

From the Greek

Baptism ❖ Elders ❖ Women's Role

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Abbreviations

Gen	Genesis	Gal	Galatians
Deu	Deuteronomy	Eph	Ephesians
Josh	Joshua	Col	Colossians
Isa	Isaiah	1 Tim	1 Timothy
		Heb	Hebrews
Matt	Matthew	Jam	James
Rom	Romans	1 Pet	1 Peter
1 Cor	1 Corinthians	2 Pet	2 Peter
2 Cor	2 Corinthians	Rev	Revelation

KJV	King James Version
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version

***BAPTISM
FROM
THE GREEK***

The New Testament teaching concerning baptism gets in the way of some very popular theological theories, and for that reason the teaching is often neglected. Nonetheless, baptism is important. It is important because it occupies a crucial place in the New Testament with regards to conversion, and no serious Bible student should ignore it.

Every person that reads the New Testament encounters baptism again and again. It sticks out as ancient bones stick out of the ground, which bear witness to earlier things; and many theologians stumble over these “bones.”

These notes have been written at the request of one of my grandsons, Ben Walker, who was seeking information about baptism from the Greek for a friend of his.

The method that I have used in preparing these notes has been to write out the relevant Greek verses and look at them carefully. Sometimes I printed the verses out with the help of the *QuickVerse* computer program, which was graciously supplied to me by Dr. Harold Higginbottom. At other times, I copied out the relevant passages by hand. (I find that when a passage is written out on paper, it lies quietly before me and does not dance around, as it otherwise might. This seems to help me catch the broader meaning of the passage, as well as some of its nuances.)

I want to state emphatically that the Greek word *baptizein* from which the English expression “to baptize” comes, means “to dip” or “to immerse” someone (or something) in water (or in some other liquid). This word shows that baptism was originally performed by immersion, and there is no doubt about this. If anyone has any doubts about it, let him look in any Greek lexicon under the word *baptizo*, and he will see that what I say is true.

The English clerics, who brought forth the King James Bible in 1611, could not bring themselves to translate *baptizein* as “to immerse,” because neither the English church nor the Roman

church practiced baptism by immersion. The normal practice of both of these churches was (and still is) to sprinkle a little water on the head of a person brought to them for baptism. Therefore, the clerics that prepared the King James Bible simply appropriated the Greek word and made an English word out of it. The average person at that time was mostly in the dark as to the origin of the word “baptize,” and I fear that many people are still in the dark about it today.

The purpose of this study is to look at what the authors of the New Testament said about baptism. I have used Roman letters in writing out Greek words, but readers acquainted with the Greek language will have no difficulty identifying the Greek words.

The English quotations are from the New King James Version (NKJV), Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. I used the NKJV because its wording follows the Greek a little more closely than some of the other versions.

1

Matthew 3:4-6

And John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

John the Baptist was a very great man. He appeared in the attire and manner of Elijah the prophet. Jesus said that John the Baptist was not only a prophet but “more than a prophet” (Mat 11:9).

Jesus also said, “Among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist” (Mat 11:11). John was the first person in the New Testament to preach and practice baptism. The response that people made to his work was great.

Mark began his Gospel with a narration of the work of John the Baptist. Mark wrote, “John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4). John’s message was that people should repent and be baptized. Therefore, his baptism is called a “baptism of repentance” (*baptisma metanoias*). The apostle Paul also characterized John’s baptism as a “baptism of repentance” (Acts 13:24; Acts 19:4).

John the Baptist was very specific about what he understood repentance to be. He told people possessing food and clothing to share what they had with those that had none (Luke 3:11). He told tax collectors to collect no more than was due them (Luke 3:13). He told soldiers, “Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages” (Luke 3:14). He urged people to repent, “for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mat 3:2).

John the Baptist’s baptism was not only a “baptism of repentance,” but it was also a baptism “for the remission of sins” (*eis aphesis hamartion*). The thought that baptism should be for the remission of sins is offensive to a lot of people today, but the truth of the matter is that John the Baptist and Jesus’ apostles all preached baptism for the remission of sins.

It is wrong to say that the expression “for remission of sins” (*eis aphesis hamartion*) in Mark 1:4 should be translated “because of the remission of sins.” *Eis aphesis hamartion* does not mean “because of the remission of sins.” It means “unto the remission of sins.” See the comments under Acts 2:38-39 on pages 16-19 of this paper. From Jerusalem and from all over Judea, people went out to John the Baptist, and he baptized them “in the Jordan River” (*en to*

Iordanee potamo). The use of the preposition *en* with the dative case reveals where the baptizings took place. They took place in the Jordan River. The wording of this passage is compatible with the thought that John the Baptist baptized by immersion.

It is interesting to note that people came to John, “confessing their sins” (*exomologoumenoi tas hamartias auton*) (Mat 3:6).

2

Matthew 3:13-16

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me? But Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.

Jesus was aware that John was baptizing people in the Jordan River, and He went out to John “to be baptized by him” (*tou baptistheenai hup’ auton*). The Greek article *tou* is in the genitive case, which, when used with an infinitive, generally expresses purpose. This tells us that Jesus did not go out to inspect John’s work or to hear his message. He went out for the expressed purpose of getting John, and no other, to baptize Him. By doing this, Jesus showed His appreciation for John as a person, for his work, and for the importance of baptism.

John the Baptist felt, however, that he was not worthy of the honor of baptizing Jesus. He also knew that Jesus did not need to be baptized for the remission of sins, as other people did. John was not so sure about himself, for he said, “I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?” Jesus replied, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”

Jesus was not content to be just a little righteous; rather, He wanted “to fulfill all righteousness” (*pleerosai pasan dikaikosuneen*). Jesus felt that it was “fitting” that He should be baptized. Indeed, it was fitting, for if He had not been baptized, people would still be saying today, “Jesus was not baptized; therefore, I do not need to be.” The proper response to Jesus’ having been baptized should be, “If Jesus, who committed no sins, was baptized, how much more should I be.”

After Jesus was baptized, He “came up immediately from the water” (*anabee apo tou hudatos*). Literally, He came “up away” from the water. This shows that Jesus was in the water at the time He was baptized. It also shows that John was in the water, too. So the wording of Matt 3:16 is compatible with the idea of Jesus’ having been baptized by being dipped or immersed in water.

An additional account of Jesus’ being baptized is found in Mark 1:9-11. This account says that Jesus was baptized *eis ton Jordaneen* (into the Jordan). The wording gives the picture of Jesus going down into the river. This account also is compatible with the idea of Jesus’ having been dipped or immersed in water.

The Gospel of Luke informs us that the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus after He was baptized (*baptisthentos*) and while He was praying (Luke 3:21-22). *Baptisthentos* is an aorist passive participle, which shows that the baptizing was already over with when the Holy Spirit fell on Jesus. Not even upon Jesus did the Holy Spirit descend before He was baptized.

3

Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.’

After Jesus was raised from the dead, He came to His apostles in Galilee and said to them, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.” He added, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.”

Jesus then gave His apostles instructions as to how they should go about making disciples: The first thing was to go to all the nations. The participle *poreuthentes* (going) is in the aorist tense. It shows that the apostles had to “go” before they could make disciples of all nations.

Jesus also said, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The Greek word for “baptizing” (*baptizontes*) is a present participle. It shows action that is contemporary with the verb with which it goes. So, Jesus told His apostles that while they were in the process of making people into disciples, they should baptize them. From, this we learn that baptizing people is a part of the process of making them into disciples of Jesus. There is not even a hint in Jesus’ words that the nations could become His disciples without their being baptized.

From Jesus' point of view, being baptized was an integral part of becoming disciples.

The KJV and the New King James say that Jesus gave instruction to His apostles to baptize people “in the name of” the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Greek text in this verse, however, does not say “in the name of.” It says “into the name of” (*eis to onoma*). There is a difference between “in” and “into.” The one shows location, while the other shows movement toward (or entrance into) something. The apostles were instructed to baptize people into the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. That is, they should baptize people to put them into a relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The relationship would be established in baptism.

Not only should the disciples baptize people, but they should also teach them. Jesus said, “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” The word *didaskontes* (teaching) is also a present participle. It modifies the main verb *matheetesate* (make disciples) and shows that teaching is a part of turning people into disciples.

Jesus told His apostles to teach people “to observe all things (*panta bosa*) that I have commanded you.” They should teach people to keep “everything” (*panta*) that He had commanded them. There is a little word in the Greek here, which does not come through strongly enough in English. It is the word *bosa*, which means “as much as.” Jesus emphasized that His disciples should teach the people to keep as much--no more, no less—as He had taught them. It is too bad that this emphasis is lost in translation. Jesus also promised that if His apostles would do as He commanded, He would be with them until “the end (*sunteleias*) of the age.” The extent of the duration of this promise (“to the end of the age”) shows that Jesus commissioned not only His eleven apostles but also His followers of today to take the gospel to all nations.

4

Mark 16:15-16

And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.’

Following Jesus’ resurrection, He appeared to the eleven apostles while they sat eating. He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” The Greek word for “preach” is *keeruxate*, which means, “to proclaim” as a herald. *Keeruxate* is in the imperative mood (the command form), which indicates that Jesus did not merely advise His apostles to preach; He commanded them to preach. They were to preach the “gospel” (*euangelion*). The Greek word *euangelion* means “good news.”

Indeed, the apostles had a lot of good news to share. They were to proclaim that Jesus had died for all, and that He had arisen from the grave. This was exciting news. It suggested that the bonds of sin and death had been broken.

The apostles were to tell the good news “to every creature” (*pasee tee ktisei*). The expression “every creature” does not include the animal kingdom. It means that they were to proclaim the gospel to Jews and Gentiles alike.

Jesus knew that some people would listen to the good news, believe it, and ask for baptism. Therefore, He said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved.” The Greek expression for “will be saved” is *sotheesetai*, which is a verb in the future tense. Observe, please, that both believing and being baptized go before being saved. The Greek word for “believes” is *pistensas*, and the Greek word for “is baptized” is *baptistheis*. Both of these Greek

words are aorist participles. Being in the aorist tense, they both show action prior to the action of the main verb, which is *sotheesetai*. The resultant thought is that both a person's believing and a person's being baptized precede a person's being saved. This thought should give pause to anyone who thinks that believing is important but that baptism is not important.

Jesus knew that when people heard the "good news" it would place a decision before them. He knew that some of them would not believe the gospel and would, therefore, be condemned. So He said, "But he who does not believe will be condemned." The fact that some people do not believe shuts off their way of escape from the condemnation under which they stand. (See John 3:17-18.) The expression "will be condemned" is a translation of the Greek verb *katakritheesetai*, which is the future passive form of *katakrino*. *Katakrino* means to condemn. In the Greek New Testament, *katakrino* refers frequently to the last judgment, and this may be its meaning here.

Not only did Jesus identify the person (or persons) that would be saved, but He also identified the person (or persons) that would be condemned. He said, "but he who does not believe will be condemned." So, according to Jesus, it takes two things (belief and baptism) for a person to be saved, but it takes only one thing (disbelief) for a person to be condemned.

I have heard people say, "If baptism is essential, why did Jesus not say, 'He who does not believe and *is not baptized* will be condemned?'" Well, for one thing, it was not necessary for Jesus to say that, because He did not envision that any nonbeliever would want to be baptized. Further, if Jesus had said, "he that does not believe and is not baptized will be condemned," those words would have been subject to gross misunderstanding. Those words would have meant that it takes two things to make a person liable for condemnation. If Jesus had spoken in that way, it would have

implied that if a person lacked either one of those negative qualifications, he would not be liable for condemnation. That would support the thinking of people who want to believe but who do not want to be baptized; for it would free them from condemnation, as they desire. But it would also have some unforeseen consequences: It would free any nonbelievers from condemnation, who went ahead and got baptized even though they did not believe. So if Jesus had said, “He that does not believe and is not baptized will be condemned,” the easiest way for a person to avoid condemnation would be for him not to believe the gospel but to be baptized anyway.

5

Luke 7:29-30

And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.

Most of the leaders of the Jews did not approve of what John the Baptist was doing, nor did they believe that God had sent him (Mat 21:25). John’s call for the high and mighty people to repent offended them. Lowly people, however, accepted John as a prophet (Mat 21:26). Some tax collectors, who were generally despised by the people, respected John the Baptist, in spite of the fact that he told them, “Collect no more than what is appointed for you” (Luke 3:13); for they knew that John’s message was just.

Luke said that the tax collectors “justified God” (*edikaïosan ton theon*) by allowing themselves to be baptized (*baptisthentes*) by John

(Luke 7:29). That is, they agreed that God is righteous. *Baptisthentes* is an aorist participle. It shows that the baptism of the tax collectors proceeded their fully justifying God. This suggests that their “justifying” God was contingent upon their being baptized.

The text says that the tax collectors were baptized with “the baptism of John” (*to baptisma Ioannou*). The fact that the expression *to baptisma* is in the accusative case defines the limit, or the specificity, of their being baptized. It was not just any baptism. It was John’s baptism, and it differed from the usual ceremonial washings that were done by the Jews.

The Pharisees and lawyers, on the other hand, did not justify God. They “rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.” By refusing to be baptized by John, they rejected the will of God “for themselves.” The expression “for themselves” (*eis heautous*) suggests that it was precisely for proud people like the Pharisees and the lawyers that John’s baptism was designed; but they “rejected” (*eetheteesan*) it. Surely, there is a message here for any haughty person of today, who feels that Christian baptism is beneath him.

6

John 3:22-23

After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized.

Sometime after Jesus had spoken with Nicodemus, He and His disciples left Jerusalem and came into Judea, where they stayed for

a time, baptizing people. Jesus was not baptizing people personally; His disciples were doing it (John 4:2).

John the Baptist, at the time, was baptizing at Aenon near Salim. He baptized at Aenon “because there was much water there” (*hoti hudata polla een ekei*). The comment to be made is rather obvious. If John only sprinkled a littler water on the heads of people, he would not need “much water.” If, on the other hand, he were baptizing by immersion, he would need a lot of water.

7

John 4:1-3

Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples), He left Judea and departed again to Galilee.

Jesus was very successful in making disciples and baptizing people and the Pharisees got wind of it. When Jesus became aware that they had heard of His success, He left off working in Judea and returned to Galilee. We do not know all that Jesus was telling the people in Judea about baptism. We do know that some of His teaching echoed the words of John the Baptist. Jesus preached, among other things, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mat 4:17), just as John was preaching.

I suspect that the baptizing that Jesus’ disciples were doing was similar to John’s baptism. If that is true, it would suggest that Jesus was also preaching a “baptism of repentance,” as John was doing (Mark 1:4), and that the baptizing that Jesus was doing was also “for the remission of sins.”

It would appear, then, that the baptisms that Jesus' disciples performed worked only retroactively, just as John's baptisms did. Such a baptism cleansed people of past sins, but it does not appear to have established a new relationship for the future, as Christian baptism does.

The people that were baptized at this stage of the unfolding of God's plan were not "baptized into Christ Jesus" (Rom 6:3), nor were they "buried with Him though baptism into death" (Rom 6:4), for Jesus had not yet died and had not yet been placed in his tomb. In addition, they were not baptized into the "one body" (1 Cor 12:13), because the church (the body of Christ) had not yet been established.

8

Acts 2:38-39

Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.'

The people who heard the Apostle Peter speak on the day of Pentecost had their consciences pricked by what he said. They cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

Peter commanded them, "Repent." This meant not only that they should be sorry for having consented to the death of Jesus, but also that they should make a sincere effort to change the way they lived.

The Greek word *metanoeo* implies a change of mind. It means that people should reorient their thinking, so as to be able to change their actions. *Metanoeo* is the same word that is found in the message of John the Baptist, who said, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mat 3:2).

Peter’s call for repentance implied that his listeners were capable of doing something to alter their guilty state. It was not necessary for them to wait around for God’s Holy Spirit to change them.

The message that the apostle Peter spoke at Pentecost is sorely needed today. Bible teachers and preachers should not leave the impression that people can come to God, and receive His forgiveness, without first changing their attitude toward sin in their lives.

The apostle Peter used the expression “every one of you” (*hekastos humon*), which emphasizes the responsibility that each person has to get himself or herself baptized. Contrast this with today. A preacher of today often has to plead with people to allow themselves to be baptized, but it should be the other way around. People should be pleading with a preacher to baptize them. The Greek word *baptistheeto* (be baptized) in Peter’s speech is in the imperative (command form) mood, showing it was the people’s responsibility to get baptized. This does not mean, of course, that they should baptize themselves by dipping themselves in water. The word *baptistheeto* is in the passive voice, which shows that the recipients of baptism are passive and must get someone to help them. Nothing in the Christian system is less worklike than baptism.

Baptism upon the Name of Jesus

The apostle Peter told the people to be baptized, as most translations say, “in the name of Jesus Christ.” The Greek text of this verse, however, does not have *en to onomati*, which would mean

“in the name of.” What the Greek text has is *epi to onomati*, which literally means, “upon the name of.”

“In the name of” might imply some sort of a ceremony, but “upon the name of Jesus Christ” explains why a person should get baptized. He should do it upon Jesus’ authority.

There is no reason to find a contradiction between Peter’s words on Pentecost and what Jesus said in commissioning His apostles. Peter told the people to be baptized upon the name (authority) of Jesus (Acts 2:38), while Jesus told His apostles to baptize people into the name (*eis to onoma*) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mat 28:19). Peter’s words were spoken to explain to people why they should submit to baptism.

Jesus’ words were spoken to explain to His apostles why they should baptize people: The apostles were to baptize people in order to bring them into a loving relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Baptism for the Remission of Sins

The apostle Peter told the people that they should be baptized “for the remission of your sins” (*eis aphesin ton hamartion humon*). Baptism for remission of sins is a highly controversial topic of discussion, today. Not so, however, in the days of the New Testament. Then, all baptisms were for a cleansing of some kind.

There is discussion today as to whether the apostle Peter meant for people to be baptized **because** their sins had been remitted, or **in order** to get their sins remitted. No discussion on this point should be necessary, however, because the preposition *eis*, when used with the accusative case, indicates “direction toward,” “unto,” or “into.” There is no way that the expression *eis aphesin* (for the remission of sins) can mean “because of the remission of sins.”

In order to check this out, I looked in a book called *The Englishman’s Greek Concordance of the New Testament* under the heading

eis. I found that *eis* is used over 1,700 times in the New Testament. As I examined these Scriptures, I found that *eis* is used to mean “toward,” “unto,” or “into.” Anyone would have difficulty finding even one instance where the word *eis* means “because of” except perhaps, as some suppose, in the case of Matt 3:11.

Let us look at Matt 3:11, in which John the Baptist said,

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but
He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose
sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you
with the Holy Spirit and fire.

It sounds strange to our ears, of course, that John the Baptist would say that he baptized people unto repentance. Normally, we think of repentance as preceding baptism, not following it. So how can John’s words be understood? A possible explanation may be that John was giving his personal motivation for being out in the wilderness baptizing people. He wanted to get people to repent, for he knew that the kingdom of heaven was just around the corner; and he wanted people to be ready for it.

His getting people to repent may have been the hardest part of his task. His getting them to be baptized does not appear to have been all that difficult, for Jewish people in those days were accustomed to ceremonial washings. (I do not mean to suggest that John’s baptism was merely ceremonial). What I am suggesting is that a baptism was nothing unusual for them; they were used to it. Indeed, the people who came to John may have already been baptized for various reasons before they came to him. John’s message was that people should show “fruits worthy of repentance” (Luke 3:8), in preparation for the kingdom (Mat 3:2). For that reason they should be baptized for “the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4). However, if someone had asked John, “Why are you out in the wilderness baptizing people?” he might have

answered: “Oh, I am out here preaching and baptizing people so they will change the way they live and be ready to accept the kingdom of heaven.”

Some theologians use Matt 3:11 to find justification for translating *eis metanoian* (unto repentance) as “because of repentance.” They have a special interest in translating it this way, for if *eis metanoian* can mean “because of repentance,” it has implications for other Bible passages, especially for Acts 2:38. In Acts 2:38 the apostle Peter urged his listeners to allow themselves to be baptized “for the remission of sins” (*eis aphesin ton hamartion*). Peter’s meaning was that the people should be baptized in order to obtain the remission of sins. Protestant theologians, however, do not like the idea of baptism being done to obtain the remission of sins. They prefer that baptism be done, if at all, because of remission of sins, for they believe that salvation comes by faith only.

The English word “for” can have two meanings. It can mean “because of” something that happened. It can also mean “in order for” something to happen. The Greek word *eis* when used with the accusative case, does not have this duality of meaning. It means “in order for” something to happen.

If “for the remission of sins” in Acts 2:38 means “because of remission of sins,” as some theologians maintain, that would indicate that Peter told the people on the day of Pentecost to be baptized because they had already been forgiven. That would mean that the people had received the forgiveness of their sins at some prior time, presumably at the moment they accepted Jesus as “their personal savior.”

The attempt, however, to make the Greek preposition *eis* with the accusative case mean “because of” runs up against the reality of Greek grammar. *Eis* with the accusative does not mean “because of.” Instead, it shows direction “toward,” or “unto,” or “into” something (or someone).

Baptism to obtain remission of sins was nothing new. This is what John the Baptist had preached (Mark 1:4). John was certainly not baptizing people *because* they had already been forgiven. He called some of them, “Brood of vipers” (Luke 3:7). John was baptizing people, because they needed to be cleansed so they would be ready to accept the kingdom of heaven when it would be revealed.

Some of the people to whom the apostle Peter spoke on the Day of Pentecost may have been baptized earlier by John the Baptist. I say this because many people from Jerusalem had gone out to be baptized by John. (See Matt 3:5-6).

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

After Peter finished telling the people on the day of Pentecost to “repent” and “be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins,” he spoke to them of the blessing that would follow. He said, “And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). The Greek word in this passage for “gift” is *dorea*. This word is used in the New Testament to refer to different kinds of gifts. Some people think Peter was referring here to the spiritual gifts of a miraculous nature that some early Christians received. Others identify “the gift,” of which Peter spoke, with eternal life. Still others think Peter was referring to the giving of the Holy Spirit as such, which opinion I hold. The reason I hold to this opinion is because in the next verse (Acts 2:39) Peter spoke of the Spirit as having been promised. The gift that had been promised in the Old Testament regarding the Holy Spirit is the gift of the Spirit Himself. (See Isaiah 44:3; Ezekiel 36:26-27; Joel 2:28.)

Although the identity of the “gift” in this passage may be controversial, one thing is clear: Peter said that the gift of the Holy Spirit would be received on the far side of baptism. That is, it comes *after* baptism, not before it. This agrees with what the New

Testament teaches in general. For instance, Jesus said that the world (i.e. people of the world) could not receive the Holy Spirit (John 14:17). That means that a person would, in some sense, have to be taken out of the world before he could receive the Holy Spirit. Peter (and others) said that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32), not to those who had not obeyed Him. In addition, the apostle Paul asked (rhetorically) whether or not the Galatian Christians had received the Spirit by the “hearing [i.e. obedience] of faith” (Gal 3:2). The answer is “Yes,” they had received the Spirit as a result of their hearing (in the sense of their harkening to) the teaching of the faith. Paul implied that the Galatians had received the Holy Spirit after they had complied with what God had said.

It would be unreasonable of us to expect that God would send His Holy Spirit into the heart of a person before the blood of Jesus had cleansed that person’s heart. Even if the Holy Spirit were to go into such a heart, He would go right out again, for God’s Holy Spirit could not live in an unholy temple (1 Cor 6:19). Further, if God were to select only certain individuals for salvation by sending His Spirit into their hearts, that would make Him a respecter of persons; and we know that God is no respecter of persons (Rom 2:11). God wants everyone to be saved (1 Tim 2:4 and 2 Pet 3:9), not just a few.

Being Added to the Church

The text in Acts 2:41 says, “three thousand souls were added” that day. The same verse also says, “those who gladly received his [Peter’s] word were baptized.” This implies that only those people were “added” (*prosetetheesan*) to their number who “received his word” (*apodexamenoi*) and “were baptized” (*ebaptistheesan*).

Notice the order: (1) receiving the word, (2) being baptized, and (3) being added to the fellowship. No one was added in Jerusalem

that did not accept what Peter preached. Indeed, no mention is made anywhere in the New Testament of anyone ever having been added to the fellowship that had not been baptized.

The text also says that “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). Many early Greek manuscripts and some English translations omit the word “church” from Acts 2:47, but its omission makes no difference as far as our present discussion is concerned. The point is that no one was being saved outside of the fellowship, for the process of being saved and being added to the church were the same.

9

Acts 8:12-13

But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

Saul of Tarsus and others were persecuting the church. This caused many believers to leave Jerusalem. Philip was one of those who went out from Jerusalem. He came to the city of Samaria, where he preached about “the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus” and performed miracles. A number of both men and women in Samaria “believed Philip” (*epistēusan to Philippon*). That is to say, they trusted Philip and had confidence in what he was saying. As a result, they “were baptized” (*ebaptizōnto*). Notice the chain of events: (1) Philip preached, (2) Samaritans believed, and (3) men and women were baptized. This is the pattern that conversions

took in New Testament times. Preaching preceded faith, and faith preceded baptism. Thus faith and baptism are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, they go together, because faith leads to baptism.

10

Acts 8:34-39

“So the eunuch answered Philip and said, ‘I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?’ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’ Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.”

There are a number of interesting points in the story of the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch. First of all, an angel commanded Philip to go south on the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza (Acts 8:26). The angel did not go himself to preach to the Ethiopian. He sent a human being instead. The human was Philip, who found the Ethiopian riding along in a chariot and reading the Scriptures. The Ethiopian was a Bible-reading man. Such a person is a prime candidate for receiving the message about Jesus. So Philip began where the Ethiopian was reading (Isa 53) and “preached (*eueggelisato*) Jesus to him.”

At some point during their conversation, they got around to the subject of baptism. After a while, they came to a place where there

was water and the Ethiopian was delighted that they had found water. He said, "See, here is water." He asked Philip, "What hinders me from being baptized?" What Philip replied is omitted from many ancient manuscripts, and for that reason, some Bible translations also do not contain his reply. The KJV and the New Kings James Version, however, record that Philip replied, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." The Ethiopian answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

As one looks at the conversion stories in Acts of Apostles, one finds a pattern of events. The bedrock on which all conversions are based is, of course, faith in Jesus as the Christ. In addition to faith, a person must be sorry for his or her sins and turn away from them. Every preacher that baptizes a person has the right to know (and the obligation to ask) whether or not the person he is baptizing believes that Jesus is the Messiah (Christ), for anyone that does not believe that Jesus is the Christ is not a proper subject for baptism. Also, every preacher has the obligation to warn the person that he is about to baptize that he or she should repent of sins; for if there is no repentance, there will be no forgiveness.

The Ethiopian commanded his chariot to stand still, and both he and Philip "went down into the water" (*katebeesan amphoteroi eis to hudor*), and Philip baptized him. This narrative sheds light on how baptisms were performed in those early days. Both of the persons that were involved went down into the water. None of the attendant circumstances, as described in any of the baptism stories in the New Testament, ever hint that a baptism need not be performed by immersion. All of the attendant circumstances point to immersion.

When the baptism of the Ethiopian was completed, the Ethiopian and Philip "came up out of the water" (*anebeesan ek tou budatos*), and the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away. The Ethiopian saw Philip no more, yet he went on his way "rejoicing."

His “rejoicing” points to one of the most surprising aspects of proper baptism. It brings joy. No one should get baptized, of course, just for the euphoria; but baptism properly performed and rightly understood is one of the most exhilarating experiences that a person can have.

11

Acts 9:17-18

And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

After Saul of Tarsus had seen Jesus, he was led into the city of Damascus, where he was without sight for three days, until a man named Ananias came to him. Ananias told Saul that the Lord Jesus had sent him so that he (Saul) might receive his sight and “be filled with the Holy Spirit” (*pleesthees pneumatos hagiou*). Notice that the Lord was again dealing through a human intermediary. He sent Ananias to Saul.

The Lord could have told Saul what He wanted him to do while He was speaking with him on the road to Damascus, or He could have communicated it to him later; but He did not do so. Instead, He sent Ananias to tell Saul what he should do. This underscores the thought that we have the treasure of the gospel in “earthen vessels” (2 Cor 4:7).

Although Saul was privileged to speak with the resurrected Lord, that experience did not take away Saul's sins. We know this to be true, because Ananias told Saul afterward, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins" (Acts 22:16).

12

Acts 10:44-48

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, 'Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

There was a Roman soldier in Caesarea named Cornelius, who had a vision of an angel speaking to him. The angel instructed Cornelius to send to Joppa and to fetch a man named Simon, who would tell him (Cornelius) what he should do.

So Cornelius sent for Simon Peter, and Peter came to Caesarea. Entering Cornelius' house, Peter found people assembled there, and he began to speak about Jesus. While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on all that heard the word. The Jewish believers, who had accompanied Peter were astonished that "the gift (*hee dorea*) of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 10:45) was "poured out on the

Gentiles also.” They were amazed to hear Gentiles “speak with tongues (*glossais*) and magnify (*megalumonton*) God,” as the apostles had done in Jerusalem on Pentecost.

The apostle Peter, however, did not appear to be as surprised as his companions were. No doubt, He remembered that Jesus had commanded him and the other apostles to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations (Mat 28:18-20), so he immediately drew the conclusion that the Gentiles at Cornelius’ house should become disciples of Jesus. Peter asked, “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”

Peter knew that some of the Jewish Christians might be hesitant to accept Gentiles into the church; yet Peter had come to the conclusion that Jesus wanted Gentiles to be in His church. The fact that the Holy Spirit had fallen on them convinced Peter of this. Peter knew that the way for people to get into the fellowship of the church was by being baptized, so he “commanded” (*prosetaxen*) them to be baptized. Peter did not say to the people, “Be baptized if you feel the need of it, or if you think it is necessary.” He commanded it. He laid the responsibility for it on their shoulders.

Irrespective of who performs a baptism, it should be done, as Peter said, “in the name of (*en to onomati*) the Lord,” Jesus Christ. This implies that anyone that baptizes another person should speak some appropriate words to let everyone present know in whose name the baptizing is taking place.

13

Acts 16:30-34

And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord

Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

When Paul and Silas came to Thessalonika, they were thrown into jail. In jail, they prayed and sang hymns in the night, while other prisoners listened. Suddenly, there was a great earthquake. The prison doors were thrown open, and the prisoners’ chains were broken. The jailer awoke with a start and saw the prison doors open. Thinking his prisoners had escaped, he drew his sword and was about to take his life when Paul called with a loud voice, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.”

The jailer called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

Paul and Silas replied, “Believe (*pistenson*) on the Lord Jesus (*epi ton kurion Jeesoun*) Christ, and you will be saved (*sotheesee*), you and your household.” The word “believe” (*pistenson*) is in the command form, which shows that Paul and Silas commanded the jailer to believe. They commanded him to believe “on the Lord Jesus” (*epi ton kurion Jeesoun*). Here, we have the preposition *epi* with the accusative case. The meaning is, “place your faith on the Lord Jesus.” Paul and Silas wanted the jailer to accept the fact that Jesus was Lord and Christ. If he could do that, they promised him, “you will be saved (*sotheesee*).” Notice the future tense in *sotheesee*. If he (the jailer) could believe that Jesus is Lord, then it would follow

that both he and his household would be saved, not at the very instant that he first believed, but as a result of his belief.

There was much that the jailer and his family did not yet know, so Paul and Silas “spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.”

There has been some speculation about whether or not there were babies in the jailer’s household, and about whether or not any babies were baptized. No one knows for sure, of course, whether there were babies in the jailer’s household or not. If there were babies, it would have been most unusual—even out of character—for Paul and Silas to speak “the word of the Lord” to them.

Only after Paul and Silas had finished teaching “the word of the Lord,” did the jailer take them and wash their wounds. It was then that he and his household were baptized.

The fact that the baptizing took place in “the same hour of the night” emphasizes the urgency of baptism. Afterwards, all of them enjoyed a breakfast together, and the jailer “rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.” The words “having believed” are translated from the Greek participle *pepisteukos*, which is in the perfect tense. The use of perfect tense shows the existence of a condition that had come about as a result of past actions. If we can determine when it was that the jailer rejoiced, we can determine when he had finally become a “believer.” Does Luke (who wrote Acts of Apostles) wish to convey the thought that the jailer rejoiced when he first heard that Jesus was the Lord? One could possibly conclude that to be true, but it is more likely that the jailer and his household began to rejoice after they were baptized. This suggests that Luke did not consider the jailer and his household to be full-fledged “believers” until after they were baptized.

14

Acts 18:8

Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.” When the apostle Paul came to the city of Corinth, he went into the synagogue every Sabbath and reasoned with both Jews and Greeks. As a result, the ruler of the synagogue, a man named Crispus, came to believe in the Lord Jesus, as did his household. Luke wrote that also “many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.

The order in which these events happened is significant: (1) The Corinthians heard the gospel. (2) They believed it. (3) Then they were baptized. This is the normal order of events found in the conversion stories in the book of Acts. These events hang together like the links of a chain, one event leading to the other.

The tenses of the Greek verbs here are instructive. The word *akouontes* (hearing) is a present participle. Such a participle describes an action that is concurrent with the action of the verb (or, verbs) with which it goes. This shows that during the time that the Corinthians were still in the process of hearing (listening to) the preaching of the apostle Paul, they started believing and being baptized. This suggests that Paul was preaching continuously. It also suggests that the Corinthians were quick to believe and quick to be baptized.

Two important links of this chain, however, are missing in Luke’s brief narrative. Luke says nothing about the Corinthians’ having repented of their sins or about their having confessed their

belief that Jesus is the Christ. Yet it stands to reason that the apostle Paul emphasized both of these things in his preaching, for he reminded the Corinthians in a subsequent letter that some of them had been fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, covetous people, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners (1 Cor 6:9-11). Paul was too alert to have allowed such people to slip into the kingdom without his having called them to repentance, and he would not have baptized people unless he was sure that they believed that Jesus was the Christ. So, although Luke did not mention repentance and confession of faith, it stands to reason that the Corinthians did both.

15

Acts 19:1-7

And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' So they said to him, 'We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.' And he said to them, 'Into what then were you baptized?' So they said, 'Into John's baptism.' Then Paul said, 'John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.' When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. Now the men were about twelve in all.

When the apostle Paul returned to Ephesus, after he had been absent for a while, he found about twelve men there that were disciples. He asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” Paul, being an apostle and having the power to lay his hands on people to give them spiritual gifts (Acts 8:18), apparently wanted to know whether or not he should lay his hands on these men and impart to them spiritual gifts of a miraculous nature.

The men answered, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” What? How could that be? How could these men not have known that there was a Holy Spirit? They should have received the Holy Spirit when they were baptized (Acts 2:28-39). So Paul concluded that something was amiss with their baptism, and he asked them, “Into what then were you baptized?” They replied, “Into John’s baptism.” So that was the problem. John’s baptism differed from a baptism performed in the name of Jesus. One of the ways it differed was that it did not provide people with the Holy Spirit; but there were other differences as well. Here are some of the differences:

1. In John’s baptism, there was no mention of being buried with Jesus.
2. In John’s baptism, there was no mention of a resurrection to a new life.
3. In John’s baptism, there was no putting on of Jesus Christ.
4. In John’s baptism, there was no new birth.
5. In John’s baptism there was no mention of the Holy Spirit.
6. In John’s baptism, there was no entering into the body of Christ (the Church).
7. In John’s baptism, no provisions were made for Gentiles.

The apostle Paul underlined some of these deficiencies in John’s baptism by saying, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of

repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus” (Acts 19:4).

When the men heard this, they were baptized into the name (*eis to onoma*) of the Lord Jesus. Note that John’s baptism had not put these men “into the name of” (*eis to onoma*) the Lord Jesus.

After they were baptized, Paul laid his hands on them and the Holy Spirit came upon them and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.

This story illustrates that if a person discovers that his baptism is faulty, it is not wrong for him or her to be rebaptized. Yet someone might counter by saying, “The apostle Paul said there is only ‘one baptism’ (Eph 4:5); how can a person be baptized twice?” Truly there is only “one baptism” for Christians, but John’s baptism is not it. John’s baptism was not appropriate after Jesus had died and ascended to heaven.

16

Acts 22:16

And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

As Saul of Tarsus was travelling to Damascus to persecute Christians he suddenly saw the Lord Jesus. As a result of the encounter, Saul lost his eyesight and was led by the hand into Damascus.

A few days later, a devout man named Ananias came to Saul and told him that God had chosen him (Saul) to see the “Just One” (Jesus) and to hear Him (Jesus), so that he (Saul) could become a witness to what he had seen and heard. Then Ananias said, “Now

why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins,” having called on the name of the Lord.

Before Ananias had come, Saul had been praying (Acts 9:11). It is interesting to note that Ananias told Saul to “arise” (*anastas*) from his praying. Therefore, it is clear that Saul did not get rid of his sins by praying. Rather, the time had come for action. Ananias said to Saul, “Be baptized and wash away your sins.” The words “be baptized” (*baptisai*) and “wash away” (*apolousai*) are in the imperative mode (command form), which means that Ananias commanded Saul to do this.

Ananias spoke first of baptism and then of washing. This shows that the two are connected. Had Ananias spoken first of washing then of baptism, one might think that a person could wash his sins away in some mystical and symbolical way prior to his being baptized. By putting baptism first Paul linked the two together. Baptism and washing both take place at the same time and in the same act.

Notice that the verbs *baptisai* and *apolousai* are in the middle voice, which indicates that the subject of the verb (Saul) would be acting upon himself, or in his own behalf. This means that Saul should initiate the baptizing (and the washing that was included).

To take the “washing” out of baptism, as many modern theologians do, robs baptism of much of its meaning. Of course, everyone understands that water does not take away a person’s sins. Only the blood of Jesus can take away sins. In baptism, however, a person comes into contact with the death of Christ, in which Christ shed His blood.

I would like to point out that the participle (*epikalesamenos*), which is translated “calling on” the name of the Lord, is in the aorist tense. A participle in the aorist tense indicates that the action of the participle is thought of as having taken place prior to the action described by the main verb. I would translate the Anninias’

command as, “Arise and be baptized, having called (*epikalesamenos*) on His name.” Remember that Saul had been calling on the name of the Lord for three days (Acts 9:9), yet his prayers had not washed away his sins. The Lord, however, answered His prayers by sending Ananias to tell him what to do. The time for praying was over and the time for baptism had come.

17

Romans 6:1-14

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin,

but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”

Jews that did not believe in Jesus could not accept the fact that Gentiles could become children of Abraham by faith in Christ Jesus. They feared that if such a thing were possible, it would circumvent the Law of Moses and morality would be undermined.

Paul, however, denied that Christians lived immoral lives. He asked, “How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it” (Rom 6:2)? As proof that Christians had died to sin, Paul referred to their baptism. He said, “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death” (Rom 6:3)? People of today, who come to the Scriptures from the distance of almost two thousand years, as we do, have their minds filled with several hundred years of Protestant rhetoric. Paul’s mind was not so filled. For him, baptism was a fundamental Christian experience. In it, a person gets into Christ. Paul said, “*ebaptisthe men eis Christon Ieesoun*” (We have been baptized into Christ Jesus).

Such an assertion sounds strange to anyone that has repeatedly heard, as we have, that a person gets into Christ by faith alone. For the apostle Paul, however, a person gets into Christ by being “baptized into” him. This was the way he (Paul) had gotten into Christ, for he wrote, “As many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus” (Rom 6:3). Please notice that Paul did not consider that he

had gotten into Christ by having experienced Him on the road to Damascus.

Paul thought of baptism as being a death. He also thought of it as being a burial. He said, "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death" (*eis ton thanaton*) (Rom 6:4).

Paul thought of baptism as the means by which a person gets into Christ's death. Death, however, is not the end. The purpose of being buried with Christ through baptism into death is that we might walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4). Notice that Jesus' resurrection lay on the far side of His dying. In the same way, our being raised to a new life in Christ lies on the far side of our dying with Him in baptism. Not only does spiritual life on earth lie on the far side of baptism, but also life with him in the hereafter lies on the far side of baptism. Paul said, "For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be (*esometha*) in the likeness of His resurrection" (Rom 6:5). The word *esometha* (we shall be) is in the future tense. This implies that a person's being baptized has something to do with that person's ultimate future. See Rom 6:8-11.

The apostle Paul elaborated upon the reality of a person's having been freed from sin by dying with Christ in baptism. He said, "Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin" (Rom 6:6-7).

The apostle Paul admonished, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace" (Rom 6:12-14).

Now, let us sum up what is implied in Rom 6:1-14. Look, first, at the condition a person is in *before* he or she is baptized:

<i>Verse</i>	<i>Condition</i>
2	He or she is still living in sin.
3	He or she is outside of Christ. He or she is outside of Christ's death.
4	He or she has not been buried with Christ.
5	He or she has not been united with Christ.
6	The old man has not been crucified. The sinful body has not been done away with. He or she is still a slave to sin.
7	He or she has not been freed from (acquitted of) sin.
8	He or she has not died with Christ.

Look also at what happens to a person *in* baptism:

<i>Verse</i>	<i>What Happens</i>
2	He or she dies to sin.
3	He or she gets into Christ's death. He or she gets into Christ.
4	He or she is buried with Christ into death.
5	He or she is united with Christ in the likeness of His death.
6	The old man is crucified with Christ. The body of sin is done away with. He or she ceases being a slave to sin.
7-8	He or she dies with Christ. He or she is freed from (acquitted of) sin.

Now look at the blessings a person enjoys *after* being baptized:

<i>Verse</i>	<i>Blessings</i>
1	He or she does not continue in sin.
2	He or she does not live in sin.
3	He or she has come into Christ Jesus.
4	He or she walks in newness of life.
5	He or she will be raised with Christ.
6	He or she is no longer a slave of sin.
7	He or she has been freed from (acquitted of) sin.
8	He or she will live with Christ.
10	He or she is alive to God.
11	He or she is dead to sin.
13	He or she is alive from the dead.
14	He or she is no longer under the reign of sin. He or she is not under the Law of Moses. He or she is under grace.

Now, the question arises, “Is baptism symbolism or reality?” To put the question another way, “Does a person really die to sin when he or she is (properly) baptized, or is baptism merely a symbol of that death?” Similarly, “Is a person really raised to a new life when he or she comes out of the water of baptism?”

There is, of course, a symbolic aspect to baptism; but is it *only* symbolism? That is the question. A person can sometimes answer a question best by asking another question. One might ask, “Does a person really get into Christ when he is scripturally baptized?” Well, the apostle Paul thought so. He said, “as many of us as were *baptized into Christ Jesus* were baptized into His death” (Rom 6:3, emphasis added). Paul spoke as though a person really does get into Christ when he or she is baptized. Another question: “Is it only symbolism that our ‘old man’ dies in baptism?” No, the “old

man” is really crucified with Christ (Rom 6:6) when a person is “baptized into His (Christ’s) death” (Rom 6:3).

Question: “Is it only symbolical that a person can be ***united*** with Christ?” No, the apostle Paul said, “For if we have been ***united*** together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection” (Rom 6:5, emphasis added).

Question: “Are Christians awaiting only a symbolical resurrection?” Paul said that resurrection of Christians would be “in the likeness of His resurrection” (Rom 6:5). “Was Christ’s resurrection only symbolical?” No, we believe that it was real.

Question: “Should a Christian consider himself dead only in a symbolical way to sin, or should he really stop sinning?” Obviously, he should stop sinning. Paul said, “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin” (Rom 6:11).

Question: “Is it only symbolism that a person is ‘freed from sin’ in baptism?” The apostle Paul did not think so. He said, “He who has died has been freed from sin” (Rom 6:7). The Greek verb translated here as “freed” (*dedikaiotai*) is in the perfect tense. The perfect tense means that the condition it describes is a fiat accompli. Other translations for *dedikaiotai* might be “cleared” or “acquitted,” meaning that a person will not be punished for what he did and that he is free to go.

More questions: “Is a person’s status really changed during baptism? Can it happen so quickly?” Well, how long does it take for God to forgive sins? Can He not do it instantaneously, if He desires? Is His mind not quicker than the fastest computer?

Some more questions: “Is the physical act of baptism really necessary? Would it not be just as satisfactory if a person were to consider himself to be dead?” No. In response to these last questions, one might ask, “Would it have been satisfactory if Jesus had died only symbolically? Why was it necessary for Him actually to go to the cross?” So we conclude that if Jews that are baptized

into Christ do not really die with Christ, they are still alive to the Law of Moses and, therefore, obligated to keep it (Rom 6:14).

Similarly, if both Jews and Gentiles who are baptized into Christ's death do not really die, they are still in their sins and not under grace (Rom 6:14), in which case, their professed faith will not help them. (I am indebted to Tom Black, one of my sons-in-law, for the above information about Rom 6:1-14. Tom has prepared some excellent charts that show the points mentioned above.)

18

1 Corinthians 1:11-17

For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

The apostle Paul heard from someone in Chloe's household that the church in Corinth was not united. The Corinthian Christians were saying, "I am of Paul," "I am of Apollos," "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ."

This grieved Paul. He asked, “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name (*eis to onoma*) of Paul?” The expression *eis to onoma* means literally “into the name?” Paul asked, rhetorically, whether or not any of them had been baptized into his (Paul’s) name. If any of them had been baptized into Paul’s name, they would have been “Paulites.” Paul was glad that he had not baptized many of the brethren in Corinth with his own hands, lest any of them think he had baptized them into his own name.

From this, it appears that being baptized “into the name” of a person results in belonging to that person in a special way. If this is correct, it has tremendous implications for the understanding of baptism. It means that a person that is baptized “into the name of Christ” belongs to Christ in a special way. Put succinctly, he is a “Christian.” This sheds light on the way people became Christians in New Testament times. It shows that baptism was a part of the process of becoming a “Christian.”

19

1 Corinthians 10:1-5

Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

This is a sermonette that the apostle Paul wrote and sent to the Christians in Corinth. The thrust of his sermonette is that, after God had saved the children of Israel from Egypt, their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. This is a warning to Christians not to assume that they will be spared if they commit such sins as the children of Israel did.

Also the experience of the children of Israel in crossing the Red Sea sheds light on baptism. In that crossing, they were all “baptized into Moses” (*eis ton Mousen ebaptistheesan*). Their baptism seems to have committed them to Moses and to all that Moses stood for. If that is true, it implies that being baptized “into Christ” commits a person to Christ and to all that He stands for. In this connection, it is interesting that the children of Israel were not on their way to the Promised Land until after they had been “baptized into Moses” by passing under the cloud and through the sea.

20

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body; whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

Many people think that a discussion of baptism is divisive, but such a discussion need not be divisive. Baptism can and should be a unifying experience. Paul said, “We were all baptized into one

body” (*eis hen soma ebaptistheemen*). His statement shows that there is but “one body” and that everyone in it has been put there by baptism.

The “one body” to which Paul referred is, of course, the church (Eph 1:22-23). Paul and the Corinthians had gotten into the church by being “baptized into” it. As a result, they had all been “made to drink into one Spirit.” Some people would not allow the word “baptized” in this passage to refer to a baptism in water. They say, “Paul was speaking about a Holy Spirit baptism.” The resolution of this question depends on how one understands the expression, “For by one Spirit” (*en henī pneumatī*).

In order to look for possible translations of the preposition *en* when it is used, as here, with the dative case, I turned to the Greek-English dictionary in the back of the Greek text that is published by the United Bible Societies. I found twelve different translations for *en* when it is used with the dative case. They are: “In, on, at, near, by, before, among, within, with, into, to, for.” Not all of these words would make sense in 1 Cor 12:13. The ones that make the most sense are “in,” “by,” “with,” or “into.” Which one is right? Grammatically, all four are satisfactory. The translation that one chooses will likely depend on one’s overall view of what the Holy Spirit does in conversion. If a person feels that no one can come to Christ unless the Holy Spirit opens his heart, he will want to use the expression “in one Spirit” or “with one Spirit” or “into one Spirit.” These expressions would mean that Paul was not thinking of water baptism at all, but of an immersion “in,” “with,” or “into” the Spirit of God. This interpretation, however, presents certain difficulties. It implies that a person cannot believe, repent, or be (effectually) baptized, unless he or she has first received the Holy Spirit. The basic difficulty with such a theory is that it places on God the onus of everyone’s being damned, to whom He does not send the Holy Spirit. In view of the unacceptability of such a

theory, it does not seem likely that Paul was saying in 1 Cor 12:13 that they had all received a baptism of the Holy Spirit and that this baptism had put them into the “one body” (the church).

There is no evidence that any of the Corinthians had received a baptism of the Holy Spirit. Remember that, although the Twelve Apostles had experienced a Holy Spirit baptism on the day of Pentecost, it had not put them into the “one body.” I say this for they were already in the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20) at the time they were baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Further, not even Saul’s exhilarating experience on the road to Damascus put him into the “one body,” for he still had to be baptized in water to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). Nor did the baptism of the Holy Spirit that Cornelius (and his relatives and friends) experienced put them into the “one body,” for they still had to go into water and be baptized (Acts 10:47).

Therefore, it does not seem likely that the apostle Paul was telling the Corinthians that he (and they) had been baptized “in,” “with,” or “into” one Spirit. What seems more likely is that he was reminding them that they all had been baptized “by one Spirit,” meaning that they had been led “by one Spirit” to baptism. If the verse is taken in this way, baptism becomes a unifying factor, since it was an experience they had had in common.

21

Galatians 3:25-27

But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

The apostle Paul was very concerned about his friends and brethren in Galatia, Asia Minor. He was concerned lest they fall away from the faith. Certain Jewish brethren had come to Galatia from Judea and were trying to persuade the Gentile Christians to accept the Law of Moses and thus to be integrated into the Jewish religion. They were telling them that circumcision was important. They were also telling them that they should keep the Sabbath and other holy days of the Jews.

In response to this, the apostle Paul wrote the Christians in Galatia that it was not necessary for them to be circumcised. He said that they had already become children of Abraham and “sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26).

Some people interpret Paul’s phrase “through faith in Christ Jesus” to mean that the Gentiles had become sons of God exclusively by believing that God had saved them for Christ’s sake. What Paul said, however, was that the Galatians had become sons of God through “the faith” (*dia tees pisteos*). “The faith” is a “package concept.” (I am indebted to my friend Royce Frederick for the idea of a “package concept.”) The expression “the faith” encompasses the whole plan of salvation. It even includes baptism, as the next verse shows.

The apostle Paul went on to say, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). Paul’s view was that by being “baptized” (*ebaptistheete*), the Galatians had “put on Christ” (*Christon enedusasthe*). It was similar to the way people put on clothing.

Who was it that Paul thought of as having “put on Christ?” Was it not those that had been “baptized into Christ?” Note the expression, “as many of you as.” This means that everyone that had been baptized had put on Christ. Had some of those that were not baptized put on Christ? If they had, there is no mention made of it in the New Testament.

As regards physical clothing, people can be clothed, unclothed, or half-clothed. With Christ, however, people cannot be half clothed. They are either clothed or unclothed. Those who have been “baptized into Christ” have, according to Paul, “put on Christ.” Therefore, they are clothed with Him. It should be obvious, then, that anyone that refuses to put on Christ in baptism has not been clothed with Him.

Many theologians today do not look at baptism as the apostle Paul did. They do not always prescribe baptism for people that come to them desiring to get into Christ. They say something like, “Accept Jesus as your personal savior.” The Galatians, however, had gained entrance into Christ by being “baptized into Christ” (*eis Christon ebaptistheete*). The Greek preposition *eis*, when it is used with the accusative case, shows direction “toward” or “entrance into” something. Thus, when the Galatians were baptized, God put them into Christ.

22

Ephesians 4:3-6

...endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

The apostle Paul was concerned about the church in Ephesus. He wanted the members of the church to keep “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). He reminded them that there was but “one body” and “one Spirit.” He also reminded them

that there is “one hope” to which they were all called (Eph 4:4). He added that there is but “one Lord” and “one faith” (Eph 4:5).

All these factors form a powerful argument for unity in the church. After enumerating the above factors, Paul added another, which may surprise some people. He said that there is but “one baptism” (*hen baptisma*) (Eph 4:5).

How could Paul have said there is but one baptism? There were many baptisms in Paul’s day: The Jews had various kinds of baptisms, John the Baptist had a baptism, and some of the pagan Greeks had a kind of baptism. It almost takes one’s breath away to read that there is but “one baptism.”

A part of the explanation for how baptism unifies a congregation may lie in the fact that baptism is like a birth. Just as a physical birth cements relationships within a human family, so a spiritual birth cements relationships within the church family. Those who have been born into the church family have a kinship with the other members of the family. It is a kinship that outsiders do not have with the members of the family. Hence, baptism draws a demarcation line between those that are in the family and those that are out of it. Baptism puts people into the family, where they can experience the unity that is in Christ.

23

Colossian 2:9-14

For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him

in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

The apostle Paul warned the Colossian Christians not to allow anyone to deceive them into thinking that they were at a disadvantage because they had not received physical circumcision. Paul assured them that they had received a kind of circumcision. They had received “the circumcision of Christ.”

The “circumcision of Christ” is more complete than Jewish circumcision. It gets rid of “the whole body of the sins of the flesh,” not just the foreskin. This getting rid of “the sins of the flesh” takes place when a person is “buried” with Christ “in baptism” (Col 2:12). The Greek word *suntaphentes* (buried) is an aorist passive participle. The action that it describes antedates the action of the verb that it goes with, which in this case is *perietmeetheete* (you were circumcised). This makes it clear that the Colossians had to be “buried” with Christ in baptism before they could receive the “circumcision of Christ.”

Circumcision has from olden times been a sign of belonging to the people of God. It follows, then, that the Colossians did not belong to the people of God until after they had been circumcised with the “circumcision of Christ” in baptism.

This “putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh” is not, however, all that happens in baptism. A person is also raised with Christ in it. The NKJV makes this clear. It says regarding baptism,

“in which you also were raised” (Col 2:12). The Greek expression *en ho* (in which) refers back to *baptismo* (baptism), its nearest antecedent. Some of the versions, notably the New International Version, muddle the thought that *en ho* refers back to baptism.

So, both the “putting off the body of the sins of the flesh” and the being “raised with Him” take place in baptism. These take place through faith, because without faith baptism is of no use. It is due to “faith in the working of God,” who raised Jesus from the dead, that a person is raised to a new life in baptism.

24

1 Peter 3:18-21

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us; baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the days of Noah Christ went and preached to the spirits, which are now in prison (1 Pet 3:19). How did Christ preach to them? Presumably, He preached through Noah, but the people of Noah’s day were, regrettably, not obedient to his preaching. The

only ones that responded to Noah's warnings were members of his own family.

As God commanded, Noah built an ark, and he and his family were saved in it. They were, so to speak, "saved through water." The same water that brought destruction to others brought salvation to them.

The apostle Peter said that what happened to Noah and his family is similar to what happens to us in baptism. He called baptism "an antitype which now saves us" (1 Pet 3:21). This language disturbs people who deny that baptism has any part in our salvation. Baptism does not, of course, save anyone by itself. It is God who saves. God is the one who saved Noah and his family, and He is the one who saves Christians. However, just as God saved the eight souls in Noah's family through water, so He also saves people through baptism, according to 1 Pet 3:21. The apostle Peter emphasized that the essence of baptism is not in the removal of the "filth of the flesh." Baptism is not a washing the body to get rid of dirt. Rather, it is an inquiry about "a good conscience toward God" (1 Pet 3:21). I use the word "inquiry" advisedly, because it is a better translation of the Greek word *eperoteema*, than "answer," which many versions of the New Testament have. "Answer" implies that a person gets baptized as a response to his or her having already received a good conscience. "Inquiry," on the other hand, shows that a person is searching for a good conscience by being baptized.

The Greek noun *eperoteema* is used in only this one place in the New Testament. The verb form of the word (*eperotao*), however, is used ten times. Each time that the word *eperotao* is used, it means to ask a question, as when Jesus said, "I will also ask (*eperoteeso*) you one question" (Mark 11:29).

So a person should not get baptized because he thinks he has found the answer to his sin problem. Rather, he should get baptized because he is searching for the answer.

25

Conclusion

A scriptural view of baptism is helpful in many ways. It helps explain some passages that would otherwise be difficult to understand. It helps a person understand what Jesus meant when He said to Nicodemus, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

A scriptural view of baptism also helps a person understand what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote to Titus, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” (Titus 3:5).

In addition to helping unravel some difficult passages, a clear view of baptism, saves a person from a number of disastrous theological views. For example, a person with a proper understanding of baptism will know that faith must be carried along to its fulfillment in obedience in order for it to be viable. Such a person will also know that faith is not merely a matter of mental assent or an emotional attachment.

No one that understands baptism will think that God arbitrarily decides which individuals will be saved and which will not. He will know that God leaves it up to individuals whether or not they wish to obey the gospel and thus be saved.

A person with a proper view of baptism will recognize the importance of preaching the gospel so that people can hear it,

believe it, and obey it. Such a person will not think that emotional gimmicks can spread the kingdom of God. No one that sees baptism clearly will suppose that the only thing for a person to do when he or she hears the gospel's call is to pray and wait for God to send the Holy Spirit. Such a person will understand that he or she should arise and be baptized to wash away sins, just as Saul of Tarsus did.

People who have a firm grasp of the place of baptism in the New Testament will have a clearer view of the church. They will understand that the church is a spiritual body and that people get into it by the spiritual birth that takes place in baptism. They will understand that the church is not a manmade denomination that people can join if they choose. Also, no one that understands baptism will start baptizing babies for sins they have not committed. Many other examples could be cited of how a clear view of baptism aids in understanding Christian doctrine. When baptism is allowed to play the role in the religious life of people that it does in the New Testament, many theological errors are avoided. If a congregation wants to be scriptural, and thus truly spiritual, it will examine baptism just as an archaeologist examines bones that he finds in the ground to see whether or not they reveal some truth regarding the past.

***ELDERS
FROM
THE GREEK***

The reason for this study is that the New Testament contains information that should be used in the choosing of elders. It also contains information that elders can use to guide their ministry.

Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations in this study are taken from The NKJV of the Holy Bible, published by the Thomas Nelson Company, Inc.

26

Acts 14:23

So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

The apostle Paul and his companion, Barnabas, converted people and started churches in Asia Minor. They did not want to leave the fledgling churches unattended. So they “appointed” (*cheirotoneesantes*) certain men to be “elders” (*presbuterous*) of the individual congregations. The Greek word for “appointed” is *cheirotoneo*. It means “I stretch out the hand to” (or toward) someone in order to choose that person (or to appoint that person) to an office (or function).

Although the Greek word for “elders” (*presbuteroi*) literally means “elderly men,” it refers in this context, to the elderly men of a local congregation whose responsibility it is to guide the affairs of the local church. The text says that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders “in every church” (*kat’ ekkleesian*, literally, church by church).

After Paul and Barnabas had prayed with fasting, they “commended” (*parethento*) the newly appointed elders to the Lord. The Greek word *paratitheemi* (of which *parethento* is an aorist middle form) presents the picture of a person setting something down

beside someone else. Which is a way of saying that Paul and Barnabas turned the newly appointed elders over to the Lord.

27

Acts 20:17

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.

On a journey to Palestine by boat, the apostle Paul disembarked at a place called Miletus, not far from Ephesus. He invited the elders of the Ephesian church to meet him at Miletus so that he could consult with them. This suggests that the elders of the Ephesian church were robust enough to make the journey from Ephesus to Miletus on short notice, which may indicate that they were not (all) old and decrepit men.

In this verse (Acts 20:17) the leaders of the Ephesian church are identified as “elders” (*presbuteroi*). In Acts 20:28 they are instructed “to shepherd” (*poimainein*) the church of God. Elders are referred to in the New Testament as shepherds because they shepherd the flock of God.

28

Acts 20:27-31

For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God

which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:27-28)

In the words before us, the apostle Paul charged the elders from Ephesus to “take heed” (*prosechete*) to themselves and to the flock. Anyone who travels in Greece today will see this word *prosechete* on traffic signs along the streets. It is a warning. It means that the driver of an automobile should pay attention. Paul admonished the elders to pay attention to themselves (as to how they lived) and to the whole flock. They were not told to pay attention to every flock. They were told to pay attention to the flock in which they had been made overseers (*episkopous*).

This was a wise admonition, because the elders of the church in such a prominent city as Ephesus might be tempted to think that their sway extended far and wide, especially in view of the fact that the gospel had spread from Ephesus to other places (Acts 19:10). The apostle Paul did not lay responsibility on the Ephesian elders for all the churches in their area.

Instead, he gave them a more limited commission. He told them to pay attention to the flock in which the Holy Spirit had placed them. Even though it was a human that had appointed the Ephesian elders (overseers), it was the Holy Spirit that had set them in office. The NKJV says, “the Holy Spirit has made (*etheto*) you overseers.” The Greek word *etheto* is from *tiheemi* and means “I place,” “I put,” or “I set” something (or someone) in a certain place. It would have been a mistake for the apostle Paul to have said that these men had been made overseers (elders) by the Holy Spirit, if they had not been selected according to the guidelines that the Holy Spirit gave. These guidelines are found in 1 Tim 3 and Titus 1. Notice where the Holy Spirit placed the overseers (elders). He placed them **inside** (“among whom”) the flock to which they belonged. The Holy Spirit did not set them **over** many flocks.

The Ephesian elders (Acts 20:17) were to function as “overseers” (*episkopoi*). The Greek word *episkopos* has been corrupted into English as “bishop.” It may sound strange to our modern ears to hear that the Ephesian church had two or more bishops (overseers) in it, but it was so. Today, people are accustomed to hearing that a bishop is in charge of several churches, but it was not so in Bible times.

“Elders” are the older (and presumably more reliable) men of the congregation whose work it is to oversee the flock. Since God intends that there be more than one overseer (elder) in a church-flock, the overseers (elders) must cooperate with each other. They must learn to work together as a unit.

Not only are elders supposed to pay attention to the flock and to oversee it, but they are also “to shepherd” (*poinmainei*) it. *Poinmainein* is an infinitive that shows **how** elders are supposed to oversee the church/flock: They are to do it by shepherding. The flock is identified in this passage as “the church of God” (*teen ekklesian tou theou*), and elders (overseers) are supposed to treat the people of the church as a good shepherd treats his sheep. The comparison of a congregation to a flock is an apt comparison, for shepherding sheep is an ongoing task, with very little time off. It involves protecting, guiding, teaching, leading, correcting, and looking after the sheep in both spiritual and material ways. Notice that the elders (overseers) are supposed to be the ones who pastor the flock, not some preacher.

All three of these designations (“elders,” “overseers,” and “shepherds”) refer to the same group of men. They are referred to in the New Testament with three designations because they have a three-fold ministry to perform.

This passage (Acts 20:28) teaches us that God paid a high price for the church. He gave “His own blood” (*tou haimatos tou idion*) for it. We understand, of course, that Paul was referring to the blood of

Jesus. Judging by the high price that God paid for the church, we should not be surprised that the church is very dear to Him.

For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. (Acts 20:29)

The apostle Paul warned that “wolves” (*loikoi*) would arise **from their own number**. For that reason, elders (overseers) should be aware of the danger inherent in their own authority. Seen from a historical perspective, it is too bad that Paul’s warning was not more closely heeded, because self-exalting leaders in later centuries brought most of the congregations of the Lord’s church under the influence of the church in Rome. This happened when the Roman emperor Constantine declared Christianity to be the religion of the state. The same type of leaders that brought the church under Roman authority kept the churches there for many centuries.

Since such a danger was imminent, Paul warned in Acts 20:31, “Watch” (*gregoreite*). The word *gregoreo* (I watch) is often used as a military term, meaning to stand guard or to be a watchman.

29

1 Timothy 3:1-7

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. (1 Tim 3:1)

The apostle Paul was well aware that churches need good leadership. His letters to Timothy and Titus show that he was counting on Timothy and Titus to select and appoint good leaders in the churches. He sent Timothy and Titus lists of the

characteristics they should look for in the men whom they would consider appointing.

Both the KJV and the NKJV use the word “bishop” in 1 Tim 3:1-2 and Titus 1:7. The word “bishop” is misleading today, because it implies a church hierarchy, in which a bishop has several (or many) congregations under his oversight. The noun that is translated in the KJV as “the office of a bishop” and as “the position of a bishop” in the NKJB is *episkopees*, which simply means “the oversight.” It is a high honor and a great privilege for a man to be counted among the overseers (elders) of a congregation of the Lord’s church. The apostle Paul calls it a “good work” (*kalon ergon*). The adjective *kalos* means both “good” and “beautiful.” It is perfectly acceptable for a man to desire to be included among overseers (elders) provided his motive is to serve the Lord and his brethren in this capacity.

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach... (1 Tim 3:2)

For a man to be considered for participation in the oversight of a congregation he must be “blameless” (*anepileempton*). *Anepileempton* comes from *epilambano* which means “I take hold of” someone, perhaps even to arrest him. The Greek negative prefix *a* on this word shows that a man chosen should not be one who could be ‘taken hold of’ for some wrong. He is, thus, irreproachable, unassailable.

He should also be “the husband of one wife” (*mias gunaikos andra*). This passage shows that an “overseer” (elder) should be married. It also shows that he should have only one wife.

Before a man is to be considered for the leadership, it should be ascertained whether or not he is a “temperate” man. The Greek word that is here translated “temperate” is *neephalion*, which means

that he should be sober, that is, he should be free from alcohol-induced intoxication. A sober soldier makes a good watchman, but a drunken soldier makes a bad one.

An overseer should also be “sober-minded.” The Greek word here is *sophrone*. Whereas *neephalion* (the word above) has to do with what one drinks, *sophrone* has to do with the way one thinks. *Sophrone* means that an elder should be sober in the sense of having a balanced mind.

An overseer should be “of good behavior” (*kosmion*), which means that he should be orderly, in the sense that his actions are decorative and pleasant to behold.

An overseer should be “hospitable” (*phioxenon*), which means that he should love strangers (i.e. guests).

An overseer should be “able to teach.” The Greek word is *didaktikon*, from which the English word *didactic* is derived. The meaning is that he should not only be able to teach, but also that he should be inclined toward teaching. That is, he should be a person that is instructive of others.

...not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous...
(1 Tim 3:3)

An overseer should not be “given to wine” (*mee paroinon*). The word *paroinon* is composed of *para* (which can mean “of,” “with,” “near,” or “by”) and *oinos* (which means “wine”). This does not specifically say that an elder should never ‘touch a drop,’ but it does warn of the danger of drinking. Adam Clarke’s Commentary defines *mee paroinon* as “not inordinately attached to wine.” Barnes’ Notes say that he should not be “one who is in the *habit* of drinking wine, or one who is accustomed to sit with those who indulge with it.” It is clear that a person should not be chosen to be among the elders (overseers) if he has an alcohol problem.

He should also not be “violent” (*mee pleekteen*). That is, he should not be a striker (someone who hits people). He should not get involved in fistfights, which would likely occur if he were a drinker. On the contrary, he should be “gentle” (*epieikee*), mild-mannered. He should not be “quarrelsome” (*amachon*), literally, he should not be a fighter, that is, not belligerent or contentious. He should not be “a lover of money” (*aphilarguron*). Literally, he should not be a lover of silver (silver coins, that is).

...one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence. (1 Tim 3:4)

He must be “one who rules (*proistamenon*) his own house well.” The Greek word here translated “house” is *oikos*, which means “house” or “household.” An *oikos* may include anyone living in a family unit, whether relatives, guests, slaves, hired hands, or whomever. A proposed candidate for overseer (elder) of a congregation must first show that he can “rule well” (*kalos proistamenon*) his own family (or house). *Kalos proistamenon* means one who stands at the head of, or represents his family (or house) in a good way.

The text implies that he must have children, for it says that his children must be “in submission” (*en hupotagee*). This does not mean they should be forced into submission, for the expression “with all reverence” (*semnoteetos*) refers to the way that a man handles his children. *Trench’s Synonyms of the New Testament* (p. 346) says that the person who is *semnos* (from which *semnoteetos* comes) is “one who inspires not respect only, but reverence and worship.” So the type of man that Timothy should identify is one who disciplines his children but who does it in a manner that maintains their respect.

...for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?
(1 Tim 3:5)

If a man is not able to teach his children to respect him, it shows that he does not know how to “rule” (*prosteenai*) his house properly, that is, he does not know how ‘to head up’ his household properly. *Prosteenai* is a form of the verb *proistamai*, which means “I am a leader of,” “I have authority over” or “I manage.” Any of these expressions would be better here than the word “rule.”

A man who cannot lead his own household will not be able “to take care of” (*epimeleesetai*) the church of God.” *Epimeleesetai* is a form of *epimeleomai*, which means “I take care of” or “I look after” someone or something.

...not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. (1 Tim 3:6)

No one should be chosen to serve among the overseers (elders) who is a “novice” (*neophuton*), a “neophyte.” That is, he should not be a “recent convert,” as some translations say. If he is a recent convert, he might get “puffed up” (*tuphotheis*), as though some kind of a vapor (*tuphos*) had gotten into him. The word “pride” is not in the text, but it is implied. The danger for such a man is that he might fall into “judgement” (*krima*). The word *krima* implies a guilty verdict. The NKJV says that a novice might fall into “the same condemnation as the devil.” The words “the same condemnation as” are not in the Greek text. The Greek text says that a novice should not be chosen to be an overseer (elder) lest he get puffed up and fall into “condemnation of the devil,” which could possible mean that he might fall into some condemnation of the devil’s causing.

...Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (1 Tim 3:7)

Only men who have a “good testimony” (*marturian kaleen*) from outsiders should be chosen lest they fall into “reproach” (*oneidismo*). The word *oneidismos* means “shame” or “disgrace.” The devil tries to lay a “snare” (*pagida*) in which to trap overseers (elders) of congregations.

30

1 Timothy 5:1

Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers...

No one should “rebuke” (*epipleexees*) an older man in a threatening way. The word *epipleesso* means “I reprimand” or “I rebuke.” It is a compound word, composed of the preposition *epi* (which means “upon”) and *pleesso* (which means “I strike”). No one should think that the official elders (overseers) of a congregation are ‘free game’ as regards criticism. Younger members should be respectful when approaching the elders (overseers). Indeed, no older man should be railed at, or spoken to with an upraised or threatening hand. Elderly men should be exhorted as fathers.

31

1 Timothy 5:17-22

Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. (1 Tim 5:17)

The KJV and the NKJV both speak in this verse of “elders” (*presbuteroi*) that “rule well.” The word “rule,” however, is too strong. The Greek expression *hoi proestotes* (translated those “who rule”) refers to the men who stand forth from the congregation to represent it. *Proestotes* is a perfect participle of the word *proisteemi* (or *proistamai*) which means “I am a leader of,” “I have authority over,” or “I manage.” The English word “rule” suggests a time in the past when bishops and priests actually ruled as overlords over the church and its property. The New International Version has a milder reading, in that it speaks of those “who direct the affairs of the church.” Yet this translation is not very exact, for if a translator uses the words “to direct,” he must supply some such words as “the affairs of the church,” which are not in the Greek text, to complete the meaning. A better translation would be, “the elders who lead well.”

Such men should be “counted worthy (*axiousthosan*) of double honor” (*diplees timees*). *Axiousthosan* is the imperative passive form of the verb *axioo*, which means “I consider (someone) to be worthy.” The church is, therefore, instructed (commanded) to count such men as being worthy of double honor.

The Greek noun that is used in this passage for “honor” is *timee*.” It has two meanings. It refers not only to an “honor,” but also to a price. For example, the apostle Paul said in another place, “You are bought with a price (*timees*)” (1 Cor 6:20). I found, by checking *timee* in a Greek concordance, that there are about ten verses in the New Testament where *timee* means “price.” In about 32 other verses, however, it means “honor.” Since the word *timee* has these two meanings, a “double” portion of it would seem to include both money and honor.

Paul’s instruction that certain elders should be considered worthy of “double honor” suggests that there can be different talents and different functions within an eldership.

The apostle Paul did not actually say, however, that the churches should pay certain elders. What he said was that certain men should be considered “worthy” of such honor. That is to say, if the congregation is able to support such men financially, and if they need and desire financial aid, it would be appropriate to support them. This is especially important for those elders “who labor in the word (*en logo*) and doctrine (*didaskalia*).” The word *didaskalia* means “teaching,” and the Greek word for “labor” is *kopiontes*, which means “working hard.”

I spent most of one morning writing the above comments on 1 Tim 5:17. Afterwards, I remarked to my wife that I had found no suitable explanation for why the apostle Paul designated the elders who labor in word and doctrine as being especially “worthy of double honor.” My wife (a very knowledgeable person and one who has read the Bible through each year for the past 37 years) suggested that perhaps Paul made that recommendation, because these men need time away from making a living in order to study and prepare their Bible lessons. Her astute comment caused it to dawn on me that the expression “in word” may refer to the studying of God’s word. Those elders who came to Christ from the Gentile world would have needed more time in the word than their brethren of Jewish background, who were already acquainted with the Old Testament.

For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages.’ (1 Tim 5:18)

The apostle Paul cited the Old Testament here to back up his suggestion that certain elders (overseers) could be helped financially.

Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. (1 Tim 5:19)

The apostle Paul told Timothy that he (Timothy) was not to “accept” (*mee paradechou*) an “accusation” (*kateegorian*) against an elder unless there were two or three witnesses (1 Tim 5:19). The expression *mee paradechou* (do not accept) is a negative command in the second person singular. Its singular number shows that Paul was not writing to several individuals but to Timothy personally. Paul urged Timothy not to accept unfounded accusations against a man, presumably, when he (Timothy) was in the process of considering a man for service among the elders (overseers).

Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. (21) I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality. (1 Tim 5:20-21)

The apostle Paul told Timothy to “rebuke” (*elengche*) those that were sinning (*tous harmartanontas*). Timothy was to do this in the presence of all. The verb *harmartanontas* is a present participle and it suggests that some were sinning as Paul wrote. The verb *elengcho* means “I rebuke” someone in such a way so as to convince that person that he or she is doing wrong. *Elengcho* does not mean ‘to blast’ someone. Rather, it means to convince a person by instruction of his or her fault.

I do not suppose that the apostle Paul was thinking that Timothy should rebuke only elders (overseers) that sin.

Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure. (1 Tim 5:22)

The apostle Paul admonished Timothy not “to lay hands on anyone hastily.” The expression “to lay hands on” can have different meanings, but in this context it seems to mean to install someone as an elder (overseer). An elder (overseer) should not be installed “hastily” (*tacheos*). The word *tacheos* means “quickly.”

32

Titus 1:5-9

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you... (Titus 1:5)

When the apostle Paul said that he “left” (*apelipon*) Titus in Crete, it seems to imply that Paul had been in Crete and that he “left” Titus there with the intention that Titus should “set” things “in order” (*epidiorthosee*). The verb *orthoo* means, “I set (something) right” (or “in order”). Paul gave two prefixes to this word. The preposition *epi* (which means “upon”) suggests that Titus’ work in installing elders would be on top of whatever else had already been done. The other preposition, *dia* (through), shows that Titus should set things in order in a thorough way.

In the beginning of his letter the apostle Paul got right to the point. He urged Titus to “appoint (*katasteesees*) elders in every city.” The word *katasteesees* (appoint) is from *kathisteemi*. It is composed of the preposition *kata* (which means “down”) and the verb *histeemi* (which means “I make (something) stand” at a certain place). This is not the word *cheirotoneo*, which is used in Acts 14:23 for appointing elders. In Acts 14:23 the emphasis is on choosing. Here, in Titus 1:5, the emphasis is on installing.

The apostle Paul had previously instructed (*dietaxameen*) Titus to appoint elders. The word *dietaxameen* is composed of the preposition *dia* (which means “through”) and the verb *tasso* (which means “I place,” “I set,” or “I appoint”). Paul’s use of the word *diatasso* in this connection shows that he wanted Titus to follow through on appointing elders. This implies that Paul felt that the appointment of elders was very important and that his and Titus’ work as evangelists would not be completed until it was done.

The men whom Titus was told “to appoint” in Crete are called “elders” (*presbuteroi*). The word *presbuteroi* means “elderly men.” The function of “elders” is the same as that of “overseers” (or bishops), who are mentioned in 1 Tim 3:1. The designations “elders,” “bishops,” and “pastors” all refer to the same men. See the comments on Acts 20:17, 28.

Note that elders were to be appointed “in every city” (*kata polin*), city by city. The implication is that Titus should go to each city where there were congregations of Christians and personally appoint elders in each of these places.

...if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife,
having faithful children not accused of dissipation or
insubordination. (Titus 1:6)

Paul instructed Titus to select men that were “blameless” (*anengkleetos*), that is, men against whom no complaint had been lodged. If complaints had been brought against a man, that fact alone would cast a shadow over a man’s candidacy.

This is similar to but slightly different from the requirement in 1 Tim 3:2, where the NKJV also says that an overseer (elder) should be “blameless.” In 1 Tim 3:2 the Greek word is *anepileempton*, which means that a man should not have done anything that could be used against him. It concerns the man’s character. (See *Trench’s Synonyms of the New Testament*, p. 381.) Here, in Titus 1:6, the word

“blameless” (*anegkleetos*) concerns how a man is perceived by the members of the local church.

An elder should be the “husband of one wife” (*mias gunaikos aneer*), literally, a “man of one woman.” A similar expression is found in 1 Tim 3:2. The word “woman” in this connection means a wife. It is interesting that being the “husband of one wife” is placed near the top of both lists. This placement near the top shows how important it is that the marital situation of an elder be in order.

Almost equally important is that an elder should have children and that his children should be “faithful” (*pista*). Some English versions of the New Testament say that an elder’s children should be “believers.” The adjective *pistos* is (properly) translated in the NKJV as “faithful,” but the word *pistos* is sometimes used in the New Testament in a special sense, as in Acts 10:45, to indicate people who are believers (in Christ).

A man should not be chosen if his children are “accused (*en kategoria*) of dissipation” (*asotias*). The expression *en kategoria* (accused) means to have been charged with having done something wrong. *Asotias* (dissipation) refers to someone who wastes his resources. The wasting of resources often leads, of course, to dissipation of all sorts. If a man’s children are justly charged with “dissipation,” he should not be chosen for the leadership.

Nor should a man be chosen if his children are “accused” (*en kategoria*) of “insubordination” (*anupotakta*). The word *anupotakta* is composed of the letter *a* (a negative) with the letter *n* (which is used to make the word easier to pronounce) plus *hupo* (a preposition meaning “under”) and *tasso* (a verb meaning “I set”). *Anupotakta* refers, in this case, to children who have not been brought under any authority. In Modern Greek the word *anupotakta* means someone who is unmanageable, as a soldier that does not respond to orders.

For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God,
not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to
wine, not violent, not greedy for money... (Titus 1:7)

Now we find the apostle Paul using the word “bishop” (*episkopos*) in his letter to Titus. The English word “bishop” is a corruption of the Greek word *episkopos*. *Episkopos* is compounded from the preposition *epi*, which means “over,” and *skopeo*, which means “I look” or “I watch.” So the word “overseer” is a good translation for *episkopos*. It is someone who oversees the flock. The apostle Paul had already referred to the leadership of a congregation in Titus 1:5 as “elders” (*presbuteroi*).

Therefore, since both *presbuteroi* (elders) and *episkopos* (overseer) are used in same passage and in the same context, it leads one to think that both terms refer to the same men.

The apostle Paul said (again) in this verse that an overseer should be “blameless” (*anengkleetos*). This time, Paul emphasizes that an “overseer” should be blameless in his oversight. That is, he is expected to be blameless as a “steward” (*oikonomon*). In the word *oikonomos* we see the word *oikos* (house) and the word *nomos* (law). A “steward” (*oikonomos*) is a person who is in charge of a house (hold) or an estate.

An elder (overseer) must not be “self-willed” (*mee authadee*), meaning he should not be a person who always insists on having his own way. The Greek word “autos” (self) can be seen in *authadee*. An elder (overseer) must not be “quick-tempered” (*mee orgilon*). *Orgilos* seems to refer not only to a man that ‘flies off the handle’ but also to one who has a mean disposition. *Orgilos* has come into Modern Greek meaning “angry.”

An elder (overseer) should not be “given to wine” (*mee paroinon*). See comments on 1 Tim 3:3, which has the same expression as here. An elder (overseer) should not be “violent” (*mee pleekteen*).

This is the same as in 1 Tim 3:3. See the comments there.

He should not be “greedy for money” (*mee aischrokerdee*). The Greek word *aischrokerdees* is composed of *aischros*, which means “shameful,” and *kerdos*, which refers to financial gain. The translation of this verse in the KJV would be acceptable when it says, “not given to filthy lucre,” except for the fact that word “lucre” is not commonly used today. The NKJV is weak when it says “not greedy for money,” because it leaves out the idea that money under certain circumstances could be tainted. It is difficult to tell, however, whether the apostle Paul was referring to money gotten in some dishonest way or whether he was referring to money that might be gotten by a man who becomes an elder (overseer) for the sake of material gain.

...but hospitable, a lover of what is good,
soberminded, just, holy, self-controlled... (Titus 1:8)

A man under consideration to be appointed to be an elder (overseer) should be “hospitable” (*philoxenon*). The word *philoxenon* occurs also in 1 Tim 3:2. See the comments there.

He should be “a lover of what is good” (*philagathon*). The Greek word *philagathon* is made up of two words: *philos*, which means a “lover” and *agathos*, which means “good.”

He should be “sober-minded” (*sophrona*). This expression occurs also in 1 Tim 3:2. See the comments there.

He should be “just” (*dikaion*). The word *dikaios* can be translated as “righteous” or as “just.” Both ideas are contained in the word *dikaios*. According to the NKJV, an elder (overseer) should also be “holy” (*hosion*). I would suggest the word “devout,” however, as a better translation of the word *hosios* than “holy,” because *hosios* is not the word that is normally used in the Greek New Testament for holiness. That word is *hagios*.

An elder (overseer) should also be “self-controlled” (*engkratee*). “Self-control” (*engkratia*) is one of the things that the apostle Paul reasoned with Felix about (Acts 24:25). It is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). It is also a personal attribute that a person must add to his character in order to make progress from knowledge to patience (2 Pet 1:6). There are two main things involved in *engkratia*. A person must be able (1) to restrain himself in certain matters and he must also be able (2) to abstain from certain things.

...holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. (Titus 1:9)

After having described the qualities that Titus should seek in prospective elders (overseers), the apostle Paul turned to a discussion of some of the things that an elder (overseer) would be expected to do. An elder (overseer) should be one who is “holding fast” (*antechomenon*) to the “faithful word.” The word *antechomenon* is from *antechomai*, which is composed of *anti* (against) and *echo* (I have or I hold). That *antechomenon* is in the middle voice suggests that an elder (overseer) should hold the “faithful word” (*pistou logou*) as his own. The adjective *pistos*, which normally means “faithful,” likely means “reliable” or “trustworthy” in this place. An elder (overseer) should hold to the word just “as he has been taught” (*kata teen didacheen*), literally, “according to the teaching.” Whether or not a person should hold to what he has been taught, however, depends on the contents of what has been taught.

The reason why an elder (overseer) should hold fast to the trustworthy word is so that “he may be able” (*bina dunatos ee*) “to exhort” (*parakalein*) others. The word “able” is translated from the adjective *dunatos*, which means to be “powerful,” suggesting that without “the faithful word” an elder (overseer) is not powerful.

Parakalein (to exhort) is composed of the preposition *para*, which means (among other things) “along side of,” and the verb *kaleo*, which means, “I call.” So elders (overseers) call out encouragement to people. They are not entirely unlike a cheering section at a football game.

Another of their functions is to use the “sound doctrine” (*tee didaskalia tee hugiainousee*) “to convict (*elengchein*) those who contradict (*tous antilegontas*).” Regarding this, let me say that the verb *elengchein* can, indeed, mean “to convict,” but it can also have other meanings as well, such as “to convince” a person of the error of his ways. Since the convicting (or convincing) is to be done with “sound doctrine,” teaching and instruction are implied. At any rate, an elder’s (overseer’s) job is not simply to prove someone wrong but to lead that person, if possible, to a better way of thinking and acting. “Sound doctrine” is healthy doctrine. You can see the English word “hygienic” in the Greek word *hugiaino*.

There were plenty of people in the early days that were contradicting (*antilegontas*) the gospel. The verb *antilego* is composed of *anti* (against) and *lego* (I speak). Elders (overseers) were called upon, then as now, to uphold the truth in spite of some people speaking against it.

33

Hebrews 13:7-8

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. (Heb 13:7-8)

Every Christian can look back on someone in his or her life that has had a decisive impact on him or her. The admonition here is not to forget such people. Likely, it was the elders of a congregation who did the teaching, but it may have been other teachers as well.

The NKJV speaks here of “those who rule (*heegoumenon*) over you.” The word “rule” is an acceptable translation of *heegeomai*, but so strong a word is not necessary. Better words would be “lead” or “guide.” The NIV says, “Remember your leaders,” which is a good translation of this phrase. The persons to be remembered are those who “have spoken” (*elaleesan*) the word of God. *Elaleesan* is in the aorist tense, which suggests that the people to be remembered are the ones who first led the recipients of the Hebrew letter to belief in Jesus. That these people are still in the leadership suggests that the congregations may not have been in existence for very long.

If the “outcome of” the leaders’ “conduct” is to be considered, then leaders need to be careful how they finish up their Christian lives. Church members are told to “follow” (*mimeisthe*) their faith. I feel there is a hint of possible persecution here. *Mimeisthe* is from *mimeomai*, in which the word “mimic” can be seen.

34

Hebrews 13:17

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. (Heb 13:17)

To say, as many translations do, that the members of a congregation should “obey” their leaders is a bit too strong. The Greek word that stands here for “obey” is *peithesthe*. (This is not *hupakouo*, which is a stronger expression for “obey.” The word *peitho*, which is used here, gives the idea of willing compliance rather than forced obedience. *Peitho* means I convince someone by persuasion. In the passive form, as here, *peitho* implies that a person does someone’s wishes as a result of having been persuaded.

Here again, both the KJV and NKJV are too strong when they refer to the leaders of the congregation as “those who rule over you.” Such a translation harks back to the time (in England and elsewhere) when church leaders were government officials and had not only ecclesiastical but also civil authority. The Greek word that stands for “those who rule over you” is the participle *heegoumenois*, which comes from the verb *heegeomai*. *Heegeomai* can mean “I esteem” or “I lead.”

The apostle Paul used the word *heegeomai* in Php 2:3 when he said, “let each esteem others better than himself.” The form of *heegeomai* that is used in here Heb 13:17 is *heegoumenois*, which is passive, signifying that those who lead the church are highly esteemed by the members. So elders are “leaders” not “rulers.” They lead with the consent of the people.

The leaders of whom the author of the letter to the Hebrews spoke may or may not have been (ordained) elders. The author seems to have allowed for the contingency that there were little churches here and there, which did not have ordained elders. We know that such churches existed in Crete, for example, before Titus got around to appointing elders (overseers) for them.

Even in the absence of elders, there has to be some kind of leadership so that a congregation can function well. The NKJV says in this passage that members of the church should be “submissive”

(*hupēikete*) to their leaders. A better reading might be that they should “yield” or “defer” to their leaders.

The leaders of a congregation are those who “watch out (*agrupnousin*) for your souls.” The Greek word here for “watch” is *agrupneo*, which means “to keep oneself awake.” It is very important for a soldier standing watch to be able to stay awake. The New International Version has “watch over,” which suggests a father watching over a sick child. It is often literally true that the leaders of a congregation miss sleep in watching over the flock. They watch diligently because they know that they will “give (*apodosontes*) account (*logon*)” for those committed to their charge. The word *apodosontes* is in the future tense, which suggests that giving account is coming up in the future.

The reason given here as to why the members of a congregation should defer to their leaders is so that the leaders might do their work with joy and not with “grief” (*mee stenazontes*), literally “without groaning.” It would be “unprofitable” (*alusiteles*), “of no utility,” to make the leaders groan. It would be disadvantageous for a church if the members conduct themselves in a way that makes their leaders groan in doing their work.

35

James 5:13-16

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. (Jam 5:13)

James exhorted suffering people to pray. The word “suffering” (*kakopatheo*) does not refer exclusively to sick people, but to people who may be suffering in any way. James spoke earlier in his letter

(in Jam 5:10) of the prophets as being examples of patience in “suffering” (*kakopathia*).

Just as prayer is appropriate in time of “suffering,” so is singing appropriate when one “is cheerful” (*euthumei*). The word *euthumei* (“is cheerful”) is a form of *euthumeo*, which is compounded of *eu* (well) and *thumeo* (I have passion). The resultant meaning is that someone is in a good frame of mind.

The word that is here translated “Let him sing psalms” is *psalleteo*. *Psallo* originally meant “I sing (while plucking a harp).” By the time the New Testament was written, however, it had lost its connection with the harp. It meant simply “I sing.” No word for “psalms” is found in the Greek text in this verse.

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. (Jam 5:14)

James said that if “anyone among you” is “sick,” he should “call for the elders of the church.” How sick must a person be before he calls for the elders of the church? The word that is here translated “sick” is *asthenei*. *Astheneo* means “I am weak.” So, apparently, *asthenei* refers to a person that is too weak to leave home.

What James described here is definitely not a modern so called “healing service,” at which any sick person in the audience is urged to raise his or her hand or come forward to be healed. James was speaking of members of the church that are sick at home, not those gathered in an assembly. What is described here is something that takes place privately.

The expression “let him call” (*proskalesastho*) is from *proskaleomai*. *Proskaleomai* is composed of the preposition *pros*, which means “to” or “toward,” and the verb *kaleo*, which means “I call.” A person that is too sick to leave home may “call” (invite) the elders of the

church to come to him. Notice that the sick person is to initiate the proceedings.

Whom should a sick person call? There is no suggestion of calling “a priest.” The Bible teaches that all Christians are priests (Rev 1:6). According to this passage, a sick person should call “the (official) elders of the church” (*tous presbuterous tees ekkleesias*). When the elders come to a sick person that has “called” them, they should “pray” (*proseuxasthosan*) over that person (*ep’ auton*). The verb *proseuxasthosan* (let them pray) is in the imperative mood, which suggests that it is a command. The elders are the ones that should do the praying.

James wrote in a manner that indicates that the “anointing” (*aleipsantes*) of a patient with “oil” (*elaio*) was to be done prior to the praying. I base this on the fact that *aleipsantes* (anointing) is an aorist participle. A participle in the aorist tense indicates action prior to the action of the main verb in a sentence. The main verb in this sentence is *proseuxasthosan* (let them pray). If the anointing is to be done prior to the praying, this suggests that the anointing does not have ‘magical’ powers of its own to effect a cure. It is the praying (petitioning of the Father) that can bring about a cure. The word for “oil” is *elaion*, meaning olive oil.

The participle *aleipsantes* (anointing) agrees with the “them” in “let them pray” (*proseuxasthosan*), which suggests that the elders should do the anointing as well as the praying.

That the anointing should be done “in the name of the Lord” (*en to onomati tou kurion*) is not surprising, for the apostle Paul said, “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col 3:17).

And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. (Jam 5:15)

James made the assertion that “the prayer of faith will save (*sosei*) the sick (*ton kamnonta*).” Here we have the Greek verb *kamno*, which means “to be sick.” This word suggests that someone is ‘all worn out.’ The reference books generally say that the sick person in Jam 5:15 is terminally ill. That may be true. The fact that James used the word “save” (*sosei*) in this verse suggests as much. *Sosei* is from the verb *sozo* and means “I save.” *Sozo* likely means here to save the person from death, because the passage says, “and the Lord will raise him up,” presumