit is explored from three angles: (1) introductory matters; (2) tracing the train of thought or narrative flow of the argument; and (3) theological issues raised by the text that are of interest to the contemporary Christian. Thus, the primary focus remains on the text and not its historical context or its interpretation in the secondary literature.

Our authors represent a variety of confessional points of view: Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Greek Orthodox. What they share in common, beyond being New Testament scholars of national and international repute, is a commitment to reading the biblical text as theological documents within their ancient contexts. Working within the broad parameters described here, each author brings his or her own considerable exegetical talents and deep theological commitments to the task of laying bare the interpretation of Scripture for the faith and practice of God's people everywhere.

Mikeal C. Parsons
Charles H. Talbert

Preface

This volume has grown out of a doctoral seminar on Ephesians offered at Baylor University in 1996, 2002, and 2004. As usual, my students have consistently been my colaborers and frequently my teachers. My friends, I thank you. The volume itself was written during a sabbatical semester spent as a visiting professor at Duke Divinity School, spring 2005, where I taught a Greek exegesis course on Ephesians to eleven bright and interesting students and made good use of the wonderful libraries. For all the support system that enabled me to do my work, I owe a debt of gratitude to Dean L. Gregory Jones, Senior Associate Dean Willie Jennings, and Mrs. Jacquelyn Norris, Staff Assistant, Academic Programs. For a gracious, congenial community within which to live and work, I heartily thank Prof. Richard Hays (who was the catalyst behind my stay at Duke), Prof. Joel Marcus, Prof. Douglas Campbell, longtime friend Prof. James Crenshaw, Prof. Stephen Chapman, Emeritus Professor Moody Smith, and Prof. Curtis Freeman, Director of the Baptist House of Studies, with whom I had many late-afternoon conversations about matters of import. This project would never have been completed had it not been for the five months at Duke. I thank you one and all.

I thank *Family Ministry: Empowering through Faith* for the permission to use material from my article, "Are There Biblical Norms for Christian Marriage?" (15/1 [2001]: 16–27). I appreciated the opportunity to share my views on the *Haustafeln* with students and faculty at the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond in April 2005. Dean Richard Vinson and Prof. Scott Spencer made my visit a memorable one.

I am deeply indebted to my graduate assistant, Julien Smith, for his careful and dedicated efforts designed to bring my manuscript into line with the expectations of Baker Academic.

None of this effort would have been possible had it not been for my wife, Dr. Betty W. Talbert, Director of Spiritual Formation at Baylor's Truett Seminary, who shouldered my family duties in addition to her own professional responsibilities to make my sabbatical semester a reality.

Abbreviations throughout conform to those set forth in *The SBL Handbook of Style* (ed. Patrick H. Alexander et al.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999). Translations of biblical material are my own or from the NRSV unless otherwise indicated. Translations of Greek and Roman sources are usually from the Loeb Classical Library; those from the Pseudepigrapha are from James H. Charlesworth, editor, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983, 1985); those from the Dead Sea Scrolls are from Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) unless otherwise indicated; gnostic documents are usually cited from James M. Robinson, editor, *The Nag Hammadi Library* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977); material cited from the church fathers is normally taken from Philip Schaff et al., editors, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* and *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994).

It is my hope that this small volume will facilitate communication between modern readers and these two ancient letters, Ephesians and Colossians. There is much benefit to be gained therefrom.

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Charles H. Talbert
Easter 2006

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Abbreviations

General

b.	Babylonian Talmud	NT	New Testament
ca.	circa	pl.	plural
chap(s).	chapter(s)	sp.	spurious
esp.	especially	*t.*	Tosefta
m.	Mishnah	*y.*	Jerusalem Talmud
MSS	manuscripts		

Bible Texts and Versions

JB	Jerusalem Bible	NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
KJV	King James Version	NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
LXX	Septuagint		
MT	Masoretic Text	RSV	Revised Standard Version
NEB	New English Bible	TEV	Today's English Version
Nestle	*Novum Testamentum Graece*. Edited by [E. and E. Nestle], B. Aland et al., 27th rev. ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993	UBS	*The Greek New Testament*. Edited by K. Aland et al. 3rd ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft and United Bible Societies, 1983.
NIV	New International Version		

Ancient Jewish, Christian, and Gnostic Corpora

DEUTEROCANONICAL BOOKS

1–2 Esd	1–2 Esdras
Jdt	Judith
1–4 Macc	1–4 Maccabees
Sg Three	Song of the Three Young Men
Sir	Sirach
Tob	Tobit
Wis	Wisdom of Solomon

DEAD SEA SCROLLS

CD	*Damascus Document*
1QH	*1QHodayot*
1QM	*1QWar Scroll*
1QpHab	*1QPesher Habakkuk*
1QpPs	*1QPsalms Pesher*
1QS	*1QRule of the Community*
4QpIsa*ᵈ*	*4QIsaiah Pesherᵈ*
4QpPs*ᵃ*	*4QPsalms Pesherᵃ*
4Q174	*4QFlorilegium*
4Q186	*4QHoroscope*
4Q521	*4QMessianic Apocalypse*
11Q18	*11QNew Jerusalem*
11Q19	*11QTempleᵃ*

TARGUMIC TEXTS

Tg. Chron.	*Targum Chronicles*

MISHNAH AND TALMUD TRACTATES

Ber.	*Berakot*
Hull.	*Hullin*
Tehar.	*Teharot*

OTHER RABBINIC WORKS

Abot. R. Nat.	*Abot de Rabbi Nathan*

OLD TESTAMENT PSEUDEPIGRAPHA

Apoc. Ab.	*Apocalypse of Abraham*
Apoc. Sedr.	*Apocalypse of Sedrach*
Apoc. Zeph.	*Apocalypse of Zephaniah*

Ascen. Isa.	*Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*
2 Bar.	*2 Baruch* (Syriac Apocalypse)
1 En.	*1 Enoch* (Ethiopic Apocalypse)
2 En.	*2 Enoch* (Slavonic Apocalypse)
4 Ezra	*4 Ezra*
Jub.	*Jubilees*
LAB	*Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* (pseudo-Philo)
Let. Aris.	*Letter of Aristeas*
Odes Sol.	*Odes of Solomon*
Ps.-Phoc.	*Pseudo-Phocylides*
Sib. Or.	*Sibylline Oracles*
T. Ab.	*Testament of Abraham*
T. Levi	*Testament of Levi*
T. Naph.	*Testament of Naphtali*
Treat. Shem	*Treatise of Shem*

APOSTOLIC FATHERS

Barn.	*Barnabas*
1 Clem.	*1 Clement*
Did.	*Didache*
Diogn.	*Diognetus*
Herm. *Mand.*	*Shepherd of Hermas, Mandates*
Herm. *Sim.*	*Shepherd of Hermas, Similitudes*
Herm. *Vis.*	*Shepherd of Hermas, Visions*
Ign. *Eph.*	Ignatius, *To the Ephesians*
Ign. *Magn.*	Ignatius, *To the Magnesians*
Ign. *Phld.*	Ignatius, *To the Philadelphians*
Ign. *Pol.*	Ignatius, *To Polycarp*
Ign. *Rom.*	Ignatius, *To the Romans*

Ign. *Smyrn.*   Ignatius, *To the Smyrnaeans*

Ign. *Trall.*   Ignatius, *To the Trallians*

Mart. Pol.   *Martyrdom of Polycarp*

Pol. *Phil.*   Polycarp, *To the Philippians*

Nag Hammadi Codices

Apoc. Paul   V,2 Apocalypse of Paul

Ancient Authors

Achilles Tatius

Leuc. Cli.   *Leucippe et Clitophon*

Apuleius

Metam.   *Metamorphoses (The Golden Ass)*

Aristides

Apol.   *Apologia*

Aristides, Publius Aelius

Or.   *Orationes*

Aristotle

Eth. nic.   *Ethica nichomachea*

Mag. mor.   *Magna moralia* (sp.)

Oec.   *Oeconomica* (sp.)

Pol.   *Politica*

Rhet.   *Rhetorica*

Rhet. Alex.   *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* (sp.?)

Augustine

Tract Ev. Jo.   *In Evangelium Johannis tractatus*

Aulus Gellius

Noct. att.   *Noctes atticae (Attic Nights)*

Basil of Caesarea

Adv. Eunom.   *Adversus Eunomium*

Callicratidas

De dom. felic.   *De domestica felicitate* (sp.)

Cicero

Att.   *Epistulae ad Atticum*

Cat.   *In Catalinum*

Fam.   *Epistulae ad familiares*

Flac.   *Pro Flacco*

Leg.   *De legibus*

Nat. d.   *De natura deorum*

Off.   *De officiis*

Phil.   *Orationes philippicae*

Clement of Alexandria

Paed.   *Paedagogus (Christ the Educator)*

Protr.   *Protrepticus (Exhortation to the Greeks)*

Strom.   *Stromata (Miscellanies)*

Columella

Rust.   *De re rustica*

Curtius Rufus

Hist. Alex. Magni   *Historiae Alexandri Magni*

Demetrius

Eloc.   *De elocutione*

Demosthenes

Or.   *Orationes*

Abbreviations

DIO CHRYSOSTOM
Or.   *Orationes*

DIOGENES LAERTIUS
Vit. phil.   *Vitae philosophorum*

DIONYSIUS OF HALICARNASSUS
Ant. rom.   *Antiquitates romanae*

DIOTOGENES
De piet.   *De pietate*

EPICTETUS
Diatr.   *Diatribai*

EPICURUS
Ench.   *Enchiridion (Ratae sententiae)*

EPIPHANIUS
Pan.   *Panarion (Refutation of All Heresies)*

EURIPIDES
Arch.   *Archelaus*
Phoen.   *Phoenissae*

EUSEBIUS
Chron.   *Chronicon*
Hist. eccl.   *Historia ecclesiastica*

HERODIAN
Hist.   *Historiae*

HERODOTUS
Hist.   *Historiae*

HESIOD
Op.   *Opera et dies (Works and Days)*

HIPPOLYTUS
Haer.   *Refutatio omnium haeresium*

HOMER
Il.   *Ilias*
Od.   *Odyssea*

HORACE
Ars   *Ars poetica*

IAMBLICHUS
Vita   *Vita pythagorica*

IRENAEUS
Haer.   *Adversus haereses*

ISOCRATES
Demon.   *Ad Demonicum (Or. 1)*
Ep.   *Epistulae*
Evag.   *Evagoras (Or. 9)*

JEROME
Epist.   *Epistulae*

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM
Adv. Jud.   *Adversus Judaeos*
Hom. Col.   *Homiliae in epistulam ad Colossenses*
Hom. 2 Cor.   *Homilae in epistulam ii ad Corinthios*
Hom. Eph.   *Homiliae in epistulam ad Ephesios*

JOSEPHUS
Ant.   *Antiquitates judaicae (Jewish Antiquities)*
BJ   *Bellum judaicum (Jewish War)*
C. Ap.   *Contra Apionem (Against Apion)*

JUSTIN
1 Apol.   *Apologia i*
Dial.   *Dialogus cum Tryphone*

JUVENAL
Sat.   *Satirae*

LIVY
Hist.   *Ab urbe condita*

LONGINUS

Subl.   *De sublimitate* (sp.)

LUCIAN

Dial. meretr.   *Dialogi meretricii (Dialogues of the Courtesans)*

Dial. mort.   *Dialogi mortuorum (Dialogues of the Dead)*

Nigr.   *Nigrinus*

Sacr.   *De sacrificiis*

LYSIAS

Or.   *Orationes*

ORIGEN

Cels.   *Contra Celsum*

Hom. Lev.   *Homilae in Leviticum*

OROSIUS

Hist. adv. paganos   *Historiae adversus paganos*

OVID

Fast.   *Fasti*

PAUSANIAS

Descr.   *Graeciae descriptio*

PHILO

Agr.   *De agricultura (On Agriculture)*

Cher.   *De cherubim (On the Cherubim)*

Conf.   *De confusione linguarum (On the Confusion of Tongues)*

Congr.   *De congressu eruditionis gratia (On the Preliminary Studies)*

Contempl.   *De vita contemplativa (On the Contemplative Life)*

Decal.   *De decalogo (On the Decalogue)*

Det.   *Quod deterius potiori insidari soleat (That the Worse Attacks the Better)*

Deus   *Quod Deus sit immutabilis (That God Is Unchangeable)*

Ebr.   *De ebrietate (On Drunkenness)*

Fug.   *De fuga et inventione (On Flight and Finding)*

Her.   *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit (Who Is the Heir?)*

Leg.   *Legum allegoriae (Allegorical Interpretation)*

Mos.   *De vita Mosis (On the Life of Moses)*

Mut.   *De mutatione nominum (On the Change of Names)*

Plant.   *De plantatione (On Planting)*

Praem.   *De praemiis et poenis (On Rewards and Punishments)*

Sacr.   *De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini (On the Sacrifices of Cain and Abel)*

Somn.   *De somniis (On Dreams)*

Spec.   *De specialibus legibus (On the Special Laws)*

Virt.   *De virtutibus (On the Virtues)*

PHILOSTRATUS

Ep.   *Epistulae*

Vit. Apoll.   *Vita Apollonii*

PLATO

Gorg.   *Gorgias*

Leg.   *Leges (Laws)*

Phaedr.   *Phaedrus*

Pol.   *Politicus (Statesman)*

Resp.   *Respublica (Republic)*

Abbreviations

Theaet.   *Theaetetus*
Tim.   *Timaeus*

PLINY THE ELDER
Nat.   *Naturalis historia*

PLINY THE YOUNGER
Ep.   *Epistulae*

PLUTARCH
Alex.   *Alexander*
Ant.   *Antonius*
Art.   *Artaxerxes*
Cat. Min.   *Cato Minor (Cato the Younger)*
Conj. praec.   *Conjugalia praecepta*
Galb.   *Galba*
Is. Os.   *De Iside et Osiride*
Lib. ed.   *De liberis educandis* (sp.)
Mor.   *Moralia*
Num.   *Numa*
Per.   *Pericles*
Pomp.   *Pompeius*
Quaest. conv.   *Quaestionum convivialum libri ix*
Virt. prof.   *Quomodo quis suos in virtute sentiat profectus*

POLYBIUS
Hist.   *Historiae*

PORPHYRY
Marc.   *Ad Marcellam*

QUINTILIAN
Inst.   *Institutio oratoria*

SENECA
Ben.   *De beneficiis*
Clem.   *De clementia*

Ep.   *Epistulae morales*
Ira   *De ira*
Nat.   *Naturales quaestiones*
Prov.   *De providentia*

SOCRATES
Ep.   *Epistulae* (sp.)

STOBAEUS
Anth.   *Anthologium*

STRABO
Geogr.   *Geographica*

SUETONIUS
Aug.   *Divus Augustus*
Tit.   *Divus Titus*

TACITUS
Ann.   *Annales*
Dial.   *Dialogus de oratoribus*

TERTULLIAN
An.   *De anima (The Soul)*
Apol.   *Apologeticus (Apology)*
Marc.   *Adversus Marcionem (Against Marcion)*
Nat.   *Ad nationes (To the Heathen)*
Scorp.   *Scorpiace (Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting)*

THUCYDIDES
Hist.   *Historiae*

VIRGIL
Aen.   *Aeneid*
Ecl.   *Eclogae*

XENOPHON
Cyr.   *Cyropaedia*
Oec.   *Oeconomicus*

Anonymous Ancient Works

Res gest. divi Aug.   *Res gestae divi Augusti* (funeral inscription)

Series and Collections

Corp. Herm.   *Corpus Hermeticum.* Edited by A. D. Nock and A.-J. Festugière. Vol. 1. Paris: Belles Lettres, 1946.

ICil.   *Inscriptions de Cilicie*. Edited by G. Dagron and D. Feissel. Paris: De Boccard, 1987.

LCL   *Loeb Classical Library*

PColZen   *Zenon Papyri: Business Papers of the Third Century B.C. Dealing with Palestine and Egypt*. Vol. 1. Edited by W. L. Westermann and E. S. Hasenoehrl. New York: Columbia University Press, 1934.

PG   *Patrologia graeca [= Patrologiae cursus completus: Series graeca]. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 162 vols. Paris, 1857–1886.*

PGM   *Papyri Graecae Magicae*. Edited by K. Preisendanz. 2 vols. Leipzig: Teubner, 1928–31.

Ephesians and Colossians

Introduction

Understanding the Relations between Ephesians and Colossians

Why, one may wonder, are Ephesians and Colossians separated by Philippians in the New Testament? The thirteen letters attributed to Paul in the Christian Bible (= canonical Paul) are arranged according to two principles. First, the letters are divided into two groups, the letters to the seven churches (Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians) and the letters to the three individuals (Timothy, Titus, Philemon). Second, the letters are placed in the order of descending length in each group. Romans is the longest of the letters to the churches, 2 Thessalonians is the shortest; 1 Timothy is the longest of the letters to individuals, Philemon is the shortest. The one possible exception to this second principle is the respective lengths of Galatians and Ephesians. At least in the way length was counted by those responsible for the current order, Galatians is deemed longer than Ephesians, Philippians longer than Colossians. These formal principles account for the current positions of Ephesians and Colossians.

In this commentary series, however, Ephesians and Colossians are treated together because of their similarities. Paul writes from prison in both (Eph 3:1; 4:1; 6:20; Col 4:3; 4:10; 4:18). Tychicus delivers both letters (Eph 6:21–22; Col 4:7–9). The style shared by the two letters is more elaborate than the rest of the canonical Pauline writings (numerous relative clauses and parallel expressions, genitival constructions, etc.). Their contents are similar, sometimes in the same order. (See table 1.)

**Table 1.
Similar Passages
in Ephesians and Colossians**

Ephesians		Colossians
Eph 1:1–2	//	Col 1:1–2
Eph 1:3–18	//	Col 1:3–11
Eph 3:1–13	//	Col 1:24–2:5
Eph 4:17–6:9	//	Col 3:5–4:1
Eph 6:18–20	//	Col 4:2–4
Eph 6:21–22	//	Col 4:7–9

These similarities have sometimes led scholars to posit a literary dependence of some kind, analogous to the way the similarities among the Synoptic Gospels or between 2 Peter and Jude are interpreted. A few have argued that Colossians used Ephesians as a source (Synge 1941; Coutts 1958). Most scholars hold that Ephesians used Colossians as a source (see Lincoln 1990, xlvii–lviii). Still others have contended that Colossians and Ephesians used a third letter (e.g., van Roon 1974, 426). The argument for the use of a written source is based on the similarities in order.

Upon closer examination, the evidence of order unravels. The elements found in the same order consist primarily of the salutation, the prayer form, the parenesis, and the closing. These four components are standard ingredients in a Pauline letter and are in their natural order. When a more complete collection of similarities between the two letters is displayed, the impression is very different. Take the list of similarities set forth by Abbott (1897, xxiii; reproduced in table 2).

**Table 2.
Comparative Ordering of Similar Passages in Ephesians and Colossians**

Ephesians		Colossians	Ephesians		Colossians
Eph 1:7	//	Col 1:14	Eph 3:2	//	Col 1:25
Eph 1:10	//	Col 1:20	Eph 3:3	//	Col 1:26
Eph 1:15–17	//	Col 1:3–4	Eph 3:7	//	Col 1:23, 25
Eph 1:18	//	Col 1:27	Eph 3:9	//	Col 1:26
Eph 1:21	//	Col 1:16	Eph 4:1	//	Col 1:10
Eph 1:22	//	Col 1:18	Eph 4:2	//	Col 3:12–13
Eph 2:1, 12	//	Col 1:21	Eph 4:3–4	//	Col 3:14–15
Eph 2:5	//	Col 2:13	Eph 4:16	//	Col 2:19
Eph 2:15	//	Col 2:14	Eph 4:22–23	//	Col 3:8–10
Eph 2:16	//	Col 2:20	Eph 4:25–26	//	Col 3:8–9
Eph 3:1	//	Col 1:24	Eph 4:29	//	Col 3:8; 4:6

Ephesians		Colossians		Ephesians		Colossians
Eph 4:31	//	Col 3:8		Eph 5:22*	//	Col 3:18
Eph 4:32	//	Col 3:12		Eph 5:25*	//	Col 3:19
Eph 5:3	//	Col 3:5		Eph 6:1*	//	Col 3:20
Eph 5:4	//	Col 3:8		Eph 6:4*	//	Col 3:21
Eph 5:5	//	Col 3:5		Eph 6:5–8*	//	Col 3:22–25
Eph 5:6	//	Col 3:6		Eph 6:9*	//	Col 4:1
Eph 5:15	//	Col 4:5		Eph 6:18–20	//	Col 4:2–4
Eph 5:19–20	//	Col 3:16–17		Eph 6:21–22	//	Col 4:7–8

Taken as raw data, this list shows the violations of order (sixteen out of thirty-eight). The asterisks (*) indicate the household code's components (= traditional material). This evidence shows that where the two letters share a similar content, they do not agree in their order about 40 percent of the time. The agreements in order, moreover, are sometimes to be attributed to the order of the tradition used. If this is taken into account, then the two letters disagree on the order of the similar material about half the time.

One must also take into account the idiosyncrasies of the content of Colossians and Ephesians. That is, common material is developed or used in different ways. Selected examples should illustrate the point. In Colossians Christ is the creator of the cosmos (1:15–17); in Ephesians God is creator of the cosmos (3:9), while Christ is creator of a new humanity (2:15). In Colossians God's fullness fills Christ first and then the church (1:19; 2:9–10); in Ephesians Christ fills the church and all things (1:22–23; 3:19; 4:10). In Colossians Christ is the mystery (1:26–27; 2:2; 4:3); in Ephesians God's plan is the mystery (1:9; 3:3–4; 6:19). In Colossians the mystery is revealed to all the saints (1:26); in Ephesians the mystery is revealed to the apostles and prophets (3:5). In Colossians all things in heaven and earth are reconciled and the powers are defeated through the cross (1:20; 2:15); in Ephesians only through the resurrection of Christ are the powers defeated and the saints saved (1:18–2:10). In Colossians the saints are already filled with the fullness of God (2:9–10); in Ephesians the saints are being filled with the fullness of God (3:19). Colossians speaks of spiritual circumcision (2:11); Ephesians is silent on this matter. In Colossians Israel is not explicitly called the forerunner and partner of Gentiles in God's covenant; in Ephesians Israel is the forerunner and partner with the Gentiles in a new humanity (2:11–22; 3:6). In Colossians God is to be praised directly (3:16); in Ephesians God is praised through the Lord Jesus Christ (5:20). Colossians mentions the Spirit only once (1:8); Ephesians refers frequently to the Spirit (1:13–14; 1:17; 2:18, 22; 3:5, 16; 4:3–4, 30; 6:17–18). In Colossians Paul is the only

apostle; in Ephesians, he is one among other apostles, even if the chief among them (2:20; 3:5). In Col 4:15–16, *ekklēsia* refers both to the local church (4:15, 16) and to the church universal (1:18, 24); in Ephesians it always refers to the universal church. In Colossians *oikonomia* refers to Paul's assignment or commission to preach the gospel (1:25); in Ephesians it refers to God's plan for the world's reunification (1:10), or it could mean either God's plan or Paul's stewardship (3:2, 9; Barth and Blanke 1994; Mitton 1951). These data, together with the disagreements in order, raise questions about either letter's use of the other. Indeed, the data also raise a question about the possibility of both letters' having come from the same mind within a short space of time.

If literary dependence is assumed, it is virtually impossible to detect which letter is the source for the other. The case for dependence can be argued for either side. For example, analyzing the alleged conflations, Polhill (1973) argues that Ephesians conflates in 1:7 (Col 1:14, 20); 1:15–16 (Col 1:4, 9); 2:1–5 (Col 2:13; 3:6), whereas Colossians conflates in 1:23 (Eph 3:7, 17); 1:21–22 (Eph 1:4; 2:16); 1:20 (Eph 1:10; 2:13). In other words, the directional indicators run both ways. Barth and Blanke (1994) and Best (1997; 2004, 159 [Eph 1:15–16], 166 [Eph 1:18], 336 [Eph 3:13], 410 [Eph 4:16], 613–14 [Eph 6:21–24]) argue that there are times when the directional indicators point to the priority of Ephesians. At times, however, they do not. The former contend, for example, that Col 1:20 is best explained if Colossians excerpts and condenses Eph 2:11–16 into one brief sentence; also that Col 4:2–6 culls the elements from Eph 4:29; 5:15–16; 6:18–20 and combines them (Barth and Blanke 1994, 75–76, 79–80). They conclude, "While a close relationship of Colossians and Ephesians is certain, the question whether the dependence of one or both of these letters can be demonstrated is as yet open" (101).

The complexity of the evidence has led some to think that the two letters were written by two different authors from the same Pauline circle of disciples, who drew on early Christian oral tradition (King 1952) and opposed related forms of doctrine and practice (Dahl 1963, 71–72; 2000, 458; Best 1997). This proposal has significant support within the scholarly community. Barth and Blanke (1994, 125), Cannon (1983), and others, however, continue to argue for Pauline authorship of both letters. Their proposals agree on the literary independence of Colossians and Ephesians and seek a hypothesis that will account for both the similarities and differences between the two writings. In this commentary Colossians and Ephesians are taken together because of their similarities. To say they are similar, however, does not mean that one used the other as a source. We will treat the two letters as literarily independent writings, even if related closely by common thought worlds and traditions. Nor do the similarities and differences determine one's answer to the question of authorship.

Authorship

The idea of authorship in antiquity was complex and covered a broad spectrum of practices.[1]

First, "authorship" could mean the author wrote the work with his own hand. At the end of Galatians, Paul writes "See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand!" (Gal 6:11; cf. 1 Cor 16:21; Col 4:18; 2 Thess 3:17; Phlm 19).

Second, it could also mean the author dictated the writing. Thus Paul is the author of Romans, in which the person who took dictation adds "I, Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord" (Rom 16:22). A secretary's role varied greatly. Some secretaries took dictation in longhand, a procedure that often required the use of multiple secretaries. According to Pliny the Elder, Julius Caesar would dictate from four to seven letters at once, using multiple secretaries (*Nat*. 7.91). Other secretaries knew a form of shorthand. Seneca spoke about "signs for whole words, which enable us to take down a speech, however rapidly uttered, matching speed of tongue by speed of hand" (*Ep*. 90.25). Quintilian expressed his concern that such rapid dictation resulted in sloppy writing (*Inst*. 10.3.19–20). (Further on shorthand in the first century BC, cf. Plutarch, *Cat. Min.* 23.3–5; in the first century AD, cf. Suetonius, *Tit*. 3.2, and Dio Cassius 55.7.) A secretary in antiquity had considerable leeway in what was written, as secretaries do today (Richards 1991). Some secretaries went beyond being copyists to being copy editors who even corrected slips made by their employers (Cicero, *Fam*. 16.17.1).

Third, collaborators could have functioned as coauthors (cf. 1 Thess 1:1, "Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy"; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1–2; Phil 1:1; Col 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; Phlm 1).

Fourth, someone could have authorized the writing, causing it to be written. Thus the NRSV translates "wrote" as "had . . . written" in John 19:19 ("Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross"); we may translate the same verb similarly in John 21:24: "This is the disciple who has caused these things to be written."

Fifth, a piece could be written "as if" by one individual but actually composed by a friend or disciple. Thus Cicero once dictated a letter to himself, using the secretary of Atticus and under Atticus's name. The letter contained words of praise for Caelius. In order to gain Caelius's favor for Atticus, he then read the letter to Caelius, as if it had come from Atticus. The letter had not been authorized by Atticus. (See Cicero, *Att*. 6.6.) To this practice we may compare the Pastoral Epistles or 2 Peter. The "as if" category of authorship is the one that is often applied to

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1. For what follows, see Murphy-O'Connor 1995, chap. 1.

Varieties of Authorship: Illustrations from Cicero

1. Authorship as writing in one's own hand:

   "I do not think you ever before read a letter of mine that I had not written myself."
   —*Letters to Atticus* 2.23.1

2. Authorship as writing by dictation:

   "The bare fact that my letter is by the hand of a secretary will show you how busy I am."
   —*Letters to Atticus* 4.16.1

3. Authorship as collaboration in writing:

   "For my part I have gathered from your letters—both that which you wrote in conjunction with others and the one you wrote in your own name—what I saw myself too. . . ."
   —*Letters to Atticus* 11.5

4. Authorship as authorizing someone else to write:

   "If there are any people to whom you think that letters ought to be delivered in my name, pray compose them and see them delivered."
   —*Letters to Atticus* 3.1.5

   "I am so fearfully upset both in mind and body that I have not been able to write many letters; I have only answered those who have written to me. I should like you to write in my name to Basilus and to anyone else you like, even to Servilius, and say whatever you think fit."
   —*Letters to Atticus* 11.5

5. Writing "as if" by the putative author:

   "But, good heavens! what credit I have given you in his eyes! I read him the letter written, not by you, but by your amanuensis."
   —*Letters to Atticus* 6.6

Ephesians. An exercise in ancient rhetorical education was the composition of speeches as though one were some ancient noteworthy figure. In such a composition one took the identity of another and spoke in his vocabulary and style, and with his values. This practice was called *prosōpopoeia*. One took on the "face" (identity) of another and spoke for him in first person as if the past figure himself were speaking. When ancient Pythagoreans wrote not in their own names but in the name of their master, Pythagoras, this is what they were doing (Metzger 1972).

The practice of writing in the name of one's teacher was also a way to acknowledge the source of the ideas. This practice, then, was the moral equivalent of the modern footnote system. The practice of speaking in the voice of another came from rhetorical training; the function of the practice in this type of case was the acknowledgment of the source of one's ideas. As Tertullian (*Marc*. 4.5) put it, "The works that disciples publish belong to their masters."

A sixth and final possibility is outright forgery (2 Thess 2:2, "Do not be shaken or alarmed . . . by a letter, as though from us, that says the day of the Lord has already come"). The difference between an "as if" letter and a forgery was that the former maintained continuity with the master's thought while the latter distorted it, manifesting discontinuity with his teaching.

If Colossians is understood to have been written by Paul, it would represent a combination of the first, second, and third types: the author's own handwriting, dictation to a secretary, and coauthorship. Paul and Timothy agreed on the content, which was then dictated to a scribe in one way or another. At the end Paul would have written his authenticating sentence in his own hand. If, as Dunn hypothesizes, at the end of his life the apostle authorized Timothy to write to the Colossians, it combines the first, second, and fourth forms: Paul would have authorized Timothy to write, Timothy would have dictated the letter, and then at the end Paul would have written his authenticating sentence in his own hand. If one believes, as most scholars do, that Colossians is deutero-Pauline, this would involve the second and fifth types of authorship. A close disciple of Paul who knew the apostle's mind would have invoked the apostle's authority in a new situation. He would have dictated the letter to a secretary and then have added the authenticating sentence, allegedly from Paul. Because the content of the letter reflected continuity with the apostle's thought, it would not have been considered a forgery but an expression of genuine Pauline conviction. The same processes would apply to Ephesians as well.

Scholars who consider Colossians or Ephesians, or both, deutero-Pauline (the fifth type, "as if") do so largely because their theology seems to differ at points from that of the authentic seven letters. Several examples illustrate the matter.

For Paul, baptism is a dying with Christ and resurrection is future (Rom 6), whereas for Colossians baptism is being buried and rising with Christ (2:12; 3:1, 3) and for Ephesians baptism is the raising of those who were dead through trespasses and sins (2:5).

For Paul, "mystery" refers to an eschatological teaching about the participation of believers in the glory of the world to come (Rom 11:25; 1 Cor 2:6; 15:51), but for Colossians the mystery is Christ (1:27; 2:3; 4:3)

Attribution of Authorship to an Honored Teacher

Pythagoras, a thinker and teacher of the sixth century BC who made important discoveries in mathematics and music theory and founded a religious society, may have left no writings of his own, but his devoted followers customarily signed his name to their works, as the author of a much later biography states:

"But the men shut out all lamentation and tears and the like, letting neither gain nor desire nor anger nor love of honor nor any other such thing become a cause of difference. Rather, all the Pythagoreans have the same attitude toward each other as a diligent father would have toward his children. And they consider it a noble thing to attribute and allot all of their investigations to Pythagoras, claiming none of the honor for themselves—unless perhaps rarely, for there are very few whose writings are known to be their own."

—Iamblichus (AD 250–324?), *Life of Pythagoras* 31.198

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and for Ephesians the mystery is God's plan to reunify the cosmos, which involves inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God (1:9–10; 3:3–6).

For Paul, "church" refers to the local church (e.g., 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:22; 1 Thess 1:1; Phlm 2). The Lord will return and take believers to be with him (1 Thess 4:13–17). For Colossians, the church is both local (4:15–16) and universal (1:18, 24). Believers are now hidden with Christ in God and will be manifested when Christ is (3:3–4). For Ephesians, the church is always universal. It is growing through time toward the full stature of Christ (4:12–13). There is no mention of the Lord's return.

Paul occasionally refers to Satan (1 Cor 5:5; 2 Cor 12:7; 1 Thess 3:5) but never to the devil or to the prince of the power of the air. Though powers are mentioned (Rom 8:38–39), there is no sense of intense, ongoing spiritual warfare. In Colossians, the leader of the evil forces is the authority of darkness (1:13), and his legions are the *stoicheia* of the cosmos (2:8, 20) and the rulers and authorities (2:10, 15). Christians have died to these powers (2:20). In Ephesians, the enemy is the devil (4:27), the ruler of the power of the air (2:2), and a host of evil spirits that dwell in the heavens (2:2; 6:12; Kirby 1968, 10–17, agreeing with Masson's arguments).

Colossians and Ephesians lack characteristic Pauline terms like sin, law, promise, and righteousness/justification. Nothing is said about Christ's victory over sin, law, and death. The stress is on Christ's triumph over the cosmic powers. Imminent eschatology is gone (Lohse 1975, 178). Many scholars see these differences as evidence of a profound change in Pauline theology. Paul, therefore, cannot be considered to be

the direct or indirect author of these letters; rather, theologians of the Pauline circle composed the letters to deal with a new situation in the life of the church. While Romans and Galatians, genuine Pauline letters, are focused on the problem of the Gentiles, Colossians and Ephesians are concerned with the problems of Gentile Christians.

To modern ears, the claim that Colossians and Ephesians are pseudonymous documents, written by a disciple or disciples of Paul in his name after his death, often sounds like a charge of forgery—a dishonest practice. According to ancient sensibilities, however, the letters would be perceived as forgeries only if the ideas presented were not in continuity with those of the alleged author. So modern scholars treat Colossians and Ephesians as deutero-Pauline letters, meaning that they differ enough from the authentic Pauline letters to show that they do not come from Paul himself, but they exhibit sufficient continuity with his letters to warrant the conclusion that they were written by followers of his who saw themselves as carrying on his work and writing under his authority. Since Colossians and Ephesians are in the canon and part of canonical Paul, their religious authority for the church is unaffected by issues of authorship.

Date

External evidence locates both letters in the early Christian period. Ephesians was known, used, and revered early. There may be an echo of Eph 4:4–6 in *1 Clem*. 46.6. Ignatius, in *To the Ephesians*, echoes Eph 1:3–5 (prescript) and alludes to Eph 2:20–22 (9.1). Polycarp, in *To the Philippians*, echoes Eph 2:5, 8–9 (1.3). Elsewhere he echoes both Eph 4:26 and Ps 4:4, calling both scripture and making Ephesians the first New Testament book to be called scripture by the early fathers (Pol. *Phil*. 12.1).

No exact quotations from Colossians can be found among the Apostolic Fathers. Marcion, however, quotes from every chapter of Colossians but omits, or deletes, Col 1:15–17 and 2:17, which have to do with Christ's "body." The Valentinians also used Colossians quite early.

Colossians and Ephesians show similarities with the Pauline letters commonly deemed authentic. This data can be interpreted in two very different ways. On the one hand, the similarities can be taken as evidence that Colossians and Ephesians depend literarily on the authentic Pauline letters, indicating that these two letters are deutero-Pauline (for Ephesians: Goodspeed 1927, 1933, 1956; Mitton 1951; for Colossians: Sanders 1966; Leppä 2003). Or if deutero-Pauline authorship is assumed, then the echoes or allusions of the authentic letters may reflect the Pauline

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school's intimate knowledge of their foundational literature. In either of these scenarios, Colossians and Ephesians are later than the authentic seven. On the other hand, if Paul is the author, one would expect to hear echoes of his earlier letters. Even so, Colossians and Ephesians must come from a period after the letters they "echo." Taken together, the data locate Colossians and Ephesians between the late 50s and the end of the first century.

Locale

The links between the letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians, and the links between Colossians and the other cities of the Lycus River valley (Laodicea and Hierapolis, Col 4:13, 16), together with key Colossian individuals' connections with Ephesus and the province of Asia (Timothy, 1 Tim 1:3; Tychicus, 2 Tim 4:12) point to the province of Asia, or at least western Asia Minor, as the likely geographical setting for the two letters.

Purpose

Taking Ephesians first, scholarship breaks into two main camps on this issue. In the first, scholars attempt to isolate a particular problem that Ephesians addresses and see the purpose of the letter in relation to that problem. Proposed problems include persecution (Lindemann 1985), gnostic tendencies (Pokorný 1992), threats from hostile powers (Arnold 1989), Gentile Christians' contempt for Jewish Christians (D. C. Smith 1977; R. P. Martin 1978, 224), a Paulinism that has lost its Jewish roots (Meade 1986, 149), and Jewish Christian visionaries (Goulder 1991). Since, however, no particular problem is specifically mentioned in the letter, all attempts to find a purpose for Ephesians in the correction of or defense against a single problem have failed.

The fact that no specific issue is being explicitly combated has led another group of scholars to a more general proposal. Some of these scholars identify the purpose of Ephesians as identity formation (Sampley 1993, 23; Hendrix 1988, 10; Snodgrass 1996, 23; Lincoln 1990, lxxv; Lincoln and Wedderburn 1993, 82, 145; O'Brien 1999, 56–57; Mouton 2002, 112) or reorientation/resocialization/character formation (Mouton 2002, 46, 47, 186). Others do not employ such terminology but seem to point in the same direction, although using a variety of schemes. When Best (2004, 75) says the purpose of Ephesians is to tell converted Gentiles the nature of their new life and the conduct required of them in it, or when Dahl (2000, 416) describes the contents of Ephesians as

Figure 1. Map of the Roman Province of Asia.

The Roman province of Asia encompassed a number of Greek cities in the western portion of the Anatolian peninsula, which came under Roman control during the second century BC.

Figure 2. Map of Cities of the Province of Asia.

The cities of Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis were located in the fertile Lycus River Valley. Colossae was about 120 miles east of Ephesus, 11 miles southeast of Laodicea, and 15 miles south-southeast of Hierapolis. An earthquake devastated the area in AD 60 or AD 64.

baptismal *anamnēsis* (remembrance) in chapters 1–3 and baptismal parenesis (instruction) in chapters 4–6, or when Kirby (1968) argues that Ephesians is a prayer (Eph 1–3) and a discourse (Eph 4–6) used liturgically as a call for the renewal of baptismal vows, or Jeal (2000, 59, 60–61) contends that the author's concern is for his audience's growth and maturity, even though the language of identity/character formation is not used, the idea is present. One may speak, therefore, of an emerging front in the study of Ephesians that sees the purpose of the letter as identity formation in a more general sense than the correction of a specific problem.

The purpose of Colossians has usually been seen as the defense against the problem of the "Colossian philosophy" (2:8). The debate among scholars has then been over the nature of the philosophy, whether it is a problem caused by mystery religion piety, Neopythagorean or Cynic philosophy, Judaism, or syncretistic folk religion (see the commentary

on 2:6–23 for details). For this camp of scholarly opinion, Colossians is a defense against a worldview that is alien to Christian convictions. Recently, however, Meeks and Wilson have mounted a case for seeing Colossians against the backdrop of Hellenistic philosophy's strategies to form the moral character of its adherents. Colossians certainly does employ the main strategies used by moral philosophers in the Mediterranean world of the time (see the commentary on 1:1–2 and 1:3–23 for details). The letter seems to be a Christian adaptation of conventional philosophic strategies to form the readers of Colossians so that they might make progress in their Christian walk.

Approach

Both Colossians and Ephesians are to be read as efforts to shape Christian identity and enable Christian growth. They differ in that Colossians aims at progress in the face of a specific problem, while Ephesians is not focused against a specific problem but directed to Christian identity formation and growth within the context of the general cultural ethos of the early imperial period.

This difference requires different approaches to the two letters. Colossians is less problematic because scholars are accustomed to interpreting Pauline letters that focus on a particular problem. This traditional tack, combined with attention to the strategies of Hellenistic moral philosophers, should suffice to make for an intelligible reading of the Colossian letter. The case of Ephesians is more complex. This letter has proved to be "something of an enigma" to modern scholars who work with the historical method (O'Brien 1999, 3). As one contemporary scholar puts it, "The trouble with Ephesians can be summed up quite simply; it has no setting and little obvious purpose" (Muddiman 2001, 13). Consequently, E. J. Goodspeed described Ephesians as "the Waterloo of commentators" (1933, 15).

The normal historical questions do not yield the necessary answers: To whom was the letter sent? Where did it originate? Who was its author? What were its sources? What problem is it trying to solve? This commentary is able to conclude only that Ephesians is probably a deutero-Pauline letter written between the late 50s and AD 100, literarily independent of Colossians, likely addressed to some audience in western Asia Minor, and intended to reinforce their Christian identity and promote their Christian growth. This is very general. What is needed is a different set of questions, a different perspective, a different approach that will render Ephesians less of an enigma.

To help find this new perspective I make two suggestions. First, one must recognize that the audience functions not only as the *cause* of the composition of Ephesians but also as the *catalyst* for the selection of its language, style, arguments, and *topoi*. That is, the author would have had to adapt himself to his audience in order to establish a mutual frame of reference between them (Mouton 2002, 117). There is nothing radical here. Communicators in general attempt to produce texts that are maximally relevant to their audiences. This requires the use of information shared with an audience as a springboard for introducing new information (Sperber and Wilson 1986). Ephesians must reflect to some degree the cultural, intellectual, and religious ethos of its intended audience. If so, from the letter one may infer various dimensions of the *Zeitgeist* of the readers. This "world" of the audience may then be fleshed out from what we know otherwise about the milieu.

Second, a reading of Ephesians should then be done in terms of the authorial audience (Rabinowitz 1977, 1987, 1989). The questions to ask are: How would the ancient auditors at the end of the first century have heard Ephesians? What would it have meant to them in their "world"? This involves a close reading of the text of Ephesians in dialogue with aspects of the culture that have been signaled by the letter's argument. In this approach, it is not this or that particular problem that is addressed but the culture at large, or at least the parts of the larger culture reflected in the topics addressed in the argument of the letter.

Because of the ongoing dominance of the historical paradigm in New Testament studies it is necessary to say a word about comparative material and its use in this commentary. In the History of Religions School, parallels detected in the larger culture were assumed to demonstrate borrowing by Christians from non-Christian sources. Christianity was portrayed as a syncretistic religion created out of pieces taken over from here, there, and everywhere. Commentators who rejected this approach and defended the integrity of the Christian movement were tempted to discredit pagan parallels with arguments like, "The parallel material is too late to have been of use by the New Testament authors," or, "The parallels may reflect verbal similarity but lack essential continuity with Christian positions and are hence irrelevant for New Testament studies." This is not the way comparative material is understood or used in a reading that is sensitive to the authorial audience; rather, one should ask, "How would the original auditors have heard what was said?"

It is assumed that the Christian movement has its own essential integrity. It is also assumed that no one could communicate in the Mediterranean world without some participation in the culture. Every reader brought a cultural repertoire to the text. In this method, then, parallels

are used to reconstruct the authorial audience. Only thereby can one hope to answer the question, "How would an ancient Mediterranean auditor have heard Ephesians?" In what immediately follows, I will attempt to describe those parts of the ancient cultural repertoire that seem indicated by the points of interest in Ephesians (and Colossians as well).

Unity

Given the pervasive theme of unity in Ephesians, the "world" of Ephesians must have included a desire for or emphasis upon unity and the overcoming of factions. In other sources geographically and chronologically close to Ephesians, one also hears arguments urging unity on divided factions (Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 34, 38–41, 48; Aelius Aristides, *Orations* 23–24; Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 4.8–9; Pliny, *Epistles* 6–8). These sources continued a long Greek tradition (e.g., Isocrates, *Ep.* 1, 2, 3, 9; Demosthenes, *Epistles* 1; cf. Mitchell 1991, 62–63). That factions were also a problem for early Christian communities is evident from 1 Cor 1–4, in the 50s, and *1 Clement*, in the 90s.

Mediterranean peoples looked back to Alexander the Great as the great uniter. For Plutarch, ever since Augustus, the Caesars had assumed the role of Alexander the Great and were fulfilling what he had begun. "Rome's political and military successes were the means of overcoming factionalism and establishing a single state in which all would be governed under a single justice and obey a single purpose" (Odell-Scott 2003, 161). A dominant theme in the propaganda of imperial Rome was that the ideal king, Augustus, had restored order and brought peace to the Mediterranean world, the *pax romana* (e.g., Virgil, *Aen*. 6.851–853; *Ecl*. 4). In the ancient Mediterranean world it was widely assumed that the harmony of the political unit was an imitation of the concord of the universe. The king's rule was necessary to produce this ideal condition (Cairns 1989, 10–28). This unity, Roman propaganda asserted, the Caesars

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Alexander the Great as the Great Uniter

"[Alexander] came as a heaven-sent governor to all and as a mediator for the whole world; those whom he could not persuade to unite with him, he conquered by force of arms, and he brought together into one body all men everywhere, uniting and mixing in one great loving-cup, as it were, men's lives, their characters, their marriages, their very habits of life. He bade them all consider . . . as their stronghold and protection his camp."

—Plutarch, *On Alexander's Great Fortune and Virtue, Moralia* 4.329C

had accomplished. Horace describes Augustus as Jupiter's terrestrial regent and viceroy (*Odes* 1.12.49–52).

Ephesians would have been heard by people who shared this concern about overcoming factionalism and restoring order and were familiar with Roman imperial propaganda that touted the *pax romana*. Given this cultural obsession for a unity that would overcome the deep divisions among peoples, and given the Roman propaganda that this reunification of the cosmos is precisely what the Caesars had done, the theme of the reunification through Christ in Ephesians (e.g., 1:10; 2:14–15; 3:10; 4:3, 13, 31–32; 5:22–6:9) would certainly have shaped the identity and formed the character of readers from western Asia Minor over against the regnant imperial propaganda. This letter's focus on unity and the reunification of the cosmos takes on fresh meaning when read against the background of the Mediterranean hunger and thirst for just such a reality.

Hostile Powers

Given the repeated references to evil powers in Ephesians, the "world" of the letter must surely have been concerned about such hostile forces and their effect on human lives. This is the significant contribution of Arnold (1989) to the study of Ephesians. The Greek magical papyri reflect this ethos. "The people whose religion is reflected in the papyri agree that humanity is inescapably at the whim of the forces of the universe. . . . Individuals seem to be nothing but marionettes at the end of power lines, pulled here and there without their knowledge by invisible forces" (Betz 1986, xlvii). Magic provided a sense of security to the insecure, a sense of help for the helpless, and a sense of comfort for the hopeless. For example, a first/second-century papyrus is concerned with gaining relief from demon possession (*PGM* LXXXV. 1–6). Plutarch says that magi instructed those who were possessed by demons to repeat to themselves magical words in order to drive out the evil spirits (*Quaest. conv.* 7.5). These words were the Ephesian Grammata, six terms (*askion, kataskion, tetrax, lix, danameneus, sision*) believed to have power over evil spirits (so Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5.242; cf. Usami 1983, 17). People also felt victimized by an impersonal, amoral Fate that affected them down to the minutiae of their lives and by fickle Fortune that seemed like a tempest at sea. Best summarizes the situation well: "Almost everyone in the ancient world believed that the way they lived was controlled by the stars, various deities and sub-deities and by magic exercised by other people. Fate . . . determined what should happen" (Best 2004, 48). No deity who did not offer relief from such oppression could expect devotees in this milieu. So in an aretalogy of Isis from the end of the first/beginning of

the second century, the goddess says, "I am Isis. . . . I overcome Fate. Fate hearkens to me" (Grant 1953, 133). In Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, when Isis has delivered Lucius from being in the form of a donkey, the priest says to him, "Fortune has no power over those who have devoted themselves to the majesty of our goddess" (11.15, Grant 1953, 139). He declares, "See, here is Lucius, freed from his former miseries by the providence of the great goddess Isis" (Grant 1953, 140). At the end of Book 11, Lucius addresses the goddess:

> O holy and eternal guardian of the human race. . . . Neither day nor night, nor any moment in time, ever passes by without thy blessings, but always

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Augustus as the Great Bringer of Peace

"Janus Quirinus, which our ancestors ordered to be closed whenever there was peace, secured by victory, throughout the whole domain of the Roman people on land and sea, and which, before my birth is recorded to have been closed but twice in all since the foundation of the city, the senate ordered to be closed thrice while I was princeps."

—The funerary inscription of Augustus (*Res gestae divi Augusti* 13)

"Never have the Romans and their allies thrived in such peace and plenty as that which was afforded them by Augustus Caesar from the time he assumed absolute authority."

—Strabo, *Geography* 6.4.2

"Dread Sire and Guardian of man's race,
"To thee, O Jove, the Fates assign
"Our Caesar's charge; his power and place
"Be next to thine.

"Whether the Parthian, threatening Rome,
"His eagles scatter to the wind.
"Or follow to their eastern home
"Cathay and Ind,

"Thy second let him rule below
"Thy car shall shake the realms above;
"Thy vengeful bolts shall overthrow
"Each guilty grove."

—Horace, *Odes* 1.12 (trans. John Conington)

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on land and sea, thou watchest over men; thou drivest away from them the tempests of life and stretchest out over them thy saving right hand, wherewith thou dost unweave even the inextricable skein of the Fates; the tempests of Fortune thou dost assuage and restrainest the baleful motions of the stars. Thee the gods above adore, thee the gods below worship. (Grant 1953, 143)

When Mediterranean peoples heard Ephesians and Colossians read, they would have understood their words about hostile powers and would have listened intently to what they said about victory over these alien forces. The proclamation that Christ was exalted "far above all rule and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come" (Eph 1:21), with "all things under his feet" (1:22) was a claim to which citizens of Mediterranean antiquity would listen with rapt attention. The assertion that Christians also have been exalted and are seated together in the heavenlies (2:6) would have made a Gentile's heart beat faster with its promise of deliverance from victimization. The assurance that the very armor of God could be assumed by Christians to enable them to stand against the hostile powers (6:11–17) would have been thrilling. For followers of Christ to experience such saving strength and to think of themselves as free from alien powers would have been an identity-shaping event.

Benefaction

The readers of Ephesians lived in a world whose public spaces were knee deep in honorific inscriptions. These decrees were the most ubiquitous public documents of Greco-Roman antiquity. They were designed to honor benefactors, both human and divine, for significant public or private service.

Although the format of these decrees could vary, either by omission or relocation of some of the elements, the basic structure was as follows (Harrison 2003; Gauthier 1985, 9–10; Ma 1999, 183–84):

1. A preamble, which named the magistrate under whom the proposal was made, the date of the proposal, and other information that helped identify the resolution (e.g., "To Domitian when the proconsul was Marcus Fulvius Gillo").
2. An announcement that a resolution had been passed (e.g., "It was resolved by the people and the city and the ephors to praise Poseidippos").
3. Identification of the one who proposed the resolution (e.g., "Dionysodorus Alopekethen the son of Zopyros moved the motion").
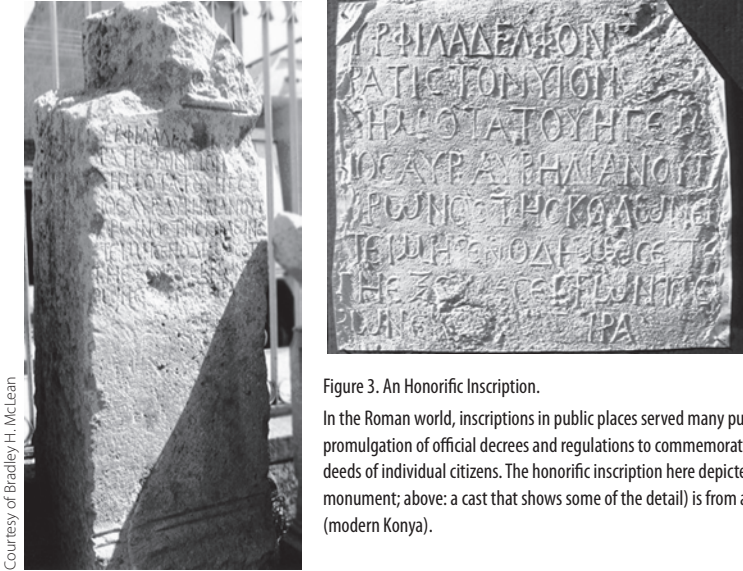
Figure 3. An Honorific Inscription.

In the Roman world, inscriptions in public places served many purposes, from promulgation of official decrees and regulations to commemoration of the worthy deeds of individual citizens. The honorific inscription here depicted (left: the entire monument; above: a cast that shows some of the detail) is from ancient Iconium (modern Konya).

4. The eulogy, introduced by "whereas" and followed by the reasons for honoring the benefactor (e.g., "Whereas Krateia, the priestess, both offered the sacrifice at the beginning of the year and came to offer the remaining sacrifices on behalf of the guild . . ."). The style of this section involved long, ponderous sentences that could go on for as many as eighty lines.

5. A manifesto clause, introduced by "therefore" and summing up the response of the people to the generosity of the one just eulogized (e.g., "In order that our gratitude is manifest, we shall show our goodwill and shall reverence Tiberius, son of Augustus, and we will consider his friends our friends and his enemies our enemies . . ."). The ethos of reciprocity is evident here: the return of favors for favors done.

6. A wish for good fortune for the resolution's implementation.

7. The resolution proper, listing the honors apportioned to the benefactor (e.g., "It was resolved to set up this decree on a stone stele in the most conspicuous place in the gymnasium"; or, "It was resolved to praise Krateia and crown her with an olive branch crown and to set up this decree on a stone monument").

These honorific decrees reflected the reciprocity system of ancient Mediterranean culture. That is, a gift was given; a gift was returned; the gift returned then became an incentive for more benefactions, and so the cycle continued (e.g., "Whereas X has acted for the common

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Letter of Ptolemy II to Miletus (c. 262/261 BC)

"King Ptolemy to the council and the people of Miletus, greeting. I have in former times shown all zeal in behalf of your city both through a gift of land and through care in all other matters as was proper because I saw that our father was kindly disposed toward the city and was the author of many benefits for you and had relieved you of harsh and oppressive taxes and tolls which certain of the kings had imposed. Now also, as you guard steadfastly your city and our friendship and alliance—for my son and Callicrates and the other friends who are with you have written me what a demonstration you have made of good-will toward us—we knowing these things praise you highly and shall try to requite your people through benefactions, and we summon [parakaloumen] you for the future to maintain the same policy of friendship toward us so that in view of your faithfulness we may exercise even more our care for the city. We have ordered Hegestratus to address you at greater length on these subjects and to give you our greeting. Farewell."

—trans. Welles 1934: 72–73.

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good, therefore we honor this benefactor so as to show proper gratitude and so that others, when they see us bestowing honors on deserving people, will themselves be moved to do the same type of things for our city").

The apostle Paul knew this system and wrote about benefaction, both human and divine. An example of human benefaction is found in the letter to Philemon. One hears of the slave, Onesimus, who seeks out the apostle to intercede for him with his master. Paul was the respected spiritual father and benefactor of Onesimus's master, Philemon, and so was in a position to appeal for a return on his prior benefaction on Philemon's behalf (Harrison 2003, 328–43). An example of divine benefaction may be found in Rom 1:18–32. There Paul portrays God as the dishonored benefactor. Whereas the culture regarded it as axiomatic that humans owed the gods honor (*timē*) and glory/repute (*doxa*) for their beneficence, Paul portrays unregenerate humanity as incapable of giving appropriate honor and glory to their creator. God, then, is a dishonored benefactor. Yet in Rom 5:6–11 God is depicted as responding with an unparalleled act of favor: Christ died for the ungrateful enemies of God (Harrison 2003, 215–27).

Recently there has been an attempt to view Ephesians not only within the system of ancient benefaction, with its reciprocity principle, but also as a Christian adaptation of the honorific decree (Danker 1982; Hendrix 1988; Mouton 2002). Ephesians, however, does not conform to

the formal structure of the honorific decree sketched above. It is, therefore, not possible to call it such. Having said this, however, it should be noted that the ethos of the system of benefaction and its accompanying principle of reciprocity are found beyond honorific decrees. Consider the royal letter from Ptolemy II to Miletus (262/261 BC; Welles 1934, 71–73). The king says that he has formerly shown kindness to the city. He then says that the city has demonstrated goodwill toward him. He praises the city and says he will try to return benefactions to them. He then summons or encourages (*parakaloumen*) them to maintain the same policy of friendship toward him in the future, so that in view of their faithfulness he may exercise even more care for the city. Here the reciprocal exchange between the king and the city continues in an ongoing cycle. It is recounted in the first person by the king.

Ephesians portrays God as a divine benefactor. The letter, however, does not have God speaking in the first person, recounting his blessings, benefactions, and grace directed toward humanity. Instead, God's ambassador (Eph 6:20) speaks. He is an ambassador to whom the divine benefactor has revealed his eternal plan for the cosmos (3:3, 7–9; cf. Col 1:25–26). "Paul" begins by blessing God. Ephesians 1:3–14 is a eulogy (*berakah*) of the divine benefactor that looks forward to the expected, appropriate response of praise (1:6, 12, 14) for the divine benefactions bestowed. The ethos of the benefaction system is clearly present. Furthermore, the intercessory prayer (1:16b–19; 3:13, 14–19) offered by the ambassador asks God for the auditors of the letter to have experiential awareness of the divine benefactions. The doxology (3:20–21) then offers praise to the divine benefactor for the power of his working in the readers. Again the ethos of the benefaction system is present.

Since the reciprocity system involved the beneficiaries in the performance of certain duties on behalf of the benefactor, duties that expressed their continuing gratitude and loyalty, Eph 4:1–6:20 can be read as part of the expected response of Christians to their divine benefactor. It begins, "I, therefore . . . summon [beseech, encourage; *parakalō*] you to walk worthily [*axiōs*] of the calling with which you were called." The term *parakalein* was used in royal letters that reflected the benefaction system to call beneficiaries to an appropriate response. Two examples suffice. The letter of Ptolemy II to Miletus, cited above, has the king say, "We summon [*parakaloumen*] you to maintain the same policy of friendship in the future" (Welles 1934, 71–73, line 12). The letter of Antiochus II to Erythrae, after 261 BC, relates how the city sent the king an honorific decree. The king accepts the honor and responds by granting the city autonomy and tax exemption. He then summons (*parakaloumen*) the city to remember suitably those by whom they have been benefited (Welles

1934, 78–80, line 30). In Eph 4:1, God's ambassador uses the technical term employed in the benefaction system to call for an appropriate response from the beneficiaries. Such a response would include maintaining the unity God has given in uniting Jew and Gentile in one new humanity (4:1–16); putting off the ways of Gentile excess and putting on the truth as they have learned it in Jesus (4:17–5:21), which includes not only one's daily walk but also one's way of worship; concord in the household (5:22–6:9); and empowered resistance to spiritual forces of evil (6:10–20).

One may legitimately conclude that although Ephesians does not adhere to the structure of the honorific decree and is not precisely a royal letter, it does breathe the same air of benefaction and reciprocity. It is difficult to think that the Gentile auditors in western Asia Minor would have heard it otherwise. The very participation of the letter in the culture of benefaction with its corollary of reciprocity would, however, have posed significant risks for the Christian ethos of Ephesians (and Colossians) if left without critique and uncorrected. These dangers were most ominous in the sphere of soteriology.

The cultural assumption of many was that the gods were beneficent and showed it through their gifts to humans. Human gratitude to the gods originates here in the divine initiative (Seneca, *Ben*. 2.30.2). There would have been no problem for a Paulinist here. Paul and his school believed the same thing. The culture held two other assumptions, however, that would have raised a red flag for the Pauline tradition. First, the reciprocity system of antiquity supposed that the gifts given by the gods elicited gratitude from humans. This gratitude was believed to be the motivation and driving force for an appropriate response of humans to the gods. The Pauline tradition, however, held that humans, in and of themselves, are incapable of showing honor and gratitude to their divine benefactor (cf. Rom 1:18–32). The reciprocity system did not take human sinfulness adequately into account. If humans are to respond rightly to God, God must enable it (cf. Phil 1:27; 2:13). Second, the reciprocity system assumed that once the divine beneficence had been shown to humans, the gods placed themselves under counter-obligation. Humans through proper cultic activity could obligate the gods so they would be required to show gratitude to their worshipers. The Pauline tradition, however, held that in the divine-human relationship God always has the initiative, humans always respond. Any attempt by humans to seize the initiative in the relationship and obligate God to respond favorably is regarded as legalism, false religion.

In summary, for the Pauline tradition God always has the initiative and humans always respond. Further, when humans respond rightly, it is only because God has enabled them to do so. Ephesians, then, uses

the cultural phenomenon of benefaction in its understanding of God. At the same time, however, Ephesians corrects the cultural understanding of reciprocity. As the late first-century auditors listened to the reading of the letter, they would have been aware throughout of a variety of devices whereby the author of Ephesians focused repeatedly on the divine enablement of humans' relationship to their heavenly benefactor (e.g., in Christ, sealing, exaltation, the working of God's power in believers, believers' being clothed with God's armor, etc.).

Loose Living, Disorderly Worship

Yet another concern in the world of the auditors of Ephesians (and Colossians) in western Asia Minor would have been "loose living" and disorderly worship. The Ephesian letter reflects on the readers' loose living as a problem before their conversion (2:1–2, "You were dead in trespasses and sins in which you once walked"; 2:5, "we were dead through our trespasses") and after their initiation into Christ (4:17, "no longer live as the Gentiles do"; 4:22, "Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life"; 4:28, "Let the thief no longer steal"; 5:11, "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness"; 5:18, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery"). Some, starting from Eph 5:18, have contended that the auditors were influenced by the practices of the cult of Dionysus that, according to Plutarch (*Ant*. 24.3), existed in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamon, and Philadelphia (Rogers 1979). This cult certainly involved drunkenness, but this vice was not limited to just the one cult. Achilles Tatius relates, "It was the festival of Artemis and drunken people were roaming everywhere, so that all night long a crowd filled the entire agora" (*Leuc. Cli*. 6.3). Quite apart from religious cults, there was also the everyday debauchery such as one reads about in Petronius's *Satyricon* (e.g., Trimalchio's nighttime revelries). Others have linked the cult of Demeter/Cybele in Hierapolis to crude language and shameful things done in secret (Kreitzer 1998b). Once again, things done in secret have a much broader scope than one specific cult. Fear of secret nighttime meetings was widespread in antiquity. Such gatherings were generally suspect of both conspiracy (e.g., Cicero, *Cat*. 1.1; 3.5–6; Juvenal, *Sat*. 8.231–235) and immorality (e.g., Cicero, *Leg*. 2.35; Livy 39.8). Furthermore, the issues addressed in Ephesians are broader than drunkenness or secret nighttime gatherings.

Wisdom of Solomon's critique of Gentile culture covers a broad spectrum closer to what we read about in Ephesians. In 14:22–27 a roll call of Gentile misbehavior is described.

> It is not enough for them to err about the knowledge of God, but they live in great *strife* . . . and they call such evils *peace*. . . . They no longer keep

either their lives or their marriages pure, but they treacherously kill one another, or grieve one another by adultery, and all is a raging riot of blood and murder, theft and deceit, corruption, faithlessness, tumult, perjury, confusion over what is good, forgetfulness of favors, pollution of souls, sex perversion, disorder in marriage, adultery, and debauchery. For the worship of idols . . . is the beginning and cause and end of every evil. (RSV; emphasis added)

Against the background of such a value system, Gentile converts had to be taught a different way. Ephesians refers to being "taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus" (4:21; cf. Rom 6:17; 1 Thess 4:1–2; 2 Thess 3:6).

Early Christian worship also sometimes took on the disorder of disreputable pagan cults. Acts 2:13 indicates that some opponents believed the Christians' enthusiasm was due to drunkenness ("They are filled with new wine"). In 1 Cor 14:23, prophecy was preferred over uninterpreted tongues because if the latter characterized Christian worship "and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?" In 1 Cor 14:26–33 the apostle instructs the congregation to worship in an orderly fashion "for God is a God not of disorder but of peace." Jude 12–13, 16, speaks about Christians who were blemishes on the church's love feasts (cf. 2 Pet 2:13; 1 Cor 11:21, "and another becomes drunk" at the supper). Gentiles needed guidance about both loose living and disorderly worship.

These data indicate that Gentile values were at odds with the Jewish and Christian tradition and that a thorough reeducation of Gentile converts was needed. The Christian walk had to be spelled out at length. Against such a background, it is not at all surprising to be confronted with an elaborate Two Ways form in Eph 4:17–5:21 (and Col 3:1–17). Christian formation had to address Gentile loose living and disorderly worship. Resocialization was an imperative.

Households

For Romans in the early imperial period, the household provided the basic undergirding of the state. The health of the household was considered essential to the stability of the state (Jeffers 1998, 376). According to Aristotle a household (*oikos*), in its simplest form, involved property, a marriage partner, and either an ox or a slave (*Pol*. 1.1252b 10). Several households made up a city; several cities made up a state. Hence Pythagoras (Iamblichus, *Vita* 30) says, "For again, a just arrangement of household [*oikia*] concerns is the principle of good order in cities. For cities are constituted from households (*oikōn*)."

Given the centrality of households to cities and to states, it is not surprising that there was a science of household management. Several

extant manuals are known. Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* is a discussion about estate management, as is pseudo-Aristotle's *Oeconomica*. In addition, one finds numerous portions of such instruction remaining from antiquity (cf. Balch 1988). One stream of opinion about household management comes from the Neopythagorean moralists. One may get a feel for the ethos of the times by listening to this succession of opinion (for which see Balch 1992, the source of the following references). Bryson says, "The *topos* 'household management' is complete in four things. The first of them concerns money, the second slaves, the third the wife, and the fourth children" (*Oecon.*).

We may take first the relation of wife and husband. Consider Callicratidas, who discusses the husband's rule of the wife: "But he does not rule over her with despotic power: for he is diligently attentive to her welfare" (*De dom. felic*. 106.1–10). Also, he says, proper wives "are also naturally well disposed to be instructed by and to fear (*phobēthēmen*) and love their husbands" (107.8–11). Pseudo-Charondas commands, "Let everyone love his lawful wife" (in Stobaeus, *Anth*. 4.2.24).

The relation of children and parents may be taken up next. Iamblichus has Pythagoras teach that children should love their parents (*Vita* 22.13), honor them (22.18–19), and be obedient to them (23.8–9). Regarding parental responsibility, Diotogenes asks, "What therefore is the principle of every polity? The education of youth" (*De piet*. 76.2–4).

Regarding slaves, the Neopythagoreans address only masters. Pseudo-Zaleucus says, "It is fitting that slaves should do what is just through fear" (in Stobaeus, *Anth*. 4.2.19). Theano says, "Too much relaxation produces the dissonance of disobedience, but where severity is urged too far, nature herself gives way. In all things, moderation is the best policy" (198.25–28).

In the societies of Gentile western Asia Minor, where the health of a household was the barometer of the health of the state, the issue of household management would have been a central concern. That society understood household health in terms of the proper submission of wives, children, and slaves. The converted Gentile readers of Ephesians and Colossians would have wanted to know what difference Christ made in the organization and management of a Christian household.

Having thus begun to enter into the social world of the late first century AD and to get a feel for what concerned its citizens, it is time to proceed from introduction to interpretation. But first let us note one final implication of the similarities between Ephesians and Colossians. Since the two letters cover much of the same content, there will inevitably be some repetition in the commentary. Since Ephesians will be treated first, the greatest amount of detail will be encountered there. When reading the commentary on Colossians in the parts with

parallels in Ephesians, the reader, after perusing the commentary on Colossians, is urged to turn to the similar content in Ephesians for additional information. When reading the commentary on Ephesians, the reader should consult the parallel in Colossians, where there may also be comments that supplement the material in Ephesians.

Ephesians

Ephesians 1:1–2

Introductory Matters

Ancient letters followed a stereotyped form: the address ("A to B, greeting"); a prayer form (usually a thanksgiving but sometimes combined with an intercession); the body of the letter; and the conclusion. The thirteen New Testament letters attributed to Paul adopt and adapt this standard form. Ephesians is certainly a Hellenistic letter; its introduction and conclusion seal the fact (e.g., Snodgrass, 1996; Stott, 1979; O'Brien, 1977, 1979, 1999; Hoehner, 2002). Given that a document like 2 Peter can be a farewell speech in a letter envelope and the Revelation to John can be an apocalypse in a letter frame, there is room to ask whether Ephesians is more than just a letter. Some have argued it is a theological tractate (e.g., Lindemann 1985); others a homily (Best 2004, 62; Gnilka 1971, 29–33; Lincoln 1990, xli; Jeal 2000, 28); others a meditation (Schnackenburg 1991, 21–24); still others a mirror of the liturgy of the church at Ephesus (Kirby 1968); some an epistolary form of an honorific decree (Danker 1982, 451; Hendrix 1988; Mouton 2002). Beyond the fact that Ephesians is a letter, however, there is no widespread agreement about its genre.

In the history of the church, Ephesians and Romans have been the two most influential New Testament letters. This is the modern judgment of Protestant and Catholic alike (e.g., Snodgrass 1996, 20; Brown 1997, 620). Ephesians was revered early. In the early second century Polycarp (*Phil*. 12.1) echoes both Eph 4:26 and Ps 4:4, calling both scripture; he thus made Ephesians the first New Testament book to be called scripture by the early fathers. John Chrysostom, the great fourth- and early fifth-century preacher at Constantinople, lauded Ephesians as a sublime example of Pauline teaching (in his brief introduction to his

homilies on this letter, PG 62:10). John Calvin regarded Ephesians as his favorite letter (*Sermons* viii). During the days just before his death on November 24, 1572, John Knox had his wife read to him daily from Calvin's sermons on Ephesians (Laing 1966, 6:639, 643). John A. Mackay, a former president of Princeton Theological Seminary, attributes his conversion to his reading of the letter. He says that in July 1903, as a boy of fourteen, he experienced through reading Ephesians a "boyish rapture in the Highland hills" (Mackay 1956, 9).

> What happened to me? Everything was new. Someone had come to my soul. I had a new outlook, new experiences, new attitudes to other people. I loved God. Jesus Christ became the center of everything. The only explanation I could give . . . was in the words of the Ephesian Letter. . . : "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." (Mackay 1956, 7)

Ephesians, the letter, has been a significant influence on Christian experience and thought through the centuries.

For discussion of how letters were sent in the ancient Mediterranean world, see below on Eph 6:21–24.

Tracing the Train of Thought

Ephesians 1:1 employs a modification of the expected greeting. The author claims to be **Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God**. The use of the title "apostle" indicates that the letter is official, even if it was not written by Paul himself. (See the discussion of authorship in the introduction above. This commentary will refer to the author of Ephesians as "Paul," in quotation marks, signaling the widespread belief that the Paul of this letter reflects the "as if" category of authorship in Mediterranean antiquity.) The qualification "through the will of God" locates this apostle among those chosen by God/Christ (cf. Gal 1:1, "Paul, an apostle—sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father") and not among those sent out by a given church (e.g., 2 Cor 8:23; Phil 2:25).

The salutation of a letter ran: "A to B, greeting." Who fills the B slot in this letter? To whom was the letter addressed? The first issue related to the identity of the readers involves a textual variant in 1:1. Does the phrase **in Ephesus** belong in the text of Ephesians? The external evidence is of two types: the manuscript tradition, and the patristic testimony. The patristic evidence points in three directions. First, Marcion in the mid-second century contended that this is the letter to Laodicea mentioned in Col 4:16 (so Tertullian, *Marc*. 5.17.1). Ephesians is really Laodiceans. Second, Irenaeus (*Haer*. 5.2.3; 8.1; 14.3; 24.4), Clement of Alexandria

Figure 4. Paul to the Saints—in Ephesus?

Codex Sinaiticus is a fourth-century manuscript discovered by Constantine Tischendorf in St. Catherine's Monastery at Mt. Sinai in the mid-nineteenth century. Here the first two verses of Ephesians are shown in an actual photograph of the manuscript. The words "in Ephesus," not originally present in the manuscript, have been added in the margin. (The tilde-shaped mark shows the insertion point.) In other manuscripts, "in Ephesus" is included in the text.
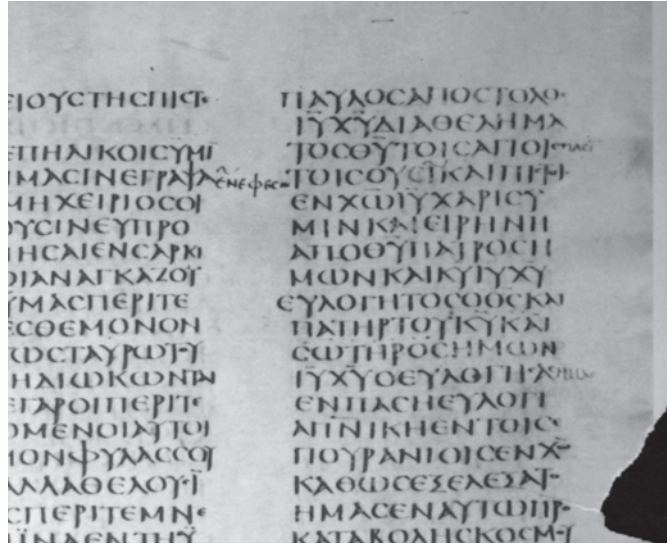
Photograph: www.csntm.org

(*Strom*. 4.8; *Paed*. 1.5), and Tertullian (*Marc*. 5.11.12; 5.17.1) all refer to the letter as addressed to the Ephesians. Third, Origen (early third century) knew a manuscript tradition in which the letter had no named destination. Basil (*Adv*. *Eunom*. 2.19), about AD 370, also says the words "in Ephesus" were omitted by the oldest authorities known to him.

The manuscripts have three variant readings, one with and two without "in Ephesus." The first reads "to the saints, to those being in Ephesus" and faithful (A and D [fifth century], and the majority of other MSS). The second reads "to the saints, to those being also faithful" (B and Sinaiticus [early fourth century]). The third reads "to the saints being also faithful" ($\mathfrak{P}^{46}$ [ca. AD 200]).

Which tradition is to be preferred? It is specious to argue that the readers of the letter had only heard of Paul (3:2) and that Paul had no firsthand knowledge of the readers (4:21) and so the letter could not have been addressed to Ephesus, where Paul was known and where he knew the church. The conditional sentences in both places (3:2 and 4:21) should be translated, "If, and I assume you have" (Hoehner 2002; MacDonald 2000, 261, 303). The statement in 1:15, "I have heard of your faith and love," could just as easily mean that, since he was separated from them geographically, news had been brought to him about the readers. More useful is the argument that the reading that best explains the origin of the others is to be preferred. It is easier to explain why "in Ephesus" would have been added than why it might have been omitted.

Although there is no certainty, several possible explanations for the inclusion of "in Ephesus" have been offered by scholars. The inclusion

of "in Ephesus" could have been a guess based on a combination of Eph 6:21–22 ("I have sent Tychicus to you") and 2 Tim 4:12 ("Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus" [Caird 1976]). Alternatively, the letter could have been written by Paul from Rome to Ephesus, to be disseminated from there. A copy was left in the Ephesians' church archives. When Paul's letters were collected, the letter's association with Ephesus led to the belief that it was written to Ephesus (Best 1987). A third possibility is that the letter originally was sent to Laodicea. When Laodicea became anti-Pauline (Rev 3:14–21), the letter was no longer preserved there. A copy survived in Ephesus; hence the tradition, "in Ephesus" (Goulder 1991, following Harnack). Finally, if Ephesians was not written by Paul, then one must recognize that a pseudonymous letter is not sent; it is discovered, it comes to light. A letter discovered in Ephesus would most likely have been assumed to have been intended for Ephesus (Muddiman 2001, 45). Even though these suggestions are just that, the point remains: the phrase "in Ephesus" can more easily be understood as added than as deleted.

If "in Ephesus" was not in the original letter known to us as Ephesians, then what would have been the letter's function? It is widely regarded as a circular letter, sent to multiple churches rather than to a single congregation. There is no manuscript evidence that would prove this; no surviving copy has a space in which to insert the name of the church being visited. But it is the most reasonable inference from the data. Circular letters sent to multiple churches were an early Christian phenomenon (e.g., Acts 15:23; Jas 1:1; 1 Pet 1:1–2; Rev 1:4). Ephesians does not indicate that any particular congregation is in mind. No individuals are greeted, no one besides Tychicus is mentioned (contra Colossians), no specific problems are combated (contra Colossians again), and the tone is more formal than that characteristic of a letter sent to one church (cf. the more personal tone of Colossians).

If the phrase "in Ephesus" does not belong in the text of the letter, how should one understand the phrase **to the saints (those) being also faithful in Christ Jesus**? "Saints" is a common term for Christians in Pauline writings (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:2). The phrase "to those being" is considered strange by some scholars. Schnackenburg (1991, 40), however, offers data that indicate the participle (*ousin*) can be used in a way that does not require a preceding place name. The participle can be translated "there," "present," or omitted from the translation altogether. If "also" (*kai*) were taken as part of a comparison between Paul the apostle and the saints, then Paul is writing to Christians who, like himself, are also faithful. To be "faithful in Christ Jesus" raises the whole issue of the meaning of the phrase "in Christ," which will be treated below.

In place of the simple "greetings" usually found in Greek letters (e.g., Acts 15:23, "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers of Gentile origin in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings"; Jas 1:1, "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion, greetings"), Pauline letters used the adapted and expanded formula "grace and peace" (e.g., 1 Cor 1:1–3, "Paul . . . to the church of God that is in Corinth . . . , grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"). This was only a slight change from the occasional Jewish use of "mercy and peace" in greetings (e.g., *2 Bar.* 78.2). Ephesians 1:2 follows the common Pauline pattern: **grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ** (1:1–2).

Theological Issues

The modern debate about the meaning of "in Christ" in Paul goes back to Adolf Deissmann (1892). He argued that the "in" was locative (denoting something like "the sphere where") rather than just instrumental ("the means by which"). Further, he contended that the "in" had a mystical meaning. Paul thinks the normal Christian life is "in Christ." That means the Christian now lives in the spiritual Christ who is present on all sides, dwells in the believer, and speaks to, in, and through the believer. This is not to be construed as pantheistic mysticism but rather as communion mysticism. It is not acting mysticism but rather reacting mysticism. "In Christ" corresponds closely to "in the Spirit." Antonyms include "in the flesh," "in sins," "in Adam," "in the law," and "in the world," all meaning "in the sphere of." The locative, mystical meaning of "in Christ" in Paul was obscured, he said, by Luther's translation of the New Testament. For example, in Rom 3:24 Luther translates "in Christ" by "through [*durch*] Christ."

Deissmann's mystical reading of "in Christ" has not stood the test of time. Those who argue for a locative connotation of "in" now usually think rather in terms of an ecclesiological meaning. To be "in Christ" means to be in the corporate personality, Christ, the church (e.g., Beker 1980, 273; Black 1973, 93–94; Bultmann 1951, 1.311). Just as Israel was the name of both an individual and a corporate body, so Christ is the name of an individual and a people.

Many contend that "in Christ" has both a locative and an instrumental meaning: Christ is both the sphere in which and the agent by whom God effects salvation (e.g., Matera 1999, 148; Best 2004, 153–54; Longenecker 1964, 160–70). "In Christ" and equivalents sometime have an instrumental sense (e.g., Rom 6:11; 14:14; 1 Cor 15:22 with 15:57;

2 Cor 2:17; 3:14; 5:18–19; Phil 4:13), sometimes a locative meaning (e.g., Rom 8:1; Phil 3:9).

Others assert that the instrumental meaning of "in Christ" is dominant (e.g., F. Büchsel 1949; Bouttier 1962, 1991; Wedderburn 1985). "In Christ" should normally be translated "through Christ" or "by means of Christ." It is generally recognized by all, moreover, that "in Christ" can at times mean something like "Christian" (e.g., Rom 16:7; 1 Cor 4:17; 7:22, 39; 15:18; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 1:22; Phil 1:1; 1 Thess 4:16; e.g., Longenecker 1964, 161–70; Neugebauer 1957–1958; Bouttier 1962).

A meaning of "in Christ" that is often overlooked in recent scholarship is "under the power of Christ," "in dependence on Christ," "in Christ's hands." One encounters such a phenomenon in various ancient Greek writings. In Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, Antigone begs the elders to allow her and her father to stay. She says they are "in you as in a god" (*en ymmi gar hōs theō*, line 247), which means being dependent on the elders' power. In Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, there is a prayer to the seer for salvation from defilement, for "we are in you" (*en soi gar esmen*, 314). Fagles (1984, 176) translates, "We are in your hands": to be "in the seer" means to be dependent on him for deliverance. In Pindar's *Olympian Odes*, we hear that "the issue is *en theō*," which is translated by the LCL as "in God's hands" (13.104). The next line makes this explicit. "We shall leave this to Zeus to accomplish." Philostratus says the Ephesians belong to Artemis (*Ep*. 65). They could be addressed as being *en Artemidi*. Again the meaning is something like "in Artemis's hands, dependent on her power, under her protection."

In Philo this idiom is found repeatedly (e.g., *Det*. 48.4, to be in God means to be the recipient of God's power; *Deus* 12.2, to rest in God means to be dependent on God for the outcome; *Ebr*. 62.2, joy that is in God is derived from or given by God; 83.3, strength in God is that given by God; *Fug*. 174.3, rest in God is that given by God). Several instances of this idiom are found in the Apostolic Fathers. In *1 Clement* 30.6, "Let our praise be with God [*en theō*], and not from ourselves [*ex autōn*]," means "in recognition of our reliance on God." Ignatius of Antioch uses the idiom in a similar way (*Eph*. 1.1, *en theō* equals "through God"; *Eph*. 6.2, good order in God means "in dependence on God"; *Eph*. 21.2, "Farewell in God [*en theō*] the Father and in Jesus Christ [*en Iēsou Christō*], our shared hope" means relying on God and Jesus Christ; *Magn*. 3.1, "wise in God" means "wise in dependence on God"; *Magn*. 14.1, "prayer in God" means prayer in reliance on God; *Trall*. 4.1, "I have many thoughts in God [*en theō*]" means thoughts given by God). Ignatius says that he gloried exceedingly that it was granted to him to see Polycarp's face, in which he wished to have joy "in God [*en theō*]" meaning joy granted by God (Ign. *Pol.* 1.1). Similarly, "I bid you farewell always in our God Jesus

Christ; may you remain in him, in the unity and care of God" (Ign. *Pol.* 8.3) means remain in dependence on Jesus Christ (be in God's care). There is, then, a trajectory in the ancient Mediterranean world (pagan, Jewish, early Christian) that uses the language "in God" as a virtual equivalent to "being in God's hands," and thus with the notion of God's power or enablement of humans so related to God. So understood, *en theō* is in continuity with *entheos* (inspired by God). Both speak of God's enabling power manifested in or on behalf of humans.

When Rom 8:1 says, "there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ," the supposed locative would have been heard not as incorporation but as "dependent upon" or "enabled by." In Phil 3:9 "to be found in him [Christ]" is best explained as relying on the faithfulness of Christ for one's righteousness instead of oneself. The ancient Mediterranean auditor would have so understood the idiom. In effect, the alleged locative focus has an instrumental force. In the uncontested Pauline letters, then, there are three basic meanings for "in Christ": an instrumental meaning ("through Christ"), a locative meaning with instrumental force ("in dependence on Christ"), and a derived meaning ("Christian").

The debate over the connotation of "in Christ" in the undisputed Pauline writings carries over into the study of Ephesians. John A. Allan (1958), arguing that Ephesians is deutero-Pauline, asserts that whereas in the undisputed Pauline letters "in Christ" connotes personal identification with Christ and personal participation in the corporate personality of Christ, in Ephesians "in Christ" lacks this meaning and is instead the formula for God's activity through Christ (cf. Gnilka 1971, 66–69). Ephesians, he argues, uses the formula predominantly, if not exclusively, in the instrumental sense. "In Christ" in Ephesians is almost always synonymous with "through Christ." Responses to Allan's thesis have focused on two parts of his argument. On the one hand, his attempt to draw a sharp distinction between the undisputed Paulines and Ephesians ignores the fact that many believe that in the genuine Paulines the instrumental sense is predominant. If so, this argument for a deutero-Pauline status for Ephesians carries no weight. On the other hand, while some (e.g., Hoehner 2002) argue for a predominantly locative meaning of "in Christ" in Ephesians, many recognize a frequent instrumental usage alongside the locative instances of the formula (Best 2004, 153–54; Matera 1999, 148). Allan is partially correct.

My own examination of the evidence yields three categories of usage in Ephesians; others find a fourth. In the first category, "in Christ" sometimes means "Christian." This usage is comparable to what one finds in the undisputed Pauline letters. In the second category, "in Christ" or "in the Christ" refers to Christ as the object of one's faith or hope, or God's

Usage of "in Christ" (or "in the Christ") in Ephesians

Category 1: "in Christ" means "Christian"

5:8   "in the Lord you are light" = as Christians you are light
6:1   "obey your parents in the Lord" = as Christian children, obey your parents
6:21 "Tychicus is a minister in the Lord" = a Christian minister

Allan believes further examples fall into this category:
1:12 "hoped in the Christ" = Christian hope
4:1   "prisoner in the Lord" = Christian prisoner
4:17 "insist on in the Lord" = as a Christian teacher
4:21 "you were taught in him" = taught as a Christian

Category 2: "in Christ" refers to Christ as the object of one's faith or hope, or of God's power

1:12 "hoped in the Christ" = Christ is the object of hope
1:15 "faith in the Lord Jesus" = Jesus is the object of faith
1:20 "God worked in the Christ" = Christ is the object of God's power

Category 3: "in Christ" or "in the Christ" has an instrumental meaning

1:1   "faithful in Christ" = faithful by means of Christ
1:3   "blessed us in Christ" = by means of Christ
1:4   "chose us in Christ" = through Christ (parallel to 1:5, through [*dia*] Christ)
1:6   "grace bestowed in the beloved" = by means of
1:7   "in him we have redemption" = through him
1:9   "God set forth in Christ" = by means of
1:10 "to gather up all things in him" = by means of
1:10b–11   "in him, in whom we obtained" = by him, by whom
2:7   "show grace to us in Christ Jesus" = by means of Christ
2:10 "created in Christ Jesus" = by means of Christ
2:13 "in Christ Jesus you were brought near" = by means of ("in the blood of Christ" = by means of the blood)
2:14 "in his flesh" = by means of his death
2:15 "create in himself" = create through himself (2:18, "access in one Spirit" = by means of one Spirit)
2:21 "in him the structure joins and grows" = by means of him (if Jesus is the cornerstone in 2:20, then in 2:21 the instrumental sense is preferable to the locative)
2:22 "in whom you are built" = by means of whom
3:6   "sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus" = by means of Christ (note 3:5, "in the Spirit" = by means of the Spirit; cf. 3:16, "through [*dia*] the Spirit")
3:11 "carried out in Christ Jesus" = by means of, through
3:21 "glory in the church and in Christ Jesus" = glory given by the church and through Christ Jesus
4:32 "as God in Christ has forgiven you" = through Christ
5:20 "in the name of the Lord Jesus" = through the name

power. Most of the time—a third category—"in Christ" or "in the Christ" has an instrumental meaning.

In a fourth and final category, there are certain texts in which some scholars who admit the preponderance of instrumental usage of "in Christ" in Ephesians still find evidence of the locative connotation of the phrase. Most can be explained in terms of the usages already described. The test case is 2:6, "raised us up and seated us together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus" (MacDonald 1988, 232, is representative). While this sounds like a locative connotation, it is also susceptible to at least two other readings. "In Christ" here could fit into the category of usage that sees the phrase as the equivalent of "Christian." Since the heavenlies in Ephesians house both God/Christ and the evil powers (2:3; 6:12), the author would need to distinguish in which part of the heavenlies Christians are seated; they are seated in the Christ part, the Christian part. A second and preferable option would be to understand "in Christ" in 2:6 in the sense of "in the power of, in dependence on, in the hands of" Christ. This connotation would also seem preferable for 4:1 ("a prisoner in the Lord" = dependent on the Lord's power), 4:17 ("insist on in the Lord" = in dependence on, with the power of the Lord), and 6:10 ("be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power" = in dependence on). In my estimation, most of the evidence supports Allan's interpretation. All his argument needs is the addition of the connotation "in the power of, in dependence on, in the hands of." I do not see that the locative meaning of "in Christ" with the sense of "incorporation into" occurs in the

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An Outline of Ephesians

Salutation (1:1–2)

Prayers: using the language of worship to reinforce Christian identity (1:3–3:21)

> **Berakah: blessing God for blessings bestowed on believers (1:3–14)**

> **Thanksgiving: thanking God for the readers' faith and love (1:15–16a)**

> **Intercession to God: in two parts, sandwiching two digressions about God's power (1:16b–3:19)**

>> Intercession1: for the readers' enlightenment (1:16b–1:19)

>> Two digressions about God's power (1:20–3:13)

>>> Digression 1: God's power at work in Christ and in Christians (1:20–2:22)

>>> Digression 2: God's power at work in and through Christ's apostle, Paul (3:1–13)

>> Intercession 2: for the readers' empowering, infilling, and enlightenment (3:14–19)

> **Doxology: praising God for his power at work in Christians (3:20–21)**

Parenesis: using the language of exhortation in an appeal to demonstrate Christian identity in life (4:1–6:20)

> **A call to maintain Christian unity (4:1–16)**

> **A Two Ways form (4:17–5:21)**

> **A household code (5:22–6:9)**

> **A call to stand firm (6:10–20)**

Postscript (6:21–24)

Ephesian letter. The author of Ephesians has other ways to speak about one's incorporation into Christ.

If the preceding survey is accurate, then "the faithful incorporated in Christ Jesus" is incorrect. So how should one understand the address to the "faithful in Christ Jesus"? Two other interpretations seem more probable. Either the "faithful in Christ Jesus" means "faithful by means of Christ Jesus," or it means "faithful in dependence on (by the power of) Jesus." The difference in meaning is negligible. Both attribute the saints' loyalty/faith to the enabling work of Christ (cf. Eph 2:8). Such a reading sets the tone of the letter from its first sentence. Christ is the one through whom all God's saving activity is mediated. Hence we translate: "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus [= by means of the activity of Christ] through the will of God, to the saints, (to those) who are also faithful [or "loyal"] by means of the power of Christ [= in Christ]." From the very first, the letter attributes both Paul's role and the readers' status to the one who mediates God's salvific will in the world. As the letter unfolds, these two emphases will be seen to permeate its argument.

Ephesians 1:3–14

Introductory Matters

Ephesians begins with a "blessing" (Heb. *berakah*) in 1:3–14. Although in Greek it is one long sentence, English translations break it up into multiple sentences. For example, the NRSV has six sentences (1:3–4, 5–6, 7–8a, 8b–10, 11–12, 13–14) that are different from the JB's six (1:3, 4–7b, 7c–8, 9–10, 11–12, 13–14); the NIV has eight sentences (1:3, 4, 5–6, 7–8, 9–10, 11–12, 13a, 13b–14) that are different from the NEB's eight (1:3, 4–6, 7a–b, 7c–8, 9–10, 11a–b, 11c–12, 13–14); while the TEV has fifteen sentences in five paragraphs (1:3–4a, 4b–8a, 8b–10, 11–12, 13–14). Long sentences are frequent in Ephesians (e.g., 1:15–23; 2:1–7; 3:2–13; 3:14–19; 4:1–6; 4:11–16; 6:14–20); they are integral to its style.

The origin of the material in 1:3–14 has been a matter of debate. Some have argued that it comes from preexisting liturgical matter, either a hymn (e.g., Lohmeyer 1926; Schille 1965, 65–73) or a prayer associated with baptism (e.g., Dahl 1951, 263). Others have seen it as a redaction of Col 1:5, 9, 13–14, 16 (e.g., Boismard 1999, 81–86; Mitton 1951, 281, 283). Most scholars today tend to view 1:3–14 as an ad hoc composition. They say there is no preexisting source for this segment of the letter; the author himself has composed the long sentence (e.g., Best 2004, 108–10; Deichgräber 1967, 65; Lincoln 1990, 14; Maurer 1951–1952; O'Brien 1979, 509).

The arrangement of the material within the long sentence of 1:3–14 has long perplexed scholars. One proposal is that 1:3–14 consists of three sections (1:3–4, 5–8, 9–14) introduced by three aorist participles: *eulogēsas* ("having blessed," 1:3), *proorisas* ("having predestined," 1:5), and *gnōrisas* ("having made known," 1:9) (e.g., Maurer 1951–1952, 154; Gnilka 1971, 59). Another divides the long sentence into three by taking *en hō* ("in whom," 1:7, 11, 13) as the clue (e.g., Nestle-Aland 27th ed.; UBS 3rd ed.), yielding four sections (1:3–6, 7–10, 11–12, 13–14). Another proposes six strophes (1:3b–4, 5–6, 7–8, 9–10, 11–12, 13–14) with strophes 1, 2, and 4

(concerning the work of God) being introduced by aorist participles, and with strophes 3, 5, and 6 (dealing with the redemption through Jesus) being introduced by the relative *en hō* (Grelot 1989). Yet another argues for three sections (1:1–6, 7–12, 13–14), each ending with the refrain "to the praise of his glory" (e.g., Cambier 1963, 100–103). Other scholars propose a chiastic arrangement of all (A, 1:3–4; B, 1:5–9b; C, 1:10–11a; B′, 1:11b–13a; A′, 1:13b–14; so Boismard 1999, 81–86) or part of the section (A, 1:4; B, 1:5; C, 1:6; D, 1:7a–b; C′, 1:7c–8; B′, 1:9; A′, 1:10; so Thomson 1995, 46–83). Still another argues that after the introductory verse 3, there are two parallel structures (A, 1:4–6a; B, 1:6b–7; C, 1:8–10; A′, 1:11–12; B′, 1:13; C′, 1:14; so Iovino 1986). J. T. Sanders's widely accepted conclusion that "every attempt to provide a strophic structure for Eph 1:3–14 has failed" (1965, 227) may be supplemented by saying that every attempt to find some formal arrangement based on key words or a variety of parallelisms has failed. So Schnackenburg contends that there is no "clear-cut division" of the parts of 1:3–14; rather, there is "a definite movement of thought" (1991, 46–47). Lincoln (1990, 15), Best (2004, 110), and O'Brien (1999, 90) agree. The structure of 1:3–14 is to be sought first of all in its content rather than in a formal pattern.

The question of the function of the unit, 1:3–14, has been addressed by P. T. O'Brien (1977, 1979). He proposes that introductory thanksgivings in Paul's letters had any of four functions: (1) pastoral, expressing the apostle's deep concern and love for the recipients; (2) didactic, instructing the recipients with vital teaching related to the gospel; (3) parenetic, emphasizing the ethical implications of Paul's teaching; and (4) epistolary, indicating the key themes of the letter (1977, 13–15). Applying this schema to the Ephesian eulogy (1:3–14), he concluded that it has epistolary, didactic, and parenetic functions (1979, 514). That is, the opening blessing introduces key themes of Ephesians (e.g., in the heavenlies, in Christ, grace of God, mystery, Holy Spirit) and teaches about the gospel and its ethical implications.

Tracing the Train of Thought

This unit is a *berakah*, a conventional form for blessing God (cf. Tob 13; Sg Three 29–34; 1 Macc 4:30–33; Luke 1:68–79). Both pagan and Jewish traditions are compatible with Ephesians beginning as it does. Hesiod's *Works and Days* begins with a hymn and a prayer; *b. Berakoth* 32a states that one should always first utter praises and then pray. It is also possible to find ancient letters that begin with a *berakah* (e.g., Josephus, *Ant.* 8.53, has Hiram of Sidon write to King Solomon in response to the latter's request for help in building the temple, saying after the greeting, "It is

proper to bless God for having given you . . . your father's royal power"; cf. 1 Kgs 5:7; and 2 Chr 2:11–12, where the blessing comes second in the letter; cf. 2 Cor 1:3–7; 1 Pet 1:3–5). When one blessed God, the blessing expressed not a wish ("may he be blessed") but a declaration ("he is blessed"; Hoehner 2002, 162). The omission of the verb "to be" in verse 3 is no surprise. The omission of the verb is common in eulogies. The verb supplied should be "is," not "be": **Blessed is God**.

It is not possible to discern any clear-cut formal arrangement of the text, but it is possible to identify a definite movement of thought. The first thing to note is that verse 3 is the main statement to which everything that follows up to the end of verse 14 is syntactically linked, as indicated by the *kathōs* at the beginning of verse 4. What follows in verses 4–14 indicates why God is to be praised. Verse 3, then, is the heading and verses 4–14 elaborate its content (Louw 1999). "The author declares God *eulogētos* and then tries in one sweep to enumerate all his reasons for eulogizing him" (Lincoln 1990, 12).

The second thing to note is that the two movements of the unit's thought are determined by the varying uses of "we/us" and "you." In particular, to whom do "we" and "you" refer in verse 13? The option that seems to fit the context best is that the "we" are Jewish Christians who were in Christ before the "you," namely, Gentile Christians who make up the readers of the letter (e.g., Aletti 2001, 74; O'Brien 1999, 116; Schlier 1963, 66–68; MacDonald 2000, 203).

Verse 3 celebrates the blessedness of God in terms of who he is (**the God and father of our Lord**

An Outline of Ephesians 1:3–14

Berakah: blessing God for blessings bestowed on believers (1:3–3:21)

Generalized introductory blessing: "Blessed is God . . . who has blessed us." (1:3)

Movement 1: God's gracious acts, before and within history, benefit all Christians ("we" = all Christians). (1:4–10)

Two synonymous expressions for God's precreation activity (1:4–6a)

Election: "he chose us . . . before the foundation of the world" (1:4)

Predestination: "he predestined us . . . for the praise of his grace" (1:5–6a)

Two complementary manifestations of God's grace within history (1:6b–9)

Redemption: "with which he graced us in the beloved, in whom we have redemption . . . according to . . . his grace" (1:6b–7)

Revelation of the mystery: "which he showered on us . . . making known to us the mystery of his will . . . to bring all things together in Christ" (1:8–10)

Movement 2: God's acts set the goal for all Christians, whoever they may be ("we" probably = Jewish Christians [2:1, 3]; "you" = Gentile Christians). (1:11–14)

We: "In him, we who first hoped in the Christ have been appointed to live for the praise of his glory" (1:11–12; cf. Jer 13:11; 1 Pet 1:7)

You: "In him you . . . were sealed with the Holy Spirit . . . [awaiting] redemption . . . to the praise of his glory" (1:13–14)

Jesus Christ) and what he has done (**blessed us** [= all Christians] **with every spiritual blessing**). The spiritual blessings are characterized as being **in the heavenlies** and **in Christ**. The phrase "in the heavenlies" appears five times in Ephesians (1:3; 1:20, Christ is at God's right hand in the heavenlies; 2:6, Christians share with Christ in his resurrection power, seated in the heavenlies; 3:10, the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places; 6:12, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies). The reference is to the realm of transcendence, the spiritual dimension beyond the world of sense. This realm includes evil powers (2:2; 6:12) as well as those aligned with God and Christ. Hence when the author of Ephesians speaks of blessings from God bestowed on Christians, he specifies the relevant heavenlies as those "in Christ." Does the instrumental sense apply here or should "in Christ" be understood as incorporation into Christ? Context inclines one to read "in Christ" here as "Christian." The reference indicates what part of the heavenlies is meant (cf. 2:6): it is the Christ part. The opening statement of verse 3 is elaborated in verses 4–14.

Movement one (1:4–10) consists of two parts. The first (1:4–6a) speaks about God's blessings before the creation of the world; the second (1:6b–10) speaks about the divine blessings within history. God's precreation activity is described by the terms "chose" (*exelexato*, 1:4a) and "predestined" (*proorisas*, 1:5a). The former act of God is described as **he chose *us*** (= all Christians) **by means of Christ** (= "in him," understood instrumentally) **before the foundation of the world** (1:4a, cf. 2 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 Pet 1:2). The purpose of the choice is given as **in order that *we*** (= all Christians) **should be holy and blameless in his presence in love** (1:4b). "In love" should be understood as the third in a series of qualifiers, the first two being "holy" and "blameless" (cf. Phil 1:9–10; 1 Thess 3:12–13). The latter act of God is spoken of as **having predestined us for sonship through** (*dia*) **Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will** (1:5). There is some similarity between this letter's remarks about election and predestination and the thought of Qumran.

The result of the predestining act is **the praise of the glory of his grace** (1:6a). "Grace" was a key term in Mediterranean antiquity to designate a gift bestowed by a benefactor, human or divine. Praise was one of the acceptable and expected responses to the gracious benefactor by the recipients of the gift. Praise was especially relevant when the benefactor was a deity. For example, one aretalogy of Isis begins, "Hail . . . Giver of all blessings," to which the response is "praise" (Danker 1982, 180–81). The earliest extant aretalogy of Isis (first/second century BC) reads, "May our word of praise not be lacking in the face of the magnitude of your benefaction" (G. H. R. Horsley 1981, 1:10–12). Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* tells how

Isis delivered Lucius from being in the form of a donkey. In response the young man praises Isis for her benefactions in a doxology (Danker 1982, 178–79). A similar phenomenon is found in *1 En*. 27.3, 5. Such praise was often written in flowery prose similar to that of Ephesians.

How should "in him" (1:4a) be understood? Are Christians chosen "in Christ" (location) or "through Christ" (instrumentality) before the foundation of the world? Given the fact that predestination is said to be done "through [*dia*] Christ" (1:5), it would seem preferable to take "in Christ" in verse 4 as instrumental and translate it also "through Christ" or "by means of Christ." Both God's choice and his predestining his children were by means of Christ. Consequently, Christ is not the elect one (contra Witherington 1994, 248–49), but the instrument of election. After all, the text says, "he chose *us*."

When do election and predestination take place? The contention that election and predestination occur within history (Newman 1996; Sloan 1993; Eskola 1998) is untenable. "Before the foundation of the world" (1:4) controls the reading.

What is the relation of "he chose us through [*en*] Christ" (1:4) to "having predested us through [*dia*] Christ" (1:5)? Aorist participles (like that in 1:5) can express identical action, antecedent action, or simultaneous action. They cannot express subsequent action (Robertson 1934, 858–63). This means that predestination does not follow election; rather, predestination is either the ground or cause of election, or it is another way of talking about the same thing, God's precreation saving activity. Paul, using traditional material, says in Rom 8:29 that God foreknew and predested; the terms are virtually identical in their meaning. The same is true here (Best 2004, 123; K. Barth 1957–1967, II/2, 13).

What is the significance of using plural pronouns in connection with election and predestination ("chose us"; "predested us")? Does this mean that predestination/election is corporate (e.g., Newman 1996)?

Predestination at Qumran

"I know through the understanding that comes from Thee that righteousness is not in a hand of flesh, that man is not master of his way and that it is not in mortals to direct their steps. . . . Thou alone didst create the just and establish him from the womb for the time of goodwill, that he might hearken to Thy covenant and walk in Thy ways. . . . But the wicked Thou didst create for the time of Thy wrath, Thou didst view them from the womb to the Day of Massacre, for they walk in the way which is not good."

—1QH XV, 12–21; trans. Vermes 1987, 202

The plural pronoun is used because the letter is written to a church or churches, and what is said includes both those churches and the author and others like him. There is no way that a singular pronoun could have been used in this context. To attempt to derive corporate election from such data is overinterpretation. Individuals are chosen and predestined, but these individuals make up a group (Hoehner 2002, 176).

It goes without saying that there is no hint of the church as being preexistent in this text (contra Strecker 2000, 569). The instrumental reading of "in him" (= "through him") rules this out.

The language of election and predestination found at Qumran offers a contrast to Paul's usage (e.g., CD II, 7; 1QS I, 10–11). According to Qumran sources, the course of cosmic powers and humankind were ordained in God's act of creation (1QH IX [= I], 10–20; 1QS III, 15). This involved both the election of the righteous and the condemnation of the wicked, a double-edged decree. In Rom 8:28–30, however, there is only a single-edged predestination. The same is true for Ephesians.

The second part of movement one (1:4–10), found in verses 6b–10, speaks about two complementary dimensions of God's grace manifested within history: redemption (1:6b–7) and revelation (1:8–10). The first of these connects to the conclusion of the previous unit, "for the praise of the glory of his grace" (1:6a). Verse 6b begins a new segment building on the words of verse 6a about God's grace: **with which he graced us in the beloved**. "The beloved" is a technical term for Jesus (cf. Mark 1:11; 9:7; *1 Clem*. 59.2–3; Ign. *Smyrn*. pref.). Thus the location of God's grace is in his beloved, the Christ. The author continues: **by means of whom** ("in whom," but understood instrumentally) **we have the redemption through his blood** (1:7a; Rom 3:24–25; Col 1:20; 1 Pet 1:2; 1 John 1:7; 5:6–8). Jesus' death is the concrete means by which Christians have experienced their redemption (= deliverance), which in this case is described as **the forgiveness of trespasses** (1:7b; Col 1:14; elsewhere, more than forgiveness; Eph 1:14; 4:30). The undisputed letters of Paul do not have the term *aphesis* ("forgiveness"), although in Rom 4:7 (quoting Ps 32:1–2) Paul uses the cognate verb. Elsewhere Paul speaks of forgiveness in other terms. This segment ends as it began, with a reference to God's grace: **according to the riches of his grace** (1:7c). One could translate, "according to the riches of his benefaction."

The second dimension of God's grace manifested within history appears in verses 8–10. Again, the new thought develops the last-mentioned ingredient of the previous segment: "according to the riches of his grace" (1:7c). It is the grace **which he lavished on us** (= all Christians) **with all wisdom and understanding** (1:8)**, having made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he set forth through Christ** ("in him," understood instrumentally) (1:9) **as a**

plan (*oikonomian*, with a passive connotation; cf. 3:2, 9) **for the fullness of time, to gather up everything** (= the cosmos as a whole) **through the Christ** ("in the Christ," understood instrumentally)**, things in the heavenlies and things on the earth** (1:10). In 1 Cor 15:24–28 Paul spoke of the divine plan for Christ's bringing harmony to the cosmos in military terms, as the subjugation of God's enemies by Christ. This metaphor will be echoed in Eph 1:20–23. Here another metaphor is used. The term "to gather up everything" means literally to bring to a head. It was originally applied to adding up a sum. In Greek practice, the sum of a column of figures was given at the top, not the bottom. So the process was called "bringing to a head." In rhetoric it was used to refer to the summary of the argument of a speech, and eventually to any kind of summarizing. It suggests the gathering of a number of scattered items into some kind of unity. So here in Eph 1:10 God's plan is to gather all things (the whole cosmos) into a unity through Christ.

There has been a revelation to Christians. It is a revelation of the mystery of God's will. The Qumran scrolls also connect a revelation of a mystery with a preordained plan (e.g., 1QS IV, 18–19). In apocalyptic Jewish writings, "mystery" usually refers to an event that will be revealed at the end of history (cf. *4 Ezra* 14.5–6). God's prophets, however, may know of it now because God reveals to them "the things that must come to pass" (LXX Dan 2:28–29). At Qumran "mystery" can refer to an event that has already been realized in the community's life (e.g., 1QS XI, 5–8). In the genuine Pauline letters the mystery is an eschatological teaching about the participation of believers in the glory of the world to come (Rom 11:25; 1 Cor 2:6; 15:51). In Col 1:26–27 the mystery is "Christ in you, the hope of glory." In Eph 1:10 the mystery is God's plan to gather up everything by means of the Messiah. This is the overall vision. In 3:6 it is that Gentiles have become part of the one body, a part of the overall plan. One may infer from this statement that Ephesians assumes (as does Colossians) that the unity and harmony of the cosmos have suffered serious dislocation, on earth and in the heavenlies.

Against the background of this assumption, the overriding theme of the letter may be understood. The theme is that the cosmic, redemptive purpose of God, predestined from eternity and executed through the instrumentality of Christ, is to overcome hostility and divisions in the universe by bringing all things together under the headship of Christ. This task includes not only overcoming racial (Jew-Gentile) and household divisions on earth but also an ultimate restoration of harmony in the heavenlies. A revelation of this mystery has been given to Christians as an expression of God's grace. This reordering is accomplished "through Christ" (1:10; *en autō*, understood instrumentally). In Eph 1:22 God places all things under the feet of the exalted Christ and makes him head over

all things so that Christ fills all things (cf. 1:23; 4:10). That is, the Christ is God's instrument to restore order to the fractured cosmos. Hence the instrumental sense of "in Christ" seems appropriate here.

Movement two (1:11–14) speaks about God's acts as setting the goal for all Christians, whoever they may be. In this unit there are two components, one referring to *us* (1:11–12) and the other to *you* (plural; 1:13–14). Both components connect to the last-mentioned item in the previous segment (Christ, 1:10b). The first component (1:11–12) begins: **through whom** ("in whom," understood instrumentally) **we were appointed, having been predestined according to the purpose of the one who works in everything according to the counsel of his will, with the result that we who hoped beforehand in the Christ** (= Christ as the object of hope) **might be for the praise of his glory**. "We" who hoped beforehand in the Christ must be Jewish Christians who came to faith before the Gentile readers of this letter (cf. 2:1–5, 11–22; cf. Col 4:11). The outcome of their experience results in "the praise of his glory," an appropriate response to the divine benefactions.

The second component of movement two is found in verses 13–14. It also begins with a reference to Christ: **through whom** ("in whom," understood instrumentally) **you, having heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, through whom also** ("in whom," understood instrumentally)**, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise** (cf. 4:30; 2 Cor 1:22)**, who is the first installment of your inheritance, with the goal of the redemption of the purchased possession, resulting in the praise of his glory**. The exalted Christ gives the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph 4:10–11; John 20:22; Acts 2:33). The instrumental sense of "through him" is therefore required in this context. "You" represents the recipients of the letter, Gentile Christians who have responded positively to the preaching of the gospel. They have consequently been sealed with the Holy Spirit. The auditors would not necessarily have understood the sealing as a reference to baptism. In Acts, the gift of the Spirit was sometimes associated with baptism (2:38), sometimes with the postbaptismal laying on of hands (8:14–17; 19:6), and sometimes with a pre-baptismal anointing of those who heard the preaching of the good news (10:44–48; 11:15–17; 15:7–8). The genuine Pauline letters offer some support for this third option (1 Cor 2:4; Gal 3:2; 1 Thess 1:5; cf. Lull 1980). The readers' sealing, then, was their experience of the Holy Spirit whether it was associated with baptism or not. The experience of the Spirit must not be conceived in terms of gifts only; the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23) must be included as well (Best 2004, 150–51).

Sealing in antiquity could indicate ownership (e.g., Rev 7:3–8), authenticity (e.g., John 3:33; 6:27), or protection (Matt 27:66; Rev 20:3).

In connection with the last-mentioned function, seals sometimes served as amulets in western Asia Minor. It may be that in Ephesians the auditors would have understood the Holy Spirit as "the talisman above all other talismans and the protection from all forms of magical influence and the temptation of reliance upon magic" (Thomas 2001). Jewish and early Christian writings attest to this conception. In Ezek 9:4–6 sealing means protection against harm. In *Pss. Sol.* 15.4–7 those with God's seal will never be disturbed by evil and will escape judgment. In *T. Sol.* 17.4 a demon says that if Christ's seal is on a person, the demon is thwarted and flees. In Rev 7:3 an angel prepares to mark the servants of God with a seal of God as protection. In the *T. Job* 5.1 an angel seals Job, who then asserts, "Till death I will endure; I will not step back at all." The last-mentioned example goes beyond protection and alludes to spiritual empowerment. In Eph 1:13 and 4:30 the sealing functions to keep converts to the day of redemption. This combines spiritual protection and empowerment.

The Spirit is, moreover, a down payment, first installment, or pledge (*arrabōn*) of the future inheritance. The future hope is understood as the ultimate redemption by God of the possession, the people of God. That all of this happens for Gentile Christians yields the same result as the experience of the Jewish Christians: "for the praise of his glory." The great benefactor elicits the praise of his beneficiaries, as is proper.

The *berakah* has spoken of the blessings the blessed God has showered on his children. They have been listed in a sequence that runs from before the creation of the world (chosen, predestined), through human history (redemption, revelation), looking to the ultimate redemption of God's people (cf. Rom 8:28–30). This grand salvific scheme expresses God's grace and evokes a threefold response of praise. The divine benefactor's grace is celebrated in this literary laudation that begins the Ephesian letter. The appropriate praise for the gift has been given, written down, and sent out for all to read.

Theological Issues

Being elected/chosen before the foundation of the world (1:4) and being predestined according to God's will/purpose (1:4, 11) appear to be synonymous expressions in 1:3–14. This early Christian confession about a precreation activity of God through Christ has held a remarkable fascination for later interpreters. A brief overview of later Christian interpretations is here offered in order to clarify the issues raised in Ephesians.

The view of the Eastern Fathers and the Orthodox tradition is reflected in the 1823 Larger Catechism of Philaret, metropolitan of Moscow. In the

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The Larger Catechism of the Eastern Orthodox Church (Philaret)

Q 121: Has not that will of God, by which man is designed for eternal happiness, its own proper name in theology?

A. It is called the predestination of God. . . .

Q 125: How does the Orthodox Church speak on this point?

A. In the exposition of the faith of the Eastern Patriarchs, it is said: As he foresaw that some would use well their free will, but others ill, he accordingly predestined the former to glory, while the latter he condemned.

—Schaff 1931, 2:464–65

Eastern Church the problem of predestination was solved by saying that God knew beforehand how creatures would choose; on the basis of this foreknowledge he predestined them either to life or to death. In Ephesians, however, God's predestining activity arises out of the good pleasure of his will (1:5; cf. 1:11, "the counsel of his will"). There is no hint of a predestination based on foreknowledge. In Rom 8:28–29, where we read, "those whom he foreknew he predestined," foreknowledge is understood in the sense of a precreation choice. There is no hint of foreknowledge of how creatures would act once they came into existence.

John Calvin, drawing upon Augustine, offers a perspective closer to that of Qumran: God foreordained some to life, some to death. The same observation must be made about both: Eph 1, like Rom 8:28–29, knows nothing of predestination to damnation, only of election and predestination to life, sonship, and purity of life. Arminius was repulsed by Calvin's interpretation and responded forcefully (Nichols and Nichols

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Predestination according to Calvin

"We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is ordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to the one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death."

—*Inst.* 3.21.5, trans. Allen 1936, 2:176

Foreknowledge according to Arminius

"God decreed to save and damn certain particular persons. This decree has its foundations in the foreknowledge of God by which he knew from all eternity those individuals who would, through his prevenient grace, believe, and, through his subsequent grace would persevere . . . , and, by which foreknowledge, he likewise knew those who would not believe and persevere."
—"My Own Sentiments on Predestination," trans. Nichols 1986, 1:247–48

1986, 1:221–23). He contended that grounding the distinction between the elect and the reprobate in the will of God rather than in the will of the creature who chooses to believe or disbelieve is "repugnant to the nature of God" (who is merciful and just), "contrary to the nature of man" (who has freedom of will), and "injurious to the glory of God" (since it makes God the real sinner). Arminius's views reflect those of the Eastern Fathers. Once again predestination is based on God's pre-creation knowledge of his creatures' future behavior. In Ephesians (and in Rom 8), however, there is no hint of such a reading. In Ephesians (and canonical Paul), election before the foundation of the world and predestination are God's choice, not the sinner's.

Karl Barth offers a fresh reading that avoids the box in which the two previous interpretations find themselves (*Church Dogmatics*, II/2). He maintains that Christ is both the Elect Man and the Reprobate Man. All individuals are elect in Christ. But Christ's election is unto death so that we who deserve death might enjoy eternal life. He is also the one true Reprobate. Christ's death is, therefore, the shadow side of predestination. One can say predestination is double since Christ is both the Elect Man and the Reprobate Man. This novel solution, however, is not without its problems. There is little biblical evidence for Christ's being the one elected prior to creation. Most of the references to Christ as elect refer to election within history (e.g., Luke 9:35; 23:35; Acts 3:20; 1 Pet 2:4). Only 1 Pet 1:20 comes close to a precreation election of Christ. There we hear that Christ was foreknown before the foundation of the world. This need mean nothing more than that Christ was chosen before creation. Acts 4:28 says the death of Jesus at the hands of enemies is according to God's predestined plan. In 1 Cor 2:7 we hear of God's secret wisdom, which was predestined for our glory. Elsewhere Christians are said to have been elected before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4), predestined (Eph 1:5, 11), or foreknown and predestined (Rom 8:28–29). In sum, Ephesians (and canonical Paul) know nothing about Christ's being

the Elect One from before creation and Christians' being elect in him. In Eph 1:4 Christians are elect through Christ just as they are predestined through Christ in 1:5.

Barth's interpretation introduces another problem. If all are elect in Christ by an eternal decree, then it would seem that no negative decision at the human level (unbelief) could ever frustrate the prior positive decision at the divine level (election/predestination). Hence all will be saved in the end. This runs directly counter to Eph 5:5–6, which claims some will not inherit the kingdom of God and Christ.

Given the failure of such attempts to explain God's precreation salvific activity, can anything more facilitate a reading of Eph 1:3–14? Recognizing the enormity of the task, several modest observations may be offered. First, note that Ephesians locates the references to election before the foundation of the world (1:4) and to predestination (1:5, 11) in the context of a eulogy that praises the heavenly benefactor for his blessings to Christians. This means that such language is used by Christians to acknowledge God's/Christ's role in their salvific experience. Second, this means that talk about God's precreation salvific activity is the language of believing confession, like talk about the future hope of believers. It is not of or for public speculation. Third, such language grows out of believers' reflection on their experience of God's grace. John Knox's comments on Rom 8:28–29 also apply to Eph 1:4–5, 11. He says,

> We must also remember that this whole chapter is written from the standpoint of Christian religious experience. Now one who has received the grace of God finds himself ascribing the whole process of his salvation to God's action; he himself has had nothing to do with it whatever. Even his faith appears to be God's gift. Some doctrine of predestination is the only possible rationalization of this experience, just as some doctrine of freedom is the only possible rationalization of the sense of responsibility we also find within ourselves. (Knox 1954, 526–27)

Finally, such language prevents real or potential misunderstandings of the nature of the divine-human relationship. In the milieu of the auditors of Ephesians, the pervasive principle of reciprocity would tend to subvert the Christian view of divine initiative. The precreation salvific activity of God/Christ precludes any notion of human merit as playing a part in establishing or maintaining the relationship between creator and creature. (For a more detailed discussion, cf. Talbert 2002b, 222–34.)

Ephesians 1:15–2:10

Introductory Matters

This segment of the Ephesian letter is composed of three sentences: 1:15–23, 2:1–7, and 2:8–10. Formally, it consists of a thanksgiving (1:15–16a), an intercession (1:16b–19), and a digression (1:20–2:10).

This section's links with what comes before and what follows raise questions for the reader. Normally the Hellenistic letter began with a salutation ("A to B, greeting") very much like Eph 1:1–2, followed by a prayer of some sort, sometimes a thanksgiving (1 Cor 1:4; 1 Thess 1:2; 2 Tim 1:3), and sometimes a thanksgiving plus an intercession (Rom 1:8, 10; Phil 1:3, 9; Col 1:3, 9; 2 Thess 1:3, 11; Phlm 4, 6). Ephesians differs in that it begins with a blessing (*berakah*) in 1:3–14, followed by a thanksgiving (1:15–16a) and an intercession (1:16b–19). This combination has been called "unusual" (O'Brien 1979). In Jewish prayers, however, one often finds a blessing followed by an intercession (e.g., Tob 3:11, 12–15; 8:5–6, 7; 1 Macc 4:30, 31–33) or a blessing followed by a thanksgiving (e.g., Dan 2:20–22, 23; 1 Esd 4:60a, 4:60b). Moreover, *Jub*. 22.6–9, a prayer of Abraham, follows the same pattern as the opening of Ephesians: blessing, thanksgiving, and intercession. It does not begin a letter, of course, but it does show the naturalness of the pattern in Jewish prayer. In 2 Cor 1:3, 11, however, one finds the combination blessing, intercession, and thanksgiving at the beginning of a letter. There Paul utters the blessing while the readers make the intercession and others offer thanksgiving. In Ephesians it is "Paul" who utters all three. Nevertheless, such data indicate that the combination of blessing, thanksgiving, and intercession in Eph 1 is at home in the world of Jewish prayer and has a close, if not exact, analogy in 2 Cor 1. Too much should not be made of the

An Outline of 1 Thessalonians

Salutation (1:1)

Thanksgiving: two parallel panels with autobiographical content (1:2–3:10)

Panel 1 (1:2–2:12)

"We *give thanks* to God" (1:2–3)

"Our gospel came to you not only in word but with . . . full conviction" (1:4–5)

"You became imitators of us and the Lord" (affliction) (1:6–8)

Paul's past visit (note "as you know" in 2:1, 2, 5, 11) (1:9–2:12)

Panel 2 (2:13–3:10)

"We also . . . *give thanks* to God" (2:13a)

"You received the word . . . as the word of God" (2:13b)

"You became imitators . . . of the churches . . . in Judea" (suffering) (2:14–16)

Paul's desired visit and the proxy visit of Timothy (note "you know" in 3:3, 4, and "that I may know" in 3:5) (2:17–3:8)

Conclusion of the *thanksgiving* (3:9–10)

Intercession (3:11–13)

Parenesis introduced by a request formula ("ask you, beseech you") (4:1–5:22)

"uniqueness" of this letter's opening prayer periods (contra M. Barth 1974, 1:161, et al.).

On the other hand, the intercession that follows 1:16b–19 does not contain the usual formula signaling a transition to the body of the letter. It lacks a disclosure formula like that of Phil 1:12 ("I want you to know"; cf. Rom 1:13), or a formula of request like that of 1 Cor 1:10 ("I appeal to you"), or any other such form (J. L. White 1972). Moreover, the resumption of the intercessory prayer comes at 3:1 ("for this reason"; cf. 1:15, "for this reason"). It then breaks off again, finally concluding in 3:14–19, and is followed by a doxology in 3:20–21. This pattern suggests that 1:3–3:21 should be considered a series of prayers: a blessing (1:3–14), a thanksgiving (1:15–16a), an intercession (1:16b–3:19), and a doxology (3:20–21).

This prayer sequence, however, breaks at two points. At 1:20 a double digression begins (1:20–2:10 and 2:11–22; Schnackenburg 1991, 71). The thought of this double digression continues that of the preceding prayers. In 1:20–2:10 the thought is in continuity with that of the intercession in 1:16b–19 (power); while 2:11–22 pick up the concerns of the blessing in 1:11–14 (inclusion of Gentiles) and the intercession in 1:16b–19 (power, inheritance, and hope). At 3:2 another digression begins and runs through 3:13 (Snodgrass 1996, 158). Its focus continues that of the blessing in 1:9–10 (the mystery) and the intercession of 1:16b–19 (inheritance and hope). These digressions serve as amplifications and excurses, and follow standard rhetorical practice (Wuellner 1979). The overall pattern for Eph 1:3–3:21, then, is that of a series of prayers broken at two points by digressions that elaborate points mentioned in the blessing and the intercession. The digressions contain the type of material that usually appears in the theological part of the body of a Pauline letter.

A similar arrangement of materials is found in 1 Thessalonians (e.g., Dahl 2000, 453).

Of course, in 1 Thessalonians the thanksgiving is broken by "body" material while in Ephesians the intercession contains the digressions. Both letters, nevertheless, have prayer forms broken up by material normally reserved for the letter body. In 2 Thessalonians, as well, various sections of what would normally be called the letter body are interspersed within a series of prayers (e.g., thanksgiving, 1:3; intercession, 1:11; body material, 2:1–12; thanksgiving, 2:13; intercession, 2:16; body material, 3:1–4; intercession, 3:5; body material, 3:6–15; intercession, 3:16). Although Eph 1–3 represents a creative adjustment of the normal letter form, this passage is not without parallel in the canonical Pauline corpus.

The creative shaping of the normal letter form renders moot the usual discussion of where the body of the letter begins. To say, for example, that the first part of the body runs from 1:3–3:21 (e.g., O'Brien 1999, 68–73; Snodgrass 1996, 30–31) makes sense only if one thinks the prayer forms constitute part of the letter body. This violates the consensus opinion that a Hellenistic letter was composed of salutation, prayer form, body, and closing, all as discrete parts. It is more appropriate to say that in Ephesians, as in 1 Thessalonians, the opening prayer forms incorporate, as digressions, sections of what would normally be called the theological part of the body. Then at 4:1 what is normally called the parenetic section of the letter body begins with a standard formula of request ("I beg you").

As indicated by the foregoing discussion and the new outline, in this section we will examine the thanksgiving (1:15–16a), the intercession (1:16b–19), and the first part of the initial digression (1:20–2:10).

An Outline of Ephesians through 2:10

Salutation (1:1–2)

Berakah: blessing God for blessings bestowed on believers (1:3–14)

Thanksgiving: thanking God for the readers' faith and love (1:15–16a)

Intercession: asking God for the readers' enlightenment, especially that they might know God's power at work in them (1:16b–19)

> **Digression 1: God's power at work in Christ and in Christians (1:20–2:10)**
>
> Raised through Christ: victory over sin and evil powers (1:20–2:10)
>
> God's power at work in Christ (1:20–23)
>
> God raised him from the dead (1:20a)
>
> God exalted him (1:20b) over the powers (1:21) and over the church (1:22–23)
>
> God's power at work in Christians (2:1–10)
>
> When all were dead in sins (2:1–3)
>
> God made us alive together and seated us together through Christ (2:4–7)
>
> All this is God's doing through Christ (2:8–10)

Tracing the Train of Thought

The thanksgiving begins, **For this reason** (1:15a). This may refer both backward and forward. It refers back to the *berakah* (1:3–14) and the many blessings bestowed on believers by their divine benefactor. The auditors of Ephesians would have found this natural. They would have been familiar with inscriptions giving thanks to this or that deity for various benefactions. For example, an inscription from the imperial period begins, "I give thanks [*eucharistō*] to you, Lady Artemis." Another says Aurelia Juliane "gives thanks to Lady Hestia and to all the gods, because they healed me and restored me to my parents" (G. H. R. Horsley 1987, 1:127–28). The thanksgiving also refers forward to the readers' **faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for all the saints** (1:15b; cf. Col 1:3–4; Phlm 4–5) because these signal that the readers are now participants in the blessings.

The intercession (1:16b–19) asks for the readers' enlightenment: **that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . might give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, having enlightened the eyes of your hearts** (1:17–18a; cf. 1QS II, 3, "May he illuminate your heart with the discernment of life and grace you with eternal knowledge").

This enlightenment is requested so that the readers can have experiential awareness of three things. First, he wants them to **know what is the hope of his calling** (1:18b). This, of course, refers to the consummation of their salvation. In 2:12 these Gentiles are described as formerly without hope; in 4:4 we hear of the one hope of their calling. The author wants his Gentile Christian readers to know the goal toward which everything is moving. This knowledge is *eschatological*.

Second, he prays that they might know **what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance among the saints** (1:18c). God's inheritance is his people (Deut 9:26, 29; 1 Kgs 8:51, 53; 2 Kgs 21:14; Ps 28:9). The saints here are not angels (contra Schnackenburg 1991, 71) but Christians (Lincoln 1990, 60). Two passages from Acts point to this conclusion. In Acts 20:32 Paul says to the Ephesian elders, "And now I give you over to God and to the word of his grace which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those being sanctified [= the saints, Christians]." At Paul's conversion, the risen Lord is represented as sending Paul to the Gentiles "to open their eyes . . . in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those sanctified [= the saints, Christians] by faith in me" (Acts 26:18). Such a reading fits with Eph 2:19 (citizens with the saints, Christians) and 3:6 (fellow heirs, members of the same body). The author wants his Gentile readers to know how wonderful it is to be included within God's people. This knowledge is *ecclesiological*.

Third, the author petitions God that the readers might know **what is the measureless greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of the power of his might** (1:19). As will be made clear in the next section (1:20–2:10) the power mentioned here is that which raised Jesus from the dead, exalted him to God's right hand, and gave him authority over all. It is this power that is at work "in us who believe." This knowledge is *soteriological*.

At this point "Paul" moves beyond his prayers into a two-part digression (1:20–2:10 and 2:11–22). The move is signaled by a device already employed in 1:3–14. Usually the previous segment ends with a noun and the new unit begins with a pronoun referring to the previous noun or pronoun (e.g., 1:6a concludes with "grace," 1:6b begins with "which"; 1:7b ends with "grace," 1:8a begins with "which"; 1:10b ends with "in him," 1:11a begins with "in whom"; 1:12 ends with "in the Christ," 1:13 begins with "in whom"; 1:19 ends with "working," 1:20 begins with "which"). The author is thereby signaling a new beginning of thought (but not the beginning of the letter body).

The first part of the digression is soteriological and describes the greatness of God's power (1:20–2:10). The second part speaks about both the ecclesiological dimension of the intercession (2:11–20) and the eschatological aspect of the prayer (2:21–22), both related to the working of God's power. Let us look now at the first part of the initial digression or excursus that speaks about God's power.

The first part of the initial excursus breaks into two segments: 1:20–23, God's power in Christ; and 2:1–10, God's power in Christians. God's power **worked in the Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at God's right hand in the heavenlies** (1:20). The seating of Christ at God's right hand echoes Ps 110:1 (cited also in Matt 22:44; Acts 2:34; Rom 8:34; Heb 1:3, 13; 10:12). Christ's exaltation places him **far above every rule** (*archēs*) **and authority** (*exousias*) **and power** (*dynameōs*) **and sovereignty** (*kyriotētos*) **and every name being named, not only in this age but also in the coming one** (1:21). Christ's exaltation affects two realms: the evil powers and the church. In this paragraph the focus is on the powers. Since the heavenlies contain both good and evil spiritual powers, and since the good are superior, verse 21 says Christ's place in the heavenlies is "far above" the evil powers (cf. Phil 2:9–11). The names of these evil powers—rule, authority, power, sovereignty—are found together in *2 En*. 20–22. In 1 Cor 15:24 and Col 1:16 three of the names are found; in Rom 8:38 and Col 2:10, 15 two are used. The usage of Ephesians is, therefore, traditional. The superiority of Christ over these powers extends beyond this age into the coming one. His reign is unending. **He put everything under his feet** (1:22a) echoes Ps 8:6 (cf. 1 Cor 15:27; Heb 2:8).

By virtue of his exaltation Christ also was given as **the head over all things for the church** (1:22b). At the time, non-Christians and non-Jews used *ekklēsia* for the city assembly that would gather in the civic theater to conduct business (e.g., Acts 19:41). In the LXX, however, *ekklēsia* is used for the assembly of God's people, Israel. This biblical usage influenced the early Christian understanding of the term. In the genuine Pauline letters, "church," understood as God's called-out people, is used in a variety of ways: the church in a particular locality (e.g., 1 Thess 1:1); the church in a particular household (e.g., Rom 16:5); the whole church in a given city, as opposed to its various cell groups (Rom 16:23); churches in various regions (e.g., Gal 1:22); and the church everywhere (1 Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13; Phil 3:6). In the nine places where Ephesians mentions *ekklēsia*, however, it is understood as the universal church, the church in its entirety. A number of images are used in the letter for God's people: for example, a building/temple, the body of Christ, a new humanity, the bride of Christ, the fullness of Christ (Schnackenburg 1991, 293–310). The church here is called Christ's **body** (1:23a), of which he is head (cf. 4:15–16; 5:23).

The rest of the sentence has been translated three different ways. **The fullness** can refer to Christ, while **the one who fills everything** (1:23b) refers to God the Father (Moule 1951). This option takes its cue from Col 2:9, "For in him [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." This is not the emphasis of Ephesians, however. Alternatively, "the fullness" can refer to the church while "the one who is filled totally" (read as a passive) refers to Christ (Douay-Rheims; Benoit 1984). The second option would mean that the church completes Christ as members are incorporated into it. Appeal is made to Eph 4:13, "until all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the fullness of the stature of Christ." Ephesians 4:13, however, does not seem to mean what this second translation demands. Most scholars take "the fullness" to refer to the church, while "the one who fills everything" (read as an active middle voice) refers to Christ (NRSV). The church, the body of Christ, is filled by Christ (cf. Eph 3:19, "To know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God"), who also fills everything (cf. Eph 4:10, "so that he might fill all things"). Thus we may render 1:22b–23: **and has made him** (Christ) **the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness** (cf. 3:19) **of the one** (Christ; cf. 4:10) **who fills everything** (1:23b; cf. 4:10; e.g., M. Barth 1974, 1:158; Lincoln 1990, 72–73).

"Fullness" was used as a technical term by Valentinian gnostics in the second century to designate the general scheme of the divine world: thirty aeons (= emanations) making up the *plērōma* ("fullness") of the divinity. The scholarly consensus, however, holds that all the "fullness"

texts in Colossians and Ephesians can be read, without this technical meaning, as referring to the contents with which an object can be filled (e.g., Philo, *Mos*. 2.62, the contents of Noah's ark [*plērōma*]) or the totality of something (e.g., Philo, *Praem*. 18.109). So in 1:23 the church is understood as that which holds the spiritual reality (= "the fullness") that comes from the risen Christ (cf. 2:21–22; 3:19; 4:10).

Having spoken about God's power in Christ, the text now turns to God's power in Christians (2:1–10). This segment consists of two sentences, 2:1–7 and 2:8–10. In the former the grammatical subject is God (2:4), the main verbs are "made alive," "raised," and "seated" (2:5–6). The object is "us." What comes before (2:1–3) and after (2:7) is dependent on the main verbs in verses 5–6. The thought content of the unit as a whole begins in verses 1–3 with a description of the readers' plight before Christ. **And *you* (pl.) being dead in your trespasses and sins** (2:1)**, in which formerly you walked according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, the spirit that now is working in the children of disobedience** (2:2)**.** The "age [*aiōna*] of this world" refers to the time of the current tangible world. Although *aiōn* was sometimes used as the name of a spiritual being in Mediterranean antiquity (e.g., an invocation in *PGM* XIII. 983ff. starts, "Lord *Aiōn* who created everything"; also Ign. *Eph*. 19.2 asks with reference to Christ, "How was he manifested to the *Aiōnes*?"; cf. Nock 1934, 78–91), in this context it is employed with its usual meaning, "age." The point, then, is that the readers, before Christ, were living in conformity to the standards of this time (Hoehner 2002, 310; cf. Rom 12:1–2, "Do not be conformed to this age"). This is one side of the coin. The other is that they were living according to the ruler (= the devil) of the authority of the air, the authority of the air being the spirit who dwells in the lower heavens and impinges on the lives of humans in this world. Their former existence was, therefore, in conformity to the ethos of this world under the influence of evil spiritual powers. This was the plight of the Gentile Christian readers prior to their relation to Christ.

It was, however, not theirs alone: **among whom also *we* lived formerly in the desires of our flesh, doing the will of our flesh and reasonings** (cf. Rom 2:17–24; 8:5–8)**, and *we* were children of wrath by nature as even the rest** (2:3). The author and the group with which he is identified (Jewish Christians who had come to faith before the Gentile Christian addressees? cf. Col 4:11) were no different from the readers (Gentiles) in their pre-Christian existence (cf. Acts 15:7–11; Gal 2:15–16).

God, however, had other plans for both groups. **God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us** (2:4)**, even while *we* (= both groups) were dead in trespasses, made *us* (= both**

groups) **alive together by means of the Christ** (*en tō Christō*, understood instrumentally)**—by grace you have been saved** (2:5)**.** The pre-Christ situation of both groups is called "death." At Qumran persons who have joined the sect are described as those who have been raised from the worms of the dead (1QH XIX [= XI], 10–14). Philo gives a clear statement about how death was viewed by a Hellenistic Jew in antiquity (*Leg*. 1.105ff.). Death is of two types: one, the separation of the soul from the body (= death of the body), the other, the decay of virtue (= death of the soul). He asserts, "The godless are dead in soul" (*Spec*. 1.345). The pagan philosopher Epictetus reflects the same basic view (*Diatr*. 1.3.3, 2.19.27, 3.23.28). The same sentiment is expressed by 1 Tim 5:6, "The one who is self indulgent is dead even while that one lives"; Rev 3:1b, "I know your works. You have the name of being alive but you are dead"; and Luke 15:24, 32, "This son of mine was dead and is alive again . . . was dead and has come to life."

The new situation is said to have been due to God's love and mercy shown "even while we were dead in trespasses" (2:5a; cf. Rom 5:6, 8, 10). This act is called "grace." Its result is called both "having been saved" and "being made alive together" (2:5b). The compound verbs here in verse 5 (being made alive together) and in verse 6 (raised together and seated together) mean "made alive, raised, and seated with each other," referring here to the Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians who are the focus of the context (cf. 2:1, "you all"; 2:3, "we all"; 2:4, 5, "us," meaning both groups; Muddiman 2001, 109). This interpretation is affected by a major textual problem in verse 5. Sinaiticus and Claromontanus read *tō Christō* (he made alive *with Christ*). Vaticanus and 𝔓46 read *en tō Christō* (he made alive *by means of the Christ*). The manuscript evidence slightly favors the latter reading. The context also favors taking "together" to refer to the two Christian groups. The latter variant reading fits the overall instrumental usage of "in Christ" in Ephesians. One should therefore translate: **While we** (= Gentiles and Jews) **were dead in trespasses, [God] made us** (= Gentiles and Jews) **alive together by means of the Christ** (cf. John 5:21, 26). The terms "saved" and "made alive together" are explained in what follows. "Being made alive together" is amplified in verses 6–7; "being saved" is discussed in verses 8–10.

Verses 6–7 say that being made alive together through Christ means **God raised us together and seated us together in the heavenlies through the power of Christ Jesus** (*en Christō Iēsou*) **in order that he might show in the coming ages the superlative riches of his grace by kindness to us through Christ Jesus** (*en Christō Iēsou*, understood instrumentally). Ephesians is unique in depicting the realized salvation of believers as a past resurrection and present session enabled by Christ (but Colossians comes close to doing so as well; cf. Col 2:12; 3:1). If death is understood

metaphorically or spiritually in this context, so too are "raised together" and "seated together." The text does not picture a physical resurrection or a bodily transportation into the heavenlies for the believers. The author and his readers are physically alive and on earth. Attention is rather drawn to the Christians' spiritual position (T. Allen 1986). Insofar as they are delivered from their trespasses and sins, they are morally and spiritually alive. Insofar as they share with Christ in his superiority over the evil powers, they reign with him. Unbelievers live in one world only, the earth, although their lives are impinged upon by the evil powers from the lower heavens. They are one-dimensional beings. Believers, however, live in two dimensions. They are alive upon the earth and alive in the heavenlies at the same time. They are two-dimensional. It is, moreover, their participation in the heavenlies in dependence on Christ that enables them to resist the evil powers that impinge upon humans on earth.

Figure 5. The Dual Existence of Believers.

In the present age (1:21), unbelievers live in one dimension, impinged upon by powers from another.
Believers live in two dimensions at the same time. The *anakephalaiōsis* (1:10) and the age to come (1:21) lie in the future.
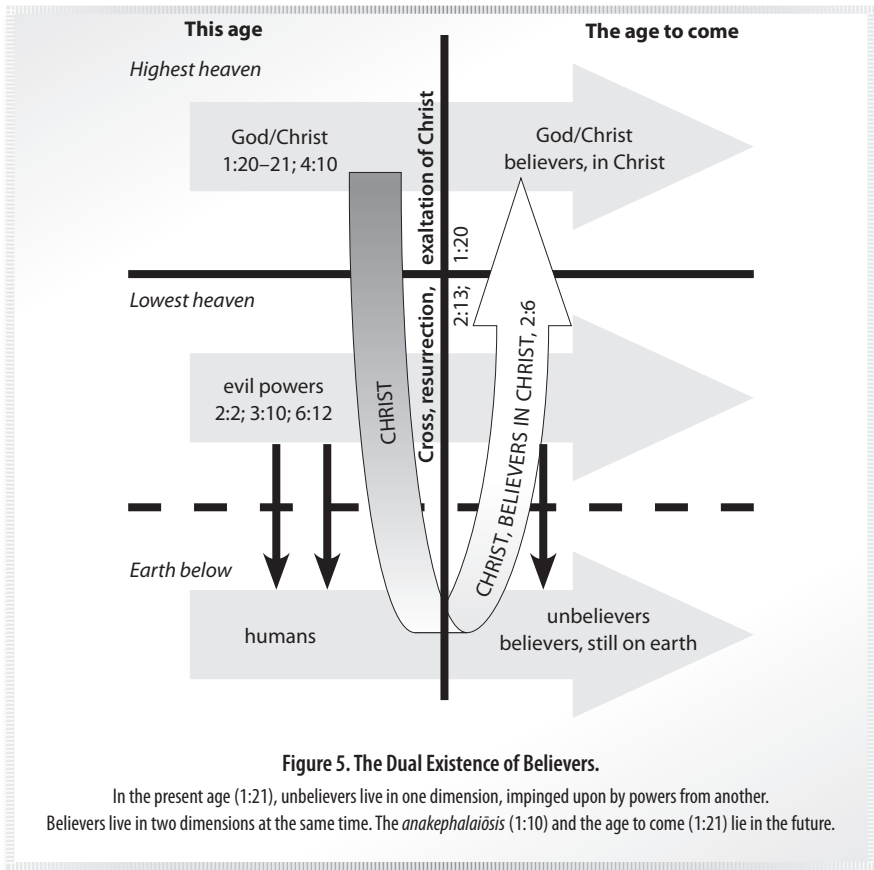
In antiquity the exaltation motif was one way of speaking about one's empowerment. Two examples speak about exaltation in history. Psalm 110:1 has Yahweh say to the king, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool." Exaltation of the king by God empowered the ruler. Psalm 37:34 says, "Wait for the Lord, and keep to his way, and he will exalt you to inherit the land; you will look on the destruction of the wicked." Exaltation of the righteous by God means victory over the wicked. Other examples speak of eschatological exaltation. In *1 Enoch* 61.8 God places the Elect One on the throne of glory, enabling him to judge the works of the holy ones in heaven above. In *1 Enoch* 108.12–15 we hear God promise to seat the righteous on thrones at the eschaton, while the wicked go to the place prescribed for them. Exaltation means vindication and victory over evil. At Qumran, 4Q521 (2 II, 6–7, 12) speaks of God's saving activity: "Upon the poor He will place his spirit, and the faithful He will renew. For He will honor the devout upon the throne of eternal royalty . . . and will make the dead live." Salvation is depicted as the exaltation of the devout with all its empowering components. Revelation 3:21 has the risen Christ say, "To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne." In these examples exaltation refers to the gift of eschatological empowerment and authority. A third category of exaltation as empowerment is found in the *Testament of Job*. The hero says to Eliphas and his fellow kings that Job's throne is among the holy ones (= angels) in the upper world (33.2–5). This seems to be similar to the Qumran concept of the fellowship of the righteous with the angels. If so, this is a mystical exaltation that empowers Job. A final example of exaltation as empowerment may be found in Phil 2:8–11. Jesus is said to have been exalted by God, giving him a position superior to everyone else in all creation. Exaltation means empowerment for Jesus from the time of his resurrection. Thus exaltation could be used to express empowerment. Exactly how empowerment was understood depended upon the context in which the exaltation occurred.

The context certainly implies that the exaltation of Christ and Christians means empowerment by God. How is this empowerment understood? Should this claim that Christians have been raised and are seated together in dependence on Christ in the heavenlies in the here and now be understood in terms of a fully realized eschatology? (Cf. 2 Tim 2:17–18, "Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have deviated from the truth by saying that the resurrection is past already"; or the *Treatise on the Resurrection* 45, "Then indeed as the apostle said, 'We suffered with him and we rose with him and we went to heaven with him.") No! There is no future hope in these two texts. Not so the Ephesian letter, which has a future hope as well as an inaugurated eschatology.

The eschatology of Ephesians is closer to 1QH III, 19–22: "I thank Thee, O Lord, for Thou hast redeemed my soul . . . and . . . Thou hast raised me up to everlasting height. . . . Thou hast cleansed a perverse spirit of great sin that it may stand with the host of the Holy Ones, and that it may enter into community with the congregation of the Son of Heaven." Here, in a community with a clear-cut future eschatology, there is a claim to have been raised up to the highest height to live among the heavenly beings. At Qumran the community believed it was united with the holy ones (angels) in heaven. According to 1QS XI, 7–8, God has joined the Qumran assembly to the sons of heaven (angels). In 1QM XII, 1, the multitude of the holy ones (angels) is with God in heaven praising God's name. The earthly community at Qumran, then, participates now in this heavenly activity. In contrast, the Christian readers of Ephesians participate together, not with angels, but in dependence on Christ in the heavenlies. Although not a dominant motif in the genuine Paulines, the Ephesian emphasis on "living with and through Christ," understood as possessing and acting with Christ's resurrection power, is not without analogy there. In 2 Cor 13:4, for example, the apostle speaks about the possibility of his "living with him [Christ] by the power of God" in a disciplinary situation. The connotation is, of course, that of empowerment.

The purpose of God's enabling Christians to share the resurrection and exaltation of Christ in the here and now is that God **might show in the coming ages the superlative riches of his grace by kindness to us through Christ Jesus** (*en Christō*, understood instrumentally; 2:7). One should keep in mind that "grace" was the term used in Mediterranean antiquity for a benefactor's gift to an individual or a community. The ongoing exaltation power given to believers in this life is a gift/grace/ benefaction beyond compare that expresses our heavenly benefactor's kindness.

The last of the three sentences in 1:15–2:10 begins with verse 8. It is an elaboration of what has come before. **For by grace you have been saved through faith** (2:8a)**.** Note that the text does not say "justified." Nowhere in Ephesians does the author speak about justification. The language is rather of salvation. The periphrastic perfect participle refers to an event that has taken place but with the emphasis on its continuing results. They have been saved and continue to be saved. Their salvation is by grace. It is through faith. How would Gentiles in western Asia have heard Eph 2:8–9, with its language of grace and faith?

At first hearing, terms such as grace and faith would have brought to the readers' minds the ancient system of benefaction that operated on the reciprocity principle. Benefaction started a relationship. A gift was given. The beneficiary reciprocated. A gift was returned. The relationship

continued as the circle of gift-giving and gift-reciprocating continued. Within the ancient system of reciprocity, *charis* ("grace") was the term used both for the benefaction and for the reciprocal response (Harrison 2003, 63). *Pistis* ("faith") was the dominant term used for the ongoing loyalty of the two parties to one another after the relationship had been inaugurated (Crook 2004a, 2004b). Seneca, whose *De beneficiis* is the most detailed discussion of benefit and exchange in antiquity, says the bestowal of benefits leads to a *fides* relationship ("trust, loyalty").

Although Aristotle had defined *charis* as "helpfulness toward someone in need, not in return for anything, nor for the advantage of the helper himself, but for that of the person helped" (*Rhet*. 2.7.1 [1385a 16–20]), in practice benefaction functioned as a virtual business transaction. On the one hand, *charis* was given to the worthy and so could be regarded as deserved, earned, merited. Consider the forensic speeches of Lysias in the time of classical Athens. In the speech *On the Charge of Accepting Bribes*, for example, the defendant contends,

> After so many dangers encountered in your defense and after all the services I have rendered the city, I now request, not a boon for my reward, as others do, but that I not be deprived of my property. . . . I could not put up with . . . the impression that it must produce on those who shirk their public services, that I get no credit for what I have spent for you, they prove to have been rightly advised in giving up to you no part of their own property. Now, if you admit my plea, you will both vote what is just and choose what is to your own advantage. (*Or.* 21.11–12)

The defendant asks only for that which he deserves, given his meritorious actions. This is made clear by his final appeal. "In return I ask from you the grace [*charin*] that I deserve" (21.25). In the New Testament period, honorific inscriptions frequently use expressions of worth in association with *charis* in the manifesto clause, the part of the inscription after the list of meritorious deeds performed by the honoree that began, "Therefore." The person being honored is receiving *charis* because of worthy deeds.

Charis was given to the worthy in order to guarantee a proper response and so was considered mercenary by some. Of course, Aristotle (*Rhet*. 1335a–1835b 3) argued that if the motive for benefaction was in any way self-interest, then any sense of "favor" was nullified. Seneca (*Ben*. 3.15.4) said that the one who gives benefits imitates the gods while the one who seeks a return mimics the moneylenders. Nevertheless, Cicero still puts it this way:

> In acts of kindness we should weigh with discrimination the worthiness of the object of our benevolence; we should take into consideration his

moral character, his attitude toward us, the intimacy of his relations to us, and our common social ties, as well as those services he has hitherto rendered in our interest. (*Off*. 1.45)

How far removed is such a conception from that expressed in Rom 5:6–8!

The reason for such discrimination is verbalized by Seneca. He says that there is so much ingratitude among the recipients of benefactions because benefactors "do not pick out those who are worthy of receiving gifts" (*Ben*. 1.1.2). Even in the best circumstances, therefore, it was difficult to avoid the mercenary character of reciprocity.

One final example should suffice. In a letter from Antiochus VIII to Seleucia in Pieria (ca. 109 BC), the king begins with a statement that the people of Seleucia had not only supported his father but also had been constant in love toward him. He, in return, had generously furthered the city's interests *as they deserved* (*axiōs*). So now he rewards them with his greatest benefaction, that they would be a free city (Welles 1934, 288–90).

The mercenary character of much of the reciprocity of the benefaction system brought forth critiques. Dio Chrysostom (*Or*. 7.88–89) refers to Homer's *Odyssey* (17.10–12) where Telemachus rejects bestowing a benefit upon a swineherd because the poor, unlike the rich, are unable to render a commensurate return. Of this action Dio says, "For what seem to be acts of kindliness and favors [*charites*] turn out, when examined rightly, to be nothing more or less than accommodations and loans, and that too at a high rate of interest as a usual thing."

The same reciprocity system that controlled humans' relations was believed also to regulate relations between humans and the deities. The gods were usually assumed to be beneficent beings who gave gifts (*charites*) to humans. The gods were then thanked by humans and placed under counter-obligation through cultic piety (*charis*). In Lucian's parody *Sacrifices*, the human Chryses makes his case in a prayer to Apollo:

> My good Apollo, I have often dressed your temple with wreaths when it lacked them before, and have burned in your honor all those thighs of bulls and goats upon your altars, but you neglect me when I am in such straits and take no account of your benefactor. (*Sacr.* 3)

Josephus reflects a similar point of view. He says,

> Twice every day, at the dawn thereof and when the hour comes for turning to repose, let all acknowledge before God the bounties which he has bestowed on them through their deliverance from the land of Egypt: thanksgiving is

> a natural duty, and is rendered alike in gratitude for past mercies *and to incline the giver to others yet to come.* (*Ant*. 14.212, emphasis mine)

Such common cultic attitudes and devotional practices came in for criticism. The critique sometimes came from Epicurean philosophers. Epicurus contends the divine nature runs counter to such cultic assumptions: "The blessed immortal nature knows no trouble itself nor causes trouble to any other, so that *it is never constrained by anger or favor* [*charisi*]. For all such things exist only in the weak" (*Ench*. 1, emphasis mine). Lucian's *Sacrifices* also critiques the cultic system from a largely Epicurean perspective. He argues that the gods cannot be manipulated by the sacrificial cult, which is after all a merely commercial transaction.

Philo maintains the reciprocity dynamic among humans and sometimes uses benefaction language in relation to God, but he rules out any reciprocity between humanity and God. After objecting to the manner and motives of the Greco-Roman benefaction system in religion, Philo says, "God is no salesman, hawking his goods in the market, but a free giver of all things, pouring forth eternal fountains of free bounties [*charitōn*], and seeking no return. For He has no needs Himself and no created being is able to repay His gift" (*Cher*. 123). God is animated by an unconditional generosity. His grace (*charis*) is of two types: general and particular. General grace is given by virtue of creation. "All things in the world and the world itself are a free gift [*charisma*] and act of kindness and grace on God's part" (*Leg*. 3.78). Particular grace is God's gift of virtue. Philo says, "The life of virtue, which is life in its truest form, is shared by few, and these few are not found among the vulgar herd, none of whom has a part in the true life, but only among those to whom it is granted to escape the aims which engross humanity and to live to God alone" (*Mut*. 213). Indeed, for Philo the virtuous life is due entirely to the *charis* ("grace") of God. He writes:

> It is necessary that the soul should not ascribe to itself its toil for virtue, but that it should take it away from itself and refer it to God, confessing that not its own strength or power acquired nobility, but He who freely bestowed [*charisamenos*] also the love of it. . . . For only then does the soul begin to be saved, . . . a readiness to yield the honor to God, the Bestower [*euergetē*] of the boon. (*Leg*. 3.136–137; cf. Phil 2:13)

Elsewhere Philo explains that God will "implant in the soul the loyalty and affection that goes out to Him as benefactor" (*Plant*. 89). This *charis* is an ongoing maintenance of the life of virtue (*Congr*. 38). Isaac prays that God's graces (*charisi*) may remain with him constantly. So "his Benefactor wills that His graces once received should stay forever with

him." For Philo, then, the life of virtue is initiated and maintained by God's unconditional *charis*. The sustaining of the relationship does not depend on human reciprocity (Whitlark 2003).

The reciprocity principle of the sacrificial cult was, nevertheless, defended by Plutarch in his response to the Epicurean critique. He argued that if people follow the Epicurean line of reasoning, we "leave ourselves no hope of divine favor [*charin*], no confidence in prosperity, and in adversity no refuge in God" (*Mor*. 1101B–C). Indeed, "the surgery of Epicurus cuts out of our lives . . . all hope of help from Heaven and all bestowal of grace [*charisin*]" (*Mor*. 1107). Within the system Plutarch defended, the gods' favors (*charites*) went to the worthy, those whose loyal works (*pistis*) had *merited* divine kindness. This social context would have been evoked in the minds of the Gentile readers of Eph 2:7–8 by the reference to grace (*charis*) and faith (*pistis*).

A careful second hearing of the language of grace and faith, however, would have indicated distance between this letter's usage and the cultural assumptions. The meaning of "grace" in "by grace you have been saved" (2:8a) is controlled by **not from yourselves** in 8b, **God's gift** in 8c, and **not of works** in 9a. *Charis* here, unlike *charis* in the cultural reciprocity system, is an unmerited gift derived, as in Philo, from God's unconditional generosity. The content of God's *charis* is salvation. "Salvation" was sometimes used to describe a public benefactor's *charis* in Mediterranean antiquity (e.g., *Icil*. 69, 2nd cent. BC Cilicia; cf. the Priene inscription honoring Augustus). In Eph 2:8, however, salvation is perceived spiritually, not politically. The context demands that it be so (cf. 2:1–3, 5). "Through faith" could be taken to refer to the faith of Christ as in 3:12 (Foster 2002) and so refer to his faithfulness unto death (cf. 2:13, 14, 16). Or it could be understood to refer to the believers' faith directed toward Christ as the mediator of God's grace (1:1, 15, 19, so Best 2004, 226). Either way, "faith" here would have the overtones of loyalty—either Christ's loyalty to God (as in Phil 2:8) or Christians' loyalty to the mediator of their salvation (as in Phil 1:29). Either is possible.

And this is not from yourselves, it is a gift of God (2:8b). The term "gift," used only here in Pauline literature, was also prominent in the language of ancient benefaction. It was a virtual synonym for "grace." The antecedent of "this" at the beginning of the statement could be "saved," "faith," or (most likely) the entirety of the previous claim (Best 2004, 228; Hoehner 2002, 342–43; Stott 1979, 83). If one reads "faith" as referring to Christians' loyalty to Christ (MacDonald 2000, 233), then even the believers' faith is God's gift (cf. Phil 1:29, "It is a gift of grace to you not only to believe [= have faith] in Jesus but also to suffer for him"). On this reading "Paul," like Philo, affirms that the human response to God, initially and continually, is due to God's *charis* (grace), benefaction.

Law and Grace

Scholars have conceived several models for relating God and humans, grace and law, in early Jewish and Christian writings.

Legalism. God establishes requirements in the form of law. If people fulfill those requirements, they can gain a relationship with God.

Covenantal nomism. God establishes a relationship with humans and graciously provides law as a guide. Humans obey the law out of gratitude. In so doing, they maintain the relationship that God established and so get into the world to come. Thus getting into the covenant is a matter of grace, but staying in the covenant and gaining entry into the world to come is by works.

New covenant piety. God establishes a relationship with humans, provides guidance, and graciously empowers humans (through the indwelling God, Christ, or Holy Spirit) to live according to it. Thus getting into the covenant, staying in it, and reaching the world to come are all matters of grace.

In Ephesians (as in other New Testament writings, including the Gospel of Matthew as well as Paul's letters), new covenant piety is the operative model.

—see Talbert 2001, 515–18

The text elaborates: **not out of works, so that one may not boast** (2:9). Note that the sentence says "works," not "works of law." Ephesians 2:8–9 generalizes the discussion of Galatians and Romans to make it one about salvation by grace as opposed to human effort in general rather than works of law in particular (Marshall 1996, 347). Ephesians does not reflect the early struggles for Jewish-Gentile equality out of which arose the tenet in Galatians and Romans that *justification* is not by works *of the law* but by grace through faith. In a Gentile context the focus is now on "salvation by grace through faith, and not by human effort of whatever kind" (MacDonald 1988, 91). Galatians and Romans were concerned with the problem of the Gentiles; Ephesians is concerned with the problems of Gentiles. The Pauline gospel is now functioning in a different social context. One should also note that in verses 8–9 the contrast is not between "faith" and "works" but between "grace" and "works." This corresponds to the emphasis of 2 Tim 1:9, "who saved us . . . not according to our works but according to his . . . grace," and Titus 3:5–7, "he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy." The argument does not set up a contrast between works and faith as methods of receiving God's salvation, but rather demonstrates that God's

saving action took place independently of what we had done (Marshall 1996). In a Gentile context, it would have been pagan religion, the sacrificial cult—which was at heart often a business transaction—that would have necessitated such a claim (Deissmann 1892, 161). In the understanding of the divine human relationship within the sacrificial cult, it was believed that the gods honored the ethos of reciprocity and subjected themselves to the legitimate counterclaims of the ritually pious. It was, therefore, possible for humans, by their works (*pistis* = "loyalty"!), to cause the gods to act favorably toward the pious (Harrison 2003, 190–91). This understanding Eph 2:8–9 rejects. Instead, "God operates on the basis of His overflowing grace over against the obligation of reciprocity" (Harrison 2003, 348). The Gentile auditors on a second hearing could not escape this fact. God has saved us, but not because we are worthy.

Those, moreover, who have been saved by grace/God's gift are **his workmanship, created through Christ Jesus** (*en Christō*, understood instrumentally) **for good works** (2:10a). The good works are not the cause of one's salvation but the desired result of God's efforts through Christ Jesus. Just as God predestined believers, so also he **has prepared** such good works **beforehand** (cf. 1:4) for the chosen to **walk in them** (2:10b). "Walk" is used metaphorically to mean "live" (cf. 2 Kgs 20:3; Prov 8:20; Sir 13:13; Mark 7:5; John 8:12; 12:35; Acts 21:21). The idea that good works are prepared by God beforehand (cf. 1:4b) is in keeping with the strong focus on God's sovereignty and initiative throughout Ephesians (MacDonald 2000, 234).

This reading indicates that according to Ephesians, and in contrast to the Mediterranean culture of reciprocity, God, our benefactor, acted out of an unconditional generosity that had nothing to do with human worthiness or merit or works. This saving grace (= being saved, being created anew) came to humans through Christ; it was not mediated through a cultic ritual. It results in newly created Christians' walking in the good works that God had prepared beforehand for them. E. A. Judge's summary is to the point: the author "takes up existing social institutions and subjects them, on the one hand, to a radical critique from his new point of view, and on the other hand, to careful cultivation because of the advantages they have to bring to what he has to do" (Judge 1973, 109).

Theological Issues

Ephesians 1:15–2:10 raises a number of questions about the letter's theology.

Spiritual Powers in Opposition

The first issue to be addressed is that of the worldview of Ephesians. Ephesians presumes the earth below and the heavens above. The heavens/heavenlies/heavenly places are the realm of both God/Christ (1:3, 20; 2:6) and the location of the ungodly powers (3:10; 6:12; cf. 2:2). The realm of God/Christ is far above that of the hostile powers (1:20–21). Humans on earth are affected by heaven. Either God (1:19; 3:20) or the prince of the power of the air (2:2) "works in" people. The evil powers are behind human sin (2:1–2; 4:27) and human divisions (implicit throughout Ephesians). Apart from Christ, people are victims of the powers. They are free only to sin and to be divided. Those who are raised and exalted with Christ sit with him in the highest heavens (2:5–6). They share Christ's transcendence over the powers. Hence they are free not to sin and not to be divided. They can resist the powers because God's power is at work in them (3:20), they possess God's armor (6:10–17) and can pray to God (6:18–20), to whom they have access in the Spirit (2:18). When the church, because of God's working in them, overcomes sin and division in itself, this fact is an announcement to the evil powers of God's eternal purpose (3:10–11).

Some ancient Jewish and early Christian circles held to the notion of multiple heavens. God is in the highest heaven; different angels occupy the various levels. For example, the *Testament of Levi* indicates that in the first heaven are certain angels who will judge humankind; in the second heaven are angels who will work vengeance on Beliar and the spirits of error; and in the uppermost heaven is the Great Glory with the archangels (*T. Levi* 3). In certain Jewish circles, some angels are fallen, disobedient to God. They inhabit lower levels of the heavens. For example, *2 Enoch* 7 tells how Enoch goes into the second heaven and sees disobedient angels, "prisoners under guard" who ask him to pray for them. In *2 Enoch* 29 we hear how one of the archangels (with the division under his authority) deviated, was thrown out of the heights where God is, and now ceaselessly flies around in the air. In *2 Enoch* 7.3 it is implied that Satanail is under restraint in the fifth heaven. Testimony to God's victory over evil is sometimes given to the rebellious angels prior to the last judgment. For example, *1 Enoch* 13 has Enoch go and speak words of righteousness and reprimand to the Watchers. Similarly, in 1 Pet 3:18–20 we hear how Christ went to preach to the spirits in prison, announcing his victory (Dalton 1989). Sometimes the sinful angels are involved in contention with one another. Daniel says that different nations have different guardian angels who continually contend against one another and against the peoples of the other angels (10:13, 20–21; 12:1). The *Ascension of Isaiah,* a Christian document, says that these angels are constantly at war with one another due to envy

and that events on earth reflect this heavenly strife (7.9–12; 10.29–31; cf. also *Apoc. Paul* 11).

The worldview of Ephesians employs a symbolism that allows us to see into its understanding of transcendence. Frequently transcendence is conceptualized spatially, either in terms of depth (e.g., God is the ultimate ground of being) or height (e.g., God is the one who dwells in the highest heavens). The author of Ephesians speaks of God in terms of height. The nature of transcendence is understood in different ways by various religions. Are good and evil part of one deity—an undifferentiated transcendence? Are good and evil associated with different entities, such as God and Satan—a differentiated transcendence? If so, are the two entities on a par with one another, or is the good superior to the evil, as God is superior to Satan in the Jewish and Christian tradition? The author of Ephesians assumes a differentiated transcendence (God and the devil) in which God is dominant. Since Ephesians speaks of transcendence in terms of height, it follows that God and the evil powers occupy different regions of the heavenlies, with God and Christ far above.

The relationship between the heavenly realities and humankind is variously understood by different religions and philosophies. Are the heavenly beings interested in humans? If so, do they involve themselves in human affairs? Traditional Greek religion (cf. Homer) regarded the gods as not only interested but also active in human affairs, taking sides either for or against various humans. Epicurean philosophy (e.g., the Epicurean in Cicero's dialogue *De natura deorum*) did not deny the existence of the gods but asserted that they were neither interested nor involved in human affairs. In this mix, Ephesians states that humans are influenced by either the good transcendent entity, or the evil, or both. Either God (1:19; 3:20) or the ruler of the air (2:2) works in humans to influence or determine humans' basic orientation. Moreover, even after one's basic orientation shifts to God/Christ, it is still possible for the devil and the evil powers to influence one's behavior (4:27; 6:12–13). Since God is dominant over the evil powers, however, humans who belong to God/Christ and are influenced thereby are not totally victimized by the opposite power but have resources to stand against the enemy.

In Ephesians, to be seated in the heavenlies through the Christ (2:6) is to be "far above every rule and authority and power and sovereignty" (1:21) both in this age and in the age to come (1:21). To be "far above" something means to have power over it. Thus Christians share Christ's transcendence over these spiritual powers. The assertion that Christians are in the heavenlies speaks of the possibility of believers' being victorious over sin and the divisiveness of the powers. When humans followed the "spirit now at work in the children of disobedience" (2:2), it was not possible not to sin. Now that believers are seated in the heavenlies

in dependence on Christ, it is possible not to sin. At the same time, the powers seek every opportunity to regain their influence in the lives of believers (4:27; 6:12–13). This involves the believers in a spiritual warfare or struggle (6:10–20). Believers can ultimately triumph because of God's power working in them (3:20). As the author of 1 John 4:4b put it, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

Participation with Christ

A second issue raised by Eph 1:15–2:10 has to do with the participation of Christians in the saving work of Christ. The issue is clarified by a comparison of the position of Ephesians with that found in the undisputed letters of Paul and in Colossians. In the undisputed letters of Paul, Christians participate in Christ's death and burial here and now but do not participate in Christ's resurrection until the Parousia.

1. Christians are crucified with Christ and die with Christ to sin (Rom 6:3; Gal 2:19).
2. Christians are buried with Christ in baptism (Rom 6:4a).
3. Christians walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4b).
4. Christ is raised and ascended now (Rom 6:4; 1:3–4; 1 Cor 15:20).
5. Christians will be united with Christ in a resurrection like his in the future, at the Parousia (Rom 6:5; 1 Cor 15:23). This is the Pauline "eschatological reservation."

In Colossians, the pattern for the here and now is expanded to include an extra element (third in the following list).

1. Christians die with Christ to the elemental spirits of the universe (2:20).
2. Christians are buried with Christ in baptism (2:12).
3. Christians are raised with Christ here and now (2:12–13; 3:1).
4. At the Parousia, when Christ is revealed, then Christians will also be revealed (3:4).

In Ephesians, one finds a distinctive pattern.

1. The death of Christ is not something in which believers participate.
   a. Christ's death is something done strictly *for* believers (1:7, redemption through his blood; 2:13, brought near by the blood of Christ; 2:16, reconciled to God through the cross).
   b. Christ's death also serves as a model for Christian behavior (5:2, walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, an

offering and sacrifice; 5:25, husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her).

2. The raising and exaltation of Christ, however, are participatory, shared experiences.

Christ alone dies; no reference is made to Christians' dying. No reference is made to the burial either of Christ or Christians. Christians are raised now and exalted in dependence on Christ now (1:20–22, Christ; 2:5–6, Christians). The present raising and exaltation of Christians has been taken by some to indicate that Ephesians has an overrealized eschatology. This question poses the third issue raised by 1:15–2:10.

Eschatological Reservation and Realization

The eschatology of Ephesians has been a difficult script to decipher. On the one hand, in this letter there are correspondences between what is said about Christ and what is said about Christians. Both are raised (1:20, Christ; 2:6, Christians), and both are made to sit in heavenly places (1:20; 2:5–6). On the other hand, the parallel is not exact: Christ's resurrection was from physical death, while Christians are made alive or raised from spiritual death (2:1).

Does the parallel, such as it is, indicate an overrealized eschatology on the part of Ephesians? No, it does not. Ephesians does have references that indicate an inaugurated eschatology (e.g., sealed with the Holy Spirit who is the first installment, 1:13–14; raised and seated in dependence on him in the heavenlies, 2:5–6; access in one Spirit to the Father, 2:18; 3:11). But Ephesians also has a strong unrealized eschatological perspective (e.g., references to age or ages to come, 1:21; 2:7; 3:21; a future hope, 1:14, 18; 4:4; an incomplete process, 2:22; 3:19; 4:13, 15–16; the last judgment, 5:5–6; 6:8–9).

The data listed above lead to a comparison between the eschatology of Rom 6:4–5, 11 and that of Ephesians. In Rom 6 Paul draws a connection between Christ and the Christian: "just as Christ was raised from the dead . . . , so also we should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. . . . So also you, reckon yourselves to be dead to sin but living to God in Christ Jesus." Here Paul does not use the explicit term "raised" for Christians' present experience, as Ephesians does. He speaks rather of the Christians' present experience as "walking in newness of life" and "living to God." Believers, he says, await the future resurrection.

Is there a difference in perspective between Rom 6 and Ephesians? Yes and no. The language does vary: Paul in Rom 6 does not use "raised" of the Christians' present experience. This is certainly different from

Ephesians, but one must attend to how the differing contexts result in differing arguments. When the danger is overrealized eschatology, Paul emphasizes the "not yet," the eschatological reservation; so in Rom 6 the "not yet" of the future reservation stands out as something qualitatively different from Christians' present newness of life. But when the danger is an underrealized eschatology, "Paul" emphasizes the "now," the eschatological realization; so in Eph 2:6 Christians are said to have been "raised by Christ" and "made to sit together in the heavenlies by means of the Christ." There is indeed a difference between Rom 6 and Ephesians both in language and context, but the underlying theological world remains very much the same. Both documents reflect a "now/not yet" eschatological scheme. The canonical Paul deals with issues of Christian living on two fronts: the threat posed by overrealized eschatology and that posed by underrealized eschatology. The changing context leads to a change of language.

One of the major matters faced by the Gentile readers of Ephesians was their belief, taken over from their culture, that evil spirits inhabited the air (e.g., *PGM* I. 97–194; IV. 2699; CI. 39; *T. Levi* 3.3–4) and exercised control over humans (e.g., *Ascen. Isa.* 2.2–4; Eph 2:2; 6:12). "The most pressing question facing believers . . . throughout western Asia Minor was, where does Christ stand in relation to the hostile 'powers'?" (Arnold 1989, 123). In the face of such a perceived threat, Ephesians focuses on the power of God (1:19–22a; 3:7, 16, 18, 20; 4:8; 6:10–20) that is accessible to Christians. One image used to depict this accessibility is the clothing of believers in God's armor (6:10–20). Another is that of Christians' sharing Christ's resurrection and exaltation far above the powers (2:5–6). "Ephesians emphasizes present eschatology to strengthen Christians facing threats in their milieu" (Arnold 1989, 146).

It is sometimes said that Ephesians has replaced the temporal eschatology of the undisputed Pauline letters (e.g., Rom 13:11–13; 1 Cor 1:7–8; 6:10; Gal 5:21; 1 Thess 1:9–10; 4:13–18; 5:1–11) with a spatial eschatology (e.g., Eph 2:19–22; 4:11–16; Lindemann 1975, 209–10). That is not the case. A temporal eschatological boundary is assumed by Ephesians (e.g., 1:21, not only in this age but also in the coming one; 1:18, what is the hope to which God has called you; 1:14, guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession; 4:4, the one hope of your calling; 4:30, you were sealed for the day of redemption; 5:5–6, no immoral person has an inheritance in the kingdom of God; the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience). The two passages that allegedly employ spatial eschatology do not contradict but complement the temporal eschatological framework. In Eph 2:19–22 the people of God (the church) is viewed as a temple being built. The foundation and cornerstone are laid; the building grows into a temple. In 4:11–16 the people of God (the

church) is viewed as a human body that grows to maturity with every part working perfectly. These two metaphors, temple and body, refer to the period prior to the end. During this interim period the church grows. It grows up in the sense that a building is erected and a body matures. In 1 Cor 3 one finds in an undisputed letter of Paul a similar depiction of the church's growth prior to the Parousia. Verses 9b–17 describe the process of building a temple, starting with a foundation and ending with a completed structure. Verses 6–9a describe a crop growing from the time of its planting to harvest. Verses 1–4 assume the necessity of growth from infancy to adulthood. This growth takes place in the period prior to the Parousia. So, while 1 Cor 3 and Ephesians have their differences, they are certainly compatible both metaphorically and theologically.

Ephesians retains the "now/not yet" of the eschatology of the undisputed Paulines but emphasizes the present dimension due to the needs of the readers. Ephesians retains the temporal eschatology of the undisputed Paulines and, like them, sometimes uses a spatial metaphor to focus on the growth of the people of God (the church) in the interval before the end.

Ephesians 2:11–22

Introductory Matters

Ephesians begins with a blessing of God (1:3–14), followed by a brief thanksgiving (1:15–16a) and a threefold intercession (1:16b–19). The last mentioned prayer is interrupted by two digressions (1:20–2:22 and 3:2–13) before it is completed in 3:14–19. The first digression, 1:20–2:22, has two parts, 1:20–2:10 and 2:11–22. The first part focuses on Christians' being raised through Christ; the second on Christians' having been reconciled through Christ. As the accompanying outline shows, 2:11–22 falls into an ABA′ pattern. Attempts to find a more detailed chiastic arrangement in these verses, however, have not gained widespread acceptance (e.g., Kirby 1968, 156–57; Giavini 1970; Thomson 1995).

This segment of the commentary will examine Eph 2:11–22, the second part of the first digression. As we proceed it will become apparent that the material is related to the threefold intercession in 1:16b–19. God's power underlies all that is said. In 2:11–20, the author declares how wonderful it is to be a part of God's people; in 2:21–22 the Christian hope is the focus. The second part of the first digression (like the first part of the first digression) aims to help the auditors attain to the realization requested in the threefold intercession (1:16b–19).

Tracing the Train of Thought

Ephesians 2:11–22 describes our reconciliation through Christ in terms of our victory over alienation or estrangement both from other people and from God. This second part of the first digression falls into an ABA′

pattern: A (2:11–13), B (2:14–18), A′ (2:19–22). We begin with the first section, 2:11–13.

Ephesians 2:11–13 (A in the pattern) presents a contrast between the condition of the Gentile auditors before (2:11–12) and after Christ (2:13). The emphasis is on the "before." **Therefore remember that** *formerly* **you** (pl.) **were "the nations" in the flesh, those being called "uncircumcision" by those of the so-called "circumcision in the flesh" that is done by a human hand** (2:11)**.** Jewish consciousness drew a sharp distinction between Jews and Gentiles ("the nations"). Galatians 2:15 reflects the perceived difference: "We are by nature Jews and not sinners from the nations [= Gentiles]." Ephesians says this distinction was based on a human act done on the human body. The implication is that the perceived difference is based only on a physical, not a spiritual difference. (Paul distinguishes between circumcision in the flesh and circumcision of the heart in Rom 2:25–29; cf. Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4; *Jub.* 1.23; Philo, *Leg.* 1.305; 1QpHab XI, 13.)

The nations before Christ lacked five privileges possessed by Israel (cf. a different list in Rom 9:4–5). The author asks his readers to remember these privileges. Remember that **you were in that time without Christ** (2:12a). This meant that before becoming Christians the Gentile readers did not share Israel's national expectation of the Messiah (Gen 49:10; Isa 9:1–7;

An Outline of Ephesians through 2:22

Blessing: blessing God for blessings bestowed upon believers (1:3–14)

Thanksgiving: thanking God for the readers' faith and love (1:15–16a)

Intercession: asking God for the readers' enlightenment, that they might know the Christian hope, how wonderful it is to be a part of God's people, and the greatness of God's power (1:16b–19)

Digression 1: God's power at work in Christ and in Christians (1:20–2:22)

Raised through Christ: victory over sin and evil powers (1:20–2:10)

God's power at work in Christ (1:20–23)

God raised him from the dead (1:20a)

God exalted him (1:20b) over the powers (1:21) and over the church (1:22–23)

God's power at work in Christians (2:1–10)

When all were dead in sins (2:1–3)

God made us alive and seated us together through Christ (2:4–7)

All this is God's doing through Christ (2:8–10)

Reconciled through Christ: victory over alienation (2:11–22)

A Gentile readers before and after Christ, emphasizing "before" (2:11–13)

B Explanation of believers' changed status: Christ's twofold activity (2:14–18)

Horizontal: Christ is our peace because *he has made two peoples one*. How? He destroyed the hostility (2:14–15)

Vertical: Christ preached peace because through him *both peoples have access to the Father*. How? He destroyed the hostility (2:16–18)

A′ Gentile readers before and after Christ, emphasizing "after" (2:19–22)

11:1–9; Mic 5:2–5a; Zech 9:9–10; and especially Rom 9:5, "from them [= Jews], according to the flesh, the Messiah comes").

They should also remember that the Gentile's pre-Christian condition could be described as **being excluded from the citizenship of Israel** (2:12b). This meant they were not part of the people of God.

They should remember that before Christ they were **strangers to the covenants of promise** (2:12c). The covenants mentioned in Israel's scriptures were of two types: promissory and obligatory. The former was based on God's promise, the latter on Israel's performance of its obligations. The covenants of promise included the Abrahamic (Gen 12:1–3; 15; 17:1–8; Rom 4; 15:8), the Davidic (2 Sam 7:12–17; Ps 89:3–4, 34–36; Rom 15:12), and the new covenant (Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 11:19–20; 16:60–63; 36:26–27; 37:26–28; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6). The Mosaic covenant was not a covenant of promise but rather an obligatory covenant. In Ephesians it is called "the law of commandments in decrees" (2:15). Gentiles before Christ could not rely on these covenants of promise.

They should remember that the Gentiles' condition before becoming Christians could be described as **not having hope** (2:12d). This meant they lived their lives in this world without a hope for something more and better after death (cf. 1 Thess 4:13b, "So that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope").

Finally, they should remember that before Christ those from the nations were **godless in the world**. They did not have a relation to the one, true, and living God, the maker of heaven and earth (cf. Rom 1:18–23; 1 Cor 8:6; 1 Thess 1:9–10). Lack of these five privileges described the Gentiles' spiritual existence before Christ.

The focus shifts from "formerly" in verses 11–12 to "but now" in verse 13. **But now through Christ Jesus** (*en Christō Iēsou*, understood instrumentally) **you** (pl.)**, being formerly far off** (foreigners; cf. Deut 28:49; 29:22; 1 Kgs 8:41; Isa 5:26; Jer 5:15)**, have become near** (part of the people who are close to God; cf. Ps 148:14) **through the blood of Christ.** "The blood of Christ" here should be understood as a covenant sacrifice, blood to seal a covenant (e.g., Gen 15:7–21; Exod 24:8; Matt 26:28; 1 Cor 11:25), not a sacrifice to propitiate God's demand of holiness (as Hoehner 2002, 363). The verse may echo Isa 57:19 (Stuhlmacher 1986).

The B segment of the ABA′ pattern comes in verses 14–18, often thought to have been taken over from an early Christian hymn, but more likely an original composition (Best 1992). Note the similarities with Col 1:19–22. These verses provide an explanation for the changed status of the auditors of the letter. It is Christ's twofold activity that has made the difference. The first dimension of Christ's activity is described in verses 14–15; the second in verses 16–18. In verses 14–15 the focus is on the horizontal aspects of his reconciling work. **For he**

is our peace, the one who made the both one and abolished the middle wall of partition, the enmity (2:14)**.** This wall of partition has been variously understood. Some have thought it referred either to the cosmic wall separating the heavenly *plērōma* from the lower world, as in gnosticism (Schlier 1963, 18–26), or to the white marble wall separating heaven from earth, as in Jewish mysticism (*1 En.* 14.9–12). No option is defensible, however, unless it deals with the horizontal dimension being discussed here. A wall between heaven and earth, of whatever kind, does not satisfy this test. Others have seen a reference to the wall in the Jerusalem temple that separated the court of the Gentiles from the inner courts in which Jews worshiped (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 15.417; *BJ* 5.194; cf. Acts 21:26–31). This option satisfies the test of the horizontal focus of the context, but it must also mesh with what follows, "the law of commandments in decrees" (2:15). For this reason, most scholars now regard the wall as the Mosaic law, the source of the enmity between Jews and Gentiles.

To view this image, please refer to the print version of this book.

Figure 6. A Warning to Gentiles.

Josephus describes inscriptions at the temple in Jerusalem warning Gentiles not to enter on pain of death. The plaster cast shown here was made from an inscription discovered in 1871 on the outer wall of the temple. It reads: "No foreigner is to enter within the balustrade and enclosure around the temple area. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his death which will follow."

Several examples from Jewish and Roman sources reflect this wall of enmity. The roots of Jewish separation from Gentiles are in Israel's scriptures. For example, Deut 23:3–4 excludes Ammonites and Edomites from God's people. Nehemiah 13:3 extends the prohibition of Deut 23:3–4 to include all Gentiles. In Dan 1:8–16, Daniel and his companions refuse the king's food. *Joseph and Aseneth* 7.1 says that when Joseph ate in the house of the priest of Pentephres he had a separate table, because he considered it an abomination to sit with the Egyptians. *Jubilees* 22.16 exhorts the readers, "Separate yourselves from the Gentiles and do not eat with them, and do not perform deeds like theirs. And do not become associates of theirs, because their deeds are defiled, and all of their ways are contaminated, and despicable, and abominable." Philo says that Israel is a people "which shall dwell alone, not reckoned among other nations . . . because in virtue of the distinction of their peculiar customs they do not mix with others to depart from the ways of their fathers" (*Mos.* 1.278). In *m. Abodah Zarah* 5.5, *m. Teharot* 7.6, and *m. Demai* 3.4 one finds proscriptions of Jewish social contact with Gentiles, particularly in regard to social contact in their homes. Acts 10–11 assumes this tradition in the story of Peter and Cornelius. The *Letter of Aristeas* has the Jewish sages from Jerusalem summarize their position for the Gentile king: "In his wisdom the legislator . . . surrounded us with unbroken palisades and *iron walls* to prevent our mixing with any of the other peoples in this matter. . . . So, to prevent our being perverted by contact with others or mixing with bad influences, he hedged us in on all sides with *strict observances* connected with meat and drink and touch and sight, after the manner of the *Law*" (139, 142; emphasis mine).

Non-Jews viewed this separatist behavior with hostility. For example, Hecataeus of Abdera censured Moses for introducing the Jews to an antisocial and intolerant mode of life. Antiochus of Sidetes' courtiers advised him in 132 BC "to destroy the Jews, for they alone among all peoples refused all relations with other races and saw everyone else as their enemy." The Jews' hatred of others, they noted, "was something sanctioned by their very own laws." Diodorus of Sicily asserted that Moses' law was "an unsociable and intolerant way of life" that was "designed to keep Jews apart from other races" (34.1–4; 40.3.4). Also Tacitus in his *History* 5.5 critiques Jews for sitting apart at meals and adopting circumcision as a mark of difference from other peoples. Any who go over to their religion, he says, "have this lesson first installed in them, to despise all gods, to disown their country, and set at naught parents, children, and brethren." Their customs Tacitus regarded as "perverse and disgusting." What bothered this Roman most, however, was that "they regard the rest of humankind with all the hatred of enemies" (cf. also 5.4.1).

Juvenal lambasts Jewish Sabbath observance (as an example of sloth), abstinence from pork, and circumcision (*Sat.* 14.96–106). Above all he abhors the Jews' scorn of Roman laws and their separation from others. He expresses impatience with those who thought only their gods worth worshiping (15.37–38). Third Maccabees is a tale of ethnic hatred and misunderstanding. Gentiles are described as abominable, lawless, and empty-headed (6:9, 11). Although loyal to the king, the Jews of Alexandria "kept their separateness with respect to foods. For this reason they appeared hateful to some. . . . Those of other races . . . gossiped . . . , alleging that these people were loyal neither to the king nor to his authorities, but were hostile and greatly opposed to his government. So they attached no ordinary reproach to them" (3:4–7). Third Maccabees provides a window into the thought world of the Gentile. The things that were most prized by the Greeks they considered to be despised by the Jews. Jews preferred to cling to their ancestral, regional ways, rejecting any embrace of the advance of Greek civilization (3:21–23). The Gentile hostility toward the separatist Jews is echoed in Josephus's *Against Apion*, where Josephus counters Apion's claim that Jews swear an oath by God "to show no goodwill to a single alien, above all to Greeks" (*C. Ap.* 2.121). He also responds to Apollonius Molon, who had charged that the Jews refuse "to associate with those who have chosen to adopt a different mode of life" (*C. Ap.* 2.148, 258). Jewish-Gentile relations in Mediterranean antiquity could be described as "mutual animosity" (Lincoln 1990, 142).

Verse 15 names that to which "the enmity" in verse 14 refers: "the law of commandments in decrees." Christ, however, abolished this wall of enmity, the Mosaic obligatory covenant (cf. Rom 10:4; Gal 3:23–26), and made the two peoples, Jewish and Gentile, one. **By means of his flesh . . . he destroyed the law of commandments in decrees in order that he might create the two, by means of it** (i.e., his flesh, *en autō* understood instrumentally), **into one new humanity, making peace** (2:14c–15). "By means of his flesh" is parallel in meaning to "by the blood of Christ" (2:13) and "through the cross" (2:16). That is, it refers to Jesus' death as a covenant sacrifice (J. A. Robinson 1903, 63). Jesus' death destroyed the law of commandments in decrees, that is, the Mosaic law covenant (cf. Rom 10:4; Gal 3:23–26), not just the casuistic interpretation of the law or the ceremonial, as opposed to the moral, law. His death achieved this by sealing a new, promissory covenant (cf. 1 Cor 11:25, "the new covenant in my blood") in place of the old, obligatory covenant. He did so in order to make the two, Jew and Gentile, into one new humanity, a corporate entity, the people of Christ. Thereby he makes peace between Jew and Gentile. It may be that there is here an allusion to Ezekiel's "covenant of peace" (37:26) or to Isaiah's "prince of peace" (9:5–6).

This new humanity is the result neither of Jews' becoming Gentiles nor of Gentiles' becoming Jews. It is a third option into which both Jews and Gentiles enter. They are "one in a unity where both are no longer what they previously were" (Lincoln 1990, 140–41). The *Preaching of Peter* (late first or early second century), expressed it thus: "The way of the Greeks and the Jews is old. But you [Christians] are . . . a third race" (cited in Clement of Alexandria, *Strom*. 6.5.39–41; cf. *Diogn*. 1, "new race"; Aristides, *Apol*. 2.1, there are three races in the world: Gentiles, Jews, and Christians; Tertullian, *Nat*. 1.8; *Scorp*. 10, the label "third race" was being used hostilely against Christians). Ephesians regarded this racial or ethnic reconciliation as a foretaste of the unification of the entire cosmos through Christ (1:10).

With 2:16 the focus shifts from the horizontal to the *vertical* dimension: **and he reconciled them both in one body to God through the cross, killing the enmity by means of it**. Here the concern is enmity between humans and God. Specifically, humans are being reconciled to God, not the reverse. Whereas LXX 2 Macc 1:5; 5:20; 7:33, speaks of God's being reconciled to humans, in Eph 2:16 the new humanity is reconciled to God (cf. 2 Cor 5:18, "God . . . reconciled us to himself through Christ"; Col 1:20, "Through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven"). Reconciliation is achieved through the cross (cf. 2 Cor 5:18–19), that is, through the sacrifice that seals the new covenant. This is the means by which the enmity is killed: "by means of it" (= the cross; Hoehner 2002, 384). The reconciliation happens "in one body," the equivalent to the one new humanity of verse 15, that is, the church.

And having come, he preached "peace to you (pl.) **who were far off and peace to those who were near"** (Isa 52:7; 57:19; cf. Stuhlmacher 1986) **so that through him we both have continual access by one Spirit to the Father** (2:17–18; cf. Rom 5:1–2)**.** Both Jew and Gentile needed reconciliation to God. Access to the Father is by means of the "one Spirit" (cf. 3:12; 4:4). The Spirit's availability is "through him" (= Christ). That is, the risen Christ gives the Spirit (4:7, 8, 11; Acts 2:33; John 20:22). Access to the presence of God is through the Spirit that was given by Christ. "Because of Christ's work, God is approachable" (Hoehner 2002, 389). Verse 18 does not say that Gentiles have gained an access that earlier belonged to Jews alone, but rather that both Jews and Gentiles have a new access (Best 2004, 275). This continuing access is a manifestation of the peace between God and humans, signaling the death of the enmity between them (cf. Rom 5:1–2).

Any Gentile in western Asia Minor, hearing this message about Christ's mission as peace-bringer, would have heard echoes of the widespread praise of Augustus and his successors for having brought peace to the

world. The elder Pliny is unusual in citing Augustus's flaws (*Nat*. 7.147–150); otherwise Jews and Gentiles alike were nearly unanimous in their praise for Augustus. For example, the Jew Philo spoke of "this wonderful benefactor's rule"; the emperor "reduced disorder to order," "safeguarded peace," and "was the first and greatest universal benefactor" (*Leg*. 143–151). Pagans likewise waxed eloquent about the peace brought by Augustus. Velleius Paterculus says, "There is no boon that humans can desire of the gods or the gods grant to mankind, no conceivable wish or blessing which Augustus, on his return to Rome, did not bestow on the Republic, the Roman people, and the world" (2.89). Above all, "peace was re-established." Ovid said, "Caesar is a man of peace" (*Fast*. 2.127–144). Strabo asserted, "The Romans and their allies have never enjoyed such peace and prosperity as that provided by Caesar Augustus" (*Geogr.* 6.4.2; cf. also Epictetus, *Diatr*. 3.13.9, and Aelius Aristides, *Orations*, "Address to Rome," 70–71a, for further praise of Augustus as the bringer of peace). The ideal king of Ephesians—Christ, the Messiah—is set forth in this letter as superior to Caesar Augustus (cf. Luke 2).

To view this image, please refer to the print version of this book.

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Figure 7. An Altar to Peace.

The Ara Pacis Augustae, here seen as restored in the twentieth century, was built on the Campus Martium at Rome in 13 BC to commemorate the peace established by the victories of Augustus Caesar. To dedicate an altar to peace was in effect to personify Peace as a goddess.

Section A′ in the pattern (2:19–22) returns to the condition of the Gentile readers before and after Christ. Here the emphasis is on the "after." These verses constitute one long, complicated sentence. **So then, you** (pl.) **are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets** (cf. 3:5; 4:11)**, Christ Jesus being the cornerstone of it, by means of whom the whole structure, being fitted together, grows into a holy sanctuary through the Lord** (*en kyriō*, understood instrumentally)**, by means of whom** (*en hō*, understood instrumentally) **also you** (pl.) **are being built together into a dwelling place of God by the Spirit.** The Gentile Christian readers of this letter are here described with two images: citizens of a city and members of a family. They are said to be now fellow citizens with all the redeemed. They are also described as new members of God's household.

This household, moreover, is compared to a building whose "cornerstone" is Christ and whose "foundation" is the Christian "apostles and prophets." (For apostles and prophets, cf. 3:5; 4:11; for the foundation of the church, cf. Rev 21:14, where the apostles alone are the foundation; Matt 16:18, where Peter alone is the foundation; 1 Cor 3:11, where Jesus is the foundation). The meaning of *akrogōniaiou* in verse 20 is debated. It could mean either the capstone or topstone of an arch (Jeremias 1930) or the cornerstone of a building. The cornerstone in antiquity was the first stone laid. Everything else was lined up to it (McKelvey 1962). The absence of truly convincing examples of texts with the first usage and the striking usage of the term in the LXX of Isa 28:16 ("See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation") inclines most scholars to prefer the second alternative (cf. Luke 2:34; Rom 9:32; 1 Pet 2:8 for use of Isa 28:16). If Christ is understood as the first stone laid, in line with which the entire foundation is laid out, then the order of authority in God's people is correctly reflected. The apostles and prophets, as the foundation for the people of God, nevertheless depend on Christ for their alignment. Context, then, also supports "cornerstone" as the preferred reading. Christ is the one by means of whom the whole structure is fitted together. In antiquity, when no mortar was used in building, stones had to be cut and smoothed so they would fit exactly with one another. So not only is the foundation of God's household in line with Christ the cornerstone, but also every component used in the building's walls and ceiling is fitted together by means of this alignment with him.

So the building "grows" by means of the Lord "into a holy sanctuary" (2:21). The term *naos* does not refer to the entire temple complex but only to the inner sanctuary inhabited by the deity's presence. By

means of Christ, the Gentile readers are being built together with other Christians into a dwelling place (= a temple sanctuary) of God, who dwells there by the Spirit (so TEV, NIV; cf. 1:23; 1 Cor 3:16–17; 2 Cor 6:16; 1 Pet 2:5, living stones). Whereas these Gentiles formerly thought of God as dwelling in a temple made with hands, the author leads them to understand that the God of the Lord Jesus Christ dwells in them, the church, through the Spirit's presence (1:23).

The Judaism of the time attests to a widespread expectation of an eschatological temple. In non-Christian Judaism this hope took several different forms. The predominant hope was for a restored temple in Jerusalem (e.g., Ezek 40–47; Zech 6:12; Tob 14:5; *Jub.* 1.27; 4Q174 1–3; 1QpPs 9; 11Q19 XXIX, 8–10; 11Q18; *Sib. Or.* 5.423). The expectation of a new temple also took the form of a hope for a remnant community as the eschatological temple (e.g., 1QS VIII, 4–10; IX, 3–6; V, 5–7; CD III, 18–IV, 10). At Qumran the members of the community, its leaders, and officials were identified as various parts of the temple structure. In 4QpIsa^d, for example, the stones are all Israel, the foundations are the founding of the community, the pinnacles are the twelve men and the three priests, and the gates are the heads of the tribes in the last days. In 4QpPs^a 1–10 (3:15–16), the pillar is the Teacher of Righteousness. On occasion there was also the expectation that Israel would be the new temple (*Tg. Chron.* 1.17.14).

Christian Judaism shared the hope for an eschatological temple. The expectation was, however, even more varied than in non-Christian Judaism. The dominant hope was that the Christian community was the eschatological temple (Mark 14:58[?]; 1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:20–22; Heb 3:2, 6; 1 Pet 2:4–5; Juel 1977, 208). In Christian Judaism, Christians in general are said to be stones (1 Pet 2:5; Hermas, *Vis.* 3; *Sim.* 9). Sometimes apostles and prophets are the foundation (Eph 2:20), sometimes Peter is the rock on which the church is built (Matt 16:18), and sometimes Jesus is said to be the foundation (1 Cor 3:11) or the cornerstone (Eph 2:20; 1 Pet 2:4, 6–7). In Rev 3:12, Christians who remain faithful and do not assimilate to imperial culture are promised by the risen Christ that they will be made pillars in God's temple, while in Gal 2:9, James, Peter, and John are acknowledged as pillars. At times the individual Christian's body was regarded as God's temple (1 Cor 6:19). On other occasions either the risen Christ was thought to be the new temple (John 2:19–22) or the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb were designated as the temple of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:22). Ephesians belongs to the dominant early Christian perspective. The people of God constitute the eschatological temple because the Holy Spirit dwells in the church.

Throughout the second part of the first digression it has been God's power in Christ that has effected the reconciliation both of two peoples to one another and of humans to God. In this sense the digression aids the readers in their understanding of the power of God—something for which the author has prayed (1:19). In verses 11–19 the argument traces the readers' shift from their pre-Christ state to their current Christian status. Their new condition is described as a grand and wonderful thing. This description aids the readers in understanding "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints," also something for which the author has prayed (1:18b).

In verses 21–22 attention shifts from the present to the future. The focus is on the process of growth and the process of "being fitted together." One is led to envision a completed sanctuary indwelt by God's presence. This vision of the future aids the readers in their understanding of "the hope of his calling," yet another object of the author's prayer (1:18a).

The first digression (1:20–2:22) has spoken about the power of God in Christ, which has not only raised and seated Christians together through and in dependence on Christ in the heavenlies but also has reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to one another and to God through Christ's death as a sacrifice that seals the new covenant. This is but the beginning of the summing up of all things through Christ (1:10).

Theological Issues

Christ's Body

In 2:16 we hear that Christ has reconciled both Jew and Gentile "in one body" to God. This picks up 1:22–23a, where we are told that Christ has been given as head over everything for the church, "which is his body." The notion of the body of Christ recurs in 3:6 (Gentiles have become members of the same body), 4:4 (there is one body), 4:12 (building up the body of Christ), 5:23 (Christ is head of the church, the body of which he is savior), and 5:30 (we are members of Christ's body). How should this be understood in its Ephesian context?

In Mediterranean antiquity *sōma* (body) was used in two different ways. Among Greco-Roman peoples it sometimes referred either to the human body or to the trunk as distinct from the head (Herodotus, *Hist*. 2.66.4; Plutarch, *Art*. 13.2; *Galb*. 4). Sometimes the cosmos was conceived as a gigantic divine body composed of many members (Plato, *Tim*. 30B–34B, 47C–48B). This conception developed into the Stoic idea of the divine soul as the head and director of the cosmos, which is its body (Cicero, *Nat. d*. 1.10.25–15.4; 3.9; Seneca, *Nat*. 6.14.1; *Ira* 2.31.7, 8).

At other times *sōma* (body) referred to the *polis* (= the *ekklēsia*) or the state (Plato, *Resp*. 5.464B; Aristotle, *Pol*. 1.1.2; Cicero, *Phil*. 8.5, 16; *Off*. 1.25, 85; Seneca, *Clem*. 1.5.1; Livy 26.16.19; 2.32.8–12). This was because the state, composed of many parts, is like the human body (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant*. *rom*. 6.86.1). So the state could be said to be the body of the emperor, who is the state's head (Seneca, *Clem*. 1.5.1; *Ben*. 3.6.32; Tacitus, *Ann*. 1.12, 13; Plutarch, *Galb*. 4.3; Curtius Rufus, *Hist*. *Alex*. *Magni* 10.9.1).

Among Jewish writings at the time one sometimes finds a distinction between head and body (*Apoc*. *Ab*. 18.5–6). The head was thought to be responsible for the movement of the whole body (*Apoc*. *Sedr*. 11.1). Also, *sōma* could be used to refer to corporate entities. Philo (*Praem*. 114, 125) says that the one man over a city, the one city over a district, or the people who rule other peoples, is like the head of a body that derives its life wholly from the forces to be found in the head. Here body refers to a corporate entity, head refers to the ruler, and the relation between them includes both the rule of the body by the head and the derivation of the life of the body from the head.

The question about usage in Ephesians is whether "body" is understood to refer to the literal human body, or to the body of the cosmos (physiologically), or to a corporate entity, a people. Would "body" in the Ephesians references have evoked in the auditors of the letter the image of an individual body as distinct from its head? Or would it have evoked the image of a corporate body, a people, with head referring to its ruler?

In favor of body with the meaning of a corporate entity and head as its ruler we may cite the following evidence. In 2:15–16 the "one new humanity" is used in parallelism with "one body." In 3:6, read in light of 2:12 ("excluded from the citizenship of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, not having hope"), Gentiles have become fellow heirs having hope, members of the same body, sharers of the promise and not strangers. In this setting "members of the same body" must be parallel to "citizenship in Israel," that is, a corporate term. In 4:4 "one body" is used in connection with "one hope of your calling." Calling echoes God's choice of the people Israel (Hos 11:1). The notion of the body as a corporate entity deriving its life from the ruler or head (Eph. 4:16) is common in both pagan and Jewish circles (e.g., Seneca and Philo). All these references, taken in context, point to an understanding of the *sōma* of Christ in Ephesians as a reference to a corporate entity, the people of God (Mayer 2002, 147, 149).

The one possible drawback to the corporate reading of "body" in Ephesians is 5:23, 28–32. An analogy is drawn between the relationship of husband and wife and that of Christ and the church. When it is said

that the husband should love his wife as his own body, it is clear that the reference is to the individual human body. Does this mean that in the reference to Christ and his body, his body must be visualized as an individual body? I think not for two reasons. First, an analogy requires a likeness in some ways between things that are otherwise unlike. Similarity in some respects, not identity, is the rule. Second, in 5:23 the reference is to Christ as head of the *ekklēsia* before there is any reference to body. The prior reference would normally control how the latter term was understood, that is, in corporate terms (contra Col 1:18, 24, where "body" precedes "church," thereby opening the door to a different, but incorrect, reading). If these two responses are adequate, then Eph 5 offers no obstacle to reading the "body of Christ" in Ephesians as a corporate term, referring to a people. Correspondingly, any references to Christ as head of the body would be understood as "ruler" or, on occasion, "source of the body's life."

In summary, in Ephesians the "body of Christ" is to be taken as a corporate entity, the people of God, the whole church. Any reference to Christ as "head" is to be understood in terms of Christ as the "ruler" over this corporate body and, on occasion (4:16–17), as the source of the body's life and growth. The explicit use of "head" as source of the church's life and growth (Eph 4:15–16) casts doubt on the claim by Grudem (1985) that in Mediterranean antiquity *kephalē* ("head") always means "authority over" and never "source." This letter's usage seems to indicate that "head" may mean both "authority over" and "source" (Bedale 1954).

The closest parallel to the usage of Ephesians is the Hellenistic and Philonic notion that a corporate entity can be compared to a body, with its ruler as head and nourisher. In this model, although functionally unified, the head and the body are clearly distinct entities. There is no ontological unity between head and body. Christ is qualitatively different from the church. A Mediterranean auditor would have heard this depiction of Christ as the ideal ruler and the church as his body over against the widespread cultural view of Alexander the Great or Augustus as the great uniter of all peoples in one body (Seneca, *Clem*. 1.5.1; 2.2.1). The designation of the church as Christ's body is an adaptation of the imagery in common usage in Mediterranean antiquity, in which the "body" is the state or community. In so doing Ephesians sets forward the Christian community as equivalent to the state, a counterculture over against the state (Dunn 1992).

Jews and Gentiles in the Church

The concern in Eph 2:11–22 with Jewish-Gentile unity needs to be seen within the trajectory of Jewish Christian and Gentile Christian relations in the early church. Note the shift of the issue as the composition of the

majority in the church changes. We begin with the pre-Pauline period and go through the middle of the second century.

In Gal 2:11–14 Paul recounts an incident in the church of Antioch of Syria that illustrated his claim that his apostleship was not from human authorities (1:1) from whom he was seeking approval (1:10). According to Acts 11:19–26, when some of those who were scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen went to Antioch and preached to non-Jews, with the result that a church was formed in the city, the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to check on the situation there. Because the task was more than he could handle, he went to Tarsus, found Paul, and brought him back to Antioch to help out. In this Gentile-Christian church in Antioch, Jewish Christians such as Barnabas, Paul, and at first Peter, ate with the Gentile Christians. Later some representatives from the Jerusalem church came to Antioch ("certain people from James"), and Peter withdrew from the common meals and kept himself separate. So strong was the fear of the Jewish-Christian faction that had come to Antioch that even Barnabas withdrew. At that point Paul confronted Peter in public: "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" Here the issue is whether Gentiles who have believed in Christ without observing the Jewish law are fully members of God's people. If they are, they can eat together; if not, they cannot. Jewish Christians from James raise the question here—and answer it negatively (cf. Acts 11:2–3; 15:1–5).

In Gal 3:1–5 and 4:1–11 Paul is confronting a similar issue. The Gentiles in Galatia, in response to Paul's preaching, had turned to Christ quite apart from law. After they had received the Holy Spirit in connection with their believing the gospel, someone came into their setting and told them that if they wanted to be truly children of Abraham they would need to be circumcised (5:2–3) and observe special days, months, and seasons (4:10). Paul bluntly inquires, "Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?" (3:3). "How can you want to be enslaved again?" (4:9). The issue here is whether Gentile Christians who have been justified through faith are spiritually complete and mature if they do not observe parts of the law. Jewish Christians from outside the Galatian churches have raised the issue—and again the answer is negative.

Romans 14:1–15:13 presents a twofold problem. On the one hand, the "weak" (some Jewish Christians and some Judaized Gentile Christians) had a list of essential marks of the people of God that included items that other members of the Roman congregations (Gentile Christians and certain other Jewish Christians) regarded as matters of indifference. The weak judged these other members as deficient. On the other hand, the strong held diet and days to be matters of indifference, putting their private freedom ahead of everything else and disdaining the weak.

Judgment, disdain, and division were the result. Here the question is, on the one hand, Gentile-Christian pride, issuing in impatience with Jewish-Christian scruples about foods, and on the other hand, Jewish-Christian scruples, leading to judgment of Gentile-Christian freedom. The issues are raised because Jewish and Gentile Christians live in the same Christian communities. The apostle asks for appropriate concessions from both groups.

Acts 15:28–29 tells of a conference in which the church in Jerusalem had to decide whether or not Gentile-Christian converts could live among Jewish Christians without first becoming proselytes to Judaism. The resulting ruling is twofold. On the one hand, Gentiles are saved just as Jews are, by grace through faith (15:11). On the other hand, in order for the two groups to associate within the Christian community, Gentile converts should observe the requirements for foreigners residing in ancient Israel (cf. Lev 17–18). They should abstain from eating food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from what is strangled, and from fornication (Acts 15:20, 29). Here the Gentile converts make concessions because of the larger Jewish population into which they are being assimilated.

Ephesians 2:11–22 assumes that Gentile Christians who have been saved not by works but by grace through faith (2:8–10) are dominant within the church. The letter has no requirement for the Gentile Christians to observe the laws designed for foreigners living in Israel. The emphasis is solely on the reconciliation of the two groups by Christ. The perspective of 1 Peter (1:1–2; 2:9–10) is that of Ephesians.

In Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*, the entire system of assumptions has shifted. In what is now a predominantly Gentile-Christian church, the question is no longer the grounds for the acceptability of Gentile Christians in the church; it is now a question of the grounds for the acceptability of Jewish Christians. Trypho asks, "If a person believes in Christ, yet desires also to observe the Mosaic Law, will he be saved?" (*Dial.* 47). Justin answers that he would receive such people and associate with them as kinsmen and brethren unless they tried to make the Gentiles practice the same rites or insisted that Gentiles could not be saved unless they did so. Justin admits, however, that there are other Christians who refuse to converse or share meals with those Jewish Christians who continued to observe as many of the Mosaic precepts as possible. Here the issue is Gentile-Christian doubt about the Jewish Christians' place in God's people.

Jerome, writing in the context of a predominantly Gentile-Christian church (*Epist*. 112.13), sharply criticizes Jewish Christians. He says that, "while they wish to be both Jews and Christians, they are neither Jews nor Christians."

Israel and the Church

The relation between the church and Israel in Ephesians is a debated issue. At one extreme, Markus Barth (1983) argues against a substitution reading (the church replaces Israel), a remnant reading (the church has continuity with Israel through Jews who have believed in Jesus), or a split-people reading (Jews and Christians remain in schism but within the one people of God). He argues for a reading of Ephesians that sees one people of God, Israel, of which Gentile Christians have become members, so that Jews and Gentiles are members of the same family. He believes that Ephesians speaks of a single people of God, of the citizenship of Israel, into which Gentiles have been accepted. Consequently, Barth claims that "the church, the synagogue, and the State of Israel, as well as all secularized Jews belong in this people and carry its name" (71). As a result, "the church will not witness to the Jews, but the Jews and the church will be a witness to the rest of the world" (61–63, 72). Judaism in the form of the State of Israel "is to be affirmed and supported by the church" (72).

A similar but more moderate position is espoused by Tet-Lim N. Lee. Reflecting the perspective of his teacher, J. D. G. Dunn, Lee contends that the law of commandments in decrees refers only to the ethnic identity markers in Judaism. It is this overemphasis on ethnicity that Christ abolishes. This leaves a transformed, inclusive Israel into which the Gentiles can be incorporated.

At the opposite pole, A. Lindemann (1985, 145–92, 237–59, esp. 253) contends that Ephesians sees no continuity at all between the church and Israel. The mention of Israel in Eph 2:11–12 is only to symbolize the sphere of salvation. In fact, Ephesians constitutes a retraction of Rom 9–11!

Lincoln (1987) offers a more balanced reading. He contends that according to Eph 2:11–22 Israel at one time had real advantages (2:11–12). Christ, however, has done away with the law (2:15). He has introduced a new humanity, a third race that is different from both Gentiles and Jews. Both have been reconciled to God in the new humanity (2:16; cf. 2:5). So the Gentiles' former disadvantages have been reversed, not by being incorporated into Israel, even into a renewed Israel of Jewish Christians, but by their being made members of a new community, a third entity that transcends the categories of Jew and Gentile. This process of inclusion of Jew and Gentile into one community through Christ is taken for granted by Ephesians. The struggle of the apostle Paul in Galatians and Romans is past. The victory has already been won.

How can Eph 2:13–19 be read in such different ways? Verse 13, read in the light of what has come just before it, and verse 19, read against the same background, sound very different from the intervening verses.

Gentiles, who were once aliens from the commonwealth of Israel (2:12), have been "brought near" (2:13) and are "no longer strangers and aliens" but "citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God" (2:19). This could suggest that the language of Jewish nationhood is appropriate to describe the church. On the other hand, verses 14–18 present a different slant on the relation between Jew and Gentile. Verse 15 says, "He abolished the law of commandments in decrees that he might create one new humanity in the place of the two and might reconcile both to God in one body." Here Jew and Gentile are taken up into something new that transcends the old differences. If one takes the metaphor of continuity with Israel as the stance of Ephesians, then this letter understands the relation between Jew and Gentile in the same way as Rom 9–11. Gentile Christians are grafted into the root of the believing remnant of Israel. If one follows the metaphor of discontinuity with Israel, however, then Jew and Gentile are taken up into a third entity. How are these two perspectives in Ephesians related to one another? Ephesians has spoken of the church in terms of a number of images so far: body, building, and temple. Israel should be taken as yet another image by which "Paul" describes the new entity. The new entity is distinct from both Judaism and all other groups in the Greco-Roman world. Yet Israel serves as an *analogy* in terms of which the new body can be described (MacDonald 2000, 242–56).

The very different models of the relation between Jews and Gentiles in Rom 9–11 and Ephesians can be explained, in part at least, by the social realities of their different times and places. In Paul's early ministry the fight was to make room for some Gentiles in the larger community of believing Jews. It would have felt as though Gentiles were being incorporated into believing Israel. Sociologically, they were. The language reflected the social reality. In the social context in which Ephesians seems to have been written, the church is largely Gentile, and their equal place alongside Jewish believers is taken for granted. It would have felt as though Jews and Gentiles had been incorporated on an equal footing into a new corporate reality, analogous to Israel but not identical to it. Sociologically, they had been. The language again reflected the perceived social reality.

Three different models for understanding the relation between Judaism and early Christianity have found advocates in the modern world (Boccaccini 1991, chap. 1). The first, associated with names such as Weber, Bousset, and Bultmann (1956), saw Judaism as the religion of the Old Testament revealed to Abraham and Moses. According to this model, the "late Judaism" of the age of Christ was a decadent religion with a remote God and a legalistic soteriology, and Rabbinic Judaism is

the codification of that religion. Christianity was a new revelation that replaced decadent Judaism.

A second model, associated with the name of G. F. Moore, sees Judaism as a developing, pluralistic religion that, at the beginning of the Common Era, split into several different groups. This early Judaism produced both a new stage of inner evolution (Rabbinic Judaism) and a different religion (Christianity).

A third perspective is associated with names such as Boccaccini and Segal. The latter speaks of Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity as siblings, Rebecca's children. This model, not that of Judaism as mother and Christianity as child, best explains the relationship. Boccaccini speaks of the genus Judaism and its various species in the time of Middle Judaism (200 BC–AD 200), such as Samaritans, Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, apocalyptic Jews, Jewish revolutionaries, mystical Jews, Christians, and others. All these groups were Jews, all held to some form of the scriptures of Israel, and all believed they had the hermeneutical key for interpreting those texts. The first Jewish revolt (AD 66–70) eliminated the Sadducees (because there was no longer a temple to manage) and the Essenes (because their community at Qumran had been destroyed). Variety still reigned after 70, however. The Pharisees served as the core group attempting to rally the majority of Jews together in a grand coalition now termed "formative Judaism." Apocalyptic Jews remained (cf. *4 Ezra*). Revolutionaries were present as well: Rabbi Akiba would proclaim Bar Kochba messiah in the early second century. Mystical Jews were around, as were Christian Jews. After the second Jewish revolt against Rome (AD 132–135), only two main players remained. One was what came to be called Rabbinic Judaism and would become normative Judaism after AD 200. The other was Christianity.

Given today's state of research, this is the correct frame of reference. One should not think of two separate religions in the early period; rather, there were two species, Rabbinism and Christianity, within the genus of Judaism. Only after AD 200 may one begin to speak of two religions. Originally they were Rebecca's children, two siblings born out of the same family who developed in very different directions, leading to an ultimate separation, each claiming to be the sole legitimate heir to ancient Israel and her scriptures. Within this frame of reference, moreover, contemporary scholars speak, for example, of Paul as a Christian Jew and of the theology of Matthew as a Christian form of Judaism. This reading of earliest Christianity as a Jewish sect conforms to the evidence of Acts (e.g., Acts 24:5, 14). The tendency now is to regard the separation of the two species of Judaism as a product of the late second century—some even say the fourth or fifth century.

When one reads the genuine Pauline letters (e.g., Rom 9–11), it is clear that the apostle has a Jewish self-understanding. Pauline Christianity is a species of Judaism. The same can be said for the First Gospel's self-understanding. When did Christian groups stop thinking of themselves as Jewish and begin to think of themselves as something new? Ephesians offers evidence for a new, non-Jewish self-understanding. In a predominantly Gentile, Pauline form of Christianity at the end of the first century, one encounters a view of the church as a new humanity, later called a third race. There are, of course, recognized links with Judaism. The Gentiles gained their place in this new humanity because of the testimony of Jewish Christians. The Jewish-Christian author of the letter, however, regards himself and those like him as having the same spiritual need as the Gentiles (2:5). The scriptures of Israel undergird the argument of the letter. The hermeneutic, however, is Christian (1:20, 22; 5:31–32). The self-understanding is not Jewish (contra Lee 2005). The current model of how to view the relations between Judaism and Christianity will have to take account of the variety of times and places and the multiple ways that the separation of the two siblings took place. As Meeks (1985, 114) has observed, "The path of separation . . . was not single or uniform."

The differences between Rom 9–11 and Eph 2 on the relations between Jews and Gentiles mirror the differences between the Pastoral Epistles and Rom 9–11. In 1 Tim 3:15 the household of God is equated with the church of the living God; in Titus 2:14 we hear that Christ gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own. Moreover, in 2 Tim 3:15–16 the scriptures of Israel are taken over by Christians, and in Titus 1:10 and 14 the readers are urged not to give heed to Jewish myths that come from people who reject the truth. The Pastorals seem to have taken the direction of Ephesians yet a step further (Rese 1990).

Ephesians 3:1–21

Introductory Matters

Ephesians begins with prayers: a blessing of God in 1:3–14, a brief thanksgiving in 1:15–16a, and an intercession that starts in 1:16b–19. The intercession is interrupted by two digressions, 1:20–2:22 (in two parts, 1:20–2:10 and 2:11–22) and 3:2–13. In 3:1 there is an attempt to resume the intercession of 1:16b–19 but it is broken off in mid-sentence by the digression of 3:2–13 (e.g., Snodgrass 1996, 157; O'Brien 1999, 224). The intercession is not completed until 3:14–19. A final prayer, a doxology (3:20–21), brings the first half of the letter to an end. This section of the commentary will cover the second digression (3:1–13), the completed intercession (3:14–19), and the closing doxology (3:20–21).

The two digressions, 1:20–2:22 and 3:2–13, correspond in crucial ways. In both it is God's power that is effective (1:20; 3:7); in both that power is described as grace (2:5, 8; 3:7–8); in both what is happening is rooted in God's eternal purpose (2:10; 3:11); and in both God's power functions in the interests of unity (2:11–22; 3:6). What distinguishes the second digression from the first is its focus on Paul. In it "Paul" speaks autobiographically. Table 3 (adapted from Perkins 1997, 79–80) shows correspondences between this second digression and Col 1:23–29. The two letters use the same traditional material about Paul. For those who assume the priority of Colossians, Ephesians has adapted and expanded its source. For those who assume the literary independence of Ephesians and Colossians, the two letters have each developed a common tradition about Paul in their own way.

Table 3.
Correspondences between Eph 3:2–13 and Col 1:23–29

Theme	Ephesians	Colossians
I, Paul, . . . for you	Eph 3:1	Col 1:23
My sufferings for you	Eph 3:13	Col 1:24
I have become a minister	Eph 3:7	Col 1:25
The administration of . . . God given to me	Eph 3:2	Col 1:25
The mystery hidden	Eph 3:9	Col 1:26
To preach/make known . . . Gentiles . . . Christ	Eph 3:8	Col 1:27–28
According the effective working . . . power	Eph 3:7	Col 1:29

Tracing the Train of Thought

Ephesians 3:1–13 is sometimes regarded as one long sentence (Hoehner 2002, 418), or as three sentences (3:1–7, 8–12, and 13; Lincoln 1990, 168 et al., following UBS and Nestle). Syntactically it is one long conditional sentence. The "if" clause comes in verse 2, the concluding clause in verse 13. Verse 1 begins, **For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ on behalf of you Gentiles**. "For this reason" refers backward to the first digression (especially 2:11–22), where Jew and Gentile are said to be a new humanity through Christ and to have a common access to God. It attempts to resume the intercessory prayer of 1:16b–19. The one who is about to pray identifies himself again (cf. 1:1 for the initial identification). He is Paul, a prisoner (cf. Eph 4:1; 6:20; 2 Tim 1:8; Phlm 1, 9) because of his Christian stance taken on behalf of Gentiles. At the mention of "Gentiles" the thought of the resumed intercession is interrupted and the second digression begins (Caragounis 1977, 72).

"If indeed" introduces the conditional sentence. Since it is a first-class conditional sentence, **If**

An Outline of Ephesians through 3:21

Berakah: blessing God for blessings bestowed on believers (1:3–14)

Thanksgiving: thanking God for the readers' faith and love (1:15–16a)

Intercession (1:16b–3:19)

  Intercession1: for the readers' enlightenment (1:16b–1:19)

  Two digressions about God's power (1:20–3:13)

    Digression 1: God's power at work in Christ and in Christians (1:20–2:22)

      In Christ and Christians (1:20–2:10)

      Through Christ for Christians (2:11–22)

    Digression 2: God's power at work in and through Christ's apostle, Paul (3:2–13)

  Intercession 2: for the readers' empowering, infilling, and enlightenment (3:14–19)

Doxology: praising God for his power at work in Christians (3:20–21)

indeed you have heard about the stewardship (= the office of administrator of making God's plan known) **of the grace of God given to me for you** (3:2) should be understood as "If you have heard, as I assume you have" (Hoehner 2002; Thrall 1962, 88; cf. also MacDonald 2000, 261, who contends the context suggests assumed knowledge: "for surely you"; cf. NRSV, "for surely you have heard"; Best 2004, 297). Whether it is the historical Paul or the canonical Paul who speaks, his assumption is that the Gentile Christian auditors of the letter in western Asia Minor will have heard of him.

The fact is that he has a ministry to the Gentiles given to him by God. **The mystery was made known to me by revelation** (cf. Gal 1:11–12, 15–16; Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:17–18)**, as I wrote briefly beforehand** (3:3)**.** When did the author write briefly about the Pauline knowledge of the mystery? Options include Rom 16:25–27; Gal 1:11–12, 16; Col 1:25–27; and Eph 1:9–10 (and/or maybe 2:11–22). The most obvious choice would be something in this letter that he now needs to expand. That would give preference to Eph 1:9–10 ("having made known to us the mystery of his will . . . to sum up all things by means of the Christ") and maybe parts of 2:11–22 (Lincoln 1990, 75). **When you read it you are able to perceive my insight into the Christian mystery** (3:4)**.**

Greco-Roman and Jewish auditors would have heard "mystery" as something that was associated with the essence of a religious tradition and that needed insightful interpretation. These days, due largely to the efforts of Raymond Brown and Joseph Coppens, one normally looks to the Jewish world for clues to the language of mystery in Ephesians. In pre-Christian Judaism, for example, "mystery" was understood to refer to something hidden that is revealed by God to or through someone. For example, in Dan 2:27–28 what is about to happen in the king's life is revealed to Daniel; in *1 Enoch* 103.2 it is something hidden that God reveals through Enoch; in *T. Levi* 2.10 it is something hidden that is revealed by God through Levi. At Qumran it was believed that there were mysteries known only to God (1QS XI, 5–6), and that God's eschatological plan was revealed to the Teacher of Righteousness (1QpHab VII, 4–5, 7, 13–14), who in turn revealed it to the community (1QpHab II, VII; 1QH XII, 27). The fully initiated were to appropriate the truths of these mysteries (1QS IX, 18–19) but keep them hidden from the uninitiated (1QS IV, 6, 17, 22). Outsiders were deemed unable to understand the hidden knowledge (1QS V, 11).

In the New Testament one finds "mystery" used in a number of ways within the scope of what has just been said. Sometimes it seems to refer to the essence of the religious tradition, about which there is some element of secrecy (Mark 4:11; 1 Cor 2:1; 1 Tim 3:9, 16). At other times it seems to

refer to something within the tradition that is in need of interpretation (Rom 11:25; 1 Cor 15:51; Eph 5:32; 2 Thess 2:7; Rev 1:20; 17:5, 7).

On other occasions "mystery" refers to the eternal will or plan of God for creation. That is the main focus in Ephesians. In 1:9–10 it is the mystery of God's will to unite all things through Christ; in 3:5–6 the mystery is revealed to apostles and prophets that Jew and Gentile are to be united in one body; in 3:3 this mystery is revealed to Paul; in 3:4 it is the mystery of Christ ("the Christian mystery"); in 3:9 it is a mystery hidden for ages; in 6:19 it is the mystery of the gospel ("the gospel mystery"). There are four elements here: (1) God's will, (2) hidden for ages, (3) revealed to someone now, and (4) associated with Christ and the gospel.

Some or all of these elements can be found elsewhere in the New Testament. In 1 Cor 2:1–10 one finds all four elements (the mystery is eschatological salvation); in Rom 16:25–27 one finds elements (2) and (3) (the mystery is the inclusion of the Gentiles); in Col 1:26–27 one finds (2) and (3), while in 2:2 and 4:3 one finds (4) (the mystery is Christ in you, the hope of glory); in Rev 10:7 one finds (1), (2), and (3) (the mystery is eschatological salvation). In Ephesians the mystery is the divine will for the unification of the cosmos through Christ. One dimension of this is the union of Jew and Gentile in a new humanity. It is not the only one, however. The Two Ways form of 4:17–5:21 aims to eliminate the vices that disrupt concord in the congregation. The household code of 5:22–6:9 also focuses on unity, this time within the household.

This "Christian mystery" **in other generations was not made known to humans** (cf. Matt 13:17 // Luke 10:24) **as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets** (cf. 2:20; 4:11, indicating Christian apostles and prophets) **by the Spirit** (3:5; cf. Acts 10:1–11:18; 13:1–3; 15:7–11, 12, 28). New Testament writings reflect a variety of traditions about the mission to the Gentiles. According to one tradition (Matt 28:19–20; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8) the Twelve are commissioned to preach to the Gentiles. According to another (Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:20, 23; Gal 1:16; 2:9) Paul is commissioned to preach to Gentiles. In yet another (Acts 10:1–11:18; 15:7–11) Peter was instructed to preach to the Gentiles. In Gal 2:7, 9 and Acts 15, all the apostles recognized the legitimacy of the Gentile mission. In Ephesians Paul is depicted as the missionary to the Gentiles. Nevertheless, all the apostles have had the mystery revealed to them as well. In Col 1:24–29 Paul is the sole apostle to the Gentiles.

What is it that has now been made known to all the apostles? Verse 6 clarifies: **the Gentiles** are **fellow heirs** (cf. Rom 8:17; Heb 11:9; 1 Pet 3:7) **and fellow members of the same body and fellow participants in the promise by means of Christ Jesus** (*en Christō Iēsou*, understood instrumentally) **through the gospel** (cf. 2:19, "fellow citizens with the

saints and members of God's household"). The mystery revealed now to apostles and prophets is that Jews and Gentiles together are part of God's household. It has become a reality because of the gospel. **Of this gospel I was made a minister** (*diakonos*) **by the gift of the grace of God, which was given to me according to the working of his power** (3:7). "God does not give responsibility without the provision of his power to carry it out" (Hoehner 2002, 451). At this point the language echoes the beginning of the unit, forming an inclusion with verses 2–3: "steward," "grace of God," "given to me," and "by revelation" (3:2–3) correspond to "minister," "grace of God," "given to me," "according to the working of his power" (3:7). For those who divide the unit into three sentences, this is the end of the first.

Verse 8 begins by returning to the same general thought. **To me, the least of all the saints** (cf. 1 Cor 15:9, "persecutor of the church"; Gal 1:13, "persecutor of the church"; 1 Tim 1:13–15, "foremost of sinners")**, this grace was given, namely, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable wealth of Christ.** Verse 9 expands the thought in different language: **and to enlighten everyone about what is the plan** (*oikonomia* in 1:10 and 3:9 refers to the salvific plan of God; in 3:2 it represents Paul's stewardship of the plan) **of the mystery concealed through the ages** (cf. Rom 16:25) **in the God who created all things**.

Verse 10 explains why Paul is preaching to Gentiles and why he is involved in the administration of the mystery, that is, why he is working for a new humanity encompassing both Jew and Gentile: **in order that through the church the manifold wisdom of God may now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies**. God's mystery (God's salvific plan) is not something the angelic powers would naturally know (cf. 1 Pet 1:12, "things into which angels long to look"). The very existence of the church, the new humanity in which Jew and Gentile are participants together, is a testimony to God's purpose to unite all things by means of Christ (1:10). The union of Jew and Gentile in the church is a first installment of the reunification of the cosmos. Are the rulers and authorities to whom all this is made known the evil powers mentioned in 1:21 and 2:2 (Snodgrass 1996, 164), or are they a combination of good and evil powers as in 3:15 (Hoehner 2002, 460), or are they good powers (cf. 1 Pet 1:12; Carr 1981)? In Ephesians there is no explicit reference to any good heavenly powers except God and Christ, with the possible exception of 3:15. For that reason it seems preferable to think of the church's existence as bearing witness to the powers that contribute to the disunity in the cosmos (cf. 1 Pet 3:19–20).

This divine purpose—the reunification of the cosmos—now made known to the unruly powers is **an eternal purpose, which he accomplished by means of the Christ, Jesus our Lord** (*en tō Christō*,

understood instrumentally, that is, by his death; Hoehner 2002, 464)**, by means of whom** (*en hō*, understood instrumentally) **we continually have boldness and access with confidence** (cf. Heb 4:16; 10:19) **through his faithfulness** (3:11–12; *pisteōs autou* understood as a subjective genitive, thus Christ's faithfulness; Foster 2002). The language of access to God in 3:12 ("by means of whom we . . . have . . . access") echoes 2:18 in the first digression ("we have access through him" [*di' autou*]). Our access to the Father can be said to depend on Christ's faithfulness because his faithfulness unto death led to his resurrection and subsequent gift of the Spirit (2:18, "access by one Spirit").

With verse 13 we arrive at the second part of the first-class conditional sentence that began back in verse 2 (Hoehner 2002). ["If indeed you have heard about the stewardship of God's grace given to me for you (and I assume that you have)"] **then** (or "therefore") **I ask that you not lose heart** (cf. Luke 18:1) **because of my sufferings on your behalf, which are your glory**. The focus of the second digression (3:2–13) is the speaker, "Paul." The content of the digression is laudatory. In ancient Mediterranean terms, this chapter would be heard as an exercise in self-praise. Plutarch argues that self-praise is legitimate when there is a need to raise confidence among friends in crisis (*Mor*. 7.15.544D–16.545D). Verse 13 provides justification for "Paul's" self-praise. Plutarch suggests that self-praise is less offensive if some of the honor linked with one's accomplishments is ascribed to the gods (*Mor*. 7.11.542E). Verse 7 ("Of this gospel I was made a minister by the gift of the grace of God, which was given to me according to the working of his power") follows Plutarch's recommendation. Plutarch also says that if reference is made to one's faults and if one stresses that one's status has been the result of much hardship and danger, self-praise is less offensive (*Mor*. 7.13.543F–14.544D). Verse 1 ("I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ on behalf of you Gentiles"), verse 8 ("to me, the least of all the saints") and verse 13 ("my sufferings on your behalf") satisfy the criteria expressed by Plutarch. So "Paul" speaks in a way that both uses self-praise and avoids some of the pitfalls associated with it (MacDonald 2000, 271). In so doing, Paul emerges as the authoritative teacher of the Gentiles. He is the type of teacher that one hears about in 1QH XII, 27, where the Teacher of Righteousness says to God, "through me you have enlightened the face of many . . . for you have shown me your wondrous mysteries."

The function of 3:1–13 goes beyond the praise of the apostle to the Gentiles. It also protects against a false interpretation of Paul's imprisonment (cf. Gombis 2004a and 2004b). Ephesians 1:20–23 has proclaimed the subjection of God's enemies to Christ. In chapter 2 there is an enumeration of the triumphs of God accomplished through Christ, demonstrating that the powers are indeed subject to the Christ. In chapter 3 the question

arises, if Christ is exalted to cosmic supremacy why is Paul in prison? An imprisoned apostle looks less like a reflection of Christ's triumph than a glaring defeat at the hands of the powers. Yet 3:1–13 portrays Paul as a divinely commissioned administrator of God's grace, whose preaching of the gospel has resulted in the church that includes the Gentiles. This fact is a witness to the powers that God's might will enable the accomplishment of his purpose for the cosmos. That Paul is a suffering prisoner is no obstacle to the realization of God's purpose. Indeed, God's triumph is most clearly seen when working in and through human agents who occupy positions of weakness and shame (cf. 2 Cor 12:9).

Ephesians 3:14–19 is regarded by some as a long sentence in which the intercessory prayer of 1:16b–19 and 3:1 is finally completed (e.g., Snodgrass 1996, 177, following UBS and Nestle). Others take 3:14–21 as one long sentence (Hoehner 2002, 472). Some of those who take 3:14–21 as one sentence see the material in 3:14–21 falling into a chiastic pattern (Mouton 2002, 66):

> A Praise (3:14–15)
>   B Power (3:16)
>   C Presence (3:17a)
>   D Love (3:18–19a)
>   C′ Presence (3:19b)
>   B′ Power (3:20)
> A′ Praise (3:21)

Others who take verses 14–21 as a single sentence (e.g., Hoehner 2002, 476) or who regard verses 14–19 as a sentence (e.g., Snodgrass 1996, 177–78) tend to focus on the syntax. Hoehner's analysis is an example:

> Request: that (*hina*) he may give you power through his Spirit (3:16)
>   Result: so that Christ may dwell in your hearts (3:17)
>   Purpose: in order that (*hina*) you may have strength to comprehend the vastness of Christ's love (3:18)
>   Result: and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge (3:19a)
>   Purpose: in order that (*hina*) you may be filled with the fullness of God (3:19b)

It is true that the thought of 3:14–21 moves in a concentric fashion. It is also true that perception of this movement does not sufficiently clarify the complexity of the thought in this passage. We turn, therefore, to an examination of the details of the language.

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father (3:14; cf. 1:2, 3, 17; 2:18; 4:6; 5:20; 6:23)**, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named** (3:15; cf. Acts 17:26)**.** "For this reason" picks up the same phrase from 3:1. In both cases the reference is back to 2:11–22 and its theme of unity. A number of different postures for prayer are mentioned in the Bible. One prays on one's knees (Ezra 9:5; Luke 22:41; Acts 7:60, Eph 3:14), lying prostrate (Ezra 10:1; Matt 26:39), with one's head between one's knees (1 Kgs 18:42), or standing (1 Sam 1:26; Luke 18:11, 13; 1 Tim 2:8). Here the reference is to a mental posture of humility. Because of the powerful salvific activity of God, "Paul" resumes his prayer of intercession (from 1:16b–19 and 3:1). Here, as in 1:16b–19, the prayer is for the illumination of the readers.

He bows his knees and prays to God **that** (*hina*) **he may give you** (pl.)**, according to the wealth of his glory, power to be strengthened through his Spirit in the inner self** (3:16). This is the request. The goal of this request is **that Christ may dwell through faith in your hearts** (3:17a) **so that you are rooted and grounded in love** (3:17b; cf. Rom 5:5b). This indwelling by Christ that roots and grounds believers in love has a purpose. It is **in order that** (*hina*) **you may be empowered to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth** (of Christ's love; 3:18). What would be the result of the auditors' comprehending the vastness of the love of Christ? They would **know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge** (3:19a). This knowledge serves a purpose: **in order that** (*hina*) **you may be filled up to the level of the fullness of God** (3:19b; cf. 1:23; 4:10).

What is the aim of this prayer? It begins with a request for the Spirit's presence in their inner self, moves to a desire that Christ may dwell in their hearts, and ends with the goal of their being filled with the fullness of God. A similar phenomenon may be found in Rom 8:9–11. There Paul speaks about the Spirit of God as dwelling in believers (Rom 8:9a), followed by language about believers' having the Spirit of Christ (8:9b), and then to a reference to Christ's being present within the believer ("if Christ is in you," 8:10). It is as though, at the experiential level, Paul does not distinguish between the activity of Christ and the Spirit. In 1 Cor 15:45b Paul says, "The last Adam became a life-giving spirit." In Gal 4:6 he speaks about God's sending "the Spirit of his Son into our hearts." For Paul, believers do not experience Christ except as Spirit and do not experience the Spirit except as Christ. The same phenomenon seems to be found in Eph 3:14–19 (Lincoln 1990, 206). If so, in this intercession "Paul" is praying for one thing—the presence of God in the inner self of the believers. This is called both the empowering of the Spirit (Eph 3:16) and the indwelling of Christ (3:17). The goal is that believers be filled up to the level of the fullness of God (3:19; cf. Col 2:10). The empowering,

indwelling, and filling are characterized by the experience of power and love. This is primary Christian religious experience.

After the completion of the intercession, the first half of Ephesians ends with a doxology: **To the one who is able to do far in excess of all that we ask or think, according to the power at work in us, to him be glory through the church** (*en tē ekklēsia*, understood instrumentally) **and through Christ Jesus** (*en Christō Iēsou*, understood instrumentally) **into all the generations of the age of the ages. Amen** (3:20–21)**.** The God being praised is the God of immense power who is at work in believers, to whom believers pray, and from whom believers receive answers beyond their greatest expectations. The author of Ephesians "knows that all human endeavor is dependent on God's power" (Schnackenburg 1991, 155). The doxology praises this God and expresses the wish that he be glorified (recognized for his greatness) through the church and through Christ Jesus. It would not fit the context to translate "*in* the church" or "*in* Christ Jesus" (understood as the location where God is glorified). "Paul" has already said that the very existence of the church is a testimony to the evil powers concerning God's salvific plan for the cosmos. That is, the church's existence is a means by which God is glorified. In everything so far, Christ has been depicted as the means by which God accomplishes his purposes. So as the church is displayed as God's workmanship and Christ is recognized as God's instrument for the summing up of all things, God's glory is recognized.

Amen means "so may it be" (cf. 1 Chr 16:36; Neh 8:6; Rom 1:25; 9:5; 11:36; 15:33; 16:27). Ephesians began with a eulogy lauding God's benefactions; in 3:20–21 the appropriate response to God's benefactions is a doxology praising the benefactor whose great power is for our benefit (cf. Rom 11:36; Phil 4:19–20), bringing the first half of the letter to an end. As is fitting, benefaction has been answered with praise.

Theological Issues

Paul was variously evaluated in the early church. For some, he was *the* evangelist, teacher, and administrator of the church. In these circles the Twelve were ignored. This stream of early Christian life is represented in orthodox circles by Colossians, the Pastoral Epistles, the *Epistle of Polycarp*, and *Acts of Paul*. In heretical circles, Marcion and Valentinus (cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Strom*. 50.7) are examples. In other circles Paul was ignored. Appeal was made exclusively to the Twelve as the church's teachers and administrators. In orthodox circles, the *Didache*; *Barnabas* (5.9; 8.3); Aristides, *Apology* (2); and Justin, *1 Apology* (39; 42; 50; 53) are examples. In heretical circles, the *Gospel of Philip* (122.16–18) belongs

to this stream. Further, Paul was regarded as an apostle of Satan by the Ebionites (so Epiphanius, *Pan*. 30.16.6–9), by Cerinthians (so Epiphanius, *Pan*. 28.5.1–3), by the Severiani (so Eusebius, *Hist. eccl*. 4.29.5), and by the Elchasaites (so Eusebius, *Hist. eccl*. 6.39). In still other circles, Paul and the Twelve together were acknowledged as apostles and teachers of the church. In orthodox circles, the Acts of the Apostles and the *Epistle of the Apostles* are representative. In both of these sources, although Paul is recognized as an apostle, he is subordinate to the Twelve. In heretical circles, Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora* is an example of the acceptance of Paul and the Twelve together as apostles.

Who was this controversial figure? There were some common elements in the depiction of Paul by those who recognized him as a legitimate leader in the early church. He was seen as a missionary of Christ, bringing the gospel to the world and suffering in the course of doing so. At the same time, some distinctive emphases are to be found. A brief comparison of Ephesians with the portrait of Paul in a few selected sources helps clarify the distinctiveness of this letter's portrayal. Two trajectories will be examined: the one that views Paul as an apostle alongside the Twelve, and the one that views Paul as the sole apostle.

We begin with the first trajectory. Two documents will be considered as points of comparison. The *Epistle of the Apostles* sets Paul alongside the twelve apostles as a missionary to the Gentiles but as subordinate to, instructed by, sent out by, and subservient to them according to the risen Jesus' command. He is described as the "last of the last" among the apostles. Here both the Twelve and Paul are apostles, but Paul is of very low status compared to the Twelve. He is actually sent out by them. That is, he is their apostle. The Acts of the Apostles depicts Paul as a high-status Christian who would be appealing to the urban Greco-Roman world (Lentz 1993). He is portrayed as an apostle (14:4, 14) alongside the Twelve (1:26) but is subordinated to them. He is an apostle of the church at Antioch (13:1–3), while they are apostles of Christ (Luke 6:12–16). Ephesians depicts both Paul and others as apostles (Paul, 1:1; others, 2:20; 3:5). In this letter Paul is an apostle of Christ by the will of God (1:1). He is the chief apostle and the authoritative teacher of the Gentiles (3:1, 13; 4:1; 6:19–20). In these writings, all of which include Paul alongside other apostles, the shades of emphasis reflect the differences. The *Epistle of the Apostles* and the Acts of the Apostles regard Paul as inferior to the Twelve, an apostle who was sent out either by the Twelve or by the church at Antioch of Syria. In Ephesians, however, even though other apostles are included, Paul, an apostle of Christ, is *the* apostle of the Gentiles. These comparisons sharpen the uniqueness of the portrait of Paul in Ephesians.

The second trajectory understands Paul as the sole apostle. The Pastoral Epistles portray Paul as a pastor who provides for the preservation of his legacy after his departure (Wild 1985). He writes rules, establishes procedures, and encourages subordinates like a hands-on CEO (Keck 1989). As in Ephesians, Paul is *the* apostle and authoritative teacher of the church, "by the will of God" (2 Tim 1:1; cf. Eph 1:1). Paul is a prisoner who suffers for the gospel (2 Tim 1:8, 12; 4:6–18; cf. Eph 3:1, 13). Paul is depicted as the recipient of the gospel ("what has been entrusted to me," 2 Tim 1:12) or of the revelation of the divine mystery that the Gentiles are fellow heirs with Jews in God's new people (Eph 3:2–13). The Paul of the Pastorals is an aged spiritual giant. The Paul of Ephesians is the "father of the Gentile mission." In these two postapostolic canonical depictions of Paul the emphases are very similar, perhaps because they both come from the same Pauline circle.

In 2 Thessalonians Paul is preoccupied with the apocalyptic future. He is the champion of tradition. In Ephesians Paul's eye is on the elongated present during which God's plan is already being fulfilled in the church (Keck 1989).

Acts of Paul and Thecla paints a portrait of Paul as a wandering miracle worker and preacher of sexual asceticism who boldly faces a martyr's death. This document's emphasis on asceticism is starkly different from Ephesians, where the inclusion of a household code reflects the assumption that marriage is the norm for Christians.

One more comparison of the Paul of Ephesians with other sources' portrayals of him will further sharpen the distinctiveness of the picture in Ephesians. The Acts of the Apostles, the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, the *Epistle of the Apostles*, and the Pastorals stress Paul's *activity* in founding and administering churches. Ephesians and 2 Thessalonians focus on Paul's theological reflection, virtually ignoring Paul's organizational activity.

These different portraits of Paul from within a period of about a century after his death "reflect an extended struggle for the legacy of Paul, for the 'rights' to Paul" (Keck 1989, 351). Ephesians stands in the midst of the struggle with its own distinctive picture of Paul. He is an apostle sent out by Christ, not by any human. There are other apostles, but he is the chief apostle to the Gentiles, whose authority exceeds that of all others. From the vantage point of his imprisonment he can look out on how his accomplishments fit into the eternal plan of God to unify all things through Christ. The inclusion of Jew and Gentile in a new humanity is a foretaste of the ultimate goal of God and a testimony to the evil powers that they are defeated. The great theologian catches all this up in a grand vision of God the benefactor that elicits the praise of his glory. He calls for the beneficiaries to respond appropriately in the

way they walk. The "walk" he prescribes is not the way of an ascetic but of one who affirms the created order, including marriage. His focus is on the present growth of the church, not on an apocalyptic future. His mood is that of an awe-filled worshiper, not that of an activist or administrator.

Ephesians 4:1–16

Introductory Matters

Ephesians falls into two main sections, chapters 1–3 and chapters 4–6. The first major division, 1–3, is dominated by a series of prayers that are interrupted at two points by digressions (1:20–2:22 and 3:2–13). The focus of the second major segment of the letter, 4:1–6:20, is parenetic; that is, it consists of advice and exhortation. This section consists of four large units of thought: 4:1–16; 4:17–5:21; 5:22–6:9; and 6:10–20. The first unit, 4:1–16, is a call to maintain the unity that has been given by God to the church (cf. 2:14–15, 17); 4:17–5:21 is a Two Ways form; 5:22–6:9 is a household code; and 6:10–20 is a call to stand firm as a Christian in the face of spiritual evil. The direction of thought in the letter as a whole is loosely concentric.

> A The power of evil in which the readers formerly *walked* (2:2) has been broken by God's power operating in and through Christ. A new walk is possible. (2:1–10)
> > B The divisions between Jew and Gentile have been overcome in the *unity* (2:14; 3:6) created by God through Christ. Peace is possible. (2:11–22; 3:2–13)
> > B′ The readers are exhorted to maintain the *unity* (4:3) that they have been given by God. (4:1–16)
> A′ The readers are encouraged to *walk* (4:17; 5:2, 8, 15) according to their new nature. (4:17–6:20)

This segment of the commentary focuses on 4:1–16, a call to maintain Christian unity. The segment breaks into two paragraphs, 4:1–6 and 4:7–16.

Tracing the Train of Thought

Ephesians 4:1 signals the beginning of the parenetic section of the letter with an appropriate **I, therefore, . . . exhort you** (cf. Rom 12:1). The term translated "exhort" (*parakalō*) was used in antiquity, in the context of the benefactor-benefaction system, to summon, exhort, and encourage those who had received a benefaction (*charis*) to respond appropriately to the giver of the gift. For example, in a letter of Ptolemy II to Miletus (c. 262/261 BC) the king describes kindnesses and benefactions he has shown the city. He then says, "We summon (*parakaloumen*) you for the future to maintain the same policy of friendship toward us" (see entire letter above, p. 22). In a letter of Antiochus II to Erythrae (after 261 BC) the king grants the city autonomy and tax exemption. He then summons (*parakaloumen*) them to remember suitably those by whom the city has benefited (Welles 1934, 78–80, line 30). "Paul's" exhortation then is for an appropriate response to the divine benefactions. The **therefore** refers to the content of the whole of chapters 1–3, the whole of the divine benefactions.

Verses 1–3 of chapter 4 consist of a call to maintain the unity that God has given them. Because of all that God has done through Christ, "Paul" the prisoner, who is in the Lord's hands (*en kyriō*), exhorts (*parakalō*) the readers **to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called** (4:1; cf. Phil 1:27; Col 1:10; 1 Thess 2:12). In canonical Paul, "calling" always refers to the call to be a Christian (Talbert 2002a, 57–58). So the exhortation is to walk (= live) in a way that is consistent with being a Christian.

What does it mean to walk worthily? It is walking **with all humility** (4:2; cf. Acts 20:19; Phil 2:3; Col 3:12; 1 Pet 5:5) **and meekness** (cf. Gal 5:23; Col 3:12), **with patience** (cf. 2 Cor 6:6; Gal 5:22; Col 3:12), **bearing with one another in love** (cf. Phil 2:2; Col 3:13), **making every effort to maintain the unity that the Spirit has given through the bonding that consists of peace** (4:3; cf. 2:15; Rom 14:17; Gal 5:22).

What is the basis of this corporate unity into which God's actions in Christ have introduced the Gentile readers of the letter?

**An Outline of
Ephesians 4:1–16**

Unity (4:1–6)

The call to maintain the unity of the Spirit (4:1–3)

The basis of this unity: the seven unifying realities of the faith (4:4–6)

Diversity (4:7–16)

The basis of Christian diversity (4:7–11): Christ's diverse gifts

The goal of the diverse gifts (4:12–16): unity, maturity, stability, growth of the church

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A sevenfold basis is given in verses 4–6. There are three groups with a threefold ring to each. Group one reads: **There is one body** (4:4; cf. 2:15, 16; 1 Cor 12:12–13)**, and one Spirit** (cf. 2:18; 1 Cor 12:12–13)**, just as you were called in one hope of your calling** (cf. 1:18). Group two runs: **one Lord** (4:5; cf. 1 Cor 8:6; Phil 2:11)**, one faith** (cf. Rom 10:8–13; Gal 1:23; 1 Tim 3:9; 4:1)**, one baptism** (cf. 1 Cor 12:13). Group three consists of **one God** (4:6; cf. Rom 3:30; 1 Cor 8:4–6; Gal 3:20; 1 Tim 2:5) **and Father** (cf. 1:3, 17; 2:18; 3:14) **of all, who is above all and through all and in all**. "All" could refer to the cosmos (Lincoln 1990, 240) or to the church (Schnackenburg 1991, 167).

There is a Jewish ring to this language. Philo speaks about there being one sanctuary because there is only one God (*Spec*. 1.67). *2 Baruch* says that "there is one law by One, one world and one end for all who exist" (85.14). Philo derives the unity of the Jewish people from their belief in the one God. He says, "the highest and greatest source of this unanimity is their creed of a single God, through which, as from a fountain, they feel a love for each other, uniting them in an indissoluble bond" (*Virt*. 7.35). *Second Baruch* sounds a similar note when it says, "we are all one people of the Name; we who received one law from the One" (48.23–24). The sevenfold basis for Christian unity in Ephesians is an adaptation of this Jewish way of thinking. The unity of the church in Ephesians is rooted in the unity of Christian reality, expressed in the seven items just mentioned (4:4–6). In contrast, Ignatius contends that the church's unity depends on submission to the one bishop in a hierarchical system (*Eph*. 4.1–2; 5.1).

Verses 7–16 shift the focus to the relation between diversity and unity in the church. Verses 7–10 provide a basis for Christian diversity: Christ's diverse gifts. **To each one of us grace** (not redemptive grace as in 2:5, 8, but special grace, the equivalent of *charisma*, spiritual gifts; cf. Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:4, 9, 28) **was given according to the measure of Christ's gift** (4:7). In 1 Cor 12:4–30 Paul speaks about diversity within the one body. Verses 4–7 of chapter 12 summarize the thought well: "Now there are varieties of gifts [*charismatōn*], but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of ministries [*diakoniōn*], and the same God. . . . To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." Romans 12:4–6 makes a similar point: "For just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, the many, are one body through Christ and individually members of one another. Having gifts according to the grace given us, let us use them" (implied, "for the common good"). These two texts refer to a diversity of gifts that are to be used for the benefit of the community as a whole. This is exactly the perspective of Eph 4:7–16. Each Christian has been

gifted. Gifts are given by Christ, who also determines their kind and amount (cf. Rom 12:3).

That Christ gives gifts to each believer is supported by scripture. **Therefore it says** (Eph 4:8; cf. 5:14; Rom 4:3, 6; 9:15; 10:16; 11:26) is a signal that scripture is about to be quoted, in this case Ps 68:18: **Having ascended into the heights he took captivity captive; he gave gifts to men**. The LXX reading (Ps 67:19), however, is a bit different: "Having ascended into the heights you took captivity captive; you received gifts for a man." The Hebrew text also differs from Ephesians: "You ascended the high mount, leading captives in your train and receiving gifts from people." There are two major differences between the use of Ps 68:18 in Ephesians and the corresponding text in the LXX and the MT. First, the MT and the LXX have "you ascended," whereas Ephesians has "[he] ascended." Second, the MT and the LXX have "you received gifts" and "receiving gifts," whereas Ephesians has "he gave gifts."

Psalm 68 in the MT and LXX functions as a call to God to rescue his people (Ps 68:1–3). God is to be praised (68:4–6) for past acts of deliverance and provision. After the exodus he went in triumph before the people (68:7) so that Sinai shook (68:8) and kings were scattered (68:11–14). Since the Lord desired Zion for his dwelling (68:16), he came from Sinai to his holy place (68:17) and ascended the high mount with captives following behind. The "you" in verse 18 refers to God's ascent to Zion, perhaps in the person of the victorious king. He led his captives in triumphal procession as they went up the temple mount. The gifts God or the king received were tribute from the conquered peoples.

This is certainly not what one finds in Ephesians. Attempts to explain the differences have taken two basic approaches. The first holds that "Paul" altered the text to bring out its true christological meaning (Harmon 1969). The second approach claims that Paul quoted from a different Old Testament textual tradition, one like that found in the Targum, which here reads, "You, Moses the prophet, ascended to the firmament; you took captivity captive, you learned the words of Torah, you gave them as gifts to the sons of men." The Midrash on the Psalm has the same type of reading (*Tehar*. 68.11). This reading, although in a late source, agrees with Eph 4:8 that the one who ascended gave gifts instead of receiving them. It does not, however, have the third person ("he") as does Ephesians but retains the second person ("you") that one finds in the MT and the LXX. If such a reading of Ps 68 as one finds in the Targum existed as early as Eph 4:8, then this is an attractive way of understanding the deviation of Ephesians from the MT and the LXX. Ephesians 4:8 would represent a Christianization of a Mosaic reading of the Psalm (Moritz 1996, 56–80).

Although the text does not discuss the matter, one might ask who are those taken captive in Eph 4:8? In Ephesians they could only be the alien powers we hear about in 1:21; 2:2; and 6:12 (Arnold 1989, 56–57). If so, this is a variation on the Christus Victor theme. By virtue of his ascent, Christ took captive the powers that held humans captive to evil.

The quotation is followed by a commentary on Ps 68:18 in verses 9–10. In form the commentary is similar to a type found at Qumran called *pesher*. Citation of a biblical text is followed by its interpretation, often introduced by the formula, "its interpretation is." The interpretation then seeks to show that the text is referring to events connected with the Qumran community's history, present, or ultimate future. For example, Hab 2:2 ("Write the vision, make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it") is interpreted to refer to the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom God has disclosed all the mysteries of the words of the prophets (1QpHab VII, 4–5). In a similar way, Eph 4:9–10 says, **Now the phrase, "He ascended": what does it mean except that he also descended into the lower parts of [the cosmos, namely,] the earth? The one who descended is also himself the one who ascended above all the heavens** (cf. John 3:13)**, in order that he might fill all things** (cf. 1:23)**.** In this context it seems clear that the descent is prior to the ascent (Moritz 1996, 80; Hoehner 2002, 532). This fits with Ps 68, where Yahweh's descent is prior to his ascent. The "also" (*kai*) in verse 10 implies as much about Christ. A textual variant found in Vaticanus and a few other witnesses that were used in the KJV inserts "first" after "he descended." This was likely a scribal insertion to make clear to the reader that the descent came first.

Where did Christ descend? The phrase "the lower parts of the earth" has been read in a variety of ways. Some have taken it to mean the descent of Christ into hell. Among the early fathers, Irenaeus (*Haer*. 4.27.2; 5.31.1; 5.33.1) and Tertullian (*An*. 55.2) understood the descent in this way. The earliest creed to refer directly to the descent into Hades, the Formula of Sirmium (AD 359), appealed to only a single biblical text in support (Job 38:17). John Chrysostom's *Homilies on Ephesians* (11), however, interpreted Eph 4:9–10 as the descent of Christ into Hades where he took as captives the devil, death, the curse, and sin. This ancient view has had modern advocates as well (Beare 1953, 10.689; Kreitzer 1998a). The interpretation of the descent in Eph 4:9 as Christ's descent into hell is eliminated as a possibility, however, because the picture of the world in Ephesians involves only two levels, earth and the heavens. It does not include a level below the earth (contra Phil 2:10).

Another reading that has been advocated of late with some force is that the descent of 4:9–10 is the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost (W. Harris 1996; Lincoln 1990, 247). In this case the descent would follow the

ascent. This is problematic because the "also" (*kai*) in verse 9 argues for the reverse order (descent followed by ascent). An even greater objection is that "himself" in verse 10 must refer to Christ. It is Christ himself who descends, not the Spirit.

The two most attractive options are, therefore, those that take the descent to the lower parts of the earth to be a reference either to the incarnation (Schlier 1963, 192; Schnackenburg 1991, 178) or to the grave (Hoehner 2002, 536). While the latter is possible (cf. Ps 63:9), the former is more inclusive and the genitive of apposition required for this is characteristic of Ephesians (2:2, 14, 15, 20; 3:4, 7; 4:3; 6:14, 16, 17). So descent understood as incarnation is to be preferred (O'Brien 1999, 296; Snodgrass 1996, 202).

That Christ gave gifts to all Christians, as attested by scripture (Ps 68), is the basis of Christian diversity. Not all Christians have the same gifts (cf. Rom 12:3–8; 1 Cor 12:4–11). Verses 11–16 argue that the diverse gifts, however, are not divisive but are for the purpose of Christian unity. So verses 7–10, the basis of Christian diversity, are followed by a statement about the role of Christ's gifts in maintaining Christian unity. The paragraph begins and ends with references to gifts: first, gifts to some (Eph 4:11), then gifts to all Christians (Eph 4:16). Certain gifted individuals have their role to play in fostering Christian unity. Verse 11 says, **And he gave the apostles** (cf. 1 Cor 12:28, 29)**, and the prophets** (cf. 1 Cor 12:28, 29)**, and the evangelists** (cf. Acts 21:8; 2 Tim 4:5)**, and the pastors** (= shepherds; cf. Acts 20:28 and 1 Pet 5:2, the verbal form) **and teachers** (cf. Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28, 29). Out of the many gifts Christ gave to the church, these are mentioned because of their relevance for the unity of the church.

Hoehner (2002, 539) makes a strong argument that this list enumerates not offices but people who are, in effect, gifts to the church. The early Christian offices, he argues, were bishops, elders, and deacons. The individuals mentioned here are rather gifts. One holds an office due to appointment (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5) or election (Acts 1:26; 6:3; 1 Tim 3:1–13), whereas gifts are bestowed by God (Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:11, 18, 28). Every Christian has a gift (Rom 12:4; 1 Cor 12:7, 11), but not everyone holds an office. Marital status is mentioned as relevant for those holding an office (1 Tim 3:2, 4–5, 12; Titus 1:6) but not for the gifted. Officeholders cannot be novices (1 Tim 3:6, 10; Titus 1:8–9), whereas gifts are given regardless of age or maturity. Certain offices are held by men (1 Tim 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6). In the Pastorals this requirement is historically conditioned by the specific circumstances out of which these epistles came (Talbert 2002a, 117–18). The gifted may be of either gender (Acts 21:9–10; 1 Cor 11:5). Some support for Hoehner's distinction between an office and a gifted function may be found in 1 Pet 5:1–2, where elders (officeholders)

are to do the work of pastors (tending the flock of God, a function). In Ephesians the individuals mentioned in verse 11 perform functions that are empowered by the Spirit, and are thus spiritual gifts.

Verses 12–16 speak about the purpose of these gifted individuals in the church. Verse 12 is a battleground for interpreters. In this verse there are three clauses, each introduced by a preposition: **for** (*pros*) **the training of the saints**; **for** (*eis*) **the work of ministry** (or "service"); **for** (*eis*) **the building up of the body of Christ**. The question concerns how these three clauses are related to one another. The issue of interpretation can be seen if we look at three representative translations, the RSV, the NRSV, and the NJB. The RSV, following the KJV, translates:

> for the equipment of the saints,
>   for the work of ministry,
>   for building up the body of Christ.

Two commas are used here. This indicates three coordinate phrases. The NRSV translates:

> to equip the saints for the work of ministry,
>   for building up the body of Christ.

Only one comma is used here. This indicates the first two phrases are linear, the last two are coordinate. The NJB translates:

> to knit God's holy people together for the work of service to build up the Body of Christ.

There are no commas here. This indicates that all three phrases are taken as linear.

The basic issue of interpretation is seen in the difference between the first one and the last two. The question is, to whom does the work of ministry or service belong? First, however, one must ask, what kind of work is it to which reference is made? *Diakonia/diakonos* is used in the NT with three different connotations. It can refer to the ministry of Paul (Rom 11:13; 2 Cor 3:8–9; 4:1; 5:18; 6:3; Eph 3:7) and that of Paul's coworkers (1 Cor 16:15; Eph 6:21; Col 4:17). It can also denote the ministries of gifted individuals generally (Acts 6:1, 4; 1 Cor 12:4–6). Finally, it is used of the office of deacon (Rom 16:1; 1 Tim 3:8).

In the first translation, with two commas, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors-teachers were given by the ascended Christ for three purposes: equipment of the saints, work of ministry, and building up the body of Christ (T. Gordon 1994; Hamann 1988; MacDonald 2000,

292). In the last two translations, with one or no commas, the purpose of these gifted individuals is "training [or "equipping"] the saints for the work of ministry" resulting in the building up of the body of Christ. Does the ministry belong to these few gifted individuals or to all the gifted saints? The different translations (RSV, NRSV, NJB) are in fact different interpretations of the text. Which reading is to be preferred?

In favor of the majority reading (NRSV and NJB) scholars point out that there is a shift in prepositions (*pros . . . eis . . . eis*), which means at least the first two prepositional phrases are not coordinate. Thus the translation would run: "for the equipment of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ" (Aletti 2001, 219–21). Some, however, argue that the combining of prepositional phrases, all dependent on the main verb and coordinate with each other, is common to the writer's style (Lincoln 1990, 253). How should one evaluate these two claims? The data show that Ephesians can use a sequence of prepositional phrases in both coordinate (e.g., 4:13; 6:12) and linear (e.g., 1:3, 20; 2:7) ways. Also at times some prepositional phrases in the same location are coordinate and others are not. For example, in 1:5–6, *eis . . . eis* are coordinate, while *kata . . . eis . . . en* are not; in 4:14, *en . . . en* are coordinate, while *pros* functions in a linear fashion. Either coordinate or linear readings of a series of prepositional phrases are possible. The *pros . . . eis . . . eis* sequence of 4:12 has its closest analogy in 4:14, which separates the *pros* phrase from the two *en* phrases. The former is linear; the latter two are coordinate. The translation **for the training of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ** survives its critics.

The **work of ministry** here refers to gifted activity by Christians in general to build up the church, as in 1 Cor 12:4–6: "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and varieties of ministries [*diakoniōn*], but the same Lord; and varieties of workings, but the same God." Here ministry entails manifesting one's gift(s). This meaning seems mandated in this context because of Eph 4:16b, where the "working by the measure of each part" corresponds to "work of ministry" in verse 12, and "makes for the growth of the body unto building itself up" corresponds to "for the building up of the body" in verse 12. In verse 16b "by the measure" echoes "according to the measure" of verse 7. Both refer to the different gifts given by Christ to each and all Christians. The translation then would run: **for the training of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ**.

Ultimately the larger context is determinative. Canonical Paul knows the concept of all Christians' being gifted by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:7; Eph 4:7), though in different ways (1 Cor 12:4–11; Eph 4:7, 11), as well as the concept of the various gifts' working together for the benefit of

the church (1 Cor 12:7; Eph 4:16). The latter two translations have the advantage of agreeing with the canonical Pauline context. The gifted individuals mentioned in verse 11 train or equip the saints, all of whom have been gifted as well in other ways, for their work of ministry/service, the purpose being the church's edification. A picture emerges of a community of gifted individuals, each manifesting his or her ministry. The church as a whole is thereby dependent upon each member's gifted ministry for its growth. The ministries mentioned in 4:11 are examples of this communal giftedness, which in all its variety yields unified growth. Moreover, the text indicates that the saints need guidance about the proper way to use their giftedness if it is to contribute to the growth of the church. First Corinthians 12–14 is an excellent example of an apostle's equipping gifted saints so that their differing gifts would contribute to the church's growth and not its division.

How does Ephesians understand the growth of the church, the body of Christ? The focus of the passage is on the church's inner growth rather than on its mission to the world (Lincoln 1990, 268), in contrast to Acts 1:8, where the gift of the Spirit is intended to empower mission. Verses 13–16 make this focus on inner growth explicit. Growth continues **until we all attain unto** (*eis*) **the unity of the faith** (cf. 4:5) **and of the knowledge of the Son of God** (cf. 3:18–19)**, unto** (*eis*) **a mature person, unto** (*eis*) **a measure of the stature of the fullness of the Christ** (4:13). The thrice-repeated preposition (*eis*) indicates that the three phrases are parallel to one another. They are three dimensions of the one goal of attaining spiritual maturity. This maturity is defined as the Christ's full stature.

This Christian maturity serves yet another purpose, expressed first negatively and then positively in 4:14. Speaking negatively, let us attain maturity **in order that we may no longer be children** (the metaphor is of a full-grown adult versus a child; cf. 1 Cor 3:1–3) **tossed around and carried about** (the metaphor is of a storm-tossed boat; cf. Philo, *Decal*. 67, who says idolaters are like those "tossed around on the sea") **by every wind of teaching by the cunning of people, by craftiness for schemes of deceit** (the metaphor is that of a game of chance in which one misleads and cheats a victim; in antiquity dice playing became a synonym for trickery). Christians need to grow up to the full stature of Christ (= maturity) in order to gain spiritual stability. Speaking positively, **speaking the truth in love, let us grow up in every way unto him, who is the head, Christ** (4:15). Christ is the measure by which spiritual growth is to be reckoned.

Here the goal of the church's growth is defined as the community's reaching the ideal king's stature. Ancient Mediterranean auditors would have heard this statement against the backdrop of discussions about

ideal kings. Plato believed that government was ideal when the state was ruled by a king who lived his life in accordance with the law of nature and was able to legislate out of his person (*Pol*. 33a). Aristotle counseled Alexander the Great to lead a virtuous life because "the greatest part of humankind regulate their conduct either by law or by your life and principle" (*Rhet. Alex*. 1420b). Hence the ideal ruler embodied a superior form of law. The highest law was that of the king's character. Isocrates regarded the imitation of the ideal ruler as the best form of legislation. He counseled Democritus to "pattern after the character of kings, and to follow closely their ways," considering "their manner of life your highest law" (*Demon*. 36). Xenophon declared that just as passengers on a ship obey the captain, who knows the seas better than they do, so subjects will obey a king who has gone further in virtue than they have gone or are able to go (*Cyr*. 1.6.21). Musonius Rufus shows the ancient tradition continued into the Common Era when he says, "it is of the greatest importance for the good king to be faultless and perfect in word and action, if . . . he is to . . . [effect] good government and harmony, suppressing lawlessness and dissension" (*That Kings Also Should Study Philosophy* 8). The Cynic Epistles continue the tradition into the second century (Malherbe 1977, 15, 163).

The Jewish tradition reflected this ancient Greek conceptual world. For example, Sirach says, "As the ruler of the city is, so are all its inhabitants" (10:2). The statement by a Jewish author reflects the larger Mediterranean world's belief that the king's rule—his headship—was necessary to produce harmony and stability in the political unit (Cairns 1989, 23, 87). So Ephesians says the church, as a corporate "body," is to grow into the likeness of its head, the Christ; as is the king, so are the people. When the auditors of Ephesians heard that the church's goal was to grow up to the full stature of the ideal king, the Messiah, they would have understood it in terms of communities' aspirations to reflect the character of their ideal kings (Chesnut 1978; Goodenough 1928).

The Christ is not only the measure of maturity, he is also the enabling source: **from whom the whole body, being fitted** (cf. 2:21–22) **and held together through every bond of connection, according to the working by the measure** (cf. 4:7; cf. Rom 12:3) **of each part, causes the growth of the body unto the building up of itself through love** (4:16). Christ is the source as well as the goal of the church's growth unto maturity. Ancient Mediterranean people viewed the ideal ruler—the people's "head"—as the catalyst for such progress. For example, Plutarch says of Numa, the next king after Romulus:

> For not only were the Roman people softened and charmed by the righteousness and mildness of their king, but also the cities round about, as if

some cooling breeze or salubrious wind were wafted upon them from Rome, began to experience a change of temper, and all of them were filled with a longing desire to have good government, to be at peace, to till the earth, to rear their children in quiet, and to worship the gods. (*Num*. 20.3)

Plutarch believed this was so because

when they [= the multitude] see with their own eyes a conspicuous and shining example of virtue in the life of their ruler, they will of their own accord walk in wisdom's ways, and unite with him in conforming themselves to a blameless and blessed life of friendship and mutual concord, attended by righteousness and temperance. Such a life is the noblest end of all government, and he is most a king who can inculcate such a life and such a disposition in his subjects. (*Num*. 20.7–8)

The ruler (= head) of a people (= body) is not only the measure of its maturity but also the source of its growth toward that goal. Convictions similar to Plutarch's can be found earlier in Philo. The Alexandrian Jewish philosopher spoke of a corporate entity as a "body," of a ruler as "head," and of the relation between them as involving both the rule of the body by the head and the derivation of the life of the body from the head (*Praem*. 114, 125). Ephesians spoke out of and to this cultural mindset. For Ephesians, every element of progress in Christians is effected by divine enablement. Nevertheless, "because progress is God's gift, a person does everything that God does in him" (Montague 1961, 231, 233).

Growth is also made possible by the use of all Christians' spiritual gifts whatever they are, as determined by Christ's measure. Here at the end of the paragraph the focus returns to the function of gifts to foster unity. The focus is on the gifts of all Christians, as in verse 7. Just as in 1 Cor 12:31b–14:1a, love is the motivation for the use of spiritual gifts (Talbert 2002a, 108–9). Consequently, Christians are to use gifts for "body-edification, not self-edification" (Hoehner 2002, 579). When this is done, the body is built up; when it is not done, the body is divided (cf. 1 Cor 12:14–26). When all members are using their measure of spiritual gifts out of love, the body is building itself up (Eph 2:21–22).

The gifted individuals of 4:11, together with all the gifted members of the church (4:7, 16), contribute to the church's growth, maturation, and stability. For how long do these gifted ministries endure? Some have said that apostles and prophets ceased after the first Christian generation (Vaughn 1963, 92). The *Didache* 11–13, 15, however, speaks clearly about apostles and prophets continuing into the second century at least. It is more accurate to say that the thought world of Ephesians presupposes that not only such gifted functionaries as mentioned in verse 11 but

also the whole membership's giftedness would endure until the church reaches its goal, which has not yet happened (Schnackenburg 1991, 184; Lincoln 1990, 255). As long as the church has yet to become what it is called to be, it will continue to need the gifts of the Spirit. To remove the giftedness of the Holy Spirit from the life of the church would be to return its members to human effort as their only resource in the face of the principalities and powers. From the point of view of Ephesians, what a catastrophe that would be!

Theological Issues

Spiritual gifts are mentioned in Rom 12:1–8; 1 Cor 12:8–10, 28–30; Eph 4:11; and 1 Pet 4:11. The lists of spiritual gifts are not the same in the various sources. The lists are illustrative rather than exhaustive. These gifts have been organized by interpreters in various ways. One way that seems to help one to grasp the logic behind the lists is offered by Fung (1987). He divides gifts into two main categories: endowments for ministry in word and equipment for ministry in deed. Table 4 summarizes his arrangement, with some modifications.

Table 4. Gifts for Ministry in Word and Deed
(after Fung, 1987)

Endowments for Ministry in Word	Equipment for Ministry in Deed
Gifts of gospel proclamation	*Gifts of supernatural power*
apostles	miracles
evangelists	healing
	faith
Gifts of inspired utterance	
prophets	*Gifts of administrative leadership*
discernment of spirits	administrators
tongues	pastors
interpretation of tongues	
utterances of knowledge	*Gifts of practical assistance*
	helping
Gifts of didactic speech	serving
teachers/pastors	sharing
exhortation	caring
utterances of wisdom	showing mercy

The gifts mentioned in Eph 4:11 (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers) almost all belong under "endowments for ministry in word." The gifts of Eph 4:11, moreover, fall into all three categories under "endowments for ministry in word." Although they are not called gifts, certain behaviors prescribed in the parenetic section of the letter

would seem to fall under "equipment for ministry in deed," within the category of "gifts of practical assistance." Sharing would encompass 4:28 ("so you will have something to share with the needy"). Helping relates to 4:29 ("let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up others") and 6:19 ("pray also for me"). Caring seems related to 4:32 ("be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving") and 6:4 ("fathers, do not provoke your children to anger"). Showing mercy seems linked to 6:9 ("masters, . . . stop threatening [your slaves]"). Ephesians 5:10 ("try to find out what pleases the Lord") and 5:17 ("understand what the will of the Lord is") could very well relate to the gift of discernment of spirits. Perhaps the reader will find other examples of unmentioned gifts in the parenetic section of Ephesians. One should expect to find such evidence given 4:16 ("as each part is working properly it promotes the body's growth") read in light of 4:7 ("each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift").

Ephesians 4:17–5:21

Introductory Matters

Ephesians 4:17–5:21 is a large thought unit of composite nature. Taken as a whole, it belongs to the Two Ways form of instruction, a common form among ancient Mediterranean peoples (MacDonald 2000, 320). It consisted of three requisite components: (1) a sharply dualistic introduction; (2) lists of virtues and vices; and (3) a warning phrased in eschatological or cosmic terms (Suggs 1972). Hesiod provides an example when he presents the way of justice and the way of pride, cites antithetical ethical behaviors, calls on hearers to accept his teaching, and predicts reward and punishment from Zeus and his council (*Op*. 1.213–297). A similar form may be found in Plato's dialogues and in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (2.20–34). In the scriptures of Israel, Deut 30:15–20 reflects the three components. Pre-Christian Jewish examples include the *T. Ash*. 1.3–5.4 and 1QS III, 13–IV, 26. Christian examples from near AD 100 are the Latin *Doctrina*, the Greek *Didache* 1.1–6.1, and the Greek *Epistle of Barnabas* 18–21. The earliest Christian example is Gal 5:16–25. The form put two ways of living in stark contrast, one good and the other bad. It was a rhetorical device well-suited to elicit a positive choice.

Ephesians 4:17–5:21 reflects the required three components of a Two Ways form: (1) a sharply dualistic schema ("put off . . . put on," 4:22–24; "light . . . darkness," 5:8; "unwise . . . wise," 5:15); (2) lists of virtues and vices (4:25–32; 5:1–4, 17–20); and (3) an eschatological warning (5:5–6). The diversity of material in the larger unit argues for the independence of the various parts before their inclusion in this letter. For example, many phrases of 1QS V, 24–VI, 1 are echoed in Ephesians (Culpepper 1979), as shown in table 5. The consistent adherence to the Two Ways

Table 5.
Echoes of the Qumran Rule in Ephesians

The Rule of the Qumran Community (1QS V, 24–VI, 1)	The Letter to the Ephesians (Eph 4–5)
"They shall reprove each other in truth and humility and loving charity one towards the other" (V, 24–25).	"Speaking the truth in love" (4:15); "let every one speak the truth with his neighbor" (4:25, quoting Zech 8:16).
"Let no man speak to his brother with anger, or ill-temper, or disrespect, or impatience, or a spirit of wickedness" (V, 25–26).	"Let no evil talk come out of your mouth, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear" (4:29).
"And let no man hate him in the perversity of his heart" (V, 26).	"Be angry but do not sin" (4:26, quoting Ps 4:5).
"He shall be reproved on the very same day" (V, 26).	"Do not let the sun go down on your anger" (4:26).
"And thus a man shall not bear a fault because of him" (V, 26–VI, 1).	"Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them" (Eph 5:11).

Figure 8. How to Live in Community.

The Rule of the Community (also known as the Manual of Discipline) is a document that governed life in the Jewish religious community whose library was discovered at Qumran. The fragments depicted here are from the Rule of the Congregation (1Q28a), an appendix to the Community Rule.

genre, whatever the source of the material, argues for the unity of the total section, 4:17–5:21.

"Ephesians presumes that conversion leads to moral renewal" (Perkins 1997, 94). Several indicators point to this conclusion: the auditors are labeled "saints" (1:1), election has as its aim the elect ones becoming "holy and blameless" before God (1:4), the good works in which converts walk are said to have been prepared beforehand by God (2:10), and the parenetic section of the letter (4:1–6:20). Like the ancient moral philosophers (e.g., Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 17.2), the author of Ephesians apparently thought that if people are to act properly, they must be reminded of what they know about a proper lifestyle. Ephesians 4:17–5:21 is just such a reminder.

The unit as a whole (4:17–5:21) falls into four segments, but there is disagreement as to their composition. A number of scholars see 4:17–24; 4:25–5:2; 5:3–14; and 5:15–20 (or 21) as the component paragraphs (e.g., Schnackenburg 1991; Lincoln 1990; Snodgrass 1996; cf. RSV, NRSV). Hoehner, however, argues for 4:17–32, 5:1–6, 5:7–14, and 5:15–21. He bases his divisions on the joint recurrence of *oun* (therefore) and *peripatein* (walk) in 4:17 ("*Therefore* this I say and bear witness to in the Lord that you should no longer *walk* as the Gentiles do"), 5:1–2 ("*Therefore* be imitators of God . . . and *walk* in love"), 5:7–8 ("*Therefore* do not be participants with them . . . *walk* as children of light"), and 5:15 ("*Therefore* watch carefully how you *walk*"). The clue to this principle of organization is given in 4:1 ("*Therefore* I exhort you . . . to *walk* worthy of your calling"), which introduces the parenetic section of the letter. This plan will be followed here.

Tracing the Train of Thought

The Two Ways—Part 1

The first of the four segments of 4:17–5:21 is 4:17–32. Verses 17–24 speak in general terms; verses 25–32 supply the specifics. Let us begin with the general exhortations found in verses 17–24. This subunit has significant parallels with Col 3:5–10, as shown in table 6. This paragraph follows the plan of (1) what not to do (Eph 4:17–19), (2) why not to do it (4:20–21), and (3) what to do (4:22–24).

1. What should the readers not do? **Therefore I am saying this and bearing witness in dependence on the Lord** (*en kyriō*)**, that you** (pl.) **should no longer walk as even the Gentiles walk in the futility of their minds** (cf. 1 Pet 1:18)**, being darkened in their understanding** (cf. Rom 1:21; Wis 13:1)**, being estranged from the life of God** (cf. 2:12)**, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their hearts, who, having become callous, have delivered themselves** (in contrast to Rom 1:24, 26, 28, where God delivers

Table 6.
Parallels between Ephesians and Colossians
(after Perkins 1997, 104–5)

Theme	Ephesians	Colossians
The former walk with its vices	4:17, 19	3:5, 7
Put off the old self (= man)	4:22	3:8–9
Put on the new self (= man)	4:24	3:10
The new creation	4:24	3:10

humans to immorality) **to debauchery for the practice of every kind of uncleanness** (cf. Rom 1:24) **with insatiable desire** (Eph 4:17–19)**.** The Gentile lifestyle ("walk") is described as the result of an insatiable desire or greediness to practice every kind of uncleanness. This ethos has arisen out of hard hearts, ignorance of and alienation from God, and darkened minds. This is what not to do. Do not live as the Gentiles do (cf. 1 Pet 4:3–4)!

2. Why should the readers not live like the Gentiles do? Verses 20–21 speak to this matter. **But you** (pl.) **did not so learn the Christ, if indeed you have heard about him [as I assume you have]** (*ei ge* here reminds the audience of what they must surely have already heard [Best 2004, 427; cf. 3:2]) **and were taught by him** (*en autō*, understood instrumentally) **[as I assume you were] just as truth is in Jesus.** Best remarks that this is unusual because what is learned is a person (2004, 426). The ancient auditors would not have heard it as strange. In their milieu the ideal ruler (here, the Christ/Messiah) was understood as a "living law." It was regarded as better to learn a right way of living from observing the ruler's lifestyle than from the laws he has promulgated. In the genuine Paulines the Apostle has little to say about Jesus' teachings or the events of his career; rather, Paul appeals to the Christ event taken as a whole (e.g., Rom 15:3, 8–9a; 2 Cor 8:9; Phil 2:5–11; also Col 1:15–20, if genuine). The totality of the Christ event functioned as a "living law" (Talbert 2002b, 304–6). In this sense one learned Christ, one was taught by means of him (*en autō* understood instrumentally), and the truth could be said to reside in him. The Gentile lifestyle is at odds with the Christ paradigm, the walk that Jesus embodies. It is this walk that the readers have been taught in their initiation into and their continuation in the Christian community.

3. What should these Gentile Christian readers do? Three things are prescribed. First, **You** (pl.) **must put off the old person, the one associated with the former lifestyle, the one corrupted by deceptive desires** (4:22). This is the language of moral transformation. For example, when Pyrrho was attacked by a dog, he sought refuge in a tree, a behavior inconsistent with his philosophy. When this was pointed out

to him, he admitted, "It is difficult to put off the man" (Diogenes Laertius 9.62, 66). In the third century BC the expression "to put off the man" was used to denote the transition from the unenlightened to the enlightened state (van der Horst 1973). The *Letter of Aristeas* speaks of putting off vices (122; for a pagan example cf. Lucian, *Dial. mort*. 10.8–9). The second prescription is: **be continually renewed in the spirit of your mind** (4:23; cf. Rom 12:1–2; Col 3:10). The third is: **put on the new person, the one associated with God, the one created with the righteousness and the holiness of truth** (4:24; cf. 1QS IV, 2). Philo speaks of putting on virtues (e.g., *Conf*. 31; for a pagan example cf. also *Corp. Herm*. 13.8–9). The image is that of changing garments—taking off an old, dirty one and putting on a new, clean one. The new self (= garment) has been created with righteousness and holiness, of which truth (i.e., in Jesus; 4:21) is the subject. In Jesus one sees the norm of all values. This vision produces righteousness and holiness, not debauchery and a greedy desire to practice all kinds of uncleanness.

Ephesians 4:17–24 has given a general perspective on the Two Ways: the way of the Gentiles and the way of Jesus. The next paragraph (4:25–32) provides some specifics related to the lifestyle of the new person in a series of five exhortations, each spelling out what to do or not to do followed by the reason for the specified behavior (Hoehner 2002, 614–41). The first comes in 4:25a: **Putting away falsehood, "speak truth each with his neighbor"** (Zech 8:16a; *T. Dan* 5.2). The reason for this truthfulness is given in verse 25b: **for we are members of one another** (cf. 1 Cor 12:12, 14, 18).

The second exhortation is offered in verses 26–27. What to do is spelled out in verse 26. **"Be angry and do not sin"** (LXX Ps 4:5)**; do not let the sun go down on your anger** (4:26)**.** For similar prescriptions see Plutarch (*Mor*. 488C) and CD VII, 2–3. The reason for not holding on to one's anger is given in verse 27. **Do not give a place for the devil** (4:27; cf. 1 Tim 3:6; 2 Tim 2:26; 1 Pet 5:8; cf. Hermas, *Mand*. 5.1.3)**.** Holding on to one's anger opens one to the influence of the evil powers. This, however, is a situation from which the readers have been delivered (2:1–2).

The third exhortation is presented in verse 28a: **As for the thief, let him no longer steal** (Exod 20:15; Mark 10:19; 1 Cor 6:10; 1 Pet 4:15) **but rather let that one labor, working good with his own hands** (cf. *Ps.-Phoc*. 153–154). The reason is offered in verse 28b: **in order that he may have something to share with the one having a need** (cf. Rom 12:13; 1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:6–11).

The fourth exhortation, covering both what to do and what not to do, comes in verse 29a: **Let no unwholesome word go forth out of your mouth, but only something good to meet a need**. The twofold reason comes in verses 29b–30: **in order that it may give benefit** ("grace") **to**

those who hear; and also not grieve the Holy Spirit of God (cf. Isa 63:10) **by whom you were sealed unto the day of redemption** (cf. 1:13–14).

The fifth and final exhortation in the series is found in verses 31–32a and also covers both what to do and what not to do: **Let all bitterness and rage and anger and shouting and slander be put away from you, together with all malice; be kind to one another** (cf. 2:7)**, tenderhearted, forgiving each other**. The reason for this behavior comes in verse 32b: **just as God through Christ has forgiven you**.

The Two Ways—Part 2

The second segment of the Two Ways form in 4:17–5:21 is found in 5:1–6. It is signaled by the joint occurrence of *oun* ("therefore") and *peripateite* ("walk") in verses 1–2. It has significant parallels with Col 3:5–8, as illustrated by table 7.

Table 7.
Parallels between Ephesians and Colossians
(after Perkins 1997, 113)

Theme	Ephesians	Colossians
Vices of sexual immorality, impurity, greed	5:3	3:5
Vices of indecent speech	5:4	3:8
Eschatological judgment on such	5:5–6	3:5–6

This paragraph again has a dualistic cast to it, distinguishing between the way Christ acts (the positive) and the way that will get one excluded from Christ's kingdom (the negative). Verses 1–2 present the positive (what to do and why): **Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, just as the Christ loved us and gave himself for us as an offering and sacrifice to God for a pleasant fragrance**. Verses 3–6, presenting the negative (what to avoid and why) fall into an ABCC′A′B′ pattern.[1]

> A What to avoid: two sets of three vices (5:3a, 4a) plus one positive alternative (5:4c)
> B Why avoid them (5:3b, 4b)
>   C This you know (5:5a)
>   C′ Knowing that (5:5b)
> A′ What to avoid: three types of persons embodying vices (5:5c)
>   B′ Why avoid being such a person (5:5d–6)

1. What follows is an adaptation of S. Porter 1990.

Verses 3–4, A and B in the pattern, offer the negative (what not to do and why) in three steps. Step one (5:3a) indicates what is not to be done. **But sexual immorality** (*porneia* = extramarital intercourse, including premarital; Jensen 1978) **and all impurity or insatiable desire** (= greediness, cf. 4:19) **are not to be named among you.** Verse 3b gives the reason: **as is fitting for saints**.

Step two (5:4) spells out what not to do: **and obscenity** (*aischrotēs*) **and foolish talk or coarse jesting**. *Eutrapelia* signifies degrading jesting, suggestive language, sharpness of tongue at someone else's expense (van der Horst 1978); Ephesians is not denouncing humor and wittiness. In the middle of verse 4 is the reason for the prohibition: **which are not fitting**. Kreitzer (1998) argues that *aischrotēs* should be taken as a reference to behavior associated with the cult of Demeter, in particular the branch at Hierapolis. At certain festivals in honor of Demeter coarse language was common, especially about sexual matters (Diodorus Siculus 5.4.7; Pausanias, *Descr*. 7.27.9–10; a scholion on Lucian, *Dial. meretr*. 7.4; Clement of Alexandria, *Protr*. 2.17–21). Rather than limiting the proscription of improper language in Ephesians to this one context, we should probably take the Demeter festivals' excesses as but one expression of a larger problem in Gentile culture. What to do follows: **but rather giving thanks** (cf. 1QS X, 21–23).

These six behaviors and these two reasons for them are something the readers **know** (*iste*, 5:5a), C in the pattern. At Qumran, concern about undisciplined speech was a fact of life. In 1QS X, 21–24 we hear, "From my mouth no vulgarity shall be heard or wicked deceptions . . . I shall remove from my lips worthless words." C′ in the pattern (5:5b) repeats the theme of knowing: **knowing that** (*ginōskontes*, "knowing that, since you know that, therefore"). A′ in the pattern repeats what to avoid. Verse 5c indicates what one is not to be: **any fornicator, or unclean person, or person with insatiable desire** (= who is covetous)**—who is an idolater**. Verses 5d and 6, B′ in the pattern, provide the reason for avoiding these lifestyles: **such a person does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ** (cf. 2 Tim 4:1, 18; 2 Pet 1:11) **and God** (cf. 1 Cor 6:9; Gal 5:21). **Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the children of disobedience.** Various Jewish writings refer to wicked persons who excused their evil actions on the grounds that God does not judge (e.g., Deut 32:47; Ps 10:3–4; 14:1; Mal 3:13–15; Wis 2; *T. Naph*. 3.1). The author of Ephesians says, "Do not listen to such people. They lie!"

The Two Ways—Part 3

The third segment of the Two Ways form is found in 5:7–14. It is introduced with the usual "therefore" and "walk" (5:7–8). This paragraph employs a dualism of darkness and light. The unfolding thought of this unit forms the following pattern: (A) what not to do and why (5:7–8a), (B) what to do (5:8b–10), and (A′) what not to do and why (5:11–14). The (A) and (A′) segments are formally parallel, both forbidding participation in a Gentile lifestyle and explaining why it is to be avoided (*gar*, "for").

Verses 7–8a (A) run: **Therefore do not be participants with them** (= the Gentiles)**, for you were formerly darkness but now are light** (cf. Matt 5:14, "you are the light"; Acts 26:18, "turn from darkness to light") **in your dependence on the Lord** (*en kyriō*). (B) **Walk as children of light** (cf. 1QS III, 20–21; 1 Thess 5:5)**—for the fruit of the light is with all goodness and righteousness and truth—approving what is pleasing to the Lord.** (A′) **[Walk,] not participating in the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even confront** (or "expose") **[those who are doing such], for the things being done in secret by them are shameful even to talk about; but everything confronted** (or "exposed," *elenchomena*) **by the light will be illumined, for all that is illumined is light. Therefore it says, "Wake up, sleeping one, and rise from the dead, and the Christ will shine upon you"** (source of quotation unknown)**.**

There are two ways to read this difficult passage. The one sees the text as referring to the confrontation of *believers* who are acting unacceptably; the other understands the verses to refer to the exposing of *unbelievers'* sins.

1. If the ones exposed (or confronted) are believers, the closest thing to it in the Pauline corpus is found in 1 Tim 5:20 ("those who persist in sin rebuke [*elenche*] in the presence of all"; cf. 1QS IX, 16–18, "He should not reproach or argue with the men of the pit but instead hide the counsel of the law in the midst of the men of sin. He should reproach with truthful knowledge and with just judgment those who choose the path, each one according to his spirit"). The argument runs like this. Believers are light. Some in the community, however, have sinned. Believers are to reprove them and so bring to light their faults. When their faults are exposed they are revealed, and every sin that is revealed can no longer remain. The one who has committed the sin is now light, that is, restored to his or her proper nature as light. The hymn in verse 14 is then understood as analogous to *Pss. Sol.* 16.1–4: "When my soul slumbered, being far from the Lord, God kept me alive." That is, God has reclaimed a backslider (Best 2004, 496–98).

2. If the ones being confronted are unbelievers, the closest thing to it in the Pauline corpus is 1 Cor 14:24–25. There, in the context of Christian

worship Paul urges the practice of prophecy as preferable to uninterpreted tongues. The reason given is that if all prophesy and an unbeliever enters, that one will be confronted (*elenchetai*) and called to account by all. The unbeliever whose heart's secrets have been disclosed may be converted. The confronting mentioned in Eph 5:11–14 is associated with worship, and the confrontation or exposure of an unbeliever's sin comes in that context. The text, then, is about the possible conversion of one who currently lives in darkness. In this case the following hymn makes good sense. It speaks about the confrontation ("arise . . . get up") and about the need of the non-Christian ("you who are sleeping . . . dead"), and it promises that the light of Christ's salvation will shine upon the needy one ("and Christ will shine upon you"; Engberg-Pedersen 1989).

Either reading is possible, and neither is without problems. If a decision has to be made between them, the opening of the subunit ("you are light"; "do not associate with them"; "take no part in the works of darkness," pointing to the relationship between believers and unbelievers) and the conclusion ("rise from the dead," referring to unbelievers; cf 2:1, 5) would seem to be better understood if the ones exposed were unbelievers.

The Two Ways—Part 4

The fourth and final component in the Two Ways form in Eph 4:17–5:21 is 5:15–21. As usual, the paragraph is introduced by "therefore" and "walk." There are striking similarities between Eph 5:15–20 and Col 3:16–4:5, as shown in table 8.

Table 8.
Parallels between Ephesians and Colossians
(after Perkins 1997, 122–23)

Theme	Ephesians	Colossians
Walk as wise / in wisdom	5:15	4:5
Redeeming the time	5:16	4:5
Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, singing	5:19	3:16
All things in the name of the Lord Jesus . . . give thanks	5:20	3:17

It is organized around three contrasts expressed by "not" (*mē*) and "but" (*alla*) (5:15, 17, 18; Hoehner 2002, 690–99). The first contrast is found in 4:15–16: **Watch carefully, therefore, how you are walking, *not* as unwise *but* as wise, taking advantage of every opportunity because the days are evil** (cf. Eph 5:7, and 1QS IV, 24, which says that the children of light walk in wisdom). The second contrast comes in verse 17: **Because of this do *not* be foolish *but* discern what the will of God is.** The third contrast occurs in verses 18–21: **Do *not* be drunk with**

Singing to the Lord in Asia Minor

Pliny the Younger, governor of the Roman province of Bithynia from AD 111 to 113, wrote to Emperor Trajan for advice regarding the treatment of Christians. He had already executed a number of them simply for refusing to give up Christianity, even though he confessedly knew nothing about Christianity. He spared the more flexible defendents, who agreed to worship the emperor's image and curse Christ. Some of these described Christianity as follows:

"They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food—but ordinary and innocent food. Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations."

—Pliny, *Letters* 10.96

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wine, which is debauchery, *but* **be filled with the Spirit** (cf. the contrast, "drunk . . . filled with the Spirit," in 1 Sam 1:12–18 and Acts 2:13). Josephus, responding to an anti-Jewish polemic that accused Jews of drunkenness, accented the sobriety of Jewish worship: "Our sacrifices are not occasions for drunken self-indulgence—such practices are abhorrent to God—but for sobriety" (*C. Ap*. 2.195–199). Imperial society was sensitive about excesses in worship.

There follows in verses 19–21 a series of participles, each dependent on the verb "be filled." These participial phrases describe the results of being filled with the Spirit. They are set forth in contrast to the result of drunkenness, namely, debauchery.

First, being filled with the Spirit results in **speaking to one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and psalming in your heart to the Lord** (4:19). For hymns addressed to one another, compare Eph 5:14; Phil 2:6–11; and Rev 7:15–17. For songs addressed to Christ see Pliny, who writes of Christians' singing a hymn unto Christ as to a god (*Ep*. 10.96; cf. Rev 5:9–10, 12). The context is that of Christian worship.

Second, being filled with the Spirit issues in **giving thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to our God and Father** (4:20; cf. Rom 1:8). Again a worship context is probable.

Third, being filled with the Spirit also has as a consequence **being subject to one another in reverence for** (or "fear of") **Christ** (4:21; contra Gombis, who takes the participles as stating the means by which one is filled by the Spirit). Here again a worship context is likely, as the following discussion will explain.

The Two Ways form found in 4:17–5:21 includes material not only about one's walk in the world but also about one's conduct in a worship setting. This should not be a surprise. Pagan cults sometimes felt it necessary to set forth guidelines for their members' conduct when they assembled for their worship rituals. One example comes from the minutes of the Bakchic Society convened for revision of the bylaws of the cult sometime before 178 BC (Danker 1982, 156–61). The new rules include: "Raucous and disruptive behavior at the meetings is not to be tolerated, and members are expected to speak and act their assigned roles in the sacred rites with all propriety and in good taste and under the direction of the priest or the arch-Bakchos." Further, if anyone starts a quarrel and is uncivil, that one is to be fined and excluded until the fine is paid. No one shall deliver a speech without recognition by the priest or the vice priest.

A second example comes from a Hellenistic cult group of the late second or early first century BC at Philadelphia in Lydia (Barton and Horsley 1981). A certain Dionysius received specific instructions from Zeus in his sleep. He was told to set up a new cult involving a range of Greek gods. He was also instructed to set up a code of behavior for those involved. The rules were placed with Agdistis, the deity responsible for instilling in adherents what was necessary to comply with the code of conduct. No discrimination on grounds of sex or civic status barred membership in the cult. Moral requirements were set for members, however, for misbehavior was believed to contaminate the rest of the group. If anyone performed or plotted misdeeds, the group was not to tolerate it nor keep silent, but rather expose it (cf. Eph 5:7–14). If there was any sexual misbehavior, the group was to expose it. Strictly moral behavior was necessary because it was believed that the gods set up in that *oikos* ("household") would not tolerate those who transgressed. The same kind of problems arose in Christian assemblies (cf. 1 Cor); hence the need to include instruction about worship in the Two Ways form.

Before progressing further, it is necessary to justify the inclusion of verse 21 in the unit 5:15–21. The household code in Eph 5:22–6:9 has caused much discomfort among many contemporary Christians, and various ways have been sought to soften the perceived subordination of women in the passage. One way that has been suggested by certain evangelical feminist interpreters (Mollenkott 1977; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1975) is to take 5:21 as the introduction to 5:22–6:9 and to read 5:22–6:9

in light of the "mutual submission" expressed in 5:21. But can 5:21 go with what follows (5:22–6:9) instead of with what precedes (5:18–20)? Moreover, does 5:21 really advocate mutual submission? We begin with the first question.

There are numerous reasons for taking 5:21 with what precedes rather than with what follows. Grammatically, 5:21 belongs with the preceding verses, not with 5:22–33. The participle *hypotassomenoi* ("being subject to") is dependent on the verb *plērousthe* ("be filled") in verse 18; it is one of the dependent participles that follow the finite verb "be filled" (Hoehner 2002, 716; O'Brien 1999, 388; Perkins 2000, 442).

The material in Eph 5:18–21, like that in 1 Cor 14, focuses on worship (Fee 1994, 719; MacDonald 2000, 319). Ephesians 5:19 ("speaking to one another with psalms" [*psalmois*]) corresponds to 1 Cor 14:26 ("everyone has a hymn" [*psalmon*]). Ephesians 5:20 ("giving thanks" [*eucharistountes*]) corresponds to 1 Cor 14:16–17 ("say the Amen to your thanksgiving" [*eucharistia*], "give thanks" [*eucharisteis*]). And Ephesians 5:21 ("being subject to one another" [*hypotassomenoi*]) corresponds to 1 Cor 14:32 ("the spirits of prophets are subject to [*hypotassetai*] prophets"). Both Eph 5:18–21 and 1 Cor 14 are dealing with worship that is inspired by the Spirit. This worship involves giving thanks, singing psalms, and community discernment of a kind that makes individual Christians subject to the larger community at worship. The "being subject" in Eph 5:21, then, most naturally addresses issues in worship, not issues in the household.

A further problem with taking verse 21 as the introduction to verses 22–33 is that the supposed theme of "mutual submission" does not fit the sections on husbands, parents, and masters. There is no mutual submission in these three categories. Submissiveness is not reciprocated by husbands, parents, and masters (Bruce 1984, 383).

While it may be alleged that the presence of *hypotassein* ("be subject to") in verses 21 and 24 establishes a connection, it does not follow that the two verses must be part of the same thought unit. The verb may rather be a linking word holding two separate paragraphs together, like *peripatein* ("walk") in Eph 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, and 15 (cf. "judge" in 1 Cor 5:12–13; 6:2–3; and "evil" in 1 Cor 6:9, 13).

The absence of a verb at the start of a new thought unit has parallels elsewhere in canonical Paul (e.g., Phil 2:5b; 2 Tim 3:16). The imperative copula, moreover, is missing in Rom 12:9a; 2 Cor 8:16; and Col 4:6.

While *phobō* ("fear, reverence") in verse 21 may form an inclusion with *phobētai* ("to fear, reverence") in verse 33, it does not necessarily follow that verse 21 is therefore part of the section defined by that inclusion. Inclusions are not always included in the unit being framed. For example, "walk" in 4:1 and 4:17 constitute an inclusion (L. M. White 1987, 222),

but verse 17 is outside the unit formed by verses 1–16. Alternatively, it is possible to take "in reverence for Christ" (5:21) not as the conclusion to the sentence that ends in verse 21 but as the beginning of the sentence that begins in verse 22.

Does 5:21 really advocate mutual submission? Even if taken with 5:22–33, the appeal to submit to one another for Christ's sake most likely means that the various members of the household who are in nondominant roles are to submit to the dominant members. Although *allēlōn* ("one another") is usually assumed to require a reciprocal meaning, that is incorrect; compare John 6:43, 52, where it is reflexive. Furthermore, Eph 5:21's *allēlois* is equivalent to verse 19's *heautois* ("one another"). So one may translate verse 21, "out of reverence for Christ, be subject among yourselves." The verse then means simply, "Obey those whom you are supposed to obey" (see Walden 2003). In verse 21, being subject to one another means that, in Christian worship, individuals filled with the Spirit submit to the community filled with the Spirit. Moreover, what follows after 5:21 in 5:22–6:9 shows no signs of an egalitarian principle. Consequently, one may conclude that Eph 5:21 goes with what precedes it (Best 2004, 517, 523) and that Eph 5:21 does not teach mutual submission.

Theological Issues

The Imitation of God

The author of Eph 5:1 exhorts his Gentile readers to "be imitators of God, as beloved children" (5:1). This is language that would have been familiar and meaningful to ancient Mediterranean people. A brief survey of opinions will illustrate.

Plato believed the imitator of God will be good because God is good (*Gorg*. 470e). Contemplation brings knowledge of God and results in likeness to him (cf. *Phaedrus*). The philosopher used certain terminology interchangeably: being made like God (*homoiōsis theō,* e.g., *Theaet*. 176a), imitator of God (*mimoumenos* of God, e.g., *Phaedr*. 252d, 253b), in the image and likeness of God (*theoeides te kai theoeikelon*, e.g., *Resp*. 501b), resemblance to himself (i.e., to God; *paraplēsia heautō*, e.g., *Tim*. 29e), and those following God (*ton akolouthēsonton tō theō,* e.g., *Leg*. 716bc).

Although imitation of God is not found in the LXX, it was part of Hellenistic Judaism's thought world (cf. *Let. Aris*. 187–88, 210, 281) and becomes the great theme of Philonic ethics. Philo uses the concept in several ways. He says kings and rulers are imitators of God (*Spec*. 4.187–188). Philo says the good king does not imitate God by dressing up in a

costume to look like Heracles with his lion's skin or Apollo with the sun-rays encircling his head; rather, he attains likeness to God by imitating God's virtues (*Legat*. 79, 95). Philo also says that parents are imitators of God (*Decal*. 51 and 120). Indeed, all humans ought to be imitators of God (*Leg*. 1.48; 4.73; *Det*. 160; *Sacr*. 68; *Virt*. 168; *Spec*. 2.225; 4.72–73).

Two first-century philosophers also utilized the concept. Seneca says that the good person is God's pupil, his imitator and true offspring (*Prov*. 1.5.7–8; 6.1). He also says that true worship is to believe the gods, to acknowledge their majesty and goodness, and to imitate them (*Ep*. 95.50). Epictetus asserts, "It is of prime importance for those who would please and obey the deities to be as much like them as lies within their power. If fidelity is a divine characteristic, then they are to be faithful; if generous, they are to be generous; if beneficent, they are to be beneficent; if magnanimous, they are to be magnanimous. In brief, they are to do and say everything in imitation of God" (*Diatr*. 2.14.12–13).

Second-century Christians used the concept of imitation in several ways. Christians are to imitate God (Ign. *Rom*. 6.3; *Eph*. 1.1; *Trall*. 1.2; *Diogn*. 10.4–6; one cannot imitate God through injustice; one imitates God through goodness). The Christian apologist Aristides of Athens (ca. AD 120) writes, "The Jews imitate God's goodness by beneficence" (*Apol*. 14). Jesus imitated God (Ign. *Phld*. 7.2, "Be imitators of Jesus Christ as he was of the Father"). Christians were also to imitate Jesus Christ (*Phld*. 7.2; *Eph*. 10.3; Pol. *Phil*. 8.1–2, referring to 1 Pet 2:22, 24, says "Let us be imitators of his [Jesus'] endurance . . . for this is the example [*hypogrammon*] he gave us"; *Mart*. *Pol*. 1:2 speaks of Christians as being imitators of the Lord [Jesus]).

The concept of imitation is also found in rabbinic sources. Three traditions focus on Rabbi Saul (second century). *Sifra* on Lev 19:2 recounts, "Of Abba Saul it is said—it was he who used to comment on the word of God, 'You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy,' by explaining: 'It behooves the royal retinue to imitate the King.'" *Mekilta* 37a reads, "Abba Saul said: 'Be like God; as God is gracious and merciful so be thou gracious and merciful.'" *Sifre* on Deut 11:22, 49 declares, "Abba Saul speaks of the one who imitates the qualities of God." The Babylonian Talmud tells how the third-century rabbi Hama b. Hanina said that the imitation of the love and mercy of God finds expression in clothing the naked, caring for the sick, comforting the mourners, and burying the dead (*Sotah* 14a). From even this brief survey one can see the concept of the imitation of God was widespread in Mediterranean antiquity.

In the New Testament only Eph 5:1 uses the language of imitation of God. Matthew 5:44–45, however, has the concept but without the language of imitation. Moreover, Paul can say in 1 Cor 11:1, "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ." In 1 Thess 1:6–7 he speaks of the readers being

imitators "of us" and "the Lord." Also in 1 Pet 2:21 one hears about "following" in Jesus' steps.

In modern times Christians have sometimes been hostile to the very notion of imitation, whether of God or Christ. Lindars (1973) even claims that the idea of the imitation of God is not biblical. This hostility has been due, in large measure, to a failure to understand the ancient Mediterranean concept. Two things in particular assist our comprehension of ancient imitation. First, the ancients knew that imitation was not a copying of individual acts. Isocrates speaks about imitating the character of someone, the person's thoughts and purposes (*Evag*. 73–77). Brant explains that in the classical world *mimēsis* ("imitation") is a process whereby one expresses the essential characteristics of the object one imitates (1993, 287–88). The imitator is involved in the conscious effort to bring an idea to expression. Imitation is not mimicry or rote repetition. The imitator is not a mirror reflection of the object. The product of *mimēsis* is not a copy. Second, imitation was not something done without aid. Plutarch says that virtuous deeds "implant in those who search them out a great and zealous eagerness which leads to imitation" (*Per*. 1.3–4). Such deeds dispose those who admire them to emulate the people who performed them (2.2). Understood in the ancient sense, the imitation of God can most certainly fit within the overall biblical pattern of religion. As we will see, it is crucial to the author of Ephesians.

Sometimes commentators criticize the Two Ways section of Ephesians because the author does not cover all the issues that Gentiles would need addressed in their daily walk and corporate worship; nor does the author set out a basis for further development of ethical thinking in situations not covered by the Two Ways form (e.g., Best 2004, 642–59). As a result, the Two Ways form in Ephesians is judged deficient when compared with the authentic letters of Paul. Both criticisms can be addressed by the same data. In the Two Ways form, "Paul" made the "ideal king as living law" and the "imitation of God" the basis of Christian ethics. This means that Christian ethics do not consist of a series of casuistic rules; rather, the concrete guidelines given in 4:17–5:21 function as illustrations of the direction that ethical reflection on the Christ event and the nature of God would take. Further development of ethical thinking is the task of every Christian on the basis of a contemplation of Christ and the imitation of God.

The Function of the Two Ways Form

How does the Two Ways form function in the overall argument of Ephesians? Interpreters of Ephesians have recognized that the letter is about the plan of God to unify the cosmos through Christ. They have also seen that reconciliation of Jew and Gentile in a new humanity and

concord in the Christian household are important pieces of the plan. To my knowledge, however, no one has attempted to see the function of 4:17–5:21 within this same interpretive scheme. The original auditors, however, may very well have heard it that way.

Dio Chrysostom expresses the common sentiment of his time and place, a time and place very near that of the readers of Ephesians. He says,

> Only by getting rid of the vices that excite and disturb men, the vices of envy, greed, contentiousness, the striving in each case to promote one's own welfare at the expense of both one's native land and the common weal— only so, I repeat, is it possible ever to breathe the breath of harmony in full strength and vigor and to unite upon a common policy. (*Or.* 34.19)

In between the proclamation of the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile in a new humanity and the call for concord in the Christian household, the author of Ephesians inserts a Two Ways form that focuses on putting off the old person and forsaking the vices that divide humans. Why would he put this type of material here? If the common cultural assumption is what Dio Chrysostom articulates, a section devoted to the elimination of the vices that divide people is most appropriate. Ephesians 4:17–5:21 becomes one more plank in the letter's aim to describe and draw its audience into participation in the divine plan of the reunification of the cosmos.

Ephesians 5:22–6:9

Introductory Matters

Ephesians 5:22–6:9 is a large thought unit that belongs to the genre known as "household code" (*Haustafel*). Some of the earliest Christian writings contain such material. These codes are of two types. The first type is a code of duties for Mediterranean households (Eph 5:22–6:9; Col 3:18–4:1; 1 Pet 2:13–3:7; *Did.* 4.9–11; *Barn.* 19.5, 7). The second type is a code of duties for the household of God, the church, and is modeled after the codes for households (1 Tim 2:1–2, 8–12; 3:8–13; 5:1–3, 17–22; 6:1–2; Titus 2:1–10; *1 Clem.* 1.3; 21.6–9; 38.2; Ign. *Pol.* 4.1–6.2; Pol. *Phil.* 4.2–6.1).

The history of the modern study of the passages in the first category can be told in terms of several major books and key articles. Karl Weidinger, a student of Martin Dibelius and building on his teacher's work, produced a key volume on the codes in 1928. He argued that the Christian sources derived their codes from Stoic tables of duties. A key source for this study was the second-century AD Stoic Hierocles, whose sixth section on household management offered the best parallels for the Christian codes. He dealt with husbands and wives, authority over servants, education of children, and use of household income. The codes in their Christian dress served as parenesis and were addressed to no specific situation.

James E. Crouch in 1972 and Wolfgang Schrage in 1974 advocated a second major position on the codes. They agreed that Stoic lists of duties may lie in the background of the household codes in Christian sources. For example, Seneca (*Ep.* 94.1ff.) relates that the Stoic Ariston rejected all forms of casuistry, including precepts concerning dealings with one's

wife, children, and slaves. Here is a schema limited to relationships in the household. The main source for the Christian codes, however, lies in Hellenistic Jewish codes. For example, Philo (*Spec*. 3.169–171) says a household's management is assigned to men and that women should be subject to them. Women do, however, have their sphere of authority within the household. In the *Decalogue* (165–167), he deals with parents' authority over children and masters' treatment of slaves and slaves' dealings with masters. In Philo, then, the three sets of relationships are found, the duties are mentioned in pairs, and one member of each pair is to be subordinate to the other. In *On the Posterity of Cain* (181), Philo criticizes Onan (Gen 38:9): "Will you not . . . by providing only your individual profit, be doing away with the best things in the world, . . . honor paid to parents, loving care of a wife, bringing up children, happy and blameless relations with domestic servants, management of a house?" *Pseudo-Phocylides* speaks about duties to wives, to children, and to slaves (175–227). Josephus gives an exposition of the law under the headings of duties to God, to wives, to children, to parents, to friends, and to strangers (*C. Ap*. 2.190–219). These tables of duties summarizing the Jewish law were designed for use in Jewish missionary activity among the Gentiles. When Christians took them up, however, their function shifted. In sources like 1 Cor 7:1–24 and 11:2–16, it seems some Christians held to an overrealized eschatology, claiming that they had transcended the orders of creation, including such categories as slavery and marriage. The emerging orthodoxy in the Pauline circle used the household codes to combat excesses due to an overemphasis on the equality created by the Spirit.

Dieter Lührmann in 1980 and David L. Balch in 1981 moved the discussion to a new level. They rejected the Stoic origins of the Christian codes. They found their origins in other Greek philosophers' works on household management. For example, Plato in his *Laws* discusses the agreed upon rights in the matter of ruling and being ruled, alike in states and households, including parents and children, masters and slaves (1.627A). *Laws* 6.771E–7.824C concerns household management. Within that discussion, the matter of marriage comes up, as does that of slaves and children. Aristotle says marriage is a union of a natural ruler and a natural subject (*Pol*. 1.1252a 24–28). When a slave is added to the mix, this is called a "house" (*Pol*. 1.1252b 9–10). Several households equal a village (*Pol*. 1.1252b 16); several villages equal a city-state (*Pol*. 1.1252b 28–31). He says,

> Household management falls into departments corresponding to the parts of which the household in its turn is composed; and the household in its perfect form consists of slaves and freedmen. The investigation of everything

should begin with its smallest parts and the primary and smallest parts of the household are master and slave, husband and wife, father and children; we ought, therefore, to examine the proper constitution and character of each of these three relationships. (*Pol.* 1.1253b 1–14)

The fourth element in the household is the relation of income to expenditure. A series of manuals on household management are known from the fourth (Xenophon, *Oec.*), the third (ps.-Aristotle, *Oec.*), the second (ps.-Aristotle, *Mag. mor.*) and the first (Arius Didymus) centuries BC. Balch and Lührmann contend that the pattern of submissiveness is based on a topos "concerning household management." The early Christian authors utilize the first three elements and drop the fourth, which dealt with finances. That this approach continued into New Testament times can be seen from the itinerant philosopher Dio Chrysostom, whose *Concerning Household Management* discussed the role of the master of slaves, a wife's duty to love her husband, and the rearing of children. Working from 1 Peter, Balch takes the position that the household codes functioned as part of early Christian missionary strategy (e.g., 1 Pet 2:12; 3:1–2). If Christians who had changed their gods still maintained order in the household according to the best values of the culture, then they would decrease the hostility of their pagan neighbors and perhaps encourage them to convert.

In 1989 Ulrich Luz and Georg Strecker produced articles with similar theses that were published in the same book. They argued that while the component parts of the household codes in Colossians and Ephesians have parallels in the milieu of household management literature and probably have roots there, the actual codes as they appear in the New Testament are unique and so are likely Christian creations. Witherington in 1988 (43–46) and Lars Hartman in 1997 (179–94) sounded the same note. They doubt whether there was just such a precise form before Col 3—assuming Colossians is earlier than Ephesians.

Certain conclusions can be drawn from this continuing research. First, the contents of the household codes in the New Testament were rooted in Mediterranean culture. Second, these contents were concerned with household management. That the New Testament codes drop the component on finances reflects the Mediterranean belief that the major problems have to do with relations among persons (Aristotle, *Pol.* 1.1259b 3). Third, they probably originated in classical Greek philosophy, which influenced Jews in the Hellenistic world, and then made their way into Christian circles, in part at least via Hellenistic Judaism. Fourth, the specified duties were very much the same in pagan, Jewish, and early Christian usage. Only the motivations for the specified behavior differed significantly. Fifth, since the contents are found elsewhere but the concise

form is not, it may be that the early Christians created the precise form found in Colossians and Ephesians. Sixth, the functions of the codes are still debated. In some cases—notably 1 Peter—the code functioned apologetically in the interests of missionary strategy (3:1–2). In other cases—including Colossians and Ephesians—the evangelistic function is not readily apparent (but cf. Col 4:5–6). In the case of Colossians the code could have functioned as a check on an overrealized eschatology (3:22–25). In Ephesians it seems to serve the function of illustrating how peaceful Christian household relations reflect God's purpose of unifying all things through Christ (1:10).

The material in Eph 5:22–6:9 deals with three relationships: that of wives and husbands, that of children and fathers, and that of slaves and masters. According to Aristotle, these are the three basic relationships that make up a household. In each case the subordinate member is mentioned first. In each case the type of relationship advocated is related to Christ and is not based on the behavior of the other human party. The focus of the code in Ephesians is on the first set of relationships, that of wives and husbands, whereas in Colossians it is on slaves. It is assumed that the household is Christian (cf. 1 Peter, where the households are not Christian). All six groups within the three pairs are addressed directly, treating all the categories with dignity (Osiek 2002). In contrast, the wives are not addressed directly in *1 Clement* (1.3; 21.6–9) and Polycarp (*Phil*. 4.2); rather, the husbands are told to instruct them in their duties. Similarly, in the Neopythagorean teaching on household duties (Balch 1992), slaves are not addressed directly. The masters are told how to manage slaves, but no mention is made of masters' responsibilities to slaves.

Tracing the Train of Thought

Wives and husbands constitute the first of the three pairs that make up the household code in Eph 5:22–6:9. Material dealing with wives is found in 5:22–24; husbands are discussed in 5:25–32. A summation of the argument for both partners concludes the section (5:33). We

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An Outline of Ephesians 5:22–6:9

Wives-husbands (5:22–33)

> **Wives:** *hypotassein* (**to be subject to**) (5:22–24)

> **Husbands:** *agapan* (**to love**) (5:25–32)

> **Summation: husbands love; wives** *phobein* (**to fear/ to reverence**) (5:33)

Children-fathers (6:1–4)

> **Children:** *hypakouein* (**to obey**) (6:1–3)

> **Fathers: do not provoke to anger, but bring them up with discipline (6:4)**

Slaves-masters (6:5–9)

> **Slaves:** *hypakouein* (**to obey**) (6:5–8)

> **Masters: do good, leave off threats (6:9)**

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begin with the section on wives (5:22–24). The argument consists of two parts: what the wives are to do and how they are to do it. What they should do is given in verse 22. According to the best manuscript evidence (e.g., 𝔓⁴⁶, Vaticanus) the verse has no verb. A verb has to be provided—and was by some manuscripts (e.g., Sinaiticus, D, K). The context (5:24) demands that the supplied verb should be some form of *hypotassein* ("to be subject"). Since in the complete household code each pair is introduced by a heading—the husbands (5:25), the children (6:1), the fathers (6:4), the slaves (6:5), the masters (6:9)—the opening of 5:22 should also be so translated: **The wives: [let them be subject to] their own husbands as [they are] to the Lord**. This is not so much a reference to the wives' individual relations to Christ as to their relation to the Lord as part of the church. This is made clear by the argument in 5:23–24. These verses say *how* wives are to be subject to their husbands: *as* they are to the Lord. The point is not, "Be subject because you are subject to Christ," but rather, "Be subject in a way that is analogous to your subjection to Christ." The *why* comes next. The verses fall into a chiastic pattern. Wives should be subject to their husbands

> A *because* **the husband is the head** (= ruler, as in 1:22; not source, as in 4:15–16; Dawes 1998, 123–35) **of the wife** (5:23a)
> B *as* **the Christ is head of the church** (5:23b),
>   C **(he is savior of the body)** (5:23c);
> B′ **but** *as* **the church is subject to Christ** (5:24a)
> A′ **so also the wives [are to be subject] to the husbands in everything** (5:24b).

The argument is clear. As Christian wives within the church are subject to Christ as head, so in the household they should be subject to their husbands. The reason given is that the husband is head—but how he is the head is not explained. In the culture of that time and place, it was generally believed the husband's headship was a law of nature. The wider culture shared the assumption that wives should submit to their husbands. For example, Aristotle says, "The rule of the household is a monarchy, for every house is under one head" (*Pol*. 1.1255b; 1254ab). Dionysius of Halicarnassus praises Roman household relationships because of their insistence on the obedience of wives, children, and slaves (*Ant. rom*. 2.24.3–2.27.4). Josephus stresses subordination within the three household relationships in order to show that Judaism accepted the basic ethic of Greco-Roman society and so was not subversive to it (*C. Ap*. 2.201).

It is not possible to take the sting out of the insistence that wives are to "be subject" by contrasting their status with that of children and slaves,

Obedient Wives

Until the latter half of the twentieth century, traditional wedding vows used in many churches, grounded in the assumption that texts such as Eph 5:21–24 posited a blueprint for Christian marriage, required brides to promise to obey their husbands. For example, "The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony" in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* of the Church of England reads as follows:

> "If no impediment be alleged, then shall the Curate say unto the Man,

> "Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?

> "The Man shall answer, I will.

> "Then shall the Priest say unto the Woman,

> "Wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honour, and keep him in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?

> "The Woman shall answer, I will."

who are required to "obey." The verb *hypotassein* has the connotation of a subordinate, submissive role. Further, Titus 2:9 and 1 Pet 2:18 use *hypotassein* for slaves as well as for wives. Moreover, 1 Pet 3:1, 5–6 uses "submit to" and "obey" interchangeably. The shift from "submit to" to "obey" in Eph 5–6 is stylistic only. Wives are asked to do the same thing as children and slaves.

How the Christian wives are to act is rooted in their relation to Christ. Their submission to Christ in church is the model for their submission to their husbands in the household. Here a distinctively Christian principle infuses the common cultural ethos.

Verses 25–32 focus on the husbands. Again the argument begins with what to do, in the form of two commands (5:25, 28). Verses 25–27 offer a first argument that consists of a *what* and a *how*. What should husbands do? **The husbands: you love** (*agapate*) **your wives as also the Christ loved the church** (5:25a). How should the husbands love their wives? They should love as Christ loved, namely, **and gave himself for her** (5:25b). The goal of Christ's act of giving himself for the church was **in order that he might sanctify her** (= set her apart) **by a cleansing**

through the washing of water, by the word (5:26). The image here is likely that of the prenuptial bath of the bride, which had already been used for God's people in Ezek 16:8–14. The image of the bath refers here to the cleansing that has happened to God's people through the word of the gospel (cf. John 15:3; 1 Cor 6:11; Heb 10:22). In Ephesians Christ is the beautician (5:26–27), as God is in Ezek 16. Christ cleansed his bride-to-be **in order that he might present the church to himself as glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such flaw, but so that she might be holy and blameless** (5:27). In 2 Cor 11:2 Paul assumes the role of the bride's father, presenting the church to Christ. In Ephesians, Christ presents the bride to himself. "Paul" merely discloses the mystery of the reunification of the cosmos. Remember, all soteriological reality in Ephesians runs through Christ as agent.

Verses 28–32 offer a second argument about husbands that consists of a *what* and a *why*. The *what* comes in verse 28a: **So the husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies**. Here "body" (*sōma*) is not metaphorical but refers to the fleshly body of the husband. The reference to flesh (*sarx*) in verse 29 makes this clear (Dawes 1998, 153–54). Why they ought to love their wives as their own bodies is discussed in verses 28b–32. This material falls into an ABCC′B′A′ pattern. Love your wife as yourself because:

> A **The one who loves his own wife loves himself** (5:28b),
> > B **for no one ever hates his own flesh** (5:29a),
> > > C **but nourishes and cares for it** (5:29b),
> > > C′ **just as Christ [cares for] the church** (5:29c),
> > B′ **because we are members of his body** (5:30; here body is used metaphorically, referring to the church, as in 4:12; Dawes 1998, 154).
> A′ **"Because of this a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh"** (5:31; cf. Gen 2:24). **This mystery is great. I am speaking about Christ and about the church** (5:32).

What does it mean that a husband "who loves his own wife loves himself"? Genesis 2:24 exposes the assumption: since the husband and wife are one flesh, to love one's wife is to love oneself. What one loves, one nourishes and cares for. So there is an analogy when Christ cares for the church because we are members of his body. The text from Gen 2:24, interpreted with a Christian hermeneutic ("this mystery is great"), applies to Christ and the church as well as to husbands and wives (Hoehner 2002, 780; Dawes 1998, 183). There is an essential bond between both sets. In referring to the interpretation of a scriptural text as a mystery,

"Paul" speaks in a way parallel to what may be found at Qumran (e.g., 1QpHab VII, 1–5 refers to a mystery hidden in scripture and unveiled in the last days; cf. also CD I, 13–14). In interpreting Gen 2:24 eschatologically, Eph 5:31–32 is parallel to what Paul does in 1 Cor 9:8–12.

In interpreting the mystery it is best to avoid extreme allegory. An example of such an allegorical reading runs as follows: since the First Adam did not leave father and mother to be joined to his wife, the Genesis text must be referring to the Last Adam, who abandoned family ties for the Kingdom of God. Just as the body of the First Adam was the source of Eve at creation, so also the Last Adam was the source of the church and will be united with her at the eschaton (Muddiman 2001, 270). Such fanciful readings are unnecessary. "Paul" merely provides a scriptural basis for bringing together wife-husband and church-Christ in an analogous relationship (Best 2004, 557). The use of the term "mystery" indicates that a previously hidden meaning is now brought to light. The text's evidence for the connection between Christ and the church is now revealed (M. Barth 1974, 2:734). A previously unknown understanding of Gen 2:24 is being divulged, an understanding different from the surface meaning.

The best assistance for understanding the assumptions behind this argument is found in 1 Cor 6:16–17 (Talbert 2002a, 47–49; cf. John Chrysostom, *Hom. ad Eph*. 19). In 6:12–20 Paul argues against a Christian's having sex with a prostitute. On the basis of Gen 2:24 ("The two shall become one flesh") the apostle asks, "Do you not know that whoever is repeatedly sexually united with a prostitute becomes one body with her?" (1 Cor 6:16). This union is incompatible with the Christian's union with the Lord. "But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him" (6:17). Paul believes that repeated sexual intercourse bonds male and female together so that they can be described as one flesh, one body. He also believes that the gift of the Spirit bonds a Christian to the Lord who gave the Spirit so that they can be described as one Spirit. The scriptural text that underwrites all this is Gen 2:24. So in Eph 5:31–32, "Paul" appeals to Gen 2:24 to argue that a bond between husband and wife is analogous to that between Christ and the church. It is this bond that makes the husband's love for his wife and Christ's love for the church a love for oneself. So "Paul" spiritualizes a scriptural text (cf. Gal 4:24–26) to draw out the similarity between Christ's love for the church and a husband's love for his wife (Dawes 1998, 183; Hoehner 2002, 780).

In advocating a husband's love for his wife, the Ephesian code reflects the best of the larger culture. Plutarch says that a husband should rule his wife "not as a lord rules his property but as the soul rules the body, sympathizing with her and fostering their growing together by a good attitude" (*Conj. praec*. 142E). Stobaeus refers to Zaleucus and Charondas

and in two texts that reflect pre-Christian street-philosophy, thought to be Pythagorean (*Anth*. 4.2.19, 24). The pseudo-Charondas text contains a compilation of duties of particular social groups that revolve around the classical household. We hear, "Every man should love his wife" (line 101). *Pseudo-Phocylides* 195 also exhorts, "Love your own wife."

Verse 33 summarizes the argument so far: **So then, each one of you, let him love his own wife as himself, and the wife, let her fear** (or "reverence, respect") **her husband**. In advocating a wife's fear of or respect for her husband Ephesians again reflects the best of the culture. Xenophon said that a wife must fear/respect her husband (*Oec*. 7.25). Pseudo-Aristotle says the same thing (*Oec*. 3.144.2). In 1 Pet 3:2 the same sentiment is set forth. The pseudo-Zaleucos code, however, distinguishes between fear and respect when it says, "It is fitting that slaves do what is right out of fear, while those who are free persons do good out of respect" (228.13; Standhartinger 2000, 120–21). The discussion of the first of three pairs within the ancient Mediterranean household is now complete.

The second pair in the household code consists of children and parents (6:1–4). Children are treated in verses 1–3; fathers in verse 4. The segment that deals with children has two parts, each with a *what* and a *why*.

The first part is found in verse 1. *What* to do begins with a signal of the group being addressed, **The children**; then follows the exhortation, **obey your parents in dependence upon the Lord** (*en kyriō*, found in 𝔓⁴⁶, Sinaiticus, etc.; it is missing from Vaticanus, D, etc.). In the Mediterranean world obedience to parents was the chief virtue of children. This was true for pagans, Jews, and Christians alike (Balla 2003). Euripides says, "Children ought to obey the command of their parents" (*Arch*. 234). Aulus Gellius collects quotations from a series of philosophers on the subject of the obedience of children to their parents (*Noct. att*. 2.7). Iamblichus reports that Pythagoras taught that children should be obedient to their parents (*Vita* 23.8–9). The same values are reflected by Philo (*Spec*. 2.236). In Rom 1:30, disobedience to parents is a fruit of idolatry, while in 2 Tim 3:2 such disobedience is a sign of the end time, when everything goes from bad to worse. The *why* is brief and to the point: **for this is right**.

The second part comes in verses 2–3; *what* to do is given as a quotation from scripture: **Honor your father and mother** (6:2a; Exod 20:12 // Deut 5:16). This commandment is cited with approval by Jesus (Mark 7:10; 10:19). In Mediterranean antiquity this honor included providing for them and burying them. Hierocles says: "We should, therefore, procure for our parents liberal food . . . a bed, sleep, unction, a bath, garments; and in short, all the necessities which the body requires, that they may never at any time experience the want of any of these; in thus acting,

imitating their care about our nurture, when we were infants" (*What Manner We Ought to Conduct Ourselves towards Our Parents*; Yarbrough 1995, 137). Sirach says, "O son, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives" (3:12). The *Sibylline Oracles* condemns as impious "as many as abandoned their parents in old age" (2.273–275). Tobit has the father say to his son, "My son, when I die, bury me, and do not neglect your mother. Honor her all the days of your life. . . . When she dies bury her beside me in the same grave" (4:3–4). In 1 Tim 5:8 we hear, "Whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

Such honor is required because the scripture cited **is the first commandment with a promise** (6:2b). That promise is quoted: **in order that it may go well with you** (Exod 20:12 and Deut 5:16 in LXX; Deut 5:16 only in MT) **and you will be long-lived upon the earth** (6:3; Exod 20:12 and Deut 5:16). Is this really the first commandment with a promise? Exodus 20:5–6 presents Yahweh as saying that "no other gods besides me" held a potential blessing or curse. Apparently the author of Ephesians did not consider that a promise related to a commandment. So in this code several motivations are offered for proper treatment of parents by children: it is right, and it is commanded by scripture, which also makes a promise to those honoring parents.

Fathers are addressed in 6:4. Again, the section begins by identifying the category of addressee—**The fathers**—and proceeds to an exhortation: **do not incite your children to anger but bring them up with the Lord's discipline** (*paideia*, "education") **and correction**. It was a Mediterranean value that fathers teach their children (e.g., Tacitus, *Dial*. 29.1–3; Diotogenes, *De piet*. 76.2–4; Josephus, *C. Ap*. 1.12 § 60; *1 Clem*. 21; Pol. *Phil*. 4.2). Ephesians agrees with the Greco-Roman and Jewish milieus in making fathers ultimately responsible for the religious upbringing of their children. Ephesians reflects enlightened cultural values in putting a restraint on parental authority. Seneca (*Ira* 2.21.1–3) and Plutarch (*Lib. ed*. 12a § 8) recommend that children be led into proper behavior with encouragement and reason, not by brute force, which will only discourage them. Excessive severity was also discouraged by *Pseudo-Phocylides* 207. Curiously, Ephesians supplies a *what* here but no *why*.

Verses 5–9 provides a third pair: slaves and masters. The material addressed to **slaves** comes in verses 5–8. There is the usual *what* and *why*. The *what* comes in three parts (6:5–7). First, **obey your human masters with fear and trembling** (= with seriousness) **in the sincerity of your hearts, as to Christ** (6:5). Second, **not with eye-service as people-pleasers but as slaves of Christ doing the will of God**

wholeheartedly (6:6). Third, **serving with goodwill, as to the Lord and not to human authority** (6:7).

Slavery had a long history in the Mediterranean world. Homer assumed it, as did the Hebrew patriarchs. The Mosaic law included regulations for slaves and masters (Exod 21:1–11, 32; Lev 25:6, 39–55; Deut 15:12–18). It is estimated that in New Testament times one third of the population of Greece and Italy was enslaved (Lincoln 1990, 417). "The main organizational difference between the economy of the ancient world and our own is that in antiquity the propertied classes derived their surplus, which enabled them to live as they pleased, not from the exploitation of free wage labor . . . but from unfree labor" (de Ste. Croix 1975, 15–16). The condition of slavery might result from war, piracy and brigandage, exposure of a child, sale of a child or self to pay debts, condemnation in the law courts, or birth to a slave mother. An individual acquired slaves by purchase, inheritance, or home breeding. Ancient slavery differed significantly from the form of slavery that once existed in the United States (Hoehner 2002, 801–2): race was not a factor; freed persons could sell themselves into slavery, knowing that they could later regain their freedom; slaves could become highly trained and educated, becoming tutors, professors, and physicians; they could become wealthy; slaves could eventually become free and then become Roman citizens. The treatment of slaves depended on their owners. Cruelty was real but not universal. Columella, a large estate owner in central Italy in the first century, urged that masters maintain good relationships with slaves, and that they be concerned about the slaves' well-being, abilities, and families (*Rust*. 1.8–9). The overall situation is reflected in Xenophon (*Oec*. 3.4). He says Socrates talked about two kinds of households: those from which slaves ran away again and again, and those in which slaves wanted to stay and work. The latter demonstrate a "principle of estate management worthy of examining."

The Greeks and Romans constructed two main types of philosophical justification for slavery. One position was that slavery is rooted in nature. Aristotle said, "[just as] it is natural for the body to be governed by the soul . . . so the male is by nature ruler and the female subject . . . and [some people] are by nature slaves for whom to be governed by authority is advantageous" (*Pol*. 1.1254b). Aristotle also articulates a second position, when he denies the very name of slave to the person who does not deserve to be in such a condition (*Pol*. 1.1255a 25–26). That person is not really a slave. Slavery, like poverty, war, riches, peace, is an accident of Fortune rather than of nature. It is a matter of indifference, affecting externals only. The good and the wise are never really slaves, even if that happens to be their actual condition; rather, such persons are really free.

The abolition of slavery is a modern phenomenon. The early church did not advocate abolition and probably would not have survived if it had. In various ways, however, when circumstances permitted, Paul sought the liberation of slaves. In 1 Cor 7:21, the Apostle says if a slave can gain his freedom, he is to make use of his freedom as a Christian (Harrill 1994; contra NRSV). In Philemon, Paul seems to suggest that Philemon should release Onesimus (Petersen 1985, 133, 135, 290).

The Ephesian household code assumes a Christian household that has slaves. From these slaves it asks for wholehearted effort in their duties. The *why* comes in 6:8: **knowing that each one, if he or she does anything good, this he or she will receive back from the Lord, whether he or she be slave or free**. Work for the Lord, and the Lord will reward you.

Masters are addressed in 6:9 with both a *what* and a *why*. What they are to do is spelled out in verse 9a: **And the masters: you are to do the same things** (= good) **to them, ceasing the threats**. Tacitus says that threats and punishments were the normal way of controlling slaves (*Ann*. 14.44). Successful household managers, however, offered the very advice found here in Ephesians. Seneca spoke of the necessity of avoiding anger and rage when dealing with slaves (*Ira* 3.24.2; 3.32.1). The *why* comes in verse 9b: **knowing that the Lord of them and of you is in heaven, and there is no partiality with him**. The reason for humane treatment of slaves here is not the margin of profit it will produce, but a Christian rationale. Christian slaves and Christian masters have the same Lord, who views the behavior of both with an impartial eye. It is implied that this Lord, at the judgment, will punish or reward impartially (cf. 2 Cor 5:10).

If one looks at the household code's place in the Ephesian letter as a whole, it is clear that it functions as yet another example of the reunification of the cosmos through Christ. In 1:10 God's plan for the fullness of time is said to be gathering up all things, in heaven and on earth, through Christ. It is the establishment of a cosmic unity and peace. In 2:11–22 the unification of Gentile and Jew in a new humanity and the reconciliation of both to the one God through Christ comprise a major example of the summing up of all things through Christ. This new unity between races is said in 3:10 to be a testimony to the heavenly powers of the wisdom of God. It must surely be a part of the summing up of all things, those in heaven as well as those on earth (1:10). In 4:1–3 the readers are exhorted to maintain the unity the Spirit has given through the peaceful bonding of Jew and Gentile in the church. In 4:17–5:21 the elimination of vices functions to enable concord. Now, in the household code (5:22–6:9), the Christian household's unity and harmony are sought

as yet another expression of the summing up of all things through Christ (Sampley 1971, 96).

The point of Eph 5:22–6:9 seems clear. In the Christian household the subordinate figures are to yield to the dominant ones, while the dominant figures are to relate lovingly and humanely to the subordinate ones. The unity and harmony produced by this type of household management is yet another evidence of God's summing up of all things through Christ. This focus on concord in the household would have been regarded very positively by the culture of the time, which viewed such household concord as a necessity. It was thought that a household's unity depended upon all members' behavior being in line with the prescriptions of the household codes. Aristides says, "there is nothing greater and better than this, than when husband and wife maintain their household with concordant thoughts" (*Or.* 24.7). He exhorts the people of Rhodes to "imitate the form and fashion of a household" because "there is an order that regulates the common life in the household. The fathers rule the sons and the master the slaves. This is a natural law declared by the gods" (*Or.* 24.32–35). In a similar vein Dio Chrysostom says, "take our households (*oikoi*) . . . their safety depends not only on the like-mindedness of master and mistress but also on the obedience of the servants. . . . Moreover, what benefit are children to parents, when through folly they begin to rebel against them" (*Or.* 38.15)? Plutarch sums up the cultural assumptions when he says, "every activity in a virtuous household is carried on by both parties in agreement, but discloses the husband's leadership and preferences" (*Mor.* 139D).

Mediterranean society attached such importance to concord in the household that if a man did not maintain concord at home, he was looked down upon and his counsel was dismissed. Plutarch tells how Philip inquired about harmony among the Greeks. Because he lacked harmony at home, he received a biting reply from Demaratus of Corinth. "A glorious thing for you, Philip, to be inquiring about the concord of Athenians and Peloponnesians, while you let your own household [*oikia*] be full of all this quarreling [*stasis*] and dissension [*dichonoia*]" (*Mor.* 70C). When the orator Gorgias delivered a speech to the Greeks at Olympia about concord, Melanthius replied, "This fellow is giving us advice about concord, and yet in his own household he has not prevailed upon himself, his wife, and maidservant, three persons only, to live in concord. . . . A man therefore ought to have his household well harmonized who is going to harmonize State, Forum, and friends" (Plutarch, *Mor.* 144B–C).

The culture within which Ephesians was written maintained three truths. First, it was considered of great importance to establish and preserve concord in the household. Second, a prerequisite for concord

in the household was that the different groups within the household behave in line with conventional rules of conduct (Bakke 2001, 126). Third, the household was regarded as a microcosm of the state (Aristotle, *Pol*. 1.1253b 1–14). As the household goes, so goes the city and the state. The focus of Ephesians on the Christian household's concord as a sign of the reunification of the cosmos would, therefore, have struck ancient Mediterraneans as a positive thing. What this letter's household code prescribed reflected the highest ethic of the culture.

Theological Issues

Ephesians 5:22–6:9 has been a flash point in current New Testament interpretation. Exegetically the point of the passage and its function within the overall argument of the letter is clear, but hermeneutically it has perplexed and divided interpreters as much as any text in the Bible. One recent commentator affirms that the author of the letter believed that following his exhortations would cause household relations to be transformed through Christ. Nevertheless, in spite of the humanizing approach taken by Ephesians, the letter still presents "a vision of household relations that is considered unjust today (and in the case of slavery, completely immoral)" (MacDonald 2000, 341). Two issues are at stake: women and slavery.

Women

Western biblical scholarship of late has focused attention primarily on the matter of women's relationships with their husbands. The problem that demands attention is the text's assumption of patriarchal authority and the insistence that wives submit to husbands. Is Eph 5:22–6:9 a blueprint for Christian marriage?

A number of different hermeneutical strategies have been employed. Some interpreters see Eph 5:22–33 as a defense of patriarchal order (Clark 1980; Knight 1991). They conclude that the health of the family depends on wives' submission to their husbands. Most interpreters, however, see patriarchy as a problem for the modern family rather than its salvation. As a result, a number of studies have used various devices to deal with the patriarchy of Eph 5:22–33.

Others argue that the patriarchal assumptions implicit in Eph 5:22–33 deprive the passage of normative value (Schüssler Fiorenza 1995; Dawes 1998, 197–99; Lambrecht 2001, 307). They deny that this parenesis constitutes "a timeless and universal prescription for marriage through the ages" (Lincoln 1990, 392). In fact, Eph 5:22–33 is a testimony to the author's failure to interpret the lordship of Christ aright (McFarland

2000). Sometimes the patriarchy is rejected but the exhortations to submit and to love are retained, provided they are applied to both marriage partners (Gielen 1990).

Still others attempt to interpret the text in such a way that will not be morally objectionable. For example, it is claimed that the household code should be read against the background of the alternative option of ascetic renunciation of household obligations, such as one finds in the *Acts of Paul* (Seim 1995). Or the code should be read in terms of the exhortation to mutual submission in Eph 5:21 (Mollenkott 1977; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1975; Osiek 1992, 84). Verse 21 is said to function as a critique of the rest of the passage; the following household code reflects a viewpoint with which the writer does not entirely agree (Sampley 1971, 117). Gager (1975) argues that the code should be read in light of the political realities of the time and so as a necessary adaptation in order to survive. Alternatively, the code can be read as an acceptance of patriarchy that nevertheless gives it new meaning through willing acceptance and meaningful motivation (Yoder 1994, 175–85). Or the code can be read in light of its transformation by two principles: "in the Lord" and "in love." The task of a contemporary Christian ethic is the same: to transform the structures of our time "in the Lord" and "in love" (Fuller 1978, 116–18; Dudrey 1999, 40). Suffice it to say that no hermeneutic of Eph 5:22–6:9 has won scholarly consensus.

To deal with the code hermeneutically one must first understand it as an organizational chart for a family business, not as a model for modern Christian marriage. One problem that Eph 5:22–33 presents for modern readers stems from the virtually unanimous assumption that the code is a model for Christian families. If so, then 5:22–33 provides "a model for Christian marriage" (Schnackenburg 1991, 240–41; cf. Lincoln 1990, 352, who asserts that the "primary aim in the pericope is to give instructions about marriage"). The problem is the obvious disconnect between the guild's historical research and its hermeneutics.

How would an ancient auditor have heard Eph 5:22–6:9? Take first of all the term *oikos*, usually translated by New Testament scholars as "household" and understood to mean "family." But what is an ancient household? I have found only one article that even raises the question about the nature of an ancient household—and that in connection with the issue of infant baptism (Strobel 1965). It concludes that the ancient household (*oikos/familia*) included persons and things, slave and free. Attention to classical sources is needed.

Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* is a discussion of estate management. Xenophon asks what an *oikos* is. The answer focuses on property (1.5). Even if the property is situated in different cities, everything a man possesses is part of his estate (*oikos*). Consequently, the translator of the Loeb volume

translates *oikos* as "estate." According to Aristotle a household (*oikos*), in its simplest form, involves property, a marriage partner, and either an ox or a slave (*Pol.* 1.1252b 10). Modern scholars working with such material correctly note that the ancient household consisted of two elements: (1) the habitation with all of its property and possessions, and (2) the relatives, *clientela*, and servants (Maier 1991, 15). "In ancient Greece, the word 'family' (*oikos*) actually referred to the household economy—including the land, house, and servants" (Coltrane 2000, 27).

There was a science of household/estate management in antiquity. This management dealt both with the inanimate property and with the human members involved in it (Aristotle, *Pol.* 1.1253b 1–5; ps.-Aristotle, *Oec*. 1.2.1). A Neopythagorean treatise, *On Household Management*, has as its first sentence: "He says, the topos 'Household management' is complete in four things; the first of them concerns money, the second slaves, the third the wife, and the fourth children" (Balch 1981, 56). The major focus was on the acquiring of wealth (Aristotle, *Pol*. 1.1253b 2–3). Xenophon gives specific instructions to each person about duties in keeping the estate financially afloat. These include the duties of the wife (10.10–12) and the husband (11.14–18) within the context of the *oikos*. In order for the estate to run satisfactorily, each partner must do his or her assigned role. Household management is therefore more concerned with the human members than the inanimate property (Aristotle, *Pol*. 1.1259b 3), hence the interest in relations between husband and wife, parents and children, and masters and slaves.

Looked at in its largest terms, an ancient household's human members might include: husband and wife, their children, the parents of the husband and wife, unmarried female relatives, other relatives, slaves, freedmen, tenants, and business clients (Cicero, *Off*. 1.17, 58). They would likely be situated on properties in more than one location. "Larger than our 'nuclear family,' the household was a basis of economic activity, involving clients and business partners" (Branick 1989, 20–21). Cicero defines *domus* or household by a relationship of dependence, not kinship (Branick 1989, 37). People in the household would be related to one another in a wide variety of ways, such as descent, marriage, patronage, friendship, business, and ownership (S. C. Barton 1998, 133). The object of the estate would be, insofar as possible, economic self-sufficiency. If one thing comes clear from this brief description, it is this. The ancient household is not the equivalent of the modern nuclear family. It is rather more analogous to a nineteenth-century southern plantation or a modern urban family business. "Estate" is, therefore, a very proper and accurate translation of *oikos*.

If the ancient Mediterranean *oikos* is the equivalent of the modern family business, what is the function of the household codes? Obviously,

the codes attempt to regulate relations within the estate so as to enable it to operate profitably. Aristotle says the husband rules in virtue of fitness and in matters that belong to a man's sphere (*Eth. nic.* 8.1160b 23–1161a 10). Matters suited to a woman he hands over to his wife. Xenophon contends that because the two have different aptitudes, they have need of each other (*Oec.* 7.28). The same type of thinking is reflected in the guidelines for treatment of slaves and children. Given this evidence, it seems that the ancient household codes are analogous to modern organizational charts for a business. Labor is divided and also organized in set ways that indicate the lines of communication and authority. The household codes, then, are ancient organizational charts for family businesses (estates). The accepted organizational chart for Mediterranean antiquity was virtually identical for pagans, Jews, and early Christians.

If these observations about the ancient household and its codes are correct, then it becomes obvious that the material in Eph 5:22–6:9 and other early Christian sources is not appropriately used in defining what a modern Christian marriage should look like. They do have another function in their New Testament setting, however. What follows attempts to show their appropriate relevance.

The Pauline churches experienced a remarkable egalitarianism in their ecclesiastical life. It was probably rooted in a baptismal confession characteristic of these communities: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:27–28, RSV). Equality in Christ would have been ingrained in the consciousness of every adult convert in a Pauline church in the first century.

One should think of these churches as cell groups that were often made up of the members of a Christian household (e.g., Rom 16:3, 5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phlm 2). Sometimes individuals from non-Christian households (1 Cor 7:12–16; 1 Pet 3:1–6) would join with those of a Christian household for worship. It was possible for a number of cell groups from various households to gather together for special observances (cf. 1 Cor 14:23, "when the whole church is gathered in the same place"). The person with the largest abode would host the "whole church," the collection of cell groups from different households (Rom 16:23).

The Christian households, however, were not just worshiping communities in which equality in Christ reigned; they were also family businesses whose object was economic self-sufficiency. In a Christian household, the worshiping community and the work force were made up of the same people. The question was bound to arise: does the same equality that we know in our worship apply to our work? Does the organizational chart,

which is inevitably hierarchical, apply to Christian brothers and sisters who are one in Christ? Apparently some Christians thought that the relations of the worshiping community carried over into the workplace. In 1 Tim 6:2 the problem is stated:

> Those [= slaves] who have believing masters must not be disrespectful *on the ground that they are brethren*; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their service are believers and beloved. (RSV; emphasis added)

The amount of material addressed to slaves in Col 3:22–25 may be due to just this problem, a problem accentuated by the fact that at least on one occasion (Philemon) Paul seems to have called upon a master to give a slave his freedom, on the basis that the slave was now a Christian brother (Phlm 16). The amount of material addressed to wives and husbands in Eph 5:22–33 may point to the same type of issue, namely, the question whether there should or should not be a carryover from worshiping community to family business.

It is instructive to place the household code of Eph 5:22–6:9 next to Gal 3:27–28. Obviously the canon does not regard the two as opposed to one another. The Christian equality expressed in Gal 3:27–28 and the clear hierarchy of the household code of Eph 5:22–6:9 can stand side by side because they are addressing two entirely different, if complementary, issues. Galatians speaks to Christian equality in the worshiping community; Ephesians focuses on the organization of labor in a Christian family business. In the Pauline communities of the first century, the two communications were viewed as complementary, not as contradictory. Modern Christians may rightly regard both as normative, each in its own sphere. To do so, however, involves a refusal to apply the household codes inappropriately to the modern Christian family. The household codes in early Christian writings were never intended to set forth the order of marriage that God established in creation. They belonged to the sphere of household management, setting forth the organizational chart for a Christian family business—a chart that would have been recognized and welcomed in its description of duties by pagans and Jews alike.

Slavery

The preceding argument still leaves the modern reader with a business organizational chart that assumes patriarchy and slavery. At this point a second hermeneutical move must be made: one must distinguish between what Christians did and advocated in the *short term* and what Christians achieved and are achieving over the *long haul*. Let us begin with the short term.

Neither Paul nor the deutero-Pauline writings advocated the destruction of the Roman social order and its replacement by another. Early Christians assumed the existing Mediterranean social order with the existence of slavery and the submission of women. This was true not just of such post-Pauline documents as Ephesians but also of Paul himself (de Ste. Croix 1975, 19; contra R. Horsley 1998, 177, who thinks the stance of Ephesians represents a fall away from the egalitarianism of the historical Paul). The egalitarian statements of Gal 3:28 are true only in the spiritual sense. Equality exists in the sight of God and within the worshiping community. The sexual distinction between male and female remains in this world. The economic distinction between slave and free remains in daily life. Their self-understanding, however, has changed. "Whoever was called by the Lord when a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as the free person called by the Lord is a slave of Christ" (1 Cor 7:22). What Paul has done is to Christianize the second philosophical rationale for slavery: the good and wise person is never really a slave even if that happens to be the person's actual condition, but is truly free (Aristotle, *Pol.* 1.1255a 25–26). The slave is a freedman of Christ; the slave owner is a slave of Christ. Women and slaves, then, have a new self-understanding that enables them to transcend their actual condition of submission in this world. This is precisely the view of Ephesians as well. The structure of domination is assumed, but Christians have a new self-understanding that enables them to live within it and perform acceptably.

This is the mindset that Yoder proclaims as normative for Christians today. He says that Jesus'

> motto of revolutionary subordination, of willing servanthood in the place of domination, enables the person in a subordinate position in society to accept and live within that status without resentment, at the same time that it calls upon the person in the superordinate position to forsake or renounce all domineering use of his status. This call is then precisely not a simple ratification of the stratified society into which the gospel has come. The subordinate person becomes a free ethical agent when he voluntarily accedes to his subordination in the power of Christ instead of bowing to it either fatalistically or resentfully. The claim is not that there is immediately a new world regime which violently replaces the old; rather, the old and the new exist concurrently on different levels. It is because she knows that in Christ there is no male or female that the Christian wife can freely accept that subordination to her . . . husband. (Yoder 1994, 186)

Yoder argues that Paul, the author of Ephesians, and other early Christians transformed the concept of living within a role by finding how they, in whatever role, could make concrete the servanthood of Christ, the

voluntary subordination of one who knows another regime is normative (187). One lives within the roles provided by the current social order knowing that this present order is passing away (186).

By adopting this mindset, the Christian does not attempt to destroy the structures of the social order but rather lives within them, redeeming them by free ethical choice to humanize—or rather Christianize— the relationships within them. This commentary views this approach as a short-term hermeneutic. Given their circumstances, this was probably all that the early Christians could do (cf. Gager). It may be all that some Christians in some circumstances in the world can do in our time.

What is a hermeneutics for the long haul? When the Pauline writings became part of a Christian canon, how they were read was determined by their larger canonical context, from Genesis to Revelation. The Christian Bible then functioned as a story that reflected a Christian understanding of reality. The Bible had a plot. It began with creation (Gen 1–2), followed with the fall (Gen 3–11), and then continued with a narrative of God's redeeming activity to correct the situation—first in the old covenant (Gen 12–Malachi), then in Christ (Matthew–John), and then in the church (Acts–Jude), and ending with a vision of the culmination of God's saving work (Revelation). The larger plot controlled the way the parts (e.g., the thirteen Pauline writings) were understood.

In this larger story certain things stand out. For example, men and women are created equal as persons and different as sexual beings (Gen 1–2). It is only because of the fall that the man's domination of the woman enters the scene (Gen 3). What this means is that in the story that follows about God's redeeming activity there are two threads running through the narrative: the thread of God's redeeming activity and the thread of human fallenness. The reader must discern which thread the narrative is illustrating. Only with discernment does the reader know what is approved and what is disapproved in the biblical narrative. Anywhere the reader meets the domination of the woman by the man, discernment says this is evidence of the fall. Anywhere one sees women and men treated equally as persons, there is a sign of God's redeeming work. The same kind of reasoning applies also to slavery. In the stories about creation there is no hint of slavery. The narrative after the fall assumes slavery. This tells the reader that slavery was not a part of God's intention in creation but is a result of the fall. Wherever, therefore, one encounters slavery in the story that follows, one knows that it is an illustration of fallenness. That applies to the New Testament as well as the Old Testament material. Furthermore, when one hears of Paul's approving a slave's gaining freedom (1 Cor 7:21) and of Paul's

attempt to get Philemon to free Onesimus (Philemon), discernment says these are signs within the story of God's redeeming activity. Over time the Christian conscience and character are formed by the canonical story, and over time God's activity in the wider historical process makes possible the circumstances that allow the changes to occur that are approved by the Christian conscience. Then slavery is abolished (in most places at least) and women are moving toward the structural recognition of their created equality.

Impatience with the hermeneutic of the long haul is the order of the day. An analogy with our contemporary economic situation may cast light on the past. We live in a world of large institutions that profit from the exploitation of free wage labor. The individual laborer is used, discarded, paid, underpaid, and manipulated by the media, which sees him or her only as a consumer from whom profit is to be made. The rich get richer, the poor are left behind, and the middle class is squeezed to death. The worker's time is consumed by a comprehensive schedule that calls for total absorption into the company in order to increase profits. The best workers are virtual slaves, at the mercy of large institutions. The CEOs, the entertainers, and the athletes wallow in money, while schoolteachers, nurses, and day laborers struggle to get by. The tax situation is biased against the poor who work for wages, while the rich who live off of investments and corporations that incorporate offshore avoid paying their fair share. Since the rich buy the government's representatives, government contributes to the problem of class warfare. What can be done? When the entire economic structure is so organized, who can visualize a better scheme? The alternatives in the modern period have all failed. Moreover, who thinks the vested interests in the social order would tolerate radical change? In the short term, we try to Christianize the relations in which we find ourselves. Over the long haul, the corrupt structures will not be able to sustain themselves. They will pass away and opportunities for change will come. Such a view of our present situation enables one better to understand the conditions and the positions of the early Christians. Hopefully, such a comparison will also cultivate humility and curb naïve impatience.

Identity Formation versus Casuistry

Sometimes scholars criticize the household code in Eph 5:22–6:9 on the grounds that it avoids most of the serious problems that would arise in households and is thus pastorally unrealistic. In contrast, *Pseudo-Phocylides* shows awareness of the wide range of problems requiring treatment (175–227). Why then did the author of Ephesians incorporate such pastorally defective material (Best 2004, 526)? The answer to this

criticism of the Ephesian household code is analogous to that of the Two Ways form of 4:17–5:21. It was not the Pauline way to regulate every-thing of pastoral concern in the churches by casuistic law. The Pauline way was identity formation: shaping character by Christ, the living law, and giving only enough specifics to illustrate the direction Christian decision-making would take.

Ephesians 6:10–20

Introductory Matters

Ephesians 6:10–20 is the last large thought unit in the parenetic section of the letter (chaps. 4–6). "The paragraph is neither 'an irrelevant appendix' to Ephesians nor 'a parenthetical aside' within it but a crucial element to which the rest of the epistle has been pointing" (O'Brien 1999, 457). It is an integral part of the epistle's argument. Table 9 shows the linguistic and thematic links between 6:10–20 and the rest of Ephesians.

These items, taken from Aletti's list (2001, 305), not only indicate that 6:10–20 is an integral part of the letter but also that it is not a summary conclusion (contra Lincoln 1990, 432). It is rather an additional development of the thought within the letter. God's purpose, as Ephesians sees it, is the reunification of everything through Christ (1:10), of which the unity of the church (2:11–22; 4:1–16) and the harmony of the Christian household (5:22–6:9) are examples and the elimination of anti-social vices (4:17–5:21) is a means. The reconciliation of the races in the church functions, moreover, as a testimony to the heavenly powers of God's wise plan (3:10), surely with the hope that this reunification of things on the earth will lead eventually to a harmony of things in the heavens (1:10). Nevertheless, in the present the spiritual powers continue their assault on humans, attempting to create divisions and lawlessness. It is in the face of such a reality that 6:10–20 is written. There is warfare between the heavenly powers and believers. Believers need to know how to resist. In Ephesians the powers of evil are believed to be defeated in three ways: by the exaltation of Christ (1:20–21; 4:8–11); by the ethical endeavors of Christians who live moral lives (4:1, 27); and through

Table 9.
Linguistic and Thematic Links between 6:10–20
and the Rest of Ephesians

Theme	In Eph 6:10–20	Elsewhere in Ephesians
Strength and power of God	6:10	1:19; 3:16
Put on	6:11, 14	4:24
Evil methods	6:11	4:14
The devil; powerful enemy	6:11, 12, 16	1:21; 2:2; 3:10
Darkness	6:12	5:8–14
Evil spirits	6:12	2:2
Evil days	6:13	5:16
Truth	6:14	1:13; 4:21, 24, 25; 5:9
Righteousness	6:14	4:24; 5:9
The gospel; evangelize	6:15, 19	1:13; 2:17; 3:6, 8
Peace	6:15	2:14–18
Faith	6:16	1:15; 2:8; 3:17; 4:5, 13
Salvation	6:17	1:13; 2:5, 8
Holy Spirit	6:17, 18	1:13, 17; 2:18, 22; 3:5
Prayer of intercession	6:18	1:16
The saints	6:18	1:1, 4, 15, 18; 2:19; 3:8, 18
Mystery	6:19	1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32
Ministry of Paul	6:19, 20	3:7–8
Paul's chains, trials	6:20	3:1, 13

spiritual warfare (6:13–17; Yates 1977, 518). This thought unit focuses on the last of these three.

This section of Ephesians has a function very much like that of the speeches of ancient commanders before battle, rallying their troops in preparation for dangerous conflict (Lincoln 1990, 433). Mediterranean literature is filled with examples of such speeches (e.g., Phormio, in Thucydides 2.89; Cyrus, in Xenophon, *Cyr*. 1.4; Hannibal and Scipio, in Polybius, *Hist*. 3.63; Postumius, in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom*. 18.15; Alexander the Great, in Arrian 2.83; Caesar and Antony, in Dio Cassius 38.36–46 and 50.16–30; Severus, in Herodian, *Hist*. 3.6). There are even examples in Jewish literature (Judas Maccabeus, in 2 Macc 8:16–21 and 15:7–17; Eleazar, in Josephus, *BJ* 7.323–336). A pre-battle rallying speech was a common ancient Mediterranean rhetorical strategy.

It was also common in that culture to speak of human life as warfare (M. Barth 1974, 2:790). Roman Stoics spoke of life as "military service" in which there was constant warfare between reason and the passions

(e.g., Seneca, *Ep*. 97; Epictetus, *Diatr*. 3.24.21–37). Aristides speaks in a similar fashion (*Or*. 23.34). The Alexandrian Jew Philo describes human life as warfare against desires. He depicts not only Moses but all virtuous people as waging a continuing war for virtue (*Leg*. 3.14; *Ebr*. 75–76). The Jewish Christian Paul also made frequent use of military imagery for the Christian life. Philemon 2 addresses Archippus as "our fellow soldier." First Thessalonians 5:8 speaks about putting on the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of the hope of salvation. Second Corinthians 6:7 refers to the weapons of righteousness. Second Corinthians 10:3–4 contends that although the Christian life is warfare, believers do not wage war by human standards because their weapons are spiritual, not human. Romans 13:12 exhorts Christians to put on the armor of light. In 1 Tim 1:18 and 6:12, Timothy is exhorted to fight the good fight (of the faith). In 2 Tim 4:7 "Paul" says he has fought the good fight. Ignatius reflects an early second-century Christian usage of the imagery: "Let your baptism function as a shield, your faith as a helmet, your love as a spear, your endurance as full armor" (*Pol*. 6.2). *First Clement* also views life as military service (37.2–4). Ephesians 6:11–18, however, is the *locus classicus* of the metaphorical usage of the language of warfare for the Christian life.

The warfare has been variously described as a holy war by Christian soldiers on the offensive (Yoder Neufeld 1997) or a defensive battle to preserve and maintain what has already been won by Christ (Hoehner 2002, 818, 863; Lincoln 1990, 442–43). Since "stand" is the desired behavior—mentioned three times in the thought unit (6:11, 13, 14)—it is important to ascertain how this term would have been heard by the original auditors. For Greeks, the idea of "standing" in battle was neither an offensive nor a defensive posture per se but indicated rather a resolve to remain in the battle. The alternative to "standing" was troops fleeing in fright. Thucydides, for example, tells how, at the battle of Amphipolis, the left flank at Athens fled after seeing the center of their force attacked by the Spartans.

> At this moment Brasidas, seeing his opportunity and the army of the Athenians on the move, said to those immediately about him and to the rest of his troops: "These men *will not stand* before us; they show it by the wagging of their spears and of their heads; men who do that never await an attack. . . . Let us boldly get at them as quickly as possible." . . . The Athenians were thrown into confusion; and the left wing . . . was at once cut off, and *fled*. (*Hist*. 5.10.5–8; emphasis added)

The Roman military went into battle intending to win. The normal formation consisted of the primary force, the infantry, with cavalry on either

side. The cavalry's purposes were two: to prevent flanking movements and to move ahead and cut down the enemy if they turned to retreat or flee. The preferred tactic was to use the infantry to strike at the opponent's weakest point and to cause a break in their line, a break that would scatter them. Since a primary goal was to break through the enemy's line without having one's own line broken, it is easy to see how important it was for one's troops to "stand." In any military encounter, the soldier who did not stand in the face of battle endangered the whole enterprise.

The idea of standing, then, is by itself neither strictly defensive nor strictly offensive in a military context. The goal of an army is to get its opponents to break and run—preferably without a fight. So a soldier who does not "stand," who does not retain his place in formation as his army attacks, puts the battle in doubt. Likewise, anyone who does not stand on defense gives an opportunity to the opposition to overrun his unit by his creating a gap in the line. Consequently standing, in the sense of remaining in the battle, is crucial (Pritchett 1971–1991; Webster 1979). From Qumran comes a relevant call: "Be strong and valiant; be warriors! . . . Do not fall back" (1QM XV, 6–8).

The strength for this fight does not reside immanent within the saints; rather, they stand and resist with God's own might. "No one except God will be victorious in the strife described here" (M. Barth 1974, 2:785).

The thought unit opens with a general exhortation in verse 10 (cf. Col 1:11). This is followed by three subunits (Eph 6:11–13; 14–16; 17–20), each introduced by a finite verb ("put on," 6:11; "stand," 6:14; "receive," 6:17; Hoehner 2002).

An Outline of Ephesians 6:10–20

Opening exhortation: be empowered by the Lord (6:10)

Exposition of verse 10: what being empowered means (6:11–20)

Put on the armor of God (6:11–13)

What to do: clothe yourselves with God's armor (6:11a)

Purpose of this act: so you will be enabled to stand against the devil's schemes (6:11b)

Why? Because the struggle is against spiritual powers in the heavens (6:12)

Why? Because of this, i.e., 6:12 (6:13a)

What to do: take up God's armor (6:13b)

Purpose: so that you can resist and stand (6:13c)

Stand because you have been equipped (6:14–16)

What to do: stand (6:14a)

Basis for standing: a belt of truth, a breastplate of righteousness, shoes of the gospel of peace, and the shield of faith (6:14b–16)

Receive/take the last of the armor, and all the while pray (6:17–20)

What to do: receive the helmet of salvation and the Spirit's sword (6:17)

Accompanying activity: pray for yourselves (6:18a), for all the saints (6:18b), and for "Paul" (6:19–20)

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Tracing the Train of Thought

The final thought unit (6:10–20) of the parenetic section of Ephesians (chaps. 4–6) opens with a general exhortation. **Finally** (cf. Phil 3:1)**, be empowered by the Lord** (= Christ) **and by the power of his might** (6:10; cf. 1:19; 3:16)**.** Note the passive, "be empowered" (cf. 3:16). The empowering comes from outside the saints. It is from the Lord. The general introductory exhortation is followed by three subunits (6:11–13; 14–16; 17–20).

Ephesians 6:11–13, the first subunit, follows an ABCC′A′B′ pattern. A, what the saints are to do, comes in verse 11a: **Put on God's armor**. In Mediterranean antiquity one donned armor with deliberation before a conflict. The *Iliad* portrays Athena (5.733–747), Agamemnon (11.15–46), Patroclus (16.130–144), and Achilles (19.364–390) all engaged in this activity. The Roman soldier's equipment is described by Polybius (*Hist*. 6.23), Diodorus Siculus (20.84.3), and Josephus (*BJ* 3.5.5). Philosophers such as Seneca could speak metaphorically about life as a battle (*Ep*. 95.5) in which reason is one's weapon (*Ep*. 74.19–21) and philosophy is one's armor (*Ep*. 82.5). Hellenistic Jews reflected the philosophical use of the battle metaphor. For example, 4 Macc 13:16 speaks about putting on the full armor of self-control. The author of Ephesians, however, is not thinking about a Roman warrior's armor (contra Oepke 1964–76, 5:301) or philosophy's protection. It is God's armor that is of interest here. The armor of God or of the Messiah is mentioned in Isa 11:4–5 (the Messiah will strike with the rod of his mouth, righteousness and faithfulness are the belt about his loins); Isa 59:17–18 (God puts on a breastplate of righteousness, a helmet of salvation, and a mantle of fury); and Wis 5:17–20 (God puts on a breastplate of righteousness, a helmet of impartial justice, a shield of holiness, and takes up a sword of stern wrath). If these arms are sufficient for God and the Messiah, they should certainly be good enough for the saints. The notion of Christians being so clothed is mentioned already in 1 Thess 5:8 (the breastplate of faith and love; a helmet of the hope of salvation). Here in Eph 6:11 the desire is for the saints to clothe themselves with the armor of God.

How does this enable the saints to "be empowered" (6:10)? In antiquity, donning another's clothes signaled a change in or empowerment of the person being so clothed (a point missed by Kim 2004). Sometimes this was understood literally. For example, in 4 Kgdms (= 2 Kgs) 2:13–15 (LXX) Elijah's mantle falls onto Elisha, who then has the powers of Elijah. This is recognized by the sons of the prophets, as they say, "The spirit of Elijah has rested upon Elisha." In pseudo-Philo God says to Joshua after Moses' death, "Take his garments . . . and clothe yourself,

and with his belt . . . gird your loins, and you will be changed and become another man." Joshua does so and "when he clothed himself . . . his mind was afire and his spirit moved" (*LAB* 20.2–3). Dionysius of Halicarnassus says that to put on another's clothes is to play the other's role (*Ant. rom*. 11.5).

At other times, the notion was understood metaphorically. To speak about putting on or putting off or being given a garment came to be associated with the empowerment of an individual personally and ethically. In a pagan context, Demosthenes encourages his auditors to "put off slothfulness" (*Or*. 8.46). The Cynic Epistles exhort humans to "put on the weapons" of Diogenes with which he drove away those who had designs on him (ps.-Crates 23).

The notion is widespread in non-Christian Judaism. Judges 6:34 (LXX) says, "the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon." As a result Gideon acted to redeem Israel. He "put on the Spirit of the Lord and was strengthened" (*LAB* 36.2). "The Spirit clothed Azariah" and he prophesied to the people (2 Chr 24:20). Job says, "I put on" [or "was clothed with"] "righteousness." As a result Job was the eye of the blind, the foot of the lame, and the father of the helpless (Job 29:14–17 LXX). The Spirit clothed Kenaz and he was changed into another person (*LAB* 27.9–10). In the eschaton all the saints will be clothed with righteousness (*T. Levi* 18.14). That is, the saints will all be enabled to be righteous.

Christian circles as well know the metaphorical use of being clothed for personal empowerment or transformation. Paul instructs, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Rom 13:14). Jesus commands, "Stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Hermas says, "Having put on the faith of the Lord . . . I took courage and faced the beast" (*Herm*. 22.8 = *Vis*. 4.1.8). In *Herm*. 101.2 (= *Sim*. 9.24.2), certain people "were clothed in the holy spirit of these virgins, and always having compassion for everyone." In *Herm*. 61.4 (= *Sim*. 6.1.4) we hear, "By putting on every virtue of righteousness you will be able to keep these commandments." In the *Odes of Solomon* we find, "Put on the name of the Most High and you will cross without danger" (39.8). When used metaphorically in Mediterranean antiquity, to be clothed means to be empowered by whatever it is that has clothed the person. If so, then to "clothe oneself with Christ" (Gal 3:27) means to be empowered or enabled by Christ. In Eph 6, to put on God's armor means to be enabled or empowered by God or Christ.

B in the pattern gives the purpose of donning God's armor: **so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil** (6:11b). Ancient Judaism's speculations about the origins of evil encompassed existential, historical, and metaphysical theories. Existentially, evil was

believed to have arisen from the evil *yetser* ("impulse"; Gen 6:5; 8:21; 2 Esd 3:21–22; 4:30) often mentioned in rabbinic literature (F. Porter, 1901). Historically, evil was believed to have originated with Adam and Eve (Gen 3). Sometimes blame was placed on Adam's shoulders (2 Esd 7:118; *2 Bar*. 54.15); sometimes it was leveled at Eve (Sir 25:24; 4 Macc 18:8). Occasionally Eve's sin was understood as sexual seduction (*Apoc. Ab*. 23; *2 En*. 31.6). Metaphysically, evil was believed to have originated with the Watchers of Gen 6 (*1 En*. 6–11; 85–90) or with Satan (Wis 2:23) or with the evil spirits that struggle in the hearts of humans (1QS III, 17–24; IV, 15–17, 23).

Canonical Paul's views on the matter also encompass these three dimensions. Existentially, sin originates in human perversion of divine revelation by Gentile idolatry (Rom 1:18–32) and Jewish disobedience (Rom 2:17–29). Historically, Gen 3 furnishes an explanation for the presence of evil, whether through Adam's act (Rom 5:12–21) or Eve's deception (2 Cor 11:3). Metaphysically, evil originates with Satan and the evil spirits (1 Cor 7:5; 2 Cor 2:11; 4:4; 11:3). Significantly, Paul does not use the notion of the evil *yetser* ("impulse"), although it is reflected in James (1:13–14), Hermas (*Mand*. 12), and Justin Martyr (*1 Apol*. 10). Nor does he refer to the Watchers, although they are mentioned in Jude (6–7) and 2 Peter (2:4).

The heavenly powers (Eph 6:11–12) fit within the metaphysical category of the explanation of evil's origins. Ancients would have understood these powers as ontological realities, "personal, demonic intelligences" (O'Brien 1999, 468). They were so understood in the *Letter of Peter to Philip*, a late second or early third-century gnostic Christian text from Nag Hammadi (NHC VIII, 2) whose author appears to have the whole of Eph 6:10–20 before him (Wild 1984, 295–97). In Ephesians, the powers (1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 4:8, 27; 6:11–12) are, with one possible exception (3:15), always evil powers (contra Carr 1981). It is not a question of a conflict within a divided self as in Rom 7. The struggle is against supernatural powers. This is why the saints need to put on God's armor.

C in the pattern says, **The contest** (*palē*, a technical term for wrestling, which was preparation for hand-to-hand combat; Gudorf 1998) **for us is not against blood and flesh, but against rulers, against authorities, against world powers of this darkness, against the evil spiritual beings in the heavenlies** (6:12; cf. 2:2). The perspective of Ephesians is similar to that of 1QS III, 21–25: "Due to the Angel of Darkness all the sons of justice stray, and all their sins, their iniquities, their failings and their mutinous deeds are under his dominion . . . and all the spirits of their lot cause the sons of light to fall. However, the God of Israel and the angel of his truth assist all the sons of light." "Beneath surface appearances an unseen battle is raging" (Stott 1979, 261).

The reference to wrestling in verse 12, taken together with the girding of loins in verse 14, probably alludes to the custom of "belt-wrestling." Ancient Near Eastern and Greek art and literature attest to this sport. Nude males, wrestling with only a belt around their midsections, would each attempt to take the belt of the other (*Il.* 23.710; *Od.* 18.30; 24.89; cf. 2 Sam 2:12–23). C. H. Gordon (1950) supplies pictures of the phenomenon, one being an illustration of the various moves and holds in the sport. So characteristic of fighting men was the wrestling belt that soldiers equipped for war came to be called "heroes equipped with the wrestling belt" (Num 32:30; Josh 4:13). "To gird your loins" was the equivalent of "to put on your wrestling belt" and "to get ready for action." It came to be used for "get ready for action" even in passages where there is no question of physical combat (e.g., Isa 11:5). Against this background, the use of wrestling language in the context of warfare in Eph 6 dovetails nicely with the social reality of the Mediterranean world (Levine 1982).

C′ reiterates the *why*: **Because of this** (i.e., because our battle is against spiritual forces of evil; 6:13a). A′ in the pattern spells out what we are to do: **take up the armor of God** (6:13b). B′ specifies the purpose of taking up the armor of God: **so that you may be able to resist** (6:13c; cf. Jas 4:7; 1 Pet 5:9) **in the evil day** (i.e., at a time in this age when extraordinary attack is leveled against the saints), **and having done everything** (in the way of taking up God's armor), **to stand** (= hold your ground against the enemy). The implied contrast is that between standing up and either falling down or running away. To fall down, of course, would mean to lapse into sin and disunity (Muddiman 2001, 288). To break and run would be to fail to appropriate God's available power, and would represent an under-realized eschatology.

Verses 14–16 constitute the second subunit within 6:10–20, a unit signaled by the start of a new sentence. The pattern in these verses is twofold: what the saints are to do, and the basis for their being able to do it. What the saints are to do is stated simply in verse 14a: **Stand, therefore** (= hold your ground against the enemy). The aorist participles that follow place their action prior to the saints' standing. Hence the translation, **Stand, therefore, because of having belted your waist with truth** (= covenant faithfulness; Isa 11:5; Ps 91:4–5)**, having put on the breastplate of righteousness** (= covenant faithfulness; Isa 59:17a; Wis 5:18a)**, having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace** (cf. Isa 52:7; peace is in parallelism with salvation and God's reign)**, in everything having taken up the shield of faith** (= covenant faithfulness; cf. 3:12; 1 John 5:4; Wis 5:19) **by which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows** (cf. Ps 7:13; 77:17) **of the evil one** (6:14b–16). In antiquity, this shield (*thyreos*), was the long, curved

wooden shield covered with leather which, when placed edge to edge by soldiers, would form a barricade during an assault of the enemy. Of course, burning arrows would threaten the security of the barricade. So a shield would be soaked in water before the battle to defend against incendiary missiles (cf. Thucydides 2.75).

The third subunit within 6:10–20 is found in verses 17–20. The beginning of this subunit is signaled by another finite verb, "receive," in verse 17. This subunit is composed of two items: what to do, and certain accompanying activities. What to do comes in 6:17: **Receive the helmet of salvation** (cf. Isa 59:17) **and the Spirit's sword, that is, the word of God** (cf. Isa 11:4; 49:2). These were the last two items to be put on before battle. God's own helmet and sword have been offered to the saints. The saints are now to receive them. The Spirit's sword, the word of God, does not here refer to preaching the gospel but to defending against a foe. The temptation stories (Matt 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13), in which Jesus defends against Satan by his use of scripture, reflect this perspective. In Luke 4:1–2, moreover, we hear that Jesus was full of the Spirit and was led by the Spirit for forty days while he was being tempted. The Lukan Jesus resisted the devil with the Spirit's sword during those days, namely, with the word of scripture (4:4, 8, 12). In sum, in this letter the Christian life is depicted neither as a steady progress toward heaven, nor as a sweeping missionary endeavor, nor as a struggle against internal psychological impulses, but rather as a warfare against supernatural forces arrayed against believers. In this warfare the powers are defeated by Christ's exaltation (1:20–22), by Christians' moral walk in the world that does not leave an opening for the enemy (4:26–27), and by Christians' donning God's armor that enables them to stand against the enemy (6:10–17; Yates 1977).

Accompanying the receipt of the two final weapons are the activities mentioned in 6:18–20: **through every prayer and supplication praying in every time in the Spirit** (6:18a; cf. Rom 8:26–27; Jude 20). This prayer for themselves accompanies their receipt of the final two weapons. The union of prayer and warfare was a Jewish assumption. For example, 2 Macc 15:47 says, "So, fighting with their hands and praying to God in their hearts, they laid low no less than thirty-five thousand men, and were greatly pleased by God's manifestation." The Third Gospel, moreover, in a time when the devil is said to be the source of trouble (Luke 22:3, 53), has Jesus exhort the disciples to pray so they will be able to withstand temptation (Luke 22:40, 46). The readers' prayer for the ability to stand against the evil powers, however, is not to be limited to themselves: **and for this, staying alert with all endurance and supplication for all the saints** (6:18b; cf. 1:15; 3:18)**, and for me** (cf. Rom 15:30–32; Phil 1:19; Col 4:3). The readers' prayer for themselves and for all the saints was to

be able to resist and to stand firm against the powers. They were also to pray for "Paul" **so that a message may be given to me in the opening of my mouth** (cf. Luke 12:11–12; 21:12–15)**, with boldness** (*en parrēsia*) **to make known the mystery** (cf. 1:9; 3:4, 9) **of the gospel** (6:19)**, for which I am an ambassador** (cf. 2 Cor 5:20) **in chains, in order that by means of the message given to me** (Luke 12:11–12; 21:15) **I may speak with boldness** (*parrēsiasōmai*) **as it is divinely ordained** (*dei*) **that I should speak** (6:20).

The noun *parrēsia* and the cognate verb *parrēsiazomai* have an interesting history in Mediterranean antiquity. In the context of Athenian democracy *parrēsia* was used for the freedom of speech that was the right of the free citizen. Later among the Cynics it took on the character of insolence or audacity. In Plutarch's writings it was the mark of true friendship, candor as opposed to flattery. In 4 Maccabees it refers to the boldness of a martyr (10:5). In Philo it refers to a worshiper's ability to pray boldly and freely because she or he was free from sin and had a clear conscience (*Her*. 7; *Spec*. 1.203). In Acts it is always associated with freedom to proclaim the gospel. In Eph 6:19–20 it is also associated with preaching the gospel, especially the mystery of the reunification of all things through Christ. The connotations, given the context, may include speaking with the boldness of a martyr, the frankness of a friend or free citizen, and—if the parallel with Col 4:4 offers a synonym—with clarity (van Unnik 1980; Marrow 1982). Perhaps the most helpful parallel is found in the comments of Musonius Rufus in *That Exile Is Not an Evil*. In a discussion of the unavailability of freedom of speech (*parrēsia*) to slaves or exiles, the philosopher says freedom in speech is not prevented by slavery or exile but stems from fear "lest from speaking, pain or death or punishment or some other thing shall befall them. Fear is the cause of this, not exile" (Lutz 1947, 72–75; lines 30–35 on 72; lines 1–4 on 74). "Paul" wants to be bold, not fearful, so he will speak with freedom.

That the word was to be given by an "ambassador in chains" was a disgraceful circumstance. In antiquity, to imprison an ambassador was a gross insult to the one from whom he had come. To fulfill his commission, however, this ambassador in chains (cf. Col 4:18; 2 Tim 1:16; 2:9) asks for prayer that he may speak appropriately, as is the divine will.

Theological Issues

Until Martin Dibelius's 1909 monograph, critical scholarship had shown no interest in the principalities and powers referred to in the Pauline corpus generally. More recently, Clinton Arnold has demonstrated that the "powers" play a major role in Ephesians. Both exegetically and

hermeneutically, however, scholarly opinion is divided about these powers. The following is an attempt to survey the field at both levels using representative figures. No attempt at comprehensiveness is claimed.

We begin with a survey of exegetical options. The first possibility is that the powers are spiritual beings. Dibelius placed Paul's language in the context of his contemporary religious thought and found a world populated by supernatural forces hostile to humans. Paul developed his views about human existence and the work of Christ within this context. Carr's 1981 monograph accepts that the powers are supernatural beings but contends that they are not evil but good beings, the angelic hosts surrounding the throne of God, offering praise and adoration. Given this argument, Carr finds it necessary to treat Eph 6:12 as an interpolation from the first half of the second century, a claim that has had no takers (Arnold 1987).

Alternatively, human powers could be intended. Hendrik Berkhof's 1962 monograph contends that whereas Paul borrowed the vocabulary of the powers from apocalyptic Judaism, his own understanding of them was different. Paul regarded the powers as structures of earthly existence. A third view combines the two and asserts that the powers are both supernatural and human. Oscar Cullmann's 1957 monograph proposed that the powers have a dual reference: spiritual powers and human authorities. Cullmann found support from Caird (1976), who argued that Paul was referring to spiritual beings that operated in and through the structures of this world (91).

With regard to hermeneutical approaches, there are multiple options. Some contend that the powers have no meaning for modern readers. While Dibelius opened New Testament scholarship to the centrality of the powers as hostile supernatural beings at the exegetical level, hermeneutically he denied the text's relevance for modern people who do not believe in powers, spirits, and devils.

A second approach argues that the powers are part of a mythical worldview that, when interpreted properly, references various dimensions of our human existence. Bultmann contended that the powers refer to the conflicts and struggles that characterize our human existence (1951, 1:259). Wilder (1964) argued that the mythological language pointed to the structural elements of unregenerate society, the fake authorities of culture, which are the objects of Christian social action. Whiteley (1957) understands the powers in Ephesians to refer to "the demonic," that is, vitality acting chaotically and destructively, aspects of creation that seem to have gotten out of control and threaten the lives of humans. It is essential, he says, to distinguish between the demonic forces mentioned in Ephesians and the devils Christ cast out during his earthly ministry. The latter had an objective, spiritual existence, but not the former. Wink

sees the powers as representing on the one hand the Jungian archetypes in the lives of individuals and the massive institutions and social structures and systems that dominate our world today, and on the other the spirituality at their center. Lincoln (1995) contends that the powers that were believed by the author(s) of Ephesians and Colossians to be supernatural forces are best appropriated now in terms of ideologies and societal structures. This can be done because there is an analogy of function between the powers in antiquity and the societal structures of our time. The value of the powers is to remind us that forces of evil go beyond individual acts of sin.

Finally, others assert that the powers, regarded by Ephesians as supernatural, spiritual beings, are to be taken in the same way by us. O'Brien (1984) represents this position. Arnold (1992, 17) also says, "If the realm of spirits and angels is a dominant part of the biblical world view, it should thus be a dominant part of a Christian world view in our age."

In summary, the consensus at the exegetical level is that the text refers to evil spiritual powers that are hostile to humans. They impinge on human life, controlling those outside the Christian fold and warring against those within the fold. If there is any consensus at the hermeneutical level, it is difficult to find. The basic fault line is between those who believe in personal spiritual evil and those who do not. One's social location matters. Thus, for example, interpreters from Africa or Asia, as a whole, have been much more inclined to accept the reality of evil spiritual powers than those from Western Europe or North America.

Ephesians 6:21–24

Introductory Matters

How was a letter sent in Mediterranean antiquity? There were several procedures (cf. Murphy-O'Connor 1995, chap. 1). The emperor Augustus had established a regular postal system in the empire to handle government mail. Suetonius says he instituted a relay system; dispatches were passed from hand to hand along a series of messengers in a manner similar to the Pony Express in the American West (*Aug*. 49). This allowed messages to be passed along at a rate of about fifty miles a day. The imperial mail system carried only official correspondence, however. A private citizen had to find other ways to get a letter delivered. If one was wealthy, one could use one's slaves to carry a letter (e.g., 1 Cor 1:11, "It has been reported to me by Chloe's people"; Cicero, *Fam*. 9.15.1, "There are two letters of yours which I shall answer—one which I received four days ago from Zethus, the other which was brought to me by your letter-carrier, Phileros"). Most often, sending a letter depended on the availability of someone traveling in the right direction. One could never guarantee that such a letter would even arrive (Cicero, *Att*. 2.13.1, "What a shame! The letter I wrote on the spur of the moment at the Three Taverns in answer to your delightful notes never reached you").

Paul, however, had around him a group of young Christian men who formed, among other things, his private, reliable postal service. For example, Titus was likely the bearer of the "severe letter" (2 Cor 2:4), for Paul waited with baited breath for his return with a positive report from the church (2 Cor 7:6–14). This private postal service could be supplemented by other Christians as occasion permitted: Phoebe probably carried the Roman letter (Rom 16:1–2); the delegation (1 Cor 16:17)

that brought the Corinthian church's letter (7:1) to Paul probably took 1 Corinthians back to the church.

The Pauline letters close with a number of types of material:

1. Hortatory remarks (e.g., "And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea," Col 4:16).
2. A wish of peace (e.g., "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly," 1 Thess 5:23).
3. Greetings (e.g., "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow-workers," Phlm 23–24).
4. Greeting with a holy kiss (e.g., "Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss," 1 Thess 5:26).
5. A grace-benediction (e.g., "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all," 2 Cor 13:13).

Ephesians has only type 2, a peace wish, "Peace be to the brothers" (6:23), and type 5, a grace-benediction, "Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ for ever" (6:24). Other Pauline letters use some and omit other types of closing material. Except for its more impersonal tone, Ephesians is no different from other letters in the Pauline corpus in the way it closes.

Tracing the Train of Thought

Eph 6:21–22 says Tychicus is being sent to the recipients with the letter (cf. Col 4:7, where Tychicus is identified as the bearer of that letter; Acts 20:4, which refers to Tychicus as an Asian; and 2 Tim 4:12, "I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus"). He was also to let them know what Paul was doing and how he was. Tychicus is described as a "dear brother and a faithful minister [*diakonos*] in the Lord." The person who delivered a letter did more than act as mailman. He or she supplied an oral communication as well, interpreting the letter and supplementing its information with other, perhaps confidential, matters: **Now so that you also may know how I am, what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful Christian (*en kyriō*) minister will let you know everything. I have sent him to you for this very thing, that you may know about us and that he may encourage your hearts** (cf. Cicero, *Fam*. 11.20.4, "Please write me a reply to this letter at once, and send one of your own men with it, if there is anything somewhat confidential that you think it

necessary for me to know"; PColZen I, 6, "The rest please learn from the man who brings you the letter, for he is no stranger to us"). Of course, if Ephesians is deutero-Pauline, the reference to Tychicus likely echoes Col 4:7 and serves to make the letter seem more authentic (i.e., truly Paul's voice, *prosōpopoeia*).

Colossians

Colossians 1:1–2

Introductory Matters

Colossians is an ancient Mediterranean letter, typical in form.

> Salutation: A to B, greeting (1:1–2)
> Prayer form: thanksgiving, intercession, praise (1:3–23)
> Letter body (1:24–4:6)
> Closing (4:7–18)

The letter is parenetic; its main emphasis is on the development of Christian maturity (Wright 1988, 27). "By the first century AD, moral philosophers had developed an extensive system of pastoral care which aimed, through character education, at the attainment of virtue and happiness. Paul made use of this tradition as he nurtured the churches" (Malherbe 1989, 71). Colossians reflects the strategies of Mediterranean moral philosophers who sought to lead disciples to maturity (Wilson 1997, to whom the following segment is indebted).

Moral philosophers used a number of strategies to form disciples. These strategies grew out of the conviction that disciples needed to be reminded of what they knew so that they would act accordingly (Dio Chrysostom, *Or*. 17.2). Four of these strategies are applicable to Colossians. First, teachers tried to get disciples to remember what their conversion had accomplished (e.g., Epictetus, *Diatr*. 3.22.13; Seneca, *Ep*. 6.1). This tactic is integral to the strategy of Colossians (e.g., 1:12–14, 21–22; 2:10, 11–15, 20a; 3:1a, 3). Second, they tried to get disciples to remember the teachings they learned both during and since conversion (e.g., Porphyry, *Marc*. 3.46–51). This strategy is also key to the argument of Colossians (e.g., 1:15–20; 2:9). Third, they attempted to get disciples

to remember the teacher(s) who had facilitated their conversion (e.g., Lucian, *Nigr*. 6–7; Seneca, *Ep*. 11.8–10). Again, this tactic is at the heart of the argument in Colossians (e.g., 1:6–7; 1:24–2:5; 4:7–9). And fourth, they sought to get the disciples to remember their experiences and progress since their conversion (e.g., Plutarch, *Virt. prof*. 80, 80–81; cf. Epictetus, *Diatr*. 4.9, in which the instructor urges the disciple to recollect his initial commitment and to compare the habits adopted at that time with his present state). Once again, this device is found in the argument of Colossians (e.g., cf. 3:9b–10a, taken together with 3:5–9a and 3:10b–17). The Colossian auditors would likely have recognized these commonly used tactics and responded accordingly.

In ancient moral philosophy the process of training disciples was also believed to be accomplished by the use of a combination of doctrines and precepts. Seneca, for example, argues that either taken alone is ineffective (*Ep*. 95.4, 34). On the one hand, precepts alone do not always guide one to the right conduct. They are effective only when the will is receptive. Also, sometimes precepts are applied in vain because wrong opinions preoccupy the soul. On the other hand, in order to root out deep-seated belief in wrong ideas, conduct must be regulated by right doctrines. These doctrines included teachings about the nature of the universe that forged a comprehensive explanation of reality (cf. Seneca, *Ep*. 95). Only when precepts are added, however, can doctrines prevail. Colossians also reflects this process. In 1:15–20 and 2:9 the positive doctrines, including explanations about the origins and preservation of the universe, are offered; in 2:16–23 wrong opinions are driven out. In 3:1–2, 5–17 and 3:18–4:6 moral precepts build on proper doctrine (e.g., 3:1, 3–4). The author of Colossians, therefore, employs the accepted philosophical process for the training of disciples.

Looked at as a logical argument, the first two large thought units of Colossians (1:3–23 and 1:24–2:5) lay a foundation for what follows. In 1:3–23 a hymn (1:15–20), used in worship, is employed to provide christological authority for what follows in 2:6–4:6. In 1:24–2:5 "Paul's" authority is underscored to provide a basis for subsequent teaching in 2:6–4:6. The subsequent two thought units (2:6–23 and 3:1–4:6) give teaching based on the authority established in 1:3–23 and 1:24–2:5. In 2:6–23 wrong teachings are refuted, and in 3:1–4:6 the direction of the Christian walk is outlined.

Tracing the Train of Thought

The salutation of the letter ("A to B, greeting") is found in 1:1–2. "Paul" establishes his credentials at the very beginning of the letter. He is not

an apostle of some church (e.g., 2 Cor 8:23; Phil 2:25) sent out by human agency (cf. Gal 1:1) but **an apostle of Christ Jesus** (1 Cor 9:1; 15:8–10) **through the will of God**. This, then, is an official letter from a divinely accredited authority.

His coauthor is **Timothy** (as in 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; Phlm 1). He is here called **brother** (*adelphos*; cf. 2 Cor 1:1; 1 Thess 3:2; Phlm 1). Elsewhere he is called a co-worker (Rom 16:21; 1 Thess 3:2), a good soldier (2 Tim 2:3), and a child or son (1 Cor 4:17; Phil 2:22; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2).

The recipients are called **saints** (as in Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1) and **faithful** (or "loyal") **brothers in Christ** (cf. Eph 1:1). They are **in Colossae**, a city with an illustrious history. Herodotus, while describing how Xerxes' army was stopped on its march to Greece, refers to Colossae as "a great city in Phrygia" (*Hist*. 7.30.1). Xenophon described it as "a populous city, both wealthy and large" (*Anab*. 1.2.6). Its status under the Romans, however, is debated. On the one hand, those who follow Sir William Ramsay and Walter Ruge contend that

Figure 9. Roman Culture in the Lycus Valley.

The Roman amphitheater at Hierapolis could seat more than twelve thousand spectators. Attendees at events would have included residents of Hierapolis as well as visitors to its famous health spas. The theater was built in the second century as part of a building program that restored the city in the wake of the devastating earthquake of AD 60 or 64.

Photograph courtesy of Martin Sacherl

the city's status was considerably diminished. Strabo, so the argument goes, described it as only a small town (*Geogr*. 12.8.13). Its neighbors, Laodicea and Hierapolis, however, grew. Laodicea became the seat of Roman administration (Cicero, *Att*. 5.21); Hierapolis grew famous for its healing waters (Strabo, *Geogr*. 13.4.14).

Asia Minor was earthquake prone (Seneca, *Ep*. 91.9), especially the Lycus Valley (Strabo, *Geogr*. 12–13). Early evidence indicates Laodicea was destroyed by an earthquake in AD 60–61 (Tacitus, *Ann*. 14.27). Later evidence says Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colossae all fell by earthquakes (Orosius, *Hist. adv. paganos* 7.7.12). Eusebius (*Chron*.) dates the destruction to the ninth or tenth year of Nero. Laodicea was rebuilt without imperial assistance after the earthquake. No literary sources refer to Colossae after AD 61, but there is some inscriptional and numismatic evidence of Colossae's continued existence as a Roman city well into the Common Era. By earthly standards its status may have been low.

On the other hand, Magie (1.127; 2.986) contends that it is inaccurate to include Colossae in the list of small towns in Strabo (12), as did Ramsay and Ruge, and to infer that the city had greatly diminished in size and importance. There is a lacuna after the word for small town (*polismata*), so it cannot be assumed that this term applies to the list of places that follows. Furthermore, an inscription of the imperial period and coins issued in the second and third centuries AD show that Colossae continued to have the usual officials. This means that Colossae was still an important place in the imperial period. The latter option is to be preferred. The silence of Rev 2–3 about Colossae while focusing on Laodicea (3:14–22) may possibly indicate a Christian vacuum in Colossae at the end of the first century. Or its omission might merely be because Colossae did not symbolize what the author of Revelation wanted to stress.

The church at Colossae was founded by Epaphras (Col 1:6–7), a native of Colossae (4:12) and an agent of Paul (1:8). Paul was personally unknown to the majority of people in the churches of the Lycus Valley (2:1). He appears to have personal knowledge of and previous contact with at least Philemon and Nympha. The church in Colossae was apparently located in the house of Philemon (Phlm 1–2). We may assume that Philemon was located at Colossae because Onesimus is said to be one of the Colossian Christians (Col 4:9, "who is one of you"). Where Nympha's house church was located is unclear. It does not seem to fit either in Colossae or in Laodicea (4:15). Does this point to Hierapolis? The Colossian church apparently was in good shape (Col 1:8, 23; 2:5), if in potential danger (2:8).

The religious milieu included Jewish and pagan traditions. On the one hand, there was a sizable Jewish population in the area. Philo says there were Jews in every city in Asia (*Leg*. 245). Since the first century BC Colossae had been located in the Roman province of Asia. Josephus says that in the late third century BC Antiochus the Great settled two thousand Jewish families in Lydia and Phrygia (*Ant*. 12.147–153). Elsewhere Josephus gives a series of letters from the Roman Senate to Asia Minor that support the Jews living there, indicating a large Jewish population (*Ant*. 14.185–267; 16.160–178). Cicero, in 62 BC, says Flaccus attempted to confiscate the gold collected by Jews in Asia Minor as a tax for the temple in Jerusalem (*Flac*. 28.68). Inferences made on the basis of this data also indicate that many Jews lived in this part of the world. Grave inscriptions found at nearby Hierapolis show that Jews were part of the Asian culture. On the other hand, Phrygia was the center of the worship of the mother goddess, Cybele. In Hierapolis a cult of Demeter/Cybele was active (Kreitzer 1998b). Both Dionysus (Rogers) and Artemis (Oster) exercised significant influence in the area. The material remains surveyed by Arnold (1995) indicate that popular superstition involved astral powers, and magic was regnant. The culture fits what Plutarch described as "superstition" (*Mor*. 164E–171F). In such a context the formation of Christian identity had to be a top priority (Meeks 1993).

The greeting in a Greek letter was normally *chairein* ("rejoice"; cf. 1 Macc 10:18, 25; 11:30; 12:6; 13:36; 14:20; Jas 1:1; Acts 15:23). The Bar Kochba letters in Hebrew and Aramaic, however, use "peace" as a greeting, as does Dan 3:31 (LXX); 6:26 (LXX), 2 Esdras 4:17, and *b. Sanhedrin* 11b (letters of Gamaliel). Second Maccabees 1:1 uses "greetings and peace," a combination of the Greek and the oriental openings. Pythagoras and Epicurus used *hygiainein* ("good health"). Second Maccabees 1:10 combines "greetings and good health." Paul's greeting, **grace to you and peace** (1:2; Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:2; Titus 1:4; Phlm 3), therefore, would have stood out. The same pattern of greeting is found in 1 Pet 1:2; 2 Pet 1:2; and Rev 1:4, possibly indicating Paul's influence on other early Christian letters. Lucian, in *Pro lapsu in salutandum* (*A Slip of the Tongue in Greeting*) discusses the Greek forms of greeting used by the ancients, including accepted forms of greeting in letters, but not, of course, Christian greetings. Tertullian says he did not know why Paul did not use *chairein* as his greeting (*Marc*. 5.5; Lieu 1985).

The greetings in Colossians are **from God our Father**. It is the only Pauline epistle in which "Christ" is not coupled with "God" in the greeting formula. This omission led to a number of textual variants that

provided the missing reference to Christ. It is not clear why reference to Christ was omitted.

Theological Issues

In Christ

In 1:2 the Pauline phrase "in Christ" appears for the first time in Colossians. What does it mean? Does "in Christ" function in Colossians in the same way that it does in Ephesians, or does it function in a different way? A survey of usages in Colossians, presented in table 10, will help to answer these questions.

Table 10. The Uses of "in Christ" in Colossians

Reference	Phrase	Meaning
Col 1:2	"faithful brothers in Christ"	faithful Christian brothers
Col 1:4	"your faith in Christ Jesus"	faith in Christ (as object of faith)
Col 1:14	"in whom we have redemption"	through whom
Col 1:16	"in him was created"	through him was created
Col 1:17	"all things hold together in him"	all things through him hold together
Col 1:19	"in him all the fullness dwells"	Christ is the location for God's presence
Col 1:22	"in the body of his flesh"	by means of his body/death
Col 1:28	"present everyone mature in Christ"	mature as Christians
Col 2:3	"in whom all treasures are found"	Christ is the location of all treasures
Col 2:5	"faith in [eis] Christ"	Christ is the object of faith
Col 2:6	"walk in him"	walk in dependence on him
Col 2:7	"built up in him"	built up by means of him
Col 2:9	"in him fullness dwells"	Christ is the location where fullness dwells
Col 2:10	"filled in him"	fill through him
Col 2:11	"in him you were circumcised"	by means of him you were circumcised
Col 2:15	"triumphing over them *en autō*"	over them through it (= the cross)
Col 3:3	"hidden with Christ in God"	in God's hands/under God's control
Col 3:17	"in the name of the Lord Jesus"	through the Lord Jesus
Col 3:18	"in the Lord"	as a Christian
Col 3:20	"in the Lord"	as a Christian
Col 4:7	"fellow servant in the Lord"	Christian servant
Col 4:17	"task received in the Lord"	either a Christian task or a task received through the Lord

Several things become clear through this survey. First, the phrase is less central in Colossians than in Ephesians. Second, as in Ephesians the

dominant usage is the instrumental one. Christ is again the ideal king through whom God's will is accomplished. Third, Ephesians and Colossians share several lesser usages: the locative, the meaning "Christian," and the meaning "in Christ's hands" (cf. Col 3:3, "hidden with Christ in God"). What is missing in both Ephesians and Colossians is the widely espoused meaning, "incorporation into Christ."

The Salvific Narrative

To assist in the reading of the letter we here provide a sketch of the salvific narrative assumed by Colossians. The story begins in the precreation period where one finds God and Christ, the image of the invisible God (1:15). The Christ is the agent of creation (1:16a), both of things in the heavens (i.e., things invisible, such as thrones, dominions, rulers, and powers) and of things on the earth (i.e., things visible, such as humans; 1:16b). Although it is not explicitly narrated, for the story to make sense there must have been a rebellion of created beings, both heavenly and earthly. God's reaction to the rebellion was to have all the fullness of deity dwell in Christ bodily (1:19; 2:9). Then by means of the cross God defeated the rebellious powers (2:15) and subjected them to Christ (2:10b). God also used the cross of Christ to reconcile all things, things on earth and things in heaven (1:20). The Colossian converts died with Christ and were raised with him (2:11–12). Their life is now hidden with Christ in God (3:3). When at the end of history Christ is made manifest, then his followers will also be made manifest in glory (3:4). The disobedient, however, will find the wrath of God has come upon them (3:6). It is against the background of this salvific narrative that the arguments of the Colossian letter unfold.

Colossians 1:3–23

Introductory Matters

The thought unit consisting of verses 3–23 is held together by an inclusion: verses 4–6 (faith, hope, gospel, growing in the whole world) and verse 23 (faith, hope, gospel, proclaimed to every creature under heaven). The unit is comprised of a thanksgiving (1:3–8) and an intercession (1:9–14) that breaks into a paean of praise and its application (1:15–23).

The major preliminary questions for this segment of the letter have to do with 1:15–20. The first question is whether there is a preformed tradition behind these verses. At least three answers have been given to this question. Some argue that there is no preformed tradition used here. At this point "Paul" became lyrical, as he did in other places (e.g., Rom 8:31–39; Eph 1:3–14; Balchin 1985; O'Neill 1979–1980).

Others think a preformed hymn is being used in 1:15–20 and cite several arguments to that end. The unit begins with a relative pronoun, *hos* ("who"), as do a number of other traditional units (cf. Rom 4:25; Phil 2:6; 1 Tim 3:16b). Moreover, it reflects a symmetrical form; the introductory segment focusing on creation and a further section on redemption contain a number of the same keywords, giving the unit a feeling of balance. It contains a number of words that are not used elsewhere in the Pauline corpus: "visible" (*horatos*), "thrones" (*thronoi*), the intransitive form of "to be established" (*synestēkenai*), "beginning" (*archē*), "to be first" (*prōteuein*), "to make peace" (*eirēnopoiein*), "blood of the cross" (*haima tou staurou autou*). Finally, if verses 15–20 are removed from this context, verses 13–14 and verses 21–23 join very nicely and naturally.

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Still others contend that the symmetrical structure is imperfect, less exact in the latter half than in the first half of the unit. This points, they say, to the fact that 1:15–18a is indeed a preformed unit, maybe not even Christian, to which the author of Colossians has added, in echoing terms, the significance of Christ's redemptive work (Yates 1993). The second of these three positions has become critical orthodoxy. Colossians 1:15–20, it is thought, uses an early Christian hymn in praise of Christ.

The second question builds on the first: if an early Christian hymn has been taken up into Col 1:15–20, what is it? Some contend that 1:13–14, with God as the focus, was already associated with 1:15–20, where Christ was the focus, before the author of Colossians incorporated the two-part unit into the letter (Käsemann 1964, 158–67). This position has not gained significant support.

A second question is whether the author of the letter has edited the preformed unit in any way. There has been a large degree of agreement that editing has occurred at two points (Lohse 1975, 42–43). The first is found in verse 18b. Verse 18a reads, "And he is the head of the body." Taken in the context of strophe one, which focuses on creation, this would naturally be taken to mean that the cosmic creator Christ is head of the cosmos, viewed as a body. In antiquity it was common to view the cosmos as a body with God as its head, originator, and power source (e.g., Plato, *Tim*. 30B–34B; Cleanthes, *Hymn to Zeus*; Cicero, *Nat. d*. 1.35; 3.9; Seneca, *Nat*. 6.1; *Ep*. 92.30; 95.52; cf. Ign. *Trall*. 11.2; *Odes Sol*. 17.14–17). The author of Colossians, it is argued, then added verse 18b, "the church." He thereby shifted the focus from Christ as head of the cosmos (= body) to Christ as head of the church (= body). The other sign of editing with significant support is found in 1:20. If "through it" (*di' autou*) is to be included as part of the best text (following $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$ and Sinaiticus), then there is an apparent redundancy: "through the blood of his cross, through it." "Through the blood of his cross" then must have been added by the author of Colossians.

The problem with such suggestions is that readers of the letter who were already familiar with the hymn would have experienced dissonance when they heard it with these changes. This would have undermined the function of the hymn in the letter, namely, to establish as authoritative certain positions relevant to the argument to follow. Further, the editorial changes in the tradition are believable only if the symmetry of the strophes is not properly understood and if the redundant "through it" is taken as original (contra Vaticanus, Claromontanus, and certain key Fathers and Origen).

The third preliminary question related to 1:15–20 has to do with the structure of the text. The proposals are legion. For example, some

argue for two strophes: 15–18a and 18b–20 (Aletti 1981, 26–42); others see the two strophes organized into a series of chiastic patterns (Bammel 1961); others suggest three strophes: 15–16, 17–18a, and 18b–20 (Martin 1974, 55); still others see four strophes: 15–16a, 16b–e, 16f–18a, and 18b–20 (Pöhlmann 1973, 56); some think there are five strophes: 15–16b, 16c–f, 17a–18c, 19a–20a, and 20b–c (Masson 1950, 195). Giavini (1970) argues for a C (1:14), B (1:15, 18a), A (1:16a), X (1:16b–e), A′ (1:16f–17b), B′ (1:18b–c), C′ (1:19–20b), X (1:20c) pattern. While none of the above-mentioned proposals has won over everyone, the two strophe proposal is perhaps most popular, although it has difficulty with verses 17–18. Of the various alternatives, the simplest seems to be an ABB′A′ pattern (Wright 1990; Sterling 1997, 234). Note the following.

> A Who is (*hos estin*) image of the invisible God (1:15–16)
>> Firstborn (*prōtotokos*) of all creation
>> Because in him (*hoti en autō*) was created everything
>> In the heavens and upon the earth (*en tois ouranois kai epi tēs gēs*)
>> All things through him and for him (*ta panta di' autou . . . eis auton*)
>   B And he is (*kai autos estin*) before all (1:17)
>   B′ And he is (*kai autos estin*) head of the body (1:18a)
> A′ Who is (*hos estin*) beginning (1:18b–20)
>> Firstborn (*prōtotokos*) of the dead
>> Because in him (*hoti en autō*) was pleased to dwell
>> Through him . . . all things for himself (*d' autou . . . ta panta eis auton*)
>> Upon the earth . . . in the heavens (*epi tēs gēs . . . en tois ouranois*)

With this structure no reorganization is necessary, no omissions need be postulated. The one flaw in its symmetry is what one would expect, given Mediterranean aesthetics. Perfect symmetry was not considered beautiful in the Classical world (e.g., Horace, *Ars* 347–50; Longinus, *Subl.* 33.1; Demetrius, *Eloc.* 5.250) or in the Ancient Near East. G. A. Smith (1912, 17–18) speaks of "symmetrophobia," an instinctive aversion to absolute symmetry. The text makes sense in its present form. As the simplest explanation, this structural plan seems the best. Even if not perfectly symmetrical, the poetic unit still might have been sung—as psalms and other irregular pieces in English can be sung today (Moule 1982, 35). Consequently, if it is a preformed unit, it is Christian, not gnostic or Hellenistic Jewish.

Tracing the Train of Thought

In this subunit of the Colossian letter (1:3–23) there is a thanksgiving (1:3–8; one sentence), an intercession (1:9–14) that breaks into a paean of praise (1:15–20), together constituting one sentence, followed by a statement about the hymn's immediate relevance for the readers (1:21–23; one sentence). With the exception of Galatians, the genuine Pauline letters have either a *berakah* (blessing) or a thanksgiving immediately after the salutation. Colossians offers no exception to the rule. (Among the Deutero-Paulines, 1 Timothy and Titus lack a thanksgiving.) In this stylistic aspect, "Paul" is conforming to Jewish custom. For example, 2 Macc 1:10–17, a letter from the people of Jerusalem to the Jews in Egypt, begins with greetings, followed by a thanksgiving: "Having been saved by God out of grave dangers we thank him greatly."

Reflecting the joint authorship of the letter (1:1), the prayer is in the first person plural. **When praying for you, we always give thanks to God the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, having heard of your faith in Christ and the love that you have for all the saints because of the hope kept for you in the heavens, the hope that you heard about formerly in the word of truth** (cf. Ps 119:43)**, the gospel that has come to you, just as in all the world it is bearing fruit and growing** (cf. Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20)**, so also in you, from the day you heard it and came to understand truly the grace of God; just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant, who is a faithful minister** (*diakonos*) **of Christ on our behalf, who has made known to us your love in the Spirit** (1:3–8)**.** In this long sentence (divided into five by the NRSV: 1:3–5a; 5b–6a; 6b; 7a; 7b–8), "Paul and Timothy" give thanks for the Colossians' faith and love. They acknowledge that they did not evangelize the readers; their coworker, Epaphras, did so and has brought the good report about the Colossians to "Paul" and Timothy. "Paul" legitimates Epaphras by applying to him the same ministry terminology he uses for himself (2 Cor 11:23; Col 1:23), his coworkers (1 Cor 3:5), Timothy (1 Thess 3:2), and Tychicus (Eph 6:21; Col 4:7). The term is *diakonos*, in this context not yet the office of deacon (as in 1 Tim 3:8–12).

In this prayer there are three expressions of confidence in the Colossians (1:4, 6, 8). Like other Hellenistic writers, the author of Colossians makes use of expressions of confidence in his addressees to undergird the purpose of the letter by increasing the likelihood of a favorable reading. Pseudo-Demetrius gives an example of a friendly letter that includes such an expression of confidence. His comments are revealing: "For they [write as though they were friends] not because they are . . . but because they think that no one will refuse them when they write in a friendly manner,

rather that he will submit and heed what they are writing." By beginning with expressions of confidence the author of Colossians employs a strategy to gain a favorable hearing and a compliant response (Olson 1985).

At verse 9 "Paul and Timothy" shift their prayer to intercession. There is one long sentence from verses 9–20 (divided by the NRSV into seven: 1:9–10; 11–12; 13–14; 15–16; 17; 18; 19–20). The logic of verses 9–13 unfolds as follows: the nature of the prayer (asking), the content of the request (filling with knowledge of God), the result of the filling (walking worthy of the Lord), characteristics of such a life (bearing fruit, growing, being empowered, giving thanks to the Father; M. J. Harris 1991, 28). **Because of this we, from the day that we heard, have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will with all spiritual wisdom and understanding** (cf. Eph 1:17)**, so that you may walk worthily of the Lord** (cf. Eph 4:1)**, pleasing him fully with every good work** (cf. Eph 2:10)**, bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge of God, with all power being empowered according to the might of his glory** (cf. Eph 1:19) **unto all endurance and patience, with joy giving thanks to the father** (cf. Eph 5:20) (1:9–12a)**. There are three reasons for thanksgiving.

First, God is the one **who enabled you to share in the inheritance** (cf. Eph 1:11) **of the saints in the light** (1:12b). The language of the section is similar to that in Ephesians but not in a way that demands that either used the other as a source. The terms "share" (*meris*) and "inheritance" (*klēros*) are used together in the LXX to refer to the promised land (e.g., Deut 10:9; 32:9; Josh 19:9). Consequently, this is a reference to future eschatology. At this point the author breaks into a rhapsody on the God who has acted on their behalf (1:13–14). He is the one **who rescued us** (= the readers and Paul, Timothy, and Epaphras, at least) **from the power** (*exousias*) **of darkness** (1:13a), a spiritual power (cf. Eph 2:2, *exousias*) who, although created by the Son (Col 1:16), seems to be in rebellion against God and hostile to humans. God has also **transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son** (cf. 1 Cor 15:24–28)**, by means of whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins** (1:13b; cf. 1 Cor 15:3; Eph 1:7).

The mention of God's beloved Son (1:13) is a catalyst for the authors to give a second reason for thanksgiving, breaking into the Son's praise

> A *who is* the image of the invisible God,
> the *firstborn* of all creation (1:15),
> because in him were created all things
> in the heavens and upon the earth,
> visible and invisible,
> whether thrones or lords or rulers or authorities,
> all things were created through him and for him (1:16);

B *and he is* before all things and all things through him hold
    together (1:17),
B′ *and he is* the head of the body, the church (1:18a);
A′ *who is* the beginning
    the *firstborn* from the dead
        in order that he may become preeminent in everything
        (1:18b)
    because in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell (1:19)
    and through him to reconcile all things to himself,
    making peace through the blood of his cross,
        whether things *on the earth* or things *in the heavens*
        (1:20).

The first strophe, verses 15–16 (A in the pattern), focuses on creation.
The language echoes that used for Wisdom or the Logos ("Word") in
Hellenistic Judaism (contra Fossum's [1989] "Anthropos" and Goulder's
[1995] "Barbelo"). This in no way implies that there is a unified myth
of wisdom standing behind the hymn (Schüssler Fiorenza 1975). The
beloved Son (1:13) is introduced as the **image of the invisible God**
(1:15a). In Wis 7:26, Wisdom is "a reflection of eternal light, a spotless
mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness" (cf. Philo,
Leg. 1.43; also a papyrus of 221–205 BC that tells of the great deeds of
a young king who is said to be "the living image [*eikōn*] of God"; Llewe-
lyn 2002, 36, #15). A reference to Adam is ruled out here since Adam is
not directly called "image" (*eikōn*) but is rather said to be "according to
the image" (*kat' eikona*, Gen 1:27) or "in the image" (*en eikoni*, Gen 9:6;
Fowl 1990, 104 n. 6).

Christ is said to be **firstborn** (*prōtotokos*) **of all creation** (1:15b; cf.
Wis 9:9, where Wisdom is said to be with God before creation; cf. also
Prov 8:22–31; Sir 1:4; Philo, *Conf*. 146; *Agr*. 51; *Somn*. 1.215). The term
prōtotokos (firstborn) can be used to convey priority in time or priority
in status (cf. Ps 89:27, where it expresses the unique status of the king).
The latter fits this context. By virtue of being creator of everything, visible
and invisible (thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities; cf. *T. Ab*. 13.10;
T. Levi 3.8; *1 En*. 61.10), in heaven and on earth, the Son is preeminent
in status (1:13). The hymn says the Son created the powers and is there-
fore of greater status (cf. 2:10b). The ontological priority of the cause
over the effect permeates Greek thought from the time of Homer. Every
productive cause is regarded as superior to the nature of the produced
effect (Rangos 2000, 54). Are these powers malevolent or friendly or a
mixture of both? Carr (1981, 47–85) contends they are only friendly. The
consensus is that at least some are malevolent. The authority of darkness
(1:13, *exousias*) proves that *exousiai* (1:16) are malevolent (2:15 makes

the same point). Everything is not only created by Christ (Philo, *Fug.* 109, God created heaven and earth through Wisdom) but also for him; to my knowledge, this assertion is not paralleled in the Wisdom sayings (but cf. 1 Cor 8:6, where it is said of God).

Special attention needs to be paid to the segment of the hymn focused on the act of creation. The segment runs:

> in him (*en autō*) were created all things
> > in the heavens and on the earth
> > visible and invisible
> > thrones, sovereignties, rulers, authorities
> all things through him (*di' autou*) and for him (*eis auton*) were created.

The segment is held together by an inclusion ("all things created," in lines 1 and 5). The Son is the instrument of creation (as in Heb 1:2, *di' hou*; John 1:3, 10, *di' autou*). Three prepositional phrases are used for the Son's relationship to creation: *en autō, di' hou*, and *eis auton*. How should they be understood? It is necessary to note that Greeks and Romans distinguished multiple causes. Aristotle spoke of material cause, formal cause, efficient cause, and final cause, while Neo-Platonism distinguished the agent (*hyph' hou*), the instrument (*di' hou*), the material (*ex hou*), the form (*kath' ho*), the purpose (*di' ho*), and the time or place (*en hō*; Sterling 1997). It seems clear, however, that early Christians did not use prepositions in relation to God's and Christ's activity in exactly the same ways as they were used in the Greco-Roman milieu. For example, when 1 Cor 8:6a says, "one God the Father, from whom [*ex hou*] all things are," they did not mean that God was the material from which the world was made, but that God was the ultimate cause of the world's existence. When 1 Cor 8:6b says, "one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom (*di' hou*) all things are," they did not mean so much that Christ was the purpose of creation as that he was the instrument of creation, as in John 1:3, 10 and Heb 1:2. So when Col 1:16a says **in him** (*en autō*) **were created all things**, the hymn does not mean that Christ is the time or place where creation took place. Nor when 1:16e says **all things were created through him** (*di' autou*) does it mean that the Son was the purpose of creation. Purpose seems to be signified by the phrase *eis auton* ("for him"). In this context the phrases *en autō* and *di' autou* seem to function as part of the inclusion and to be variants of ways to speak of the Son as the instrument of the creation of all things.

Verse 17 (B in the pattern) claims that **he is before all things**, and further that **all things through him hold together** (*synestēken*). This resembles Philo's comment about the Logos, which is interchangeable

with Wisdom: "He is the bond of all things, the one who holds them together indissolubly and binds them fast, when in themselves they are dissoluble" (*Her*. 23). Sirach 43:26 makes a similar statement about the Logos: "By his word all things hold together." In *2 Enoch* angels perform this function.

> And I saw there seven groups of angels . . . And these groups carry out and carefully study the movements of the stars, and the revolution of the sun and the phases of the moon, and the well-being of the cosmos. And when they see any evil activity, they put the commandments and instructions in order, and the sweet choral singing and every kind of glorious praise. These are the archangels who are over the angels; and *they harmonize all existence*, *heavenly and earthly*; and angels who are over the seasons and years, and angels who are over the rivers and the ocean, and angels who are over the fruits of the earth and over every kind of grass, and who give every kind of food to every kind of living thing; and angels who regard all human souls and all their deeds and their lives before the face of the Lord. (*2 En.* 19.4; emphasis mine)

These Hellenistic Jewish affirmations had roots in Platonic and Stoic beliefs (van Kooten 2003, 31–43). Philo describes the problem in nature that is the backdrop for such assertions.

> And there is another war not of human agency when nature is at strife with herself, when her parts make onslaught one on another and her law-abiding sense of equality is vanquished by the greed for inequality. Both these wars work destruction on the face of the earth . . . while the forces of nature use drought, rainstorms, violent moisture-laden winds, scorching sun-rays, intense cold accompanied by snow, with regular harmonious alternations of the yearly seasons turned into disharmony. (*Spec*. 2.31 §§ 190–191)

The solution offered by Philo in this context is not Wisdom, Logos, or angels, as elsewhere, but God (*Spec*. 2.31 § 192). Philo says that God is the peacemaker and peacekeeper, who destroys faction both in cities and in the various parts of the universe. Amidst the different solutions offered to the need for cosmic unity, the Colossian paean of praise presents Christ not only as creator but also as the glue that holds the natural world together (cf. Heb 1:3).

Verse 18a (B′ in the pattern) says this one is also **the head of the body, the church** (cf. Eph 4:15–16). If verse 17 praised the Son as the unifying factor in the cosmos, verse 18a's praise lauds the Son's unifying role in human community (cf. Eph 2:15).

The final strophe (A′ in the pattern, 1:18b) moves beyond the language of Wisdom/Word that gave conceptual form to the cosmological first strophe.

The language here consists of Christian soteriological categories: **who is the beginning,** defined as **the firstborn from the dead** (cf. Rom 8:29, "in order that he might be the firstborn [*prōtotokos*] among many brothers and sisters"; and 1 Cor 15:20, which terms Christ's resurrection the first fruits of those who have died). In Gen 49:3 (LXX), the terms "beginning" (*archē*) and "firstborn" (*prōtotokos*) are used together as they are here: "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my strength and the beginning of my children." This suggests the firstborn is the founder of a people (Martin 1974, 59).

The purpose of his resurrection is **that he might become preeminent in everything** (cf. Acts 2:32–36; 13:33; Rom 1:3–4). The next phrase is a challenging one: **because in him all the fullness** (*plērōma*) **was pleased to dwell** (1:19; cf. 2:9, "because in him all the fullness of deity dwells bodily"). Among Valentinian gnostics in the second century, *plērōma* became a technical term referring to a series of emanations from God. In the Nag Hammadi documents *plērōma* refers to the heavenly realm in which the Father and the Aeons reside (e.g., *Letter of Peter to Philip* 134.19–137.4). In Colossians, however, "fullness" refers to God or God's presence, not the heavenly realm (C. A. Evans 1984). No time is specified for when the dwelling began.

Verse 20 brings the strophe to its conclusion. God/the fullness is the subject of the action: **and through him** (= the Son) **to reconcile all things to himself** (cf. Rom 5:10; 2 Cor 5:18–20)**, making peace through the blood of his cross, whether things on the earth or things in the heavens**. This sounds like a cosmic reconciliation effected through Christ's death on the cross. The sentence that began in verse 9 finally comes to an end. The praise of the Son as creator and reconciler has reached its climax in cosmic reconciliation. Auditors from a Mediterranean background would have expected as much from God (cf. Philo, *Spec*. 2.192, who speaks of "God, the peacemaker and peacekeeper, who destroys factions both in cities and in the various parts of the universe").

The poetic praise of verses 15–20 is related to the overall argument of the letter in several ways. In the immediately following sentence, verses 21–23 relate the message of the hymn to the auditors. This is the third reason for thanksgiving to God. The unit consists of four components (M. J. Harris 1991, 56):

> The auditors' previous state: at one time estranged (1:21a)
> Their present condition: now reconciled (1:22a)
> The purpose of reconciliation: in order to present you holy and blameless (1:22b)
> The condition of presentation: provided you continue steadfast in the faith (1:23a)

And you, being formerly estranged and hostile in mind with evil deeds (1:21)**, but now he has reconciled you by the body of his flesh through death, so that he may present you holy and blameless and without reproach in his presence** (1:22)**, if you remain in the faith [as you surely will], rooted and grounded and not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, the gospel proclaimed to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister** (*diakonos*) (1:23)**.** The auditors in Colossae have become participants in the reconciliation God is effecting through Christ's death (1:20 // 1:22). The goal is that they be holy and blameless before God (cf. Phil 2:15; Eph 5:27). This will be accomplished if the Colossians continue in their faith (they will) and do not shift from the hope of the gospel (they won't). At this point, the prayer that began in verse 3 is finished (Barth and Blanke 1994, 218; Wright 1988, 56). The concluding reference to "Paul" as a minister of this gospel (1:23) forms a transition to what follows.

The preceding unit (1:15–20) presented Christ as the all-sufficient creator and redeemer. Since all the powers were created by Christ (1:16), they are no match for their maker (cf. 2:15). There is no reason to fear the powers since Christians have been rescued by God from their domain (cf. 1:13). If Christ sustains the universe and holds it together, he can sustain his people until they attain their destiny (cf. 3:4). Since God's fullness dwells in Christ (1:19), only he is able to bring his followers to fullness (cf. 2:10). In sum, if the readers have Christ, they have all that is needed.

Since 1:15–20 is a hymn, quoting it in the letter recalls the corporate worship of the Colossians. The language of ritual functions differently from didactic language. Ritual not only expresses previously held beliefs, it also helps to generate religious conviction. It is performative language. So citing the hymn in the letter draws the readers back into the arena of worship, where they discover and renew their experience of the lordship of Christ. The section (1:15–20) functions both as a logical argument for and a ritual experience of the lordship of Christ (MacDonald 2000, 67–68).

Theological Issues

Colossians 1:15–20 poses problems for interpreters on a number of fronts.

"High" Christology

The first problem is raised when one considers the earthly Jesus, whose death can be placed at about AD 30, and then listens to what this hymn

says about God's Son perhaps thirty years later. Colossians 1:15–20 is cause for wonder. Moule marvels that "these stupendous words apply . . . to one who, only some . . . years before . . . had been crucified. The identification of that historical person . . . with the subject of this description is staggering, and fairly cries out for some explanation" (Moule 1957, 58). The thing that amazes Moule most is that the hymn claims that Christ is not only the creator of all things but also the goal or purpose toward which the created world is destined to move: "All things have been created through him and for him" (1:16). Such a claim is elsewhere made about God (Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 8:6; 15:28; Heb 2:10)! But affirmations of the Son's deity in such places as John 1:1, 18 and Rev 5:13 should make such claims less surprising.

Ziesler, like Moule, staggers in the face of the claims made for Christ in the hymn of 1:15–20. He says:

> On the face of it, the hymn proclaims the pre-existence of Christ, who as a person was active in both creation and redemption. Yet our knowledge of Wisdom language must make us cautious; it is possible that what is meant is that the same full presence and activity of God evident in Christ's resurrection and reconciling work was also present at creation, so that what is pre-existent is not Christ in person, but the power of God that came to be active in him." (Ziesler 1983, 124)

So, says Ziesler, one cannot assume that it denotes personal preexistence. Ziesler's qualms seem misplaced given that the personal preexistence of Christ is affirmed in John 1:1–3; 8:58; 1 Cor 8:6; 1 Tim 3:16; Titus 2:11; 3:4–5; Heb 1:2–3; and 1 Pet 1:20. The similarities between Col 1:15–20 and Heb 1:1–3 are particularly striking, as demonstrated in table 11 (adapted from Beare 1955, 11:162).

Table 11. Parallel Christologies in Colossians and Hebrews

Colossians	Hebrews
He is the image of God (1:15a)	He is the reflection of God's glory (1:3a)
Creator of all things (1:16a)	Through whom the worlds were created (1:2b)
All things created for him (1:16b)	Appointed heir of all things (1:2a)
Through him all things hold together (1:17b)	He sustains all things (1:3b)
Making peace by the blood of his cross (1:20)	Made purification for sins (1:3c)

Moule and Ziesler have difficulty accepting the high Christology in 1:15–20 because they cannot imagine how it could have developed so soon after the time of the historical figure executed by the Romans. Berger and Luckmann (1966, 106–22) propose a model for dealing with competing symbolic universes that seems relevant at this point. Deviant

groups, whether within or without, are a threat to a group's symbolic universe. This threat is a catalyst for the systematic theoretical conceptualization of the challenged symbolic universe. In the process of defense, the tradition itself is pushed beyond its original form.

> For instance, the precise christological formulations of the early church councils were necessitated not by the tradition itself but by the heretical challenges to it. As these formulations were elaborated, the tradition was maintained and *expanded at the same time*. . . . In other words, the symbolic universe is not only legitimated but *also modified* by the conceptual machineries constructed to ward off the challenge of heretical groups. (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 107; emphasis added)

In terms of this model, it would not necessarily take a long time but rather only a specific challenge from a deviant symbolic universe to expand and modify Christology beyond the original tradition. Apologetics, therefore, not chronology, develops the tradition.

Colossians, Controversies, and Creeds

This segment of the Colossian letter also raises theological problems for an interpreter looking at the epistle from the vantage point of the later creeds. Christ is here called the *prōtotokos* ("firstborn") of all creation (1:15). The term is ambiguous: it can mean either the first created being (chronology) or the one who has precedence over creation (status). The former reading was accepted by the Arians in the controversy that led to the Council of Nicea (AD 325). Arius contended that "there was when he [= the Son] was not." This meant that the Son of God was not eternal. He had a beginning. Consequently, he was a creature—the first creature, but a creature nonetheless—who then created everything else. In his *Epistle in Defense of the Nicene Definition*, Athanasius of Alexandria argued the other side. He said that "firstborn of creation" does not mean that the Son is only the first of the creatures in point of time (20.9). Irreligious men go about saying, "If he is firstborn of all creation, it is plain that he too is one of the creation." But if scripture intended to designate Christ as a creature, Athanasius argued, it would have said he was "firstborn of other creatures" (20.11). Since the late fourth century, the reading of Athanasius has been accepted in the Christian church. The Son is firstborn of all creation in terms of status. He is not a creature, not even the first creature; he is creator. That places him on God's side of the line ontologically: creator not created. His preeminence rests upon that fact.

Another theological issue arises for the interpreter in verse 19, which says either that in the Son all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell or

The Creed of the First Council of Nicea (325)

In AD 325 bishops assembled at the Council of Nicea subscribed to a creed clearly locating the Son on the God side of the God-creation divide: the Son is "of one substance" (Greek *homoousios*) with the Father. After decades of controversy the Creed of Nicea was revised into the form now commonly known as "the Nicene Creed" (or "Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed"), which is still commonly used in services of Christian worship. Here is the original creed of Nicea (325):

"We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible.

"And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made both in heaven and on earth; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; he suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

"And in the Holy Ghost.

"But those who say: 'There was a time when he was not;' and 'He was not before he was made;' and 'He was made out of nothing,' or 'He is of another substance' or 'essence,' or 'The Son of God is created,' or 'changeable,' or 'alterable'—they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church."

      —trans. Schaff 1931, 1:28–29, with minor orthographic changes

that God was pleased that his fullness should dwell wholly in Christ (cf. 2:9, "all the fullness of deity dwells bodily"). The image comes from the Jewish scriptures where God was said to dwell in the city of his choice (Ps 67:17 LXX) or was pleased to dwell in the temple (2 Macc 14:35). The idea that God could choose to indwell someone completely would provide ammunition for later debates about adoptionism. Certain early Christians contended that at the time of the resurrection Jesus became Son of God (cf. Acts 13:32–33; Rom 1:3–4). Others argued that at the time of Jesus' baptism the divine presence came upon him fully (cf. the western text's reading of Luke 3:22, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"). As a defense against the claim that the divine presence was a reward for meritorious behavior, Matthew and Luke speak of the indwelling as associated with the miraculous conception, that is, the divine presence came to dwell upon Jesus before there was time for any meritorious behavior on his part. This construct, the permanent union of the preexistent Son of God and the human Jesus from the point of the miraculous conception, is usually what is meant by the incarnation.

The Definition of Chalcedon (451)

Following the acceptance of the Nicene statement of the Son's consubstantiality with the Father, various attempts to explain how the Son could be both human and divine led to the convening of another council, at Chalcedon in 451, which formally ratified the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed and issued this further statement, whose four adverbs (here boldfaced) became touchstones of Christological orthodoxy:

*"We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; con-substantial [coessential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, **inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably**; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us."*

—trans. Schaff 1931, 2:62–63

In light of still later christological controversies, the notion that God decided to indwell a human sounds like Nestorianism (Benoit 1984). The Chalcedonian statement (AD 451) understood the incarnation not as a divine indwelling of a man but as a union of two natures in Christ. This, of course, is the historic Christian reading. It may very well be that the primitive Christian expression of faith found in the Colossian hymn reflects a lack of awareness of issues that would later become problems and so lacks the sophisticated refinement of later thought. It would be anachronistic to ask primitive Christian statements to conform to later Christian reflection (Dunn and Mackey 1987, 62, 64).

Reconciliation

On yet another front, Col 1:20 sounds like universal reconciliation: "to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace through the cross." Paul spoke of the inanimate creation as

sharing in the salvation of humans (Rom 8:19–23). Origen included even the devil and his angels (= "things in the heaven") in the reconciliation. Karl Barth (*Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 74) argued for the possibility of universal salvation, partly on the basis of Col 1:20. Wink, in our time, has a section in his *Engaging the Powers* titled "The Powers Will Be Redeemed," in which he argues the same case espoused by Origen and Barth. Does "reconcile all things to himself" mean that there will be an ultimate reconciliation of all people and all hostile spiritual powers as well? It depends on how the language is understood. All things may be reconciled, but in Pauline thought the powers are reconciled through subjugation (1 Cor 15:24–28; Phil 3:21; Col 2:15). There is no reason to think, in Pauline terms, that it will be any different for sinful humans (1 Cor 6:9–11; 2 Cor 5:10; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5; Col 3:6; O'Brien 1982, 56–57; Arnold 1995, 268; Lincoln 2000, 567).

The early Gentile Christian auditors of Colossians, conditioned by the Roman imperial understanding of peace, would have heard the text in a way not incompatible with Pauline thought as a whole. Several examples make the point. Plutarch says Alexander the Great "came as a heaven-sent governor to all, and as a mediator for the whole world; *those whom he could not persuade to unite with him*, *he conquered by force* of arms, and he brought together in one body all men everywhere" ("On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander," *Mor.* 4.329C; emphasis added). Unity was sometimes through conquest accomplished by the ideal king. The *Aeneid*, the national epic of Augustan Rome, has Anchises teach his son what he needs to know to be a Roman: "Remember, Roman, to rule the peoples with your power—these shall be your skills—and *to combine peace with morality*, to spare the conquered and *to subdue the proud*" (6.851–853, emphasis mine). Peace comes through subduing the recalcitrant. In the recital of the acts of Augustus we hear him say, "Janus Quirinus, which our ancestors ordered to be closed whenever there was *peace, secured by victory*, throughout the whole domain of the Roman people on land and sea, and which, before my birth is recorded to have been closed but twice in all since the foundation of the city, the senate ordered to be closed thrice while I was princeps" (*Res gest. divi Aug.* 13; emphasis added). Peace was made by achieving victory. Even more telling is the following, from the same source: "The provinces of the Gauls, the Spains, and German . . . I *reduced to a state of peace*" (26; emphasis added). Peace here results from conquest. An ancient Mediterranean auditor near AD 100, therefore, would have heard "making peace" (Col 1:20) as compatible with "subduing one's enemies." Reconciliation in that culture was not reduced only to making friends of one's enemies. It also meant subduing enemies.

Christ and Empire

The Colossian hymn presents a contrast to Roman propaganda. The Roman order was depicted by imperial propaganda as the divinely ordained pacification of hostile and ethnically dispersed peoples, brought about by Roman military might, led by a divinely appointed emperor, effecting global peace (the *pax romana*), and leading to moral renewal. The Colossian vision sets forth the incarnate Son in whom the fullness of God dwells bodily, who effects a universal reconciliation, and who exercises a universal reign, seen most visibly in the concord of the church and Christian households. For anyone immersed in the imperial ethos, the message of Colossians would have appeared subversive. "We have here the making of a Quiet Revolution" (Maier 2005, 340).

Of course, the subversive message of Colossians could itself be subverted, as for example by Eusebius's *Oration in Praise of Constantine* (Maier 2005, 348). Eusebius draws on Colossians to celebrate a pre-existing Son of God through whom all things were created, who is now enthroned in splendor, triumphant over the nations, but who now has an earthly representative, Constantine, who is the earthly image of that cosmic rule and who is overthrowing pagan religions and extending the Christian empire to include Greeks and barbarians. Christ and Caesar are together united in a cosmic and global rule. Thus what began as a subversive challenge to the current power could in the history of its reception become a support system for that power. This is not the last example of such a process.

Colossians 1:24–2:5

Introductory Matters

Colossians begins with two sections (1:3–23 and 1:24–2:5) that function to lay the foundations for the arguments to follow in 2:6–23 (arguments against the Colossian philosophy) and 3:1–4:6 (guidelines for those who have been raised with Christ). The first foundational unit focused on lessons learned from worship; the second is concerned with "Paul's" authority. The second foundational section (1:24–2:5) is the concern of this part of the commentary.

Two introductory issues related to Col 1:24–2:5 need to be addressed. The first concerns the function of this section. Both of the preliminary sections (1:3–24 and 1:24–2:5) are signaled by an inclusion. Section one's inclusion consists of 1:4–6 (faith, hope, gospel, growing in the whole world) and 1:23 (faith, hope, gospel, proclaimed to every creature under heaven). Section two's inclusion consists of 1:24 and 2:5 (rejoice, flesh, Christ). In the first preliminary section, remembrance of the church's worship is evoked in order to clarify the role of Christ in the cosmos. In the second, the authority of "Paul" is attested. In a world of conflicting claims and numerous distractions, it was assumed in Mediterranean philosophic culture that persons who wanted to progress toward lives of virtue needed a teacher who could point out truth, reject error, and provide support for their development (e.g., Seneca, *Ep*. 94.52–59). In Colossians, "Paul" is that teacher. The function of 1:24–2:5 is to support "Paul's" role and thereby establish the apostle's authority for what will follow in subsequent thought units (2:6–23 and 3:1–4:6).

In 1:24–2:5 "Paul" speaks in the first person about himself (cf. Eph 3:2–13) as that teacher. What he says is typical of the self-characterizations of moral philosophers in the Mediterranean world. For example, in

1:25 "Paul" says he was appointed and taught by God. The same asser-tion may be found in Epictetus (*Diatr*. 1.9.16–17; 3.22.69), Seneca (*Ep*. 41.4), pseudo-Socrates (*Ep*. 1), and Dio Chrysostom (*Or*. 32.12). "Paul" also says that he is doing his job at the cost of personal suffering (1:24). This, of course, is a note sounded by moral philosophers. Dio Chrysostom says that the true philosopher is one who is willing to enter the contest of life, to speak with the boldness that is necessary if he is to benefit his audience, and to endure the abuse that his outspokenness will generate (*Or*. 32). The Colossian "Paul" further rejoices in his sufferings (1:24, 29; 2:1). Again, philosophers in Mediterranean culture shared the Pauline sentiment; as Cicero put it, "The greater the difficulty, the greater the glory" (*Off*. 1.18.64). Consequently, one ought to rejoice in afflictions. Finally, "Paul's" work and suffering are for the benefit of his readers (1:24, 25, 28; 2:2, 4). Remember how Dio Chrysostom said that his struggles and afflictions were necessary to benefit his audience (*Or*. 32.12).

"Paul's" words about himself may be those typical of moral philoso-phers in Mediterranean antiquity but they are still self-praise. Plutarch's *On Inoffensive Self-Praise* tells what would make self-praise more palat-able to auditors, and some of his suggestions are relevant in this context. Self-praise is less offensive, he says, if God is given the credit (*Mor*. 541C, 542E–543A, 543C). This "Paul" does (1:25). Self-praise is less offensive if it is done in situations of adversity or peril (541A–C). Again, "Paul" does this (1:24, 29; 2:1). Self-praise is less offensive if it is exercised for the benefit of others (544C–546A). Once again, "Paul" speaks thus for the sake of the Colossians (1:24, 25, 28; 2:1, 2). Finally, self-praise is less offensive if it is mingled with praise for others (542B–C). The "Paul" of Col 2:5 finishes the thought unit with praise for the readers' "morale and firmness of . . . faith in Christ" (cf. 1:7–8; 4:7–13). In sum, this thought unit functions to establish Pauline authority through "Paul's" use of inoffensive self-praise.

The second introductory issue is the structure of 1:24–2:5. A number of proposals have been made. Zeilinger (1974, 44–46) saw the following pattern:

> A the apostle's sufferings (1:24)
>   B the apostle's commission (1:25a–c)
>   C the apostle's message (1:25d–27)
>   B′ carrying out the apostle's commission (1:28)
> A′ the apostle's toil and struggle (1:29)
> A the apostle's struggle (2:1)
>   B the apostle's commission (2:2a)
>   C the apostle's message (2:2b–3)
>   B′ the apostle's commission (2:4)
> A′ the apostle's presence with them (2:5)

Lamarche (1975) saw a chiasm in 1:25c–2:3:

    A the mystery (1:25c–27)
       B the content (1:28); followed by Paul's combat (1:29)
       B′ the content (2:1)
    A′ the mystery (2:2–3)

Aletti (1993) also sees a concentric pattern for 1:24–2:5:

    A rejoice (1:24)
       B make known, riches, mystery (1:27)
          C struggle (1:29)
          C′ struggle (2:1)
       B′ riches, knowledge, mystery (2:2)
    A′ rejoice (2:5)

Wilson (1997, 240–41) proposes a structure very similar to that of Aletti:

    A rejoice (1:24)
       B to make known, riches, mystery, wisdom (1:25–28)
          C apostolic struggle (1:29–2:1)
       B′ riches, mystery, wisdom, knowledge (2:2–3)
    A′ rejoice (2:5)

These proposals point to some kind of concentric pattern in the thought unit. The challenge is to find a means to see the pattern in a way that is harmonious with the thought content. Aletti and Wilson are closer to that goal than the other proposals. My own suggestion is very close to theirs.

    A I am now rejoicing (1:24)
       B make known, mystery, riches, mystery = Christ (1:25–28)
          C I struggle (1:29)
          C′ I am struggling (2:1)
       B′ riches, knowledge, mystery = Christ (2:2–4)
    A′ I rejoice (2:5)

Tracing the Train of Thought

In 1:24 (A in the pattern) "Paul" says, **Now I am rejoicing in my sufferings on your behalf, and I am completing what is lacking in the**

afflictions of Christ in my flesh on behalf of his body, that is the church. The NRSV has, "in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church." The two translations reflect two very different understandings of the verse, depending on where the phrase "in my flesh" is placed.

By transferring "in my flesh" from the end of the sentence to the beginning, the second translation implies that the lack is in the sufferings of Christ and that Paul's suffering is a remedy for the deficiency. This may be construed in one of two ways. On the one hand, the verse has been taken to mean that Christ's sufferings are inadequate or insufficient. This deficiency can be remedied only by a continuing atonement in which the followers of Christ share by successively contributing their sufferings to the cause (Kremer 1956, 191–94). This has been widely rejected because Paul clearly believed in the finished and decisive character of God's action through Christ (Rom 5:8–10; 8:3; 1 Cor 1:13; 2 Cor 5:18–19).

On the other hand, the lack has been understood in relation to the woes of the Messiah. In apocalyptic thought it was believed that the sufferings associated with the birth of the new age had a limit set by God. Consequently, there is a definite measure of suffering that is to be filled up before the end. That limit has not yet been reached. "Paul" believed that his sufferings as an apostle helped complete the lack. By his suffering he reduced the tribulations that other believers must endure (e.g., Lohse 1975, 69–70; O'Brien 1982, 78–80; Stettler 2000). There are several problems, however, with this option (Perriman 1991; Barth and Blanke 1994, 293; Lincoln 2000, 614). For example, the limit that God has set on the final sufferings is a time limit (e.g., Mark 13:20, "If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would be saved"; cf. *2 Bar.* 26–30), not a numerical limit. Moreover, there is no evidence that Christ's sufferings were intended to complete the number of sufferings required before the end could come. Nor is there any hint in Colossians that "Paul" believed the world to have entered into the period of eschatological suffering. Nowhere does one find the idea that the measure of suffering predetermined for the church before the end can be realized through the substitutionary suffering of a particular individual. Finally, the thought of taking on a quota of suffering to hasten the inauguration of the new age does not fit well in a letter that contains no mention of an imminent eschaton. This explanation of the lack in Christ's sufferings is not tenable, although it is less offensive than the first.

The translation that reads "I fill up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh" implies that the lack is not in Christ's afflictions but in Paul's (Flemington 1981). In Phil 3:10 Paul speaks about the sharing of Christ's sufferings by becoming like him in his

death. This seems to be a reference to Paul the Christian's dying daily to sin to the point of being obedient unto death. On the other hand, in 2 Cor 4:10–11 Paul says that he is "always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake." Here the reference is to the suffering that an apostolic figure experiences as a result of his boldness in the presentation of Christ in a pagan world. These two texts speak about two different types of suffering: one, the suffering that characterizes any Christian's life, the other, the suffering that is associated with an apostle's mission. The latter is in view in Col 1:24. As the suffering of an apostle on a mission, it is a suffering "on your behalf [= the Colossians'] . . . on behalf of . . . the church" (cf. Eph 3:1).

Paul lists his apostolic sufferings in 2 Cor 11:23b–27: labors, imprisonments, floggings, lashes, beatings, stoning, shipwrecks, dangers from bandits, Jews, Gentiles, false brothers and sisters, loss of sleep, hunger and thirst, cold and nakedness. In verse 28 he adds, "and besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches" (cf. 2 Cor 1:8–9). From "Paul's" remarks about suffering one can conclude that "Paul" does not claim to be a coredeemer. Nor does he see suffering as an end in itself. It is rather the consequence of his ministry for the sake of Christ and Christians. Since the Colossians are not in danger of persecution, "Paul" does not set up his sufferings as a model for his readers to follow (Hay 2000, 72–75).

The B part of the pattern, 1:25–28, has "Paul" say of the church, **of which I became a minister** (*diakonos*) **according to the plan of God given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God** (1:25; cf. Rom 15:18–19)**, the mystery concealed throughout the ages and generations** (cf. Rom 16:25–27; Eph 3:5–6)**—but now it has been manifested to his saints** (1:26; cf. Col 1:2; in contrast to Eph 3:5, "to the holy apostles and prophets")**, to those God desired to know what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is Christ in you** (cf. Rom 8:9; 2 Cor 13:5; Eph 3:17)**, the hope of glory** (1:27)**, whom we proclaim, warning and teaching every person with all wisdom, in order that we may present every person mature** (*teleion*; cf. Eph 4:13) **through** (*en*, understood instrumentally) **Christ** (1:28). "Paul" is the recipient of a revelation of God's plan, very much like the Teacher of Righteousness at Qumran (1QpHab VII, 4–5; cf. 1QH XII, 23, "you exhibit your power in me and reveal yourself in me with your strength to enlighten them; 1QH XII, 27, "through me you have enlightened the face of the many . . . for you have shown me your wondrous mysteries").

Figure 10. The Caves of Qumran.
The Dead Sea Scrolls, which include texts featuring a "Teacher of Righteousness," were discovered in the mid-twentieth century in this cave (Cave 4) and others in the Judean desert near Qumran.

Section C in the pattern (1:29) picks up on "Paul's" desire to see every person spiritually mature. He continues, **for which I toil** (cf. 1 Cor 15:10; Phil 2:16)**, struggling** (*agōnizomenos*; cf. 1 Cor 9:25) **according to his energy which is working in me with power** (cf. Eph 1:19; 3:7). "Paul" does not labor on his own; he is enabled by the power of the God who works in him.

Section C′ (2:1) expands 1:29: **I want you to know how much I am struggling** (*agōna*) **for you and those in Laodicea and as many as have not seen my face in the flesh**. The image of struggle seems to be that of athletic competition (1 Cor 9:25; 2 Tim 4:7; Heb 12:1). The "struggle" almost certainly includes the sufferings of 1:24. It may also refer to the struggle (*agōnizomenos*) in intercessory prayer like that of Epaphras in Col 4:12 (cf. 1:9). It is difficult to avoid the inference that it also included the apostle's thinking through the challenges that confronted his congregations so that he could offer theological-ethical guidance to the converts.

Section B′ (2:2–4) continues "Paul's" concern for the Colossians, the Laodiceans, and all who have not seen the apostle face to face: **in order**

that their hearts may be encouraged, being bound together in love, unto the full riches of full assurance of understanding, unto the knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ (2:2), **in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden** (2:3). **I say this in order that no one may deceive you with persuasive words** (2:4). This echoes a typical philosopher's warning. For example, Epictetus cautions his students against the deceptive power of argumentation (*Diatr.* 1.8.7).

Section A′ (2:5) brings the pericope to an end with a return to the theme of rejoicing. **For if I am absent in the flesh, I am with you in spirit, rejoicing and seeing your order and the firmness of your faithfulness to Christ** (cf. Phil 1:27). This indicates that the Colossian church was still basically sound in their faith (cf. 1:23; 2:6–7). What exactly does "Paul" mean when he says he is present in spirit? A modern speaker would mean that he or she is thinking favorably about someone or some group that is geographically distant. Barth and Blanke (1994, 286) believe something similar applies here, like what is found in 1 Thess 2:17: "When for a short time we were separated from you—in person, not in heart—we longed with great eagerness to see you face to face." Another possibility is that since the author of Colossians and the readers are part of the corporate Christ, the author can be present with them (O'Brien 1982, 98). Or perhaps 1 Cor 5:3–4 offers the clue: "Though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of the Lord Jesus. . . ." Or perhaps "Paul" means that he will be present, guarding the church against error, through this letter as its words are read in a worship service at Colossae (4:16; Hay 2000, 80). Either the first or final options would fit the Colossian setting.

Theological Issues

In canonical Paul the apostolate involved a work to be done and sufferings to be borne in order to build up the body of Christ. Suffering was integral to the apostolic calling. In 1 Thessalonians Paul says that although he had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, he had the courage to declare the gospel to the Thessalonians in spite of great opposition (2:2). Through all of his distress and persecution he was encouraged by the news about the Christians at Thessalonica (3:7). In 1 Corinthians Paul says that God has exhibited the apostles as though sentenced to death (4:8–13).

In 2 Corinthians Paul considers himself as one of God's defeated enemies; he is being led in triumph toward death (2:14–16). He sees his

life as an apostle as one long triumphal procession. Paul describes his life as an apostle as afflicted, perplexed, struck down, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, always being given up to death for Jesus' sake (4:8–11). He has experienced afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger, etc. (6:4–5). His apostolic ministry has produced an impressive catalog of hardships: labors, imprisonments, floggings, often near death, thirty-nine lashes five times, beaten with rods three times, stoned once, shipwrecked three times, in danger from rivers, bandits, Jews, Gentiles, dangers in the city, in the wilderness, at sea, from false brethren, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, cold and naked, under daily pressure due to anxiety for the churches (11:23–29). He has known weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, calamities for the sake of Christ (12:10).

Second Timothy contains many additional references. "Paul" speaks of suffering for the gospel (1:8) and explains that he suffers as he does because he is an apostle (1:11). He refers to his gospel, for which he suffers hardship to the point of being chained like a criminal (2:8–10). He endures it all for the sake of the elect that they may obtain salvation. In regard to his apostolic sufferings and persecutions, he exclaims, "What persecutions I endured!" (3:11). He is already being poured out as a libation, and the time of his departure has come (4:6).

From 1 Thessalonians to 2 Timothy the Pauline corpus makes very clear that suffering was inherent in the apostolic calling, analogous to the belief that a prophet's calling involved suffering (Matt 23:29–31, 34; Luke 13:34; Acts 7:52). Paul's apostolic suffering could be described as "carrying in his body the death of Jesus" and "being given up to death for Jesus' sake" and "for the sake of Christ." Colossians 1:24 is certainly in continuity with this trajectory in canonical Paul.

Colossians 2:6–23

Introductory Matters

Colossians, viewed as a logical argument, begins with two sections (1:3–23; 1:24–2:5) that lay a foundation for the desired behavior to be outlined in the two sections that follow (2:6–23; 3:1–4:6). In 1:3–23 worship makes its contribution; in 1:24–2:5 apostolic authority is set in place. Then two sections of argument follow, 2:6–23 and 3:1–4:6, building on the opening foundation units. The first section of argument (2:6–23) confronts the "philosophy" that has the potential to trouble the Colossian church. The second lays out a sketch of the lifestyle of those who belong to Christ. This segment of the commentary will focus on 2:6–23.

Col 2:6–23 is a battleground of scholarly opinion. Almost every word is contested. The central question is the identity of the problem. Although it has been claimed that there are no actual opponents in Colossae (Hooker 1973), most scholars disagree. The major division of opinion is about the identity of the opponents. Gunther (1973) listed forty-four suggestions about their identity. In the years since he wrote, additional proposals have not been lacking. Among the more recent proposals there are basically four major camps, with variations within each.

1. The first hypothesis suggests that signs of a mystery religion are present in Colossae, mixed with gnostic and Jewish elements (Dibelius 1973; Bornkamm 1973; Lohse 1975; Lindemann 1983). This reading finds support in a number of second-century inscriptions from the temple of Apollo at Claros that use a word found in Col 2:18 (*embateuon*) to designate a second stage of initiation into the mystery cult associated with the temple. By taking the word as a technical term scholars posit the

influence of mystery piety in the Colossian church. The crucial criticism of this suggestion focuses on method. The term under discussion means simply "to enter." In the Claros inscriptions it is found in association with other terms that clearly speak of initiation into a mystery. It was this combination that gave "to enter" its specific mystery connotation at Claros. In Colossians, however, the term appears alone, without any of the other words that would require "to enter" to mean initiation into a mystery (Lyonnet 1973; DeMaris 1994, 84). This criticism has reduced the popularity of this option.

2. A second hypothesis posits a Jewish problem in Colossae. There are at least two variations on this theme. Wright (1988, 24), Dunn (1996; 1996, 34), and Garland (1998, 27) see the opponents as Jews outside the church who are critical of the Gentile Christians and their practices. The problem would then be the danger of Christians concluding that they must go over to Judaism in order to be religiously complete. This problem had occurred early in the history of the church (Acts 15:1, 5). It may have been the focus of Paul's struggles in Galatia (e.g., Gal 3:1–5). The problem is documented at a later date as well; the *Epistle of Barnabas* warns Christians against becoming proselytes (3:6), and Ignatius speaks against Christians living in accordance with Judaism (*Magn*. 8.1; 9.1–2; 10.3). Justin Martyr's dialogue partner, the Jew Trypho, urges Justin to be circumcised and follow the law, especially with regard to Sabbaths, feasts, and new moons (*Dial*. 8.4; 10.1–4). Justin tells of Christians who have accepted Judaism (*Dial*. 47.4). Origen (*Hom. Lev.* 5:8) and Chrysostom (*Adv. Jud.* 1) warn Christians against attending the synagogue on Saturday and church on Sunday. The fourth-century Council of Laodicea forbids Christians to observe Jewish festivals or keep the Sabbath (Canons 16, 29, 37, 38). It is claimed that Jews in Colossae criticized what they regarded as the deficiencies of the Gentile Christian lifestyle. The danger was that the Gentile Christians there would adopt Jewish practices instead of relying totally on Christ. The plausibility of this argument is enhanced by the existence of Jewish communities in over fifty places in Asia Minor in the imperial period, some near Colossae (cf. Trebilco 1991, 7).

Alternatively, Francis (1973a) has advanced the option that the opponents were mystical Jews who, as at Qumran and in certain strands of apocalyptic Judaism, desired to worship with the angels in heaven and practiced asceticism to that end. This has become a popular option in recent times (e.g., O'Brien 1982; Sappington 1991; Evans 1982; Sumney 1993; Yates 1993; Roberts 1998). The most telling criticism is linguistic. It is true that the phrase "worship of angels" grammatically could be a subjective genitive (= worship which angels perform) as well as an objective genitive (= worship of which the angels are the object). However,

when ancient literature is searched for the term "worship" followed by a divine or semidivine being in the genitive case, no instances of a subjective genitive can be found; the construction is always an objective genitive. If the author of Colossians intended a subjective genitive, he would have misled his audience. They would have been expecting an objective genitive (Arnold 1995, 91–98; Garland 1998, 177–78; Lincoln 2000, 564). This appears to be the Achilles heel of the hypothesis. It is also problematic that the word *embateuon* does not appear in the Jewish apocalyptic sources as a term used for "entering heaven in a visionary way," as Francis (1973b) grants. These problems have rendered this option untenable.

3. A third attempt to identify the opposition in Colossians focuses on the philosophical schools of antiquity. E. Schweizer (1982) contends that the opponents' positions are closest to Neopythagorean teachings from the first century recorded in Diogenes Laertius (*Vit. phil.* 8.25–33). This source sees the world as constituted from the *stoicheia* (water, earth, fire, air). The immortal part of humans strives to escape the lower realm. This requires a purity achieved by a regimen of abstinence from certain foods, proper worship of the gods and heroes (cf. Philo, who equates angels with heroes; *Plant.* 4 §14), and various cleansings. Van Kooten (2003, 144), however, argues for a Middle Platonic philosophy confronting the Colossian Christians. Troy Martin (1996), by contrast, argues for a Cynic challenge in Colossae. Cynics, as well as Stoics, he contends, describe their ethics as living according to nature. They reason from the *stoicheia*, the elements of the universe, to substantiate their moral axioms. They practice an extreme asceticism. Colossians is reacting to a Cynic criticism of church practice. In both of these cases the basic problem is that the proposed groups reflect similarities to the Colossian philosophy in some areas but fail to mesh with the philosophy in other areas. Their quilt is too small for the Colossian bed. This option, in its various guises, has few followers.

4. The fourth proposal sees the opponents in Colossae as syncretists. They could be combining Jewish and pagan folk belief with Christian ingredients (Arnold 1995), or mixing Middle Platonic (angel worship, asceticism, and epistemological interest in the ordering of the *stoicheia*), Jewish (calendar observance), and Christian (humility) elements that cohere around a common philosophical theme: the pursuit and acquisition of divine knowledge (DeMaris 1994). Or they might be mixing pagan, Jewish, and neo-Platonic philosophical ingredients involving worship of angels, becoming angel-like, rejecting marriage, and claiming to arrive at a heavenly wisdom, similar to the Nag Hammadi tractate *Zostrianos* (Attridge 1994; Hay 2000, 112). Or they could represent a Greek-speaking Judaism using an allegorical reading of scripture that

incorporates a Middle Platonic demonology (Sterling 1998). Hegermann (1961) and Lähnemann (1971) offer still other variations on the theme of Hellenistic syncretism in Asia Minor. These proposals have the virtue of being able to appeal to a variety of perspectives that have some similarity with the Colossian philosophy. What is left uncertain in each case is the organizing principle that holds all the individual ingredients together.

None of these four basic approaches commands a consensus at present. Questions remain. Is there an opposition front with a single focus (e.g., mystery piety, Cynicism, Judaism), or is the problem syncretistic subversion? Does the problem come from outside the church or is it a deviant movement within the congregation? Has the Colossian church succumbed already to the opposition's perspective, or is the danger merely a possibility? The next section of commentary (2:6–23) will attempt to trace the train of thought, sifting through the various possibilities for the debated language, seeking choices that will allow a coherent reading of the material. But first, we need to understand how the section is organized.

The segment begins with an opening appeal (2:6–7), followed by three warnings (2:8, 16, 18), and concluding with a rhetorical question and answer (2:20–23). The opening appeal asks that the readers continue to live as they began their faith. The material around the first objection is presented positively so as to show the benefits the readers have in their relation to Christ. The second and third warnings and the question-and-answer sequence confront the philosophy that the author of Colossians regards as dangerous.

**An Outline of
Colossians 2:6–23**

Opening appeal (2:6–7)

Three warnings and a rhetorical question (2:8–23)

  First warning (2:8–15)

    What has happened *to* the readers? (2:9–12)

      Christ: Christians have been filled (2:9–10a)

      Christ: Christians share Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (2:10b–12)

    What has happened *for* the readers (2:13–15)

      God forgave (2:13–14)

      God disarmed (2:15)

  Second warning (2:16–17)

    Warning (2:16a)

    The issues (2:16b)

    Paul's evaluation (2:17)

  Third warning (2:18–19)

    Warning (2:18a)

    The issues (2:18b)

    Paul's evaluation (2:18c–19)

  Conclusion (2:20–23)

    Rhetorical question (2: 20)

    The issues (2:21)

    Paul's evaluation (2:22–23)

Tracing the Train of Thought

The previous unit (1:24–2:5) that laid the foundation of Paul's apostolic authority closed with the apostle's rejoicing over the Colossians' "firmness of faith in Christ" (2:5b). They are solid in their Christian commitment. This indicates the Colossians have not yet succumbed to false teaching (as had the Galatians).

The following thematic statement (2:6–7) builds on their firmness of faith. **Therefore, as you received the Messiah, Jesus the Lord, continue to walk in dependence on him** (*en autō*, understood as expressing dependence) (2:6)**.** This would mean their **being rooted** (cf. Ps 1:3) **and built up** (cf. Eph 2:22) **through him** (*en autō*, understood instrumentally) **and linked** (cf. Eph 4:16) **to the faith just as you were taught, overflowing with thanksgiving** (2:7). We know that some sort of teaching accompanied a person's incorporation into a Pauline church (e.g., Rom 6:17, "to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted"; 1 Cor 11:2, "I commend you because you maintain the traditions that I handed on to you"; 1 Thess 4:1–2, "you know what instructions we gave you"; 2 Thess 3:6, "keep away from believers who are not living according to the tradition you received from us"). What they received in this context was the Messiah (= the ideal king), Jesus the Lord. As in ancient Mediterranean belief, people best learn how to live by observing the life of their ruler, who ideally constitutes a living law (Goodenough 1928; Chesnut 1978). So in Pauline ethical reasoning the overall depiction of Jesus' person becomes the norm for Christian behavior (e.g., Rom 15:8–9; 2 Cor 8:9; Phil 2:5–11; presumably Col 1:15–20 would perform the same function). Consequently, it makes sense to say that the Colossians have received the Christ. They are urged to continue to live their lives in dependence upon or under the control of Christ, their basic paradigm of value. Throughout what follows (2:8–23) this will be the main focus of the author: continue to be linked to Christ. Thanksgiving was the expected response of devotees to a saving deity, whether the devotees were Christian or pagan. For example, in Plautus's play *The Braggart Warrior*, Philocomasium says, "Put fire on the altar that I may give glad . . . thanks to Ephesian Diana . . . since she saved me in Neptune's realm" (411–414).

Initial Warning

The first warning (2:8) introduces a subunit (2:9–15) that depicts positively both what has happened to the readers through their identification with Christ (2:9–12) and what God has done for them through Christ's death (2:13–15). The warning comes in verse 8: **Beware, so no one will take you captive through philosophy and empty deceit**

according to human tradition, according to the *stoicheia tou kosmou* and not according to Christ (cf. Epictetus, *Diatr*. 1.8.7, who cautions students against the deceptive power of argumentation). The reference to philosophy could signify the philosophic schools but could also refer to Judaism, which sometimes represented itself as a philosophy (e.g., *Let. Aris*. 256; 4 Macc 5:22–24; Philo, *Mut*. 223; *Contempl*. 26; Josephus, *BJ* 2.119). The Colossians have received Christ, the creator of all things, who holds all things together, the head of the church and the reconciler of all things. This is no human tradition, either in the sense of a tradition about a creature or a tradition that has a creature as its source. A Christian does not want to be deceived by a tradition about something created or imparted by some creature. The *stoicheia* are precisely that: something or someone created, not the creator.

The identity of the *stoicheia tou kosmou* has been hotly disputed for a long time. The basic meaning of *stoicheia* is "elements." At least three readings have been offered for how that basic meaning functions in the New Testament. It has been proposed that the term *stoicheia* can mean the basic elements or principles of religious teaching (e.g., the teachings of the Jewish law, so Bandstra 1964; elementary teaching as in Heb 5:12, so Yates 1993, 40–41). Others suggest that the term means the elemental parts of the material world: earth, water, air, fire (e.g., Schweizer 1982; T. Martin 1996; cf. Wis 7:17). Finally, many interpreters think the term refers to personal spiritual beings, the equivalent to the power (*exousia*) of darkness (1:13) and the rulers and authorities (*archas* and *exousiai*; 2:15).

Although opponents of the third reading claim that such usage is later than Colossians, there would seem to be evidence to the contrary. One of the additional meanings of *stoicheia* under position two is the stars and planets, believed to be composed of fire. Wisdom of Solomon says that the Gentiles "supposed that either fire or wind or swift air, or the circle of the stars, or turbulent water, or the luminaries of heaven were the gods that rule the world" (13:2). Philo knew that earth, water, air, and fire could, in his time, be understood as spirits or could be given the names of deities: "some people revere the *stoicheia*, earth, water, air, fire and have given them names like Hephaestus, Hera, Poseidon, Demeter" (*Contempl*. 3; cf. *Decal*. 53). *First Enoch* charges Gentiles with erroneously taking the stars themselves to be gods (80.7). Acts represents Stephen as saying that God handed the wilderness generation over to worship the hosts of heaven (the stars and planets viewed as gods; Acts 7:42–43). Numerous Jewish sources associate angels with air, fire, earth, and water (e.g., *Jub*. 2.2) and with the stars (e.g., *1 En*. 75.1–3; *2 En*. 4.1). All these examples are earlier than the latter part of the first century AD.

In the second century AD the data are overwhelmingly in favor of reading *stoicheia* as hostile astral powers. In the *Testament of Solomon*, Solomon has thirty-six heavenly bodies appear before him. He asks them, "Who are you?" With one voice they say, "We are thirty-six heavenly bodies [*stoicheia*], the world rulers [*kosmokratores*] of the darkness of this age" (18.1–5). In its present form this writing is a Christian text from the third century, but it contains Jewish traditions that are traceable to the first century. For example, the list of heavenly bodies appears to be composed by an Egyptian Jew and considerably predates the Testament itself (Charlesworth 1987, 935). In Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, Isis says to Lucius in her first revelation to him, "I am mistress of the elements" (11.5). The context points to astral deities. In Lucius's initiation rite he says he approached the boundary of death and was carried through all the elements. Again the context demands a reading of elements as divine intermediaries. After initiation, Lucius's song of praise to the goddess says that the divine beings rejoice for Isis and the elements are her slaves. The context suggests astral powers.

If the *stoicheia* are personal astral powers, they control the heavenly realm and exert a hostile influence on matters of daily life. They cause sickness, effect curses, and bring poor crops, plagues, earthquakes, and other natural disasters. If the *stoicheia* are the elements that make up the physical universe, problems remain. Plutarch says that the four *stoicheia* have produced a realm of continual becoming and destruction (*Is. Os*. 63 [376D]). From the beginning, nature was believed both to beget and to destroy as the creative elements mingle and separate to cause the arising and perishing of mortal things (T. Martin 1996, 93). To live according to the *stoicheia*, then, meant to live in a precarious world that might dash one to ruin at any time. Something drastic would need to be done to be able to cope. The *Treatise of Shem*, composed in Aramaic in Alexandria in the first century BC, is divided into twelve chapters, one for each of the signs of the zodiac. This document contends that the zodiac determines not only the features of each year but also the fate of each person. Anyone who believed this would long for deliverance from such domination. Also, in 4Q186 we hear that one's physical characteristics, spiritual inclinations, and finances are all determined by one's sign. Although it seems to me that the view of the *stoicheia* as hostile astral beings is the better option, the basic theological issue at hand is the same if the elements are those that make up the physical world. In either case the elements are hostile to human life. In both cases the elements reflect a tradition that is human—that is, created. The Colossians, however, being linked to the ideal king, the Christ, are linked to the creator, not a creature or created thing. These hostile powers constitute the focal problem sensed by the readers of the letter.

The Tyranny of the Zodiac

According to the *Treatise of Shem*, an astrological treatise written by a Jew perhaps a couple of decades before the birth of Christ, what will happen in a given year depends on the sign of the Zodiac in which that year begins. For example:

"And if the year begins in Sagittarius: Everyone whose name contains a Bēth or Pē will have misery and a severe disease, and in the beginning of the year it will increase in severity. And men in many places will be troubled. And in the land of Egypt there will be sown only a (very) little. And in the middle of the year there will be much rain. But men will gather produce into granaries because of the (following) drought. And grain will not be pleasing. Even at the end of the year it will not be good. But wine and oil will be considered good. And adultery will increase and small cattle will die."

—*Treat. Shem* 9; trans. Charlesworth 1983, 1:1

Two statements follow about Christ and the benefits enjoyed by Christians by virtue of being identified with him. The first comes in verses 9–10. Verse 9 says that **in him dwells all the fullness of deity bodily**. The fullness (*plērōma*) of deity refers to the fullness of the presence of God. Is this the letter's way of speaking about the Holy Spirit? God's presence continuously dwells in Christ (cf. John 1:32). There are two options for understanding "bodily." One could take this to be a reference to the incarnation: God's presence resides continuously in Jesus' body. Or one could take a clue from 2:17 and understand bodily to mean "really, truly." Either is possible, and either fits the argument of Colossians. Verse 10 says that **you all have been filled through him** (*en autō*, understood instrumentally). Since Christ is the one who gives the Holy Spirit, the Colossian Christians have been filled through him (cf. John 1:16, "and of his fullness have we all received"). If the Colossians want to experience the fullness of God's presence, this is how they are to do it. They will certainly not be filled with God's presence by a creature! Remember, Christ is **the head of every ruler** (*archēs*) **and authority** (*exousias*). The reference to rulers and authorities just after mention of the *stoicheia* seems to link the two. Colossians speaks with a variety of language about the same beings.

The second statement about Christians' benefits from their identification with Christ comes in 2:11–12: **through whom** (*en hō*, understood instrumentally) **you were also circumcised with a circumcision not done with hands through the putting off of the body of the flesh, through the circumcision of Christ** (2:11). A spiritual circumcision not done with hands has roots in the scriptures of Israel (Deut 10:16,

"Circumcise the foreskin of your heart and do not be stubborn any longer"; Jer 4:4, "Circumcise yourselves, remove the foreskin of your hearts"; *Jub*. 1.23). It is also known to Paul (Rom 2:28–29, "real circumcision is a matter of the heart"; Phil 3:3). To experience spiritual circumcision is described as the "putting off of the body of the flesh." In 1:22 Christ's death is linked with the body of his flesh. Here the Christians do not die physically but die to sin (cf. Rom 6:6, "so that the body of sin might be destroyed"; 7:24, "this body of death"). Spiritual circumcision is dying to the old self. "The circumcision of Christ" is not a reference to Jesus' circumcision as an infant (Luke 2:21) but is a metaphor of his death (O'Brien 1982, 117; Dunn 1996, 158). The spiritual circumcision of the readers is their dying with Christ to sin (Rom 6:5–11). Verse 12 continues: **being buried with him in baptism, with whom** (*en hō*, understood as "with whom") **you were also raised through the faithfulness of the power of God who raised him from the dead** (cf. Rom 8:11). The raising of Christians is, of course, not the physical victory experienced by Christ. It is a metaphor for conversion (as in *Jos. Asen*. 20.7). The benefits that have been made available to Christians through their link with Christ are listed here as dying to sin (spiritual circumcision), being buried and raised with Christ, and being filled with God's presence.

Verses 13–15 continue the emphasis on the benefits bestowed upon the Colossian Christians. These verses, in which God is the subject, list two things that God has done for them. The first is found in verses 13–14: **and when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he** (= God) **made you alive together with him** (= Christ)**, when he forgave all your trespasses** (2:13). The Colossians' being made alive— their conversion—is further defined as having their trespasses forgiven (cf. Eph 1:7; Col 1:14). This act of forgiveness, previously described as making alive, is now depicted with yet another metaphor: God **erased the *cheirographon* with its demands** (*dogmasin*) **that stood against us, and he took it away, nailing it to the cross** (2:14). A *cheirographon* is a record of debt written and signed by the debtor, an IOU (cf. Phlm 19). Pauline thought held that Jews and Gentiles alike were debtors— Jews because they disobeyed the written law (e.g., Rom 2:17–24; 3:9), and Gentiles because they disobeyed the law in their hearts (Rom 1:32; 2:12–16). A record of their debt stands against them. It must be paid! God, however, has taken it away and nailed it to the cross—that is, killed it. "There is, therefore, now no condemnation" (Rom 8:1).

The second thing God has done for the Colossians is found in verse 15: **Stripping** (= disarming) **the rulers** (*archas*) **and authorities** (*exousias*)**, God exposed them to public shame** (cf. Matt 1:19)**, triumphing over them through it** (= the cross). This is a Christus Victor view of the

cross. The author brings his first subunit to a close with a focus on God's forgiveness and deliverance made effective through the cross.

Second Warning

The second warning comes in 2:16–17. The structure is threefold. First there is the warning proper: **Therefore, do not let anyone judge** (or "condemn") **you** (2:16a). Someone is critical of the Colossian Christians' lifestyle. Second, there are other issues: they are not to be judged **with respect to food and drink or in the matter of feasts or new moons** (Thornton 1989) **or Sabbaths** (2:16b). The reference to "food and drink" is usually taken to be either a call for fasting or observance of dietary requirements. In the milieu of Colossians, fasting prepared Jewish mystics to receive revelations (cf. Dan 9:3; 10:2–3), prepared pagans to receive oracular statements by Apollo (Claros inscriptions, Arnold 1995, 111–14), prepared converts for initiation into the Isis cult (Apuleius, *Metam.* 11), enabled people to fend off evil spirits and to do what was necessary to have success in magical practice (Arnold 1995, 211–12), and equipped Cynics to deal with the ups and down of Fortune (T. Martin 1996, 65). Some interpreters prefer to see the remarks about food and drink as referring to the matter of partaking or not partaking of unclean foods (e.g., Dunn 1996, 174; cf. Dan 1:3–16; 10:3; 1 Macc 1:62–63; Jdt 12:2, 19; Acts 10:14; 11:3; Rom 14–15). Josephus identifies the two chief marks of covenant disloyalty as violating the Sabbath and eating unclean food (*Ant.* 11.346). These two things, Sabbath observance and proper food, were public means of identification of Jews in Mediterranean antiquity. Josephus reports an edict that exempted Jews from Roman military service on the grounds that Jews could not fight on the Sabbath and could not find permitted food in the places to which the army would send them (*Ant.* 14.223–227). This edict was addressed to the Ephesians in 43 BC to be transmitted by them to the other cities in the province of Asia.

The second issue, the list of days, corresponds exactly to that of ancient Judaism (Ezek 45:17, "the festivals, the new moons, and the Sabbaths"; Hos 2:11, "I will put an end to her festivals, her new moons, her Sabbaths"; *Jub.* 1.14). Josephus reports a letter of 45 BC from the Laodiceans to the proconsul of Asia in which magistrates agree to permit Jews to observe their Sabbaths and other rites without disturbance (*Ant.* 14.241–243). Although the state recognized the Sabbath and food rules as legally protected, the Roman intelligentsia scorned the Sabbath. Seneca said the Sabbath was enforced waste (cited by Augustine, *City of God* 6.10). Juvenal called the Sabbath an excuse for laziness (*Sat.* 14.105–106). Persius termed the Sabbath a day of gloom (*Sat.* 5), and Plutarch claimed it was a bacchanalian orgy (*Quaest. conv.* 4.6.2). One

may infer from state recognition of Jewish rites and Roman ridicule of Jewish practice that the Sabbath was widely recognized as a Jewish distinctive (Goldenburg 1979).

At this point interpretations tend to divide. Some exegetes cite the clearly Jewish list of special days as grounds for treating the issue of food and drink as Jewish as well (Dunn 1996, 174–75). In this case, a Jewish faction in Colossae is deeply critical of Gentile Christian failure in the areas of food and special days. On the other side, interpreters who believe the Colossian problem was syncretistic call attention to the late first-/early second-century Elchasaite form of Judaism, which held a magical or astrological interpretation of special days (so Arnold 1995, 218).

> There exist wicked stars of impiety. . . . Beware the power of the days of the sovereignty of these stars, and engage not in the commencement of any undertaking during the ruling days of these. And baptize not man or woman during the power of these stars, when the moon, emerging from among them, courses the sky and travels along with them. Beware of the very day up to that on which the moon passes out from these stars, and enter on every beginning of your works. But, moreover, honor the day of the Sabbath, since that day is one of those during which prevails the power of these stars. (Hippolytus, *Haer*. 9.11, cited in Arnold 1995, 218)

It is almost impossible to decide between these two options.

The third component in the second warning is Paul's evaluation of the opposition's complaints. Verse 17, literally translated, reads: **which are a shadow of the coming [things], but the body of Christ**. The thought world is obviously Platonic, echoing Plato's view of a heavenly original and an earthly copy, the former being the true reality and the latter only a shadow (e.g., the allegory of the cave; Plato, *Resp*. 7.514a–517b). In Christian circles this Platonic structure of thought was adjusted by eschatology. In Heb 10:1, for example, the law is regarded as a shadow of the good things to come. Colossians also reflects the Christian eschatological adaptation of the Platonic categories (e.g., the coming things). The regulations for food and drink and for special days are a shadow of the coming things. Obviously the coming things are the true reality. It is at this point that the phrase "but the body of Christ" comes into play. Sometimes "body" is used in antiquity for "the reality." Josephus tells how Archelaus, the son of Herod the Great, tried to gain Augustus's confirmation of the kingship bequeathed to him by his father (*BJ* 2.28). In the process, he was reproved because he had not really waited on Augustus's decision. In reality he had already begun to rule as king. He only now appeared in Rome "begging for the shadow of royalty, of which he had already appropriated the body." In this context, the shadow equals the appearance, the body equals the reality (Lohse 1975, 116).

So here in Col 2:17 the food and days are the shadow of things to come, the reality of which is Christ. This statement inclines the reader to see the problems as Jewish. Like the Fourth Gospel (e.g., John 2:1–11 and *passim*; Talbert 2005), Colossians sees the Jewish practices as foreshadowing the spiritual reality found in Christ. It is difficult to believe that "Paul" would have referred to pagan practices as the foreshadowing of the reality to be found in Christ.

Third Warning

The third warning comes in verses 18–19 and is similar in structure to the second warning section. Recognizing this similarity assists with interpretation. Verses 16–17 may be visualized as three lines:

> **Let no one condemn you**
> **about** (*en)* **matters of food and drink or festivals or new moons, or Sabbaths** (2:16)
> **which things** (*ha*) **are a shadow of the coming things** (2:17).

Verse 18 repeats the pattern:

> **Let no one disqualify you willfully**[1]
> **about** (*en*) **matters of humility and worship of angels**
> **which things** (*ha*) **he saw on entering.**

The warning, of course, is "let no one disqualify you willfully" (2:18). Controversy surrounds the term *tapeinophrosynē*, usually translated "humility" (cf. Phil 2:3, "do not act from selfishness or conceit but in humility count others as better than yourselves"). This has been taken in two very different ways. Some see the term as referring to humans and meaning "fasting" (e.g., Ps 35:13; Jdt 4:9). Thus Hermas, desiring to learn the interpretation of a revelation, has a vision of a lady who says to him, "Every request requires humility [*tapeinophrosynē*]. Fast, therefore, and you will receive what you request from the Lord" (*Herm.* 18.6 = *Vis*. 3.10.6). Hermas then fasts one day, and in the night a young man appears to him. (Cf. *Herm.* 56.7 = *Sim*. 5.3.7, where fasting is again linked with humility; MacDonald 2000, 111; Dunn 1996, 178–79; Garland 1998; Arnold 1995, 123). In this interpretation, *tapeinophrosynē* connects to the reference to "food and drink" in the second warning. The two references together may point toward an ascetic emphasis in the Colossian philosophy.

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1. Here *thelōn* is taken as modifying the verb "disqualify"; so Fridrichsen (1992), noting Epictetus, *Diatr*. 2.19.16; Garland 1998, 174–75; contra Sappington 1991, 16–18.

Others think *tapeinophrosynē* refers to the humility of angels whom mystics observe worshiping God in heaven (*Abot R. Nat*. 23a says angels in heaven practice humility to an excessive degree; Sappington 1991, 159, and others, following Francis 1973a). It was believed that angels involved in such worship in heaven manifested extraordinary humility.

A judgment on this issue must, of necessity, await the decision made about the next phrase, **worship of angels**. One option is to read the phrase as an objective genitive and translate "worship of which angels are the object." A variety of second-century sources accuse Jews of worshiping angels (*Kerygma Petri*, cited in Clement of Alexandria, *Strom*. 6.5.41.2; Aristides, *Apol*. 14.4; Celsus, quoted by Origen, *Cels*. 1.26; 5.6). A few Jewish sources may point in this direction (Deut 4:19; 17:3; Jer 8:2; 19:13; Zeph 1:5, warnings against worship of the hosts of heaven; *1 En*. 48.5; 62.6, 9, worship offered to the Son of Man; ps.-Philo, *LAB* 13.6, an offering for your watchers; *t. Hull*. 2.18, angel worship within popular Judaism). There are repeated warnings against worship of angels (Philo, *Fug*. 212; *Somn*. 1.232, 238; ps.-Philo, *LAB* 34.2, sacrifice to angels is linked with magic and is condemned; *Apoc. Zeph*. 6.15; *Apoc. Ab*. 17.2). *Targum Jerusalem* on Exod 20:23 has God say, "My people . . . you shall not make, to worship, the likeness of . . . the angels who serve before me." Such warnings are also heard in early Christian sources (Rev 19:10; 22:9; *Ascen. Isa*. 7.21). The Council of Laodicea (AD 360), canon 35, forbade the Christian worship of angels. Theodoret (c. AD 425), in his commentary on Col 2:18, says that "this disease long remained in Phrygia and Pisidia. For this reason also a synod in Laodicea of Phrygia forbade by a decree the offering of prayer to angels; and even to this present time oratories of the holy Michael may be seen among them and their neighbors" (Williams 1909, 435). Such data, it is urged, suggest that the Colossian philosophy involved a type of syncretistic Judaism.

Others read the phrase as a subjective genitive and translate "worship that angels do." This reading notes that Qumran (e.g., 1QH III, 20–22) and a number of apocalyptic sources speak of angelic worship in heaven (e.g., Francis 1973a; Sappington 1991). For those who read in this way, it is customary to take "humility" as fasting. One abstains from food and certain kinds of drink in order to have a vision of angels (cf. Dan 9:3, 21; 10:2–5).

Still others take "worship of angels" as an objective genitive but understand worship to mean invocation of angels for protection and other benefits (Arnold 1995, 21–44). Data in support of this reading are found in literary Jewish sources (e.g., Dan 8:16, "Gabriel, help this man"; 10:12–13, 20, Michael fights for the Jews against other spiritual powers; 12:1; *T. Dan* 6.1–2, "Draw near to the angel who intercedes for you"; *T. Levi* 5.5, Levi's revealing angel; *1 En*. 69.14–15, Michael helps

thwart the influence of evil angels). Various material objects also point to this practice (e.g., a bronze disk amulet found north of Pergamum reads, "Michael, Gabriel, Ouriel, Raphael, protect the one who wears this," cited in Arnold 1995, 64–65). From such data one sees that Jews perceived good angels as accessible supernatural beings who came to the aid of people in need. This reading would also take "humility" as fasting because it was a way to gain angelic assistance. There is also epigraphic evidence of assisting angels in pagan cults in Roman Asia Minor (Sheppard 1980–1981).

Finally, T. Martin (1996, 150–54) takes "worship of angels" as a genitive of source and translates "worship whose source is angels." He then interprets angels as messengers and messengers as human messengers like Epaphras and Tychicus. The reading takes "humility" as the Christian virtue (e.g., Luke 14:11; 18:14; 22:25–27; Phil 2:7–8).

The third phrase in this section has been perhaps the most perplexing for translators. Literally it reads, **which things he saw on entering**. For those who understand the Colossian philosophy to involve some type of mystery religion, "entering" refers to mystery initiation. The phrase would be referring to the things the devotee saw when going through the process of initiation (similar to Lucius in Apuleius *Metam*. 11.23; e.g., Dibelius 1973; Lohse 1975). For those who take the worship of angels to refer to worship that angels perform in heaven, "entering" would refer to visionary experiences of angelic worship. What was seen was observed upon entering heaven (Francis 1973a). For Troy Martin, "which things he saw on entering" would refer to a Cynic's entrance into a Colossian worship service to observe what was going on (1996, 160). For one who sees the problem as a Jewish critique leveled by someone from the synagogue, what the Jew saw "on entering" would also refer to entrance into the Christian service of worship (cf. 1 Cor 14:23–25).

Since the readings of the Colossian philosophy in terms of mystery or angelic worship in heaven have fatal flaws, and since the Cynic hypothesis is simply not a plausible fit, only some mixture of the Jewish and syncretistic hypotheses remains. As a tentative hypothesis, to cover only what has been surveyed so far, let us consider this construct.

There are two possible tracks. On the one hand, a Colossian Jew from the synagogue visited the Christian service of worship, perhaps on more than one occasion ("which things he saw on entering") and offered his critique of this Gentile Christian gathering ("do not let anyone judge you. . . . Let no one disqualify you"). Verse 19 ("not holding on to the head") need not identify the critic as a Christian. The author may be saying merely that such criticisms are made by one divorced from a relation to Christ (contra Lincoln 2000, 567, 632). On the other hand, perhaps a Colossian Christian visited the synagogue, perhaps on more

than one occasion ("which things he saw on entering"), and offered a self-critique of Christian worship and practice based on what happened in the synagogue (in agreement with Lincoln 2000, 567, 632). Either way, it is basically a Jewish critique of Christian practice. The visitor criticized the Colossian Christians because they did not observe the food laws, did not observe the Jewish special days such as the Sabbath, did not fast, and did not invoke the good angels for protection and deliverance. These things he observed when he entered the Christian or Jewish assembly. Such behavior, he contended, would leave the Gentile Christians vulnerable to the *stoicheia* and other heavenly powers. He urged the Colossian Christians, therefore, to supplement what they were doing with these additional practices.

Such a hypothesis fits what we know of ancient Jewish responses to early Christians. Typical responses ran the gamut from toleration (e.g., Acts 5:34–39; 28:21–25; Josephus), to verbal criticism about differences in matters of practice (e.g., fasting, Mark 2:18; Sabbath observance, Mark 2:23–24; clean-unclean laws, Mark 7:5; Acts 11:1–3; cf. Gal 2:11–14), to discipline for deviant behavior (e.g., forty-nine lashes, 2 Cor 11:23–26; warnings, Acts 4:2–3; 5:17–18), to zealous opposition (e.g., the pre-Christian Saul, Gal 1:13–14; execution of Stephen, Acts 7–8; Setzer 1994). If my hypothesis is accepted, the Colossian church is confronted either by a vocal member of the synagogue who criticizes Christians for their deviant practice or by a member of the Colossian congregation who has derived his critique from visits to the synagogue.

The need to invoke angelic assistance could have been viewed as critical, given the dangers from the evil powers—a point on which the synagogue and church agreed (cf. Col 1:13, "rescued from the authority of darkness"; 2:15, "disarmed the rulers and authorities"). This Jewish conviction may be illustrated from several early sources. *First Enoch* gives a list of the names and specific activities of the chiefs of the fallen angels (69.1–13). One of the fallen angels reveals the names to Michael. That angel also reveals a secret "oath" that causes the angels to respond (69.13, 21, 26). Michael then reveals the names to the people of God because they are the key to thwarting the evil influences of these fallen angels (69.14–15). The evil angels respond when their names are called. The *Testament of Dan* provides another example of what must have been the assumption of both synagogue and church in Colossae. Dan says to his descendants, "And now fear the Lord, my children, and be on guard against Satan and his spirits. Draw near to God and to the angel who intercedes for you, because he is the mediator between God and humans for the peace of Israel. He will stand in opposition to the kingdom of the enemy" (6.1–2). In the *Testament of Levi*, the patriarch asks of his revealing angel, "I beg you, Lord, teach me your name, so that I may

call on you in the day of tribulation" (5.5). We are told that for three weeks Daniel had eaten no rich food, no meat or wine had entered his mouth, and he had not anointed himself at all during that time as he prepared himself to receive a revelation (Dan 10:2–3). That soon was given (10:5–9). The angel tells Daniel that he has been delayed because of conflict with another angel (10:13). Assistance came in the form of Michael (10:13–14). Although he has come to assist Daniel for the moment, he must return to engage in further angelic warfare (10:20–21). Only he and Michael are fighting for Israel against these evil powers (10:21). The veneration and invocation of angels was, therefore, an integral part of popular Jewish piety from pre-Christian times. It is no surprise, then, to find a later tradition in which God says, "If trouble comes to a person, that one must not cry out to Michael or to Gabriel but rather must cry out to me and I will answer that one at once" (*y. Ber.* 9.1). A syncretistic Judaism seems to lie behind the problem in Colossae.

The third component of this unit is the author's evaluation of the opposition's positions (2:18b–19). Such a person is **puffed up without cause by the mind of his flesh** (2:18b; NRSV: "by a human way of thinking"). He is **not holding on to the head** (= Christ) **from whom the whole body** (= the church)**, through its ligaments and sinews, being nourished and fitted together** (cf. Eph 4:16)**, grows with a growth from God** (2:19). We have returned to the problem that surfaced in 2:8–15. The opponents' allegiance is to something other than Christ, the creator and reconciler. They are looking instead to created beings (angels) for aid, and they believe that they access this angelic aid by means of strict observance related to food and days (i.e., through human effort and initiative). This brings us quite naturally to the final subunit in Col 2:6–23.

The Author's Critique

This subunit (Col 2:20–23) begins with a rhetorical question, then presents the issues, and closes with the author's evaluation. The question runs, **If you died with Christ to the elemental spirits of the cosmos, why are you continuing to regulate yourselves as if you continued to live in the world?** (2:20). The author could just as easily have said, "Do not allow anyone to force you to live as if you had not died with Christ." Living as though they still belonged to the unredeemed cosmos is reflected in regulations such as **Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch** (2:21). These regulations, of course, could reflect the ritual practices of more than one of the ancient religions or philosophies. For example, Cynics practiced an extreme asceticism that not only forbade eating and drinking but also touching or handling commodities that were not produced naturally. Such commodities passed away. Goods

produced naturally by the processes of nature, however, were durable. Water, for example, will not perish with consumption but wine will because it is not produced naturally (T. Martin 1996, 45, 65). Jewish traditions also would fit these "don'ts." The term translated "handle" (*haptein*) can be used of sexual contact (cf. Gen 20:6; Prov 6:29; 1 Cor 7:1; Josephus, *Ant*. 1.163; Euripides, *Phoen*. 945; Plato, *Leg*. 8.840A; Plutarch, *Alex*. 21.9). Celibacy, surprisingly, was integral to any number of streams of Jewish life (van der Horst 2002). The following "taste" and "touch" were used together in connection with unclean foods (e.g., regarding animals such as pigs: "Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch"). This is the point at which the Cynic hypothesis is strongest, but given the fact that earlier data pointed to some type of Jewish philosophy, this should probably be taken in that sense as well.

The author's critiques come in verses 22–23. **Such regulations all refer to things that perish with use** (cf. Mark 7:18–19)**, according to human commands and teachings** (2:22; cf. Isa 29:13)**.** They belong to this world and so pass away. Second, verse 23 consists of a main clause ("Such regulations . . . lead to the gratification of the flesh") and a subordinate clause ("though having a reputation for wisdom through self-imposed piety, humility [= fasting], and severity towards the body"; Hollenbach 1978–1979; Garland 1998, 185). Taken together one may translate: **Such things** (= don't handle, taste, touch)**—although having a reputation for wisdom in the areas of self-imposed piety, fasting, and severity toward the body—are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh**. "The errorists suffered from the law of unintended consequences. Their religious aim to serve God and to bridle the flesh only succeeded in serving the flesh and unleashing its power" (Garland 1998, 185). Paul had made much the same point in 1 Cor 7:1b–6. The two arguments against the taboos are first that such regulations are relevant only for things that are passing away (= created things) and second that they are impotent to accomplish that for which they aim.

Theological Issues

Spiritual Circumcision

In 2:11 the author speaks about the readers' circumcision done without human hands (cf. Rom 2:29, "the real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual not literal"), the circumcision of Christ. Here Christian conversion is described as

1. (spiritual) circumcision,
2. performed by Christ (*en hō*, understood instrumentally), not with human hands,
3. on the occasion of the Christian's baptism (2:12).

This view continued in the early church (Ferguson 1988). For example, Justin Martyr says, "we who have approached God through Christ have received not carnal but [1] spiritual circumcision . . . and we have received it [3] through baptism" (*Dial*. 43.2). Here the spiritual circumcision's occasion is baptism. That it "is received" refers to (2) divine agency.

Odes of Solomon 11.2–3 says (1) "God circumcised me" (2) "by his Holy Spirit" (i.e., a spiritual circumcision effected by the Spirit). There is no reference to (3) the occasion.

Cyril of Jerusalem says, "And then, following upon our faith, we receive like Abraham the spiritual seal, [1] being circumcised [2] by the Holy Spirit [3] through baptism, not in the foreskin of the body but in the heart" (*Cat*. 5.6).

John Chrysostom declares, "Jews had circumcision as a seal; we, the earnest of the Spirit" *(Hom. 2 Cor.* 3.7). Here (1) spiritual circumcision is (2) effected by the Spirit, implied (3) at conversion. In another place he says, "No longer is the [1] circumcision with the knife but [2] through Christ himself; for no hand imparts this circumcision, as is the case there, but the Spirit. He circumcises not a part but the whole person . . . When and where? [3] Baptism. And what he calls circumcision, he also calls burial" (*Hom. Col*. 6.2). This is Chrysostom's accurate exegesis of Col 2:11–12.

Worshiping the Creation, Not the Creator

Clement of Alexandria offers his interpretation of Col 2:8 ("See that no one of you will be the one led captive through philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition, according to the elements of the cosmos and not according to Christ") in two places: *Exhortation to the Greeks* 5, and *Miscellanies* 11. The former is a tirade against Gentile idolatry. In chapter 5, Clement deals with the opinions of the philosophers who make an idol of matter. For example, Parmenides of Elia introduced fire and earth as gods; Heraclitus of Ephesus supposed fire to be a divinity; Empedocles of Agrigentum took the four elements to be gods: earth, water, fire, air. In doing so, the philosophers did not worship Poseidon but instead revered water itself; they did not worship Hephaestus but rather revered fire itself. Philosophers regarded the elements (*stoicheia*) as divine. Moreover, Xenocrates of Chalcedon asserted that the planets were seven gods. The second source takes the same tack. The elements are said to be worshiped by the philosophers: air by Diogenes, water by

Thales, and fire by Hippasus. So, Clement asks, what philosophy does the apostle warn against in Col 2:8? His answer is that it is any philosophy that honors what is created (e.g., the elements, the planets, created heavenly beings whether good or evil) instead of the Creator. The issue is idolatry. This seems to be a right reading of the Colossian text and a sure guide to a hermeneutical use of the material (Walsh 1999).

The relevance of the message of Colossians may be seen from the comments of R. van Leeuwen:

> Saint Augustine divided the world into those who were citizens of the "City of God" and those who gave their allegiance to the "Earthly City." My concern is that the citizens of God's City have divided loyalties, give allegiance to two kingdoms, and are walking under the opposed powers of Spirit and Flesh, God and Mammon. The dividing line between the world (in the negative sense) and the church is not simply between us and them; the conflict between spiritual forces runs right through the heart of every believer, and our very bodies are battlegrounds for the rule of Christ as opposed to darkness. The problem is not merely individual; it affects our corporate existence in Christian organizations and public institutions of all sorts. It affects Christian action in the public spheres of life. (van Leeuwen 2003, 1)

The "Paul" of the Colossian letter affirms the soteriological sufficiency of Christ. There is no need for any idols to supplement his saving power.

Colossians 3:1–4:6

Introductory Matters

Viewed as a logical argument, Colossians consists of four components. The letter opens with two thought units that establish the authority by which matters to be discussed later are to be arbitrated. The first, 1:3–23, appeals to the authority of shared experience—both the Colossians' experience of conversion (1:12–14; 1:21–23) and their experience of corporate worship (the hymn of 1:15–20). The second, 1:24–2:5, appeals to the authority of "Paul." By God's commission, "Paul" has made known the divine mystery and now struggles to present his converts mature in Christ by helping them to avoid being deceived by plausible arguments. With the authority of the auditors' shared experience and their divinely commissioned apostle in place, the argument moves to two other thought units that warn against error and give guidance about a Christian lifestyle. The first, 2:6–23, attempts to discredit the human philosophy that threatens the Colossians' continued faithfulness to Christ. The argument makes use of appeals both to the auditors' shared experience (2:9–10, 11–15, 20) and the discernment of their apostle (2:6–7, 16–17, 22–23). The second section of warning and advice (3:1–4:6) focuses on the lifestyle implications of the readers' shared experience (3:1–4, 9b–10a) as their authoritative apostle sets them forth. Our attention is now directed to this second thought unit, 3:1–4:6.

The thought unit consists of an opening statement (3:1–4) analogous to 2:6–7, which formed the opening statement of 2:6–23. What follows are a Two Ways form (3:5–17), a household code (3:18–4:1), and two concluding *topoi* (4:2–6). In terms of the model of Hellenistic moral

philosophers' formation of disciples, this entire segment of Colossians moves to the use of precepts.

Tracing the Train of Thought

The parenetic section of Colossians opens (3:1–4) with an appeal to experience and the promise of hope (cf. 1:5). Here a spatial above-below schema is combined with a temporal hidden-revealed schema. Both are best understood against the background of apocalyptic thought (Levison 1989; contra Swart 1999). First, above-below: **Since you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God** (3:1)**. Think about the things above, not those upon the earth** (3:2)**.** What are the "things above"? Apocalyptic thought offers a clue. "For they will live in the heights of that world and they will be like the angels and be equal to the stars. And they will be changed into any shape they wish, from beauty to loveliness, and from light to the splendor of glory. For the extents of Paradise will be spread out for them, and to them will be shown the beauty of the majesty of the living beings under the throne. . . . And the excellence of the righteous will be greater than that of angels" (*2 Bar.* 51.10–12).

The statement that the auditors "have been raised with Christ" should not be taken as overrealized eschatology—Colossians has a future hope as well as an inaugurated eschatology (e.g., 1:5, 22–23; 3:3–4, 6, 24–25; Still 2004), as verses 3 and 4 indicate in terms of a hidden-revealed (present-future) schema: **For you have died, and your life has been hidden with the Christ in God** (3:3)**. When the Christ, your life** (cf. Gal 2:20; Phil 1:21), **is manifested** (or "revealed," *phanerōthē*; cf. 1 John 2:28, 3:2; 1 Pet 5:4), **then you will be made manifest** (or "revealed") **with him in glory** (3:4)**.** This schema reflects the apocalyptic conviction that what will be revealed in glory is hidden for the duration of the present age (e.g., *2 Bar.* 48.49; 52.7). This is the indicative on which the imperative of the paragraph is based. According to apocalyptic thought, "They shall see that world which is now invisible to them, and they will see a time which is now hidden to them, for they will live in the heights of that world" (*2 Bar.* 51.8–10). So what should the believers do? "And concerning the righteous, what will they do now? . . . Prepare your souls for that which is kept for you, and make ready your souls for the reward which is preserved for you" (*2 Bar.* 52.6–7).

This is the type of apocalyptic hope that the Colossians have heard about (1:5). They are exhorted to seek this hope (3:1). They are encouraged to set their minds on things related to such a hope (3:2). Verse 4 promises that at the Parousia, what is now hidden will be manifested;

so "seek the things above" is a call for the converts to concentrate on the hidden realities that will characterize them when they are glorified.

The material that follows in 3:5–17 is in a Two Ways form. This way of teaching was used by pagans (e.g., Hesiod, *Op*. 1.213–297), Jews (e.g., 1QS III, 13–IV, 26), and early Christians (e.g., Gal 5:16–25; *Did.* 1–6; *Barn.* 18–20) to shape a person's moral development. Such a form consists of three components (Suggs 1972). First, there is a sharply dualistic introduction: "Kill . . . the earthly members" (*melē*, i.e., members of your personality; cf. the above/below dualism of 3:2). Second, there are exhortations sketching the way to live and the way not to live: "kill . . . get rid of" these vices (3:5, 8); "clothe yourselves" with these virtues (3:12, 14). Third, the cosmic consequences of not following this guidance are spelled out: because of such wrong behavior, "the wrath of God is coming" (3:6). These three components are found in Col 3:1–17.

The inappropriate behavior condemned in the Colossian Two Ways form is sketched by means of two vice lists (3:5, 8) and a single prohibition (3:9). Vice lists were a conventional way of teaching what behavior to avoid (e.g., Diogenes Laertius 7.110–114; Wis 14:25; 1QS IV; Matt 15:19; Mark 7:21–22; Rom 1:29–31; 1 Cor 6:9–10; Gal 5:19–21; Eph 4:31; 5:3–5; 1 Tim 1:9–10; 2 Tim 3:2–4; Titus 1:7; Rev 21:8; 22:15; Fitzgerald 1992). They sometimes were taken up into a Two Ways form, as they are here, to depict the wrong way to walk (e.g., Gal 5:16–23, a Two Ways form, includes a vice list, 5:19–20).

The first vice list comes in verse 5: **Kill, therefore, the earthly members** (*melē*; i.e., facets of your personality; cf. Rom 6:13, "do not present your members [*melē*] to sin as instruments of unrighteousness"; 1 Cor 6:15, "do you not know that your bodies are members [*melē*] of Christ? Will you take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute?"). What are the earthly facets of their personalities that are to be killed? The list enumerates five vices to clarify. *Porneian* refers to all sorts of **extramarital sexual behavior** (e.g., prostitution, homosexuality, incest). *Akatharsian* is used for religious and moral **impurity**, including sexual impurity. *Pathos* is used for letting oneself be controlled by one's emotions, so **sexual excess**. *Epithymian kakēn* is **wicked longing** for sexual satisfaction outside marriage. *Pleonexian*, which refers to always **wanting more**, is the source of the previously cited sexual evils. This is **idolatry**. To absolutize one's covetousness or greed so that it knows no bounds is to make one's desires one's functional deity (Bevere 2003, 199–203; Barth and Blanke 1994, 404). These behaviors are to be put to death. Why? Looking back, it is because you have died with Christ (3:3; cf. 2:11–12). Looking forward, it is because these improper sexual behaviors bring down **the wrath of God** (3:6; cf. Mark 9:43–48; Rom 2:5; 5:9; 1 Thess 1:10). "Kill them"; that is, eliminate them from your walk. They

do not belong in a Christian lifestyle. **In these practices you formerly walked when you lived amid such things** (3:7; cf. 1 Pet 4:3–5)**.** Sexual purity is the Christian alternative to the readers' former lifestyle.

The second vice list comes in verse 8. **But now** (that you are Christians)**, you must get rid of all things** like the behaviors in the following list, also consisting of five items: **anger** (*orgē*)**, wrath** (*thymon*)**, malice** (*kakian*)**, slander** (*blasphēmian*)**, demeaning talk out of your mouth** (*aischrologian*). These are essentially sins of anger, as the first list was basically sexual sins. The behaviors in the second list are those that disrupt the peace of the congregation. They have no place in the Christian lifestyle.

An independent prohibition follows the two vice lists. It is linked with an extensive basis for the prohibition, together with one of its implications. The exhortation (3:9a) reads, **Do not lie to one another**. Lying is another behavior that undermines the solidarity of community life. The basis for the prohibition is given in verses 9b–10: **having taken off the old self** (literally "man") **with his deeds, and having put on the new** (self/man) **that is in the process of being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the one who created it**. "It" here represents the new self, the "new man." Diogenes Laertius tells how Pyrrho, attacked by a dog, sought refuge in a tree, a behavior inconsistent with his philosophy. When this was pointed out, he said, "It is difficult to put off the man" (*Vit. phil*. 9.62, 66). So in the third century BC the expression "to put off the man" was used to denote the transition from the unenlightened state to the enlightened state (van der Horst 1973). The language of taking off vices and putting on virtues is found in conventional speech (e.g., Philo, *Somn*. 1.224–225; Dio Chrysostom, *Or*. 60.8; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll*. 4.20). Taking off and putting on was also the language of initiation within the mystery religions (Apuleius, *Metam*. 11.23–24). The image is that of taking off old or dirty garments and putting on new, clean ones. In Colossians the imagery is used in two ways. Here in verses 9b–10a it refers to the auditors' conversion, their spiritual circumcision (2:11) or death to sin (cf. Rom 6:6). In verse 5 ("Kill, therefore, the earthly members in you" by avoiding these five vices) and verses 12 and 14 ("clothe yourselves" with five virtues, love), the language points to the process of moral and spiritual growth subsequent to conversion. Note that "the new [self/man] . . . is *in the process* of being renewed" (3:10b). "The Christian life is not automatically 'free of vices' but represents rather the battle against these vices" (Barth and Blanke 1994, 413).

The text goes on to spell out an implication of the putting off and putting on of conversion and of the ongoing renewal of the new self. In the sphere of this renewal certain distinctions are transcended: **There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian,**

Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is everything (3:11). This sounds very much like Gal 3:28 ("There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"). Although Col 3:11 clearly belongs in the same category as Gal 3:28, it has some distinctives that make it difficult to interpret. Greek-Jew we understand, and circumcision-uncircumcision we grasp. The two sets seem to be referring to the same groups in reverse order. Slave-free we understand. How does one deal with "barbarian" and "Scythian"? The usual way of reading this set is to understand them as referring to the same idea—barbarity—with "Scythian" being the extreme example of barbarity. Josephus says of the Scythians, "They are little better than wild beasts" (*C. Ap.* 2.269; cf. also 2 Macc 4:47; 3 Macc 7:5; 4 Macc 10:7). To make the set say "barbarian and extreme barbarian are transcended," however, seems out of step with the unit as a whole. How then is one to read?

Two observations allow one to make sense of the unit as a whole and the presence of "Scythian" within it (Campbell 1996). First, an alternate image of Scythian in antiquity was that of a slave. Pliny says Scythians were descended from slaves (*Nat.* 4.80–81). Plutarch refers to a domestic slave named Scythian who was present at the murder of his master, Pompey, in Egypt (*Pomp.* 78.4). Dio Cassius tells that Antoninus surrounded himself with Scythians and Celts, both slaves and free (79.5.5–79.6.3). The second observation that may assist our understanding is that, if one accepts the connection between Scythian and slave, the unit is organized chiastically around two contrasts: Jew-Greek and slave-free. The chiasms in 3:11 operate as follows:

> A Greek
>   B Jew
>   B′ circumcision
> A′ uncircumcision
>
> A barbarian
>   B Scythian
>   B′ slave
> A′ free

The renewal that follows conversion produces a community in which Jew-Greek and slave-free are transcended, but in what sense? From the household code that follows in 3:18–4:1 it is clear that slaves continued to exist even in Christian households. From "Paul's" comment in 4:11 ("These are the only ones of my coworkers from the circumcision," that is, Jewish Christians) it is clear that the Jew-Gentile categories remained. The end of 3:11 points to a resolution. Literally it says, "but Christ is

everything in all" (cf. 1 Cor 15:28), which must mean something like "Christ is all that matters in all members of the community," or "Christ is absolutely everything" (Moule 1957, 121). The relation to Christ removes the ultimate significance of racial and economic distinctions, even if they remain in the social order.

Having seen in 3:5–11 what to avoid, mainly through two vice lists, we come in 3:12–17 to a segment on what to do (= the second of the Two Ways). There is a list of five virtues (3:12) followed by five independent sayings (3:13–17). Catalogs of virtues were also widely used in antiquity (e.g., Diogenes Laertius 7.110–114; Wis 8:7; 1QS IV; 2 Cor 6:6–7; Gal 5:22–23; Eph 6:14–17; Phil 4:8; 1 Tim 3:2–3; 6:11; Titus 1:7–8; Jas 3:17; 2 Pet 1:5–8; Fitzgerald 1992). Sometimes a virtue list became part of a Two Ways form (e.g., Gal 5:22–23 is part of the Two Ways form, 5:16–23).

Verse 12 reads, **Therefore, as elect of God** (cf. Rom 8:33; 16:13)**, holy** (cf. Col 1:2)**, and beloved** (cf. Rom 9:13; 11:28; 1 Thess 1:4)**, clothe yourselves with compassion** (*splanchna oiktirmou*)**, kindness** (*chrēstotēta*)**, humility** (*tapeinophrosynēn,* apparently the genuine kind of humility, as opposed to the wrong type in 2:8, 23)**, meekness** (*praytēta*)**, and patience** (*makrothymia*; Bevere 2003, 204–9). The readers are able to put on these virtues because they are elect, holy, beloved, and clothed with Christ. Note that the basic Greek virtues are missing. The virtues listed here are those that contribute to a harmonious community life.

The five independent sayings that follow manifest continuity with the virtue list in the values they espouse. Verse 13, the first saying, offers a desired behavior and its basis: Clothe yourselves, **bearing with one another and forgiving each other, if anyone has a grievance against another; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so also you [forgive]** (cf. Matt 6:14–15; Eph 4:32). Verse 14, the second saying, adds, **And above all these things, [clothe yourselves with] love, which is the perfect binding agent** (cf. 1 Cor 13:4–7; Eph 4:2; 5:1–2). Verse 15, the third saying, has, **Let Christ's peace reign in your hearts, to which you were called in one body, and be thankful** (cf. Eph 2:14, 16–17; 4:3). Verse 16, the fourth saying, advises, **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, with all wisdom, teaching and instructing one another with psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, with gratitude singing in your hearts to God** (cf. Eph 5:19–20). Singing was integral to ancient worship. Verse 17, the fifth exhortation, says, **And everything that you do, in word or deed, [do it] in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him** (cf. *m. Abot* 2.12; Rabbi Jose [c. AD 100] said, "Let all your deeds be done in the name of heaven").

How should one interpret the exhortation that everything should be done out of thanksgiving to God? How would ancient auditors have heard it? Social reciprocity was a general convention in Mediterranean

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Singing in Ancient Worship

Prayers of praise to God were commonly sung in ancient religion:

- Philo describes the worship of the Therapeutae in Egypt: *"The president arises and sings a hymn composed as an address to God, either a new one of his own composition or an old one by poets of an earlier day. . . . They all lift up their voices, men and women alike."*

  —*Contempl.* 80

- Mark says that, after supper, Jesus and his disciples *"sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives."*

  —Mark 14:26

- Paul refers to hymns in Christian worship: *"Whenever you gather, each one has a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, an interpretation."*

  —1 Cor 14:26

- The book of Revelation (11:17–18) gives an example of an early Christian hymn of praise.
- Pliny speaks about Christians singing a hymn to Christ as to a god (*Ep.* 10.96–97).
- Tertullian says that at the agape meal *"each is asked to stand forth and sing, as he can, a hymn to God, either one from the holy Scriptures or one of his own composing."*

  —*Apol.* 39

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antiquity. It involved the giving of a gift (*charizesthai*) and the response to the gift. What was the appropriate response? Seneca says that everyone agrees that thanks (*eucharistia*) should be returned for benefits (*Ep.* 3.1.1; cf. 1.10.4–5). The giving of thanks (*eucharistein*) was understood to involve both verbal and material gratitude (Peterman 1997, 77). So when Col 3:17 speaks about doing everything with thanksgiving to God, it would not have been heard as a call only for verbal thanks throughout the day and night; rather, it would have been heard as a reminder that one's daily walk, as sketched in 3:5–17, was to be a thanksgiving to the divine benefactor (cf. Rom 12:1–2). It seems clear from the list of five virtues and the five independent sayings that what the author wants is a harmonious fellowship of believers.

Colossians 3:18–4:1 is a self-contained unit held in place by an inclusion (cf. "thanksgiving" in 3:17 and in 4:2). It belongs to a form that, since the time of Luther, has been called a *Haustafel*, a household code. A consensus within New Testament scholarship holds that this type of material belongs to the *topos* "concerning household management"

(MacDonald 2000, 153; Bevere 2003, 238). Seneca reflects on the department of philosophy that tells how a husband should deal with his wife, how a father should bring up his children, and how a master should rule his slaves, and he concludes that we need many precepts to see what we should do in this area of life (*Ep*. 94.1). Although the persons addressed and the sentiments expressed in Col 3:18–4:1 are similar to those verbalized elsewhere in pagan (e.g., Polybius 18.41.8–9) and Jewish (e.g., Philo, *Decal*. 165–167; Josephus, *C. Ap*. 2.199–210) sources, the concise form, just as we find it in Colossians, appears nowhere else in extant Mediterranean literature prior to this letter—assuming that Ephesians and 1 Peter were not written earlier than Colossians (Bevere 2003, 238). If it looks as though traditional material is being used in Colossians, it must have been formulated earlier within the Pauline circle and taken up into the letter at this time.

The pattern runs: wives-husbands, children-fathers, and slaves-masters. That is, within each of the three pairs the subordinate person is mentioned first. Wives are called to submit (*hypotassesthe*) to their husbands; children to obey (*hypakouete*) their fathers; and slaves to obey (*hypakouete*) their masters. Since 1 Pet 3:5–6, in the context of a household code, uses "submit" and "obey" interchangeably, one may conclude that the difference of wording conveys no significant difference in meaning. The husbands are called to love (*agapate*) their wives; fathers are exhorted not to provoke their children (*mē erethizete*); and masters are encouraged to act justly and fairly (*dikaion kai isotēta*). This overview makes it quite clear that the *Haustafel* is not about equality but about unity, about harmonious relations in the household (Bevere 2003, 248). Equality exists, however, in the area of moral accountability. Each group is addressed; each group is made responsible for its behavior; and each group is, therefore, accountable for its actions.

The wives: submit to your husbands, as is fitting for a Christian (= in the Lord)**. The husbands: love your wives and do not act harshly toward them** (3:18–19)**.** It was an assumption of the culture that wives should submit to their husbands. The word to husbands reflects the highest attitudes in the culture. Pseudo-Charondas says, "Every man should love his wife" (in Stobaeus, *Anth*. 4.2.24). *Pseudo-Phocylides* also exhorts, "Love your own wife" (195–197). An Isis aretalogy in the first person has the goddess say, "I compelled wives to be loved by their husbands" (G. H. R. Horsley 1981, 1:20–21).

The children: obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing as a Christian (= in the Lord) (3:20)**. The fathers: do not provoke your children, in order that they may not be discouraged** (3:21)**.** In the Mediterranean world, obedience to parents was the chief virtue of children, whether pagan or Jewish. In an aretalogy of Isis from about 100

BC the goddess is praised, "You made parents honored by their children" (G. H. R. Horsley 1981, 1:10–12). Philo says, "If you honor your parents . . . you will be pleasing to God" (*Mut*. 40; cf. Col 1:10). This word to fathers, moreover, reflects the best of the culture generally. For example, Pliny wrote to a friend to caution him about his severity toward his son. "I was reminded by this example of excessive severity to write to you, as one friend to another, lest you on some occasion treat your son too harshly and strictly. Remember that he is a boy . . . and perform your duty as a father always remembering that you are a human being and the father of a human being" (*Ep*. 9.12).

The slaves: obey your earthly masters in everything, not with eye-service as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord (3:22)**. Whatever you do, work wholeheartedly, as to the Lord and not for humans** (3:23)**, knowing that it is from the Lord that you will receive the reward of the inheritance. You serve the Lord Christ** (3:24)**, for the wrongdoer will be paid back for what he has done wrong, and there is no partiality** (3:25)**.** The word to slaves assumes slavery will continue. Attempts to destroy slavery by physical violence had been tried, futilely, in the slave revolts of 134–131, 103–100, and 73–71 BC. **The masters: relate to your slaves with justice and fairness, knowing that you also have a master in heaven** (4:1)**.** The word to masters also reflects the highest values of the culture. Whereas Tacitus says that threats and punishments were the normal way of controlling slaves (*Ann*. 14.44), Seneca speaks of the necessity of avoiding anger and rage when dealing with slaves (*Ira* 3.24.2; 3.32.1). He writes to a friend, "I am glad to learn . . . that you live on friendly terms with your slaves. . . . 'They are slaves,' people declare. No, rather they are men. . . . They are not enemies when we acquire them; we make them enemies. . . . For we maltreat them, not as if they were men, but as if they were beasts of burden" (*Ep*. 47). Aesop is reputed to have instructed his son, "Take care of your slaves and share what you have with them so that they may not only obey you as their master but also honor you as their benefactor" (*Life of Aesop* 109). J. M. G. Barclay (1991) clarifies the difficulties that attended Christian slave ownership in antiquity and those attendant upon a slave's being freed.

This household code reveals that the Colossian letter shares the Mediterranean assumptions that "concord" was the most desirable value in social life, that concord in the household was the presupposition for concord in the city and the state (Jeffers 1998), and that concord in the household depended on each person's knowing his or her role and carrying it out. Josephus demonstrates his awareness of this attitude in Greco-Roman society: in response to anti-Jewish polemic, he emphasizes marriage and the submission of women to show Judaism's support of

concord in the household (*C. Ap*. 2.199–203). The Colossian household code says that Christians also support the quest for concord. To appreciate what this means, one must be aware that the ancient household is not the equivalent of the modern family. It is rather the equivalent of a modern family business, an economic unit at whose core is a family. The household code was the equivalent of the organizational chart for a modern family business. Just as 3:1–17 focused on concord in the congregation, 3:18–4:1 speaks to concord in the family business. The household code does not define relations between members of the worshiping community, nor does it provide a model for a Christian marriage; rather, it aims to clarify the lines of authority and responsibility in the ancient Christian family business (Talbert 2001).

This Christian household code offers Christian motivations for conventional behavior: "as is fitting for a Christian" (= in the Lord; 3:18); "this is pleasing as a Christian" (= in the Lord; 3:20); "as to the Lord" (3:23); "from the Lord . . . you will receive the reward" (3:24); "you also have a master in heaven" (4:1).

The code makes certain statements that cry out for qualification. "Children, obey your parents *in everything*" (3:20); "slaves, obey your earthly masters *in everything*" (3:22). Colossians assumes a Christian household. Is this why "in everything" could be inserted? Children and slaves who were Christians in non-Christian households certainly did not and would not be expected to obey their fathers or masters in the area of veneration of their fathers' or masters' gods.

The aspect of the household code in Colossians that receives emphasis is the word to slaves and masters, in contrast to Ephesians, where the emphasis is on wives and husbands. Is this because of the connection with Onesimus? It may be, but 1 Tim 6:1–2 indicates the problem to be wider than that raised by one slave's circumstances.

Colossians is a christocentric letter. The household code fits into that dominant focus.[1] The code includes a number of expressions related to the Lord (= Christ). For example, note "for a Christian" (= in the Lord; 3:18, 20); "fearing the Lord" (3:22); "work . . . as to the Lord" (3:23–24); "from the Lord . . . you will receive" (3:24); "you also have a master in heaven" (4:1). The effect of these links is to bring even mundane duties under the lordship of Christ. Ordinary tasks are placed in a different interpretive framework. They are now performed to and for the Lord, whatever mundane purposes they may also serve. Each act gains a new meaning. Whereas the daily tasks might appear to serve only human needs and demands, the Christians can think of themselves as obeying their heavenly master. Life thus becomes an unseen transaction between

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1. What follows is an adaptation of Barclay 2001.

believers and Jesus. It is in this sense that one is to "seek the things above" (3:1). "Rather than a social revolution, Colossians represents a cognitive revolution, by which the whole of life is brought under the authority of 'the Master,' and every act and word, whether recognizably 'Christian' or not, is internally Christianized by being offered up in thanks to God and in service to Christ" (Barclay 2001, 51).

In Col 4:2–6 two final exhortations are built around two imperatives (4:2a and 5), verses 2–4 on prayer and verses 5–6 on wise conduct and seasoned speech. These two *topoi* share a common focus on outsiders. The first exhortation, on prayer, has two foci. The first concerns the disciples' prayer for their own preparedness: **Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping awake in it** (cf. Mark 13:33, 35, 37; 14:37) **with thanksgiving** (cf. Phil 4:6–7) (4:2). The second concerns the Colossian Christians' prayer for "Paul" that his missionary work may be effective: **praying also for us that God will open a door for us** (cf. 1 Cor 16:9; 2 Cor 2:12) **for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, because of which I am in prison, in order that I may make it manifest, as it is divinely ordered** (*dei*) **for me to do** (cf. 2 Thess 3:1–2) (4:3–4). In prison "Paul" is concerned that the readers would be spiritually prepared and that he would be an effective evangelist.

The second exhortation, on wise conduct and seasoned speech, is also about relations with outsiders: **With wisdom walk before those outside, taking advantage of the opportunity** (4:5). **Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, knowing how it is divinely appointed** (*dei*) **for you to answer each one** (4:6; cf. Luke 21:14–15; 1 Pet 3:15–16). This concern for appropriate relations with outsiders is characteristic of early Christianity (e.g., 1 Pet 2:12, "Conduct yourselves properly among the Gentiles so . . . they may see your good deeds and glorify God"; 3:1–2, the behavior of Christian wives before their non-Christian husbands may win their unbelieving spouses). The placement of this final exhortation, with its concern for proper relations with outsiders, just after the household code raises the possibility that the code may have been designed to function, as it did in 1 Peter, to lower the hostility of outsiders against the church and possibly win some unbelievers to the faith. If so, this would have been in addition to the code's function as protection against an ascetic view of Christian life and against the assumption that the equality of the relationships of the worshiping community carried over into the ordering of work in the family business. In 3:1–4:6, then, one encounters a concern for a peaceful congregational life (3:1–17), for concord in the household (= family business, 3:18–4:1), and for appropriate relations with outsiders (4:2–6).

Theological Issues

If one stands back from Col 3:1–4:6 and asks what exactly has the author of the letter sketched for the readers as the proper way for Christians to walk, what answer can be given? The first and obvious observation is that the author "does not offer a detailed code of what constitutes proper and improper behavior" (Garland 1998, 220). To have done so would have been counter to the author's theological stance. In 2:6–7 "Paul" says, "As therefore you have received the Christ, Jesus the Lord, continue to walk by means of him [*en autō*] . . . just as you were taught." The Christ, the ideal king, is the living law, from whose character the believer receives guidance for life. In 2:10–15 and 3:1–4, "Paul" also says the Colossians have died, been buried, and been raised with Christ. In 2:20, having died with Christ has behavioral implications. In 3:1, having been raised with Christ has behavioral implications. The believer lives out of this participation in Christ's death and resurrection. Christian behavior, then, for the author of Colossians, has a twofold root: the overall picture of Christ functions as a living law, and participation in Christ's death and resurrection provides orientation for living. Given these bases for Christian behavior, there is no need for a detailed code of behavior.

So why the parenetic section, 3:1–4:6? Why is it needed? Perhaps the image of the North Star would help us to understand the function of 3:1–4:6. Just as sailors can navigate by taking their bearings from the North Star, so Christians have these parenetic sketches to show the basic direction one will take when living out of identification with Jesus' death and resurrection and by the law of his overall character. The parenetic section points in the right direction; it does not provide a detailed code.

On first reading, the parenetic section (3:1–4:6) points in the direction of concord in the Christian fellowship (3:5–17), concord in the Christian family business (3:18–4:1), and behavior appropriate to winning outsiders to the faith (4:2–6). It is true that Colossians participates in the Mediterranean quest for concord in social relations (so also Ephesians and Philippians). It is not true, however, that this was merely assimilation to non-Christian values. The scriptures of Israel, which were also the early Christians' scriptures, saw the roots of social discord and division reflected in the myth of the tower of Babel (Gen 11). It taught that idolatry led to the inability of humans to communicate with each other and to their being scattered and divided. Early Christian theology, rooted in Israel's scriptures, saw God's redeeming activity as encompassing not only the salvation of individuals but also the redemption of human

groups and even the ultimate redemption of the natural world (cf. Rom 8:19–23). Within this schema, the church represents a foretaste of the salvation of corporate humanity. The body of Christ is a human community in the process of being saved. One of the first signs of a human group's redemption is the overcoming of separation and division and the creation of unity, harmony, and concord. For Christians to agree with the imperial culture's quest for concord in households, cities, and the state was not a fall from their pristine purity of faith but the support of a goal that reflected the values of their own scriptures and experience. As Augustine put it, "The Church is now bringing together what that tower [Gen 11] had sundered" (*Tract. Ev. Jo*. 6.10). Of course, the Christians would not have agreed with the imperial means of achieving peace (i.e., by the sword), but they did agree with the ideal of concord in social relations. It is part of the goal of God's salvific activity. This agreement with the ideal of concord, combined with the desire to evangelize, is reflected in the overall direction of Col 3:1–4:6.

On a second reading, another direction becomes obvious, that of defining a proper Christian asceticism.[2] The Colossian philosophy (2:8) that "Paul" opposed in 2:6–23 included an ascetic component, as is evident in references to "matters of food and drink" (2:16), "self-abasement" (= fasting? 2:18), "do not handle, do not taste, do not touch" (2:21), and "severe treatment of the body" (2:23). This brand of asceticism involved abstinence from certain foods and drink and, most likely, abstinence from sexual relations ("do not touch," 2:21; cf. 1 Cor 7:1). The Pauline tradition had already worked through these issues (Rom 14:1–15:13; 1 Cor 7–10).

There was another type of asceticism, however, that the apostle had espoused and that is found in Colossians. This other ascetic response to the world calls believers to participate in an alternate symbolic universe while being physically integrated within the dominant social environment. It is a being in the world but not being of the world. Consequently, the author makes a great deal of the converts' difference from the world. "God has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his Son" (1:13). "You who were once estranged and hostile, doing evil, he has now reconciled in order to present you holy and blameless before God" (1:21–22). "As you have received the Christ, continue to live by means of him" (2:6). "When you were dead in trespasses and sins, God made you alive together with Christ" (2:13). "With Christ you died to the elemental spirits" (2:20). "You have been raised with Christ and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (3:1, 3). The sexual sins to be killed represent "the ways you once followed when you were pagans"

2. For what follows, cf. MacDonald 1999.

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(3:7). "You have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self" (3:9–10). Throughout his argument in the letter, the author appeals to such data about the auditors in order to make his case. The readers have come out of a pagan past and are separate from its vices and evils. They are not part of their former world. They belong to an alternate symbolic universe. They are reminded so they will remember!

Belonging to this alternate symbolic universe, however, does not take them out of the day-to-day world in which they live (cf. 1 Cor 5:9–10). The household code reflects "a desire to limit the potentially controversial visibility of these members by keeping them in place, combined with an awareness of their strategic opportunities to evangelize within the home" (MacDonald 1999, 285). In the *Acts of Paul* the apostle is pictured as a preacher of sexual asceticism whose converts, like Thecla, renounce marriage and live as though they have transcended their sexuality (cf. Thecla's short hair like a boy's). In marked contrast, the use in Colossians of a household code functions to locate Christians in the world and in its social orders, including marriage. But while they live within the world's orders, they live as citizens of another world (cf. Phil 3:20). They are in the world, but as aliens and exiles (1 Pet 2:11). A second major emphasis conveyed by the parenetic section of Colossians, therefore, is to present the Christian way as a this-worldly asceticism, being in the world but not of it. Christians are to be integrated physically in the Greco-Roman world but are not to be spiritually of it. This is the direction the parenetic section points as the appropriate expression of Christ's life in their lives.

The *Epistle to Diognetus*, a second-century apologetic document, has interesting similarities with Colossians in regard both to the philosophy that is combated and to the parenesis that is offered. Regarding the philosophy, *Diognetus* tries to explain why Christians do not worship as pagans and Jews do. Christians, he says, do not keep the superstition of the Jews (1). *Diognetus* criticizes the Jews' anxiety over *food*, superstition about the *Sabbath*, arrogance over *circumcision*, the pretense they make of *fasting*, their celebration of the *new moon* (4.1) and the utter foolishness of their constant observation of stars and moon to keep track of months and days (4.5). Christians are right, he says, to abstain from the *deceit* of the Jews. The Christians' own way of worship is *the mystery*. The similarities with the problem combated by Colossians are remarkable.

Regarding the parenesis offered, the this-worldly asceticism of Colossians is also remarkably akin to that of *Diognetus*. The apology says:

> For Christians are not distinguished from the rest of humanity by country, language, or custom. For nowhere do they live in cities of their own, nor

do they speak some unusual dialect, nor do they practice an eccentric way of life. This teaching of theirs has not been discovered by the thought and reflection of ingenious people, *nor do they promote any human doctrine*, as some do. But while they live in both Greek and barbarian cities, as each one's lot was cast, and follow the local customs in dress and food and other aspects of life, at the same time they demonstrate the remarkable and admittedly unusual character of their own citizenship. They live in their own countries, but only as nonresidents; they participate in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is foreign. . . . They are in the flesh, but they do not live according to the flesh. They live on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. (*Diogn.* 5.1–5, 8–9, trans. Holmes 2006, 295–96; emphasis mine)

In summary, *Diognetus* says, Christians are like the soul in the body (6.1). As the soul lives in the body but does not belong to the body, so Christians live in the world but do not belong to the world (3). In 7.1, *Diognetus* reiterates that "this is *no earthly discovery* that has been *handed on to them*. . . . Nor have they been entrusted with the *administration* of merely *human mysteries*." God once kept the divine *mystery* to himself but now he has revealed it through his Son and has showed the things prepared from the beginning (8.10). Once again, *Diognetus*'s similarities with Colossians are rather remarkable. One might even wonder whether the author of *Diognetus* had actually read Colossians.

Colossians 4:7–18

Introductory Matters

The ancient Greek letter opened with a salutation ("A to B, greeting"). This opening was followed by a prayer form, then the letter body, and finally the closing. Colossians reflects this letter form: salutation (1:1–2); prayer form (1:3–23); body of the letter (1:24–4:6); and closing (4:7–18). This final segment of the commentary focuses on the letter's closing, which is similar to what one finds in Rom 16: introduction of the bearer(s) of the letter (Col 4:7–9; cf. Rom 16:1–2); greetings to the readers of the letter (Col 4:10–15; cf. Rom 16:3–16, 21–23); instructions to the readers (Col 4:16–17; cf. Rom 16:17–20a); and the grace (Col 4:18c; cf. Rom 16:20b). Both letters, of course, were written to churches that Paul did not found.

Tracing the Train of Thought

Verses 7–9 introduce the bearers of the letter: **Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister** (*diakonos*) **and fellow servant** (*syndoulos*) **dependent on the Lord** (*en kyriō*)**, will make known everything about me; I am sending him to you for this very thing, that you may know the things concerning us and that he may encourage your hearts. [He comes] with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother who is one of yours. They will make known to you everything here.** This introduction is a reminder of just how much was communicated by word of mouth. The bearer(s) of a letter would pass on information that was not written, giving the letter a context, interpreting its meaning, and conveying personal data that may have been sensitive. Tychicus

(Acts 20:4, from Asia; Eph 6:21, sent with the Ephesian letter; 2 Tim 4:12, sent to Ephesus; Titus 3:12, possible messenger to Titus) and Onesimus (Phlm 10, converted by Paul; v. 16, a slave) bring the letter and the additional information.

The greetings that come in verses 10–15 appear in several clusters. The first, verses 10–11, offers greetings from Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus who is called Justus: **Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner** (*synaichmalōtos*; cf. Acts 19:29, Aristarchus is a travel companion of Paul; 20:4, from Thessalonica; Phlm 24, "my fellow worker")**; Mark, the cousin of Barnabas** (Col 4:10b; cf. Acts 15:36–41; Phlm 24, "my fellow worker"; 2 Tim 4:11, "bring Mark to me") **(concerning whom you received command: if he comes to you, receive him); and Jesus who is called Justus** (not the Gentile of Acts 18:7; not the Jewish Christian of Acts 1:23 whose name was Joseph Barsabbas, not Jesus). These three who send greetings are called **the only ones from the circumcision** (= Jewish Christians) **among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, who have been a comfort to me**.

The second set of greetings is in verses 12–13: **Epaphras** (cf. Col 1:7, "our beloved fellow servant, a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf"; Phlm 23, "my fellow prisoner")**, who is one of you, a servant** (*doulos*) **of Christ, greets you. He is always struggling** (*agōnizomenos*; cf. 1:29; 2:1) **for you in his prayers, in order that you may be presented mature and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear witness about him that he has a great commitment to you and to those in Laodicea and those in Hierapolis.**

The third cluster of greetings comes in verse 14. **Luke the beloved physician** (cf. Phlm 24, "my fellow worker"; 2 Tim 4:11, "only Luke is with me") **and Demas** (cf. Phlm 24, "my fellow worker"; 2 Tim 4:10, "he has deserted me") **greet you.** The impression that is conveyed by verses 10–14 if that of a missionary with a large number of associates (Ellis 1970–1971). Prisoners often had friends to assist them during their confinement. For example, John the Baptist's disciples tended to him in prison (Matt 11:2). Pliny notes that a person of respectable position was allowed a few slaves to wait on him when he was in prison (*Ep*. 3.16). Philostratus reports that Damis went to prison with the philosopher (*Vit. Apoll*. 7.15). Paul was supposedly granted the privilege of being attended by his friends (Acts 24:23). Ignatius says Polycarp visited him in Smyrna (*Trall*. 1.2) and the Ephesian deacon Burrhus was sent to him (*Eph*. 2.1). The Ignatian correspondence shows how letters could be sent from imprisonment with the assistance of helpers (Rapske 1991).

The fourth set of greetings is found in verse 15. Paul himself asks the auditors in Colossae to **greet the brothers and sisters in Laodicea**

and Nympha and the church in her house. Two issues surface at this point. The first has to do with textual variants associated with Nympha. There are three major readings: (1) Codex Vaticanus and others have "Nympha and the church in her house." (2) Claromontanus and others have "Nymphas and the church in his house." (3) Sinaiticus and others have "Nymphas and the church in their house." In Greek, if the accusative *Nymphan* is given a circumflex accent on the last syllable, the name is masculine. If it is given an acute accent on the first syllable, it is feminine. The earliest texts did not use accent marks, so the key for deciding gender is the personal pronoun modifying "house." As we have seen, there are three variants: his, her, their. The feminine best explains how the others could have arisen and so is preferred (Garland 1998, 279–80; contra Moule 1957, 28, who is representative of those who take Nymphas to be a man). So, as in the case of John Mark's mother, Mary (Acts 12:12), and Lydia (Acts 16:40), a woman has a church in her house. The second issue has to do with where Nympha's church was. It is awkward to think Nympha was in Colossae because "Paul" asks the Colossian church to greet her and her church. It is also awkward to think her house church was in Laodicea because in the first part of the sentence "Paul" asked the Colossian Christians to greet the members of the church in Laodicea. Verse 16 speaks of only one church in Laodicea. What does that leave? In verse 13 "Paul" has mentioned the Christians in Hierapolis. That would seem to be a plausible, if unprovable, option (Kirkland 1995, 112).

Verses 16–17 offer two exhortations. The first (4:16) says, **And when the letter has been read to you, make sure that it is also read in the Laodicean church, and that you also read the letter from Laodicea** (cf. Cicero, *Att*. 4.6, "Be sure you send me a line as often as you can, and take care that you get from Lucceius the letter I sent him"). This indicates that the letters of Paul circulated among the churches and that they were read in church (cf. 1 Thess 5:27; Phlm 2). What was the letter from Laodicea? Various hypotheses have been proposed: a letter written from Laodicea to Paul; a letter of Epaphras to Laodicea (Anderson 1966); a letter from Paul to Laodicea (e.g., Philemon? Ephesians, as Marcion thought? a lost letter? the apocryphal *Epistle of Paul to Laodicea*?). It is likely that it was a Pauline letter, but there is not enough evidence to decide its identity. The second exhortation comes in verse 17. "Paul" says to the Colossians, **Say to Archippus** (cf. Phlm 2, "our fellow soldier")**, "Pay attention to the ministry** (*diakonian*) **that you received through the Lord, that you complete it."** What is the ministry that Philemon's son has received? Opinions have varied. One view is that Archippus was the slave owner and that the majority of the letter to Philemon was addressed to him. His ministry was to

allow Onesimus to return as a free man to Paul (Knox 1959). Another is that Archippus was to accept the pastoral responsibility formerly held by Epaphras (R. P. Martin 1974, 140). There is not adequate evidence to determine what the ministry was.

Verse 18 contains two components of a typical closing of a letter. The first is Paul's authentication of the letter. **The greeting is in my hand, Paul's** (cf. 1 Cor 16:21–22; Gal 6:11; 2 Thess 3:17; Phlm 19)**. Remember my chains.** The appeal to remember Paul's imprisonment was in fact widely realized. In Acts, we are told that Paul was imprisoned in Philippi (16:19–40), Caesarea (23:23–24:27), and Rome (28:16–31). In 2 Timothy Paul is depicted as a prisoner in chains, wearing fetters like a criminal (1:8, 16; 2:9). In *1 Clem*. 5.5–6 we hear that Paul was seven times in bonds. In the *Acts of Paul* the apostle is said to have been imprisoned in Iconium (3.17–20), Ephesus (6), Philippi (8), and Rome (11). The apocryphal *Epistle to the Laodiceans* has Paul say, "now my bonds are manifest, which I suffer in Christ, on account of which I am glad and rejoice" (6). The apocryphal *3 Corinthians* (= *Acts of Paul* 8.3) has Paul refer to himself as "the prisoner of Jesus Christ." He says, "I have these fetters on my hands that I may gain Christ." Ignatius (*Eph*. 12.1–2) and Polycarp (*Phil*. 9.1) appeal to Paul's authority as a prisoner. One can only conclude that Paul's imprisonments shaped how he was remembered. The second component is the grace: **Grace be with you**. Only in the Pastorals is the grace so brief (1 Tim 6:21; 2 Tim 4:22; Titus 3:15).

Historical and Theological Issues

Greetings from Coworkers

What is the function of the closing of the Colossian letter? Colossians, like Romans, was addressed to a church not founded or visited by Paul. These two letters contain many greetings, in contrast to the few greetings present in letters to churches Paul had founded (1 Cor 16:19–21; 2 Cor 13:12; Galatians [none]; Phil 4:21–22; 1 Thess 5:26; Phlm 23–24). This surely suggests that the extensive greetings in Romans and Colossians have some particular purpose. In Rom 16 the greetings are directed to individuals in the Roman house churches that Paul had known at some time or in some place other than Rome. These greetings are designed to build a bridge between the house churches in Rome and the apostle, who is coming to the city. In contrast, the greetings in Col 4 are not directed to individuals in the Colossian church but to the church as a whole. The focus is rather on Paul's coworkers *from whom* the greetings come. This, together with 1:7–8, puts the spotlight on the apostle's associates. As in 1:7–8, so in 4:12–13, praise is heaped on Epaphras. No

doubt this functions as a public, apostolic legitimation of the founder of the Colossian church. The praise given to Tychicus (4:7) and Onesimus (4:9) must function in the same way. "Paul" commends the Jewish Christian coworkers, Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus, as those who have been a comfort to him personally (4:10–11). Only his coworkers Luke and Demas do not receive explicit praise (4:14). The Pauline circle of coworkers is here listed together with an apostolic assessment. It is as though the apostle is shifting the leadership of the churches in the Asian region to his associates (Lohse 1969). Since there is no mention of an anticipated visit to Colossae as in Phlm 22, are we to assume that the apostle does not see any hope for his release and a visit? Is he, as a result, transferring leadership in the Colossian area to his associates?

Colossians and Philemon

How are Colossians and Philemon related? There are a number of continuities between the letter to Philemon and the letter to the Colossians. Timothy is named as coauthor of both (Col 1:1; Phlm 1a). A number of names crop up in both letters: Archippus (Col 4:17; Phlm 2); Onesimus (Col 4:9; Phlm 10); Epaphras (Col 1:7–8, 4:12–13; Phlm 23); Mark (Col 4:10; Phlm 24); Aristarchus (Col 4:10; Phlm 24); Demas (Col 4:14; Phlm 24); and Luke (Col 4:14; Phlm 24). The data have been interpreted in two very different ways. On the one hand, some have argued for Pauline authorship of Colossians because of the close links. Philemon is certainly genuine; given these close links with Colossians, the latter must be genuine also (Knox 1938). On the other hand, most have seen Colossians as deutero-Pauline and regard the similarities between the two letters as evidence of a Paulinist's use of details from Philemon as an attempt to claim genuineness for Colossians. In light of these disputes about historical issues, is there a way of phrasing the question with which we began this paragraph so that the question of authorship would be irrelevant? I think so.

When one reads the two letters, whether Colossians is regarded as genuine or not, a narrative is assumed to lie behind them. If one takes Colossians as genuine, then it is a historical narrative; if one takes Colossians as deutero-Pauline, then the narrative is at least in part a fictional one assumed by the author of Colossians. In either case, there is a narrative of persons and events that makes sense of the two letters.

The narrative behind Philemon assumes that Paul was somehow instrumental in Philemon's conversion (Phlm 19). Now a church meets in Philemon's house (vv. 1b–2). Paul is presently in prison. While he is there, a slave of Philemon comes to him, asking the apostle to intercede for him with his master. While he is with Paul, Onesimus becomes a Christian (v. 10). Although Paul would like to keep Onesimus with him

as one of his coworkers (v. 13), he sends the slave back to his owner together with a letter, the canonical Letter to Philemon. In the letter he asks Philemon to receive Onesimus back no longer as a slave but as a beloved brother, both in the flesh and in the Lord (v. 16). If Onesimus owes Philemon anything, Paul promises to pay it himself. Anticipating his release from prison, Paul asks Philemon to prepare a room for him (v. 22). This much of the narrative is historical.

What direction does the assumed narrative take next? It has been widely assumed that the narrative has canonical Colossians and Philemon sent to the Colossian church at the same time, with Onesimus joining Tychicus to deliver them. This assumption, however, ignores the following discontinuities between the two letters.

1. Colossians says that Onesimus, who is one of the Colossians, is their "faithful and beloved brother" (4:9). If Onesimus was a slave who had left his master (for whatever reason), owing him money, and now was returning with the Letter to Philemon as an attempt to be received back with something other than the severity that he deserved, how could Paul call him a "faithful brother"? Would the Colossians have granted Paul credibility if he made such a statement? If, however, the narrative assumes the Colossian letter was sent later than Philemon, then there would have been time for Onesimus to earn the label "faithful brother" (Kirkland 1995, 113).

2. The theology of Philemon reflects an early period, while that of Colossians reflects a late period. This makes no sense if they were sent at the same time. The narrative needs to locate Colossians in a period later than Philemon.

3. Philemon is not mentioned at all in Colossians, although in the letter to Philemon his was the house in which the church met. Colossians mentions only his son, Archippus, who is now said to have a ministry. Has his father died (Kirkland 1995, 113)?

4. Epaphras is Paul's fellow prisoner in Philemon (23), but not in Colossians. In Colossians, Aristarchus is "Paul's" fellow prisoner (4:10). Although Paul is a prisoner in both letters, his fellow prisoners are different. Are there different imprisonments, or are we dealing with two different time periods in the same imprisonment?

5. In Philemon Paul expects to be set free and asks for a room to be prepared for him (v. 22). In Colossians there is no expectation of a release from prison. If it is the same imprisonment, then has the apostle lost all hope of release? If it is a different imprisonment, does Paul now have less chance of release?

6. Tychicus, who is identified as the bearer of the letters in Ephesians and Colossians, is not mentioned in Philemon. If one takes these six discontinuities together, then a logical inference is that in the narrative

behind the two letters, Colossians is assumed to have been written later than Philemon. How much later depends on whether or not the narrative has Paul in the same imprisonment in both letters or whether we are dealing with two different imprisonments. The theology of the two letters would argue for a considerable time between the two writings. The list of the same coworkers in the two letters, however, seems to argue for a briefer lapse of time. In either case, the assumed narrative is best reconstructed thus: the Letter to Philemon was carried by Onesimus to his owner. Philemon received him back, then freed him and sent him back to be Paul's coworker. He did this job well and became known as a faithful brother. At a later time, Paul and Timothy wrote Colossians and sent it by Tychicus and Onesimus, both of whom he commended. Because of Onesimus's good track record as a coworker, the Colossians would have accorded Paul credibility when he spoke of the former slave as a "faithful brother." Whether this part of the narrative is historical fact or a deutero-Pauline fiction, it seems to be the story assumed when both the close connections and the series of discontinuities between the letters to Philemon and to the Colossians are taken into account.

Paul's Coworkers and Paul's Letters

Passages such as Col 4:7–17 reflect a Pauline team ministry. Paul has multiple associates. What is their function in the group ministry? Paul's coworkers are commonly thought to have had no creative role in the production of the Pauline letters, except when it comes to the deutero-Pauline letters. There are reasons to believe this judgment is incorrect.[1] Almost every Pauline letter implies an apostolic team behind it. This is shown not only by the letters with coauthors but also by the greeting lists. Given the social context of antiquity, it is difficult to think of any letter as coming from Paul and his team that does not involve some group input. Moreover, Paul himself probably did not write down the text of any letter. Only at the end did he occasionally write just a bit to legitimate it (1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11; Col 4:18; 2 Thess 3:17; Phlm 19). In Rom 16:22, Tertius, the scribe, tells the readers his name. On the basis of comparative data, we know that the secretary's role varied, often allowing him considerable freedom in composition. The delivery of the letters as well usually involved persons from the circle of Paul's coworkers. Messengers were more than mere letter carriers. They probably read the letters to the churches and also explained the letter in an authoritative manner, adding personal information not contained in the text. At times coworkers from the receiving congregation were present in the authorial

1. For what follows, see Loubser 2000.

community during the production of the letter (cf. Col 4:9, "Onesimus, who is one of you"). These observations suggest a high level of involvement of Paul's coworkers in the production of the "authentic" letters as well, and thus reduce considerably the distance between "authentic Paul" and "deutero-Paul."

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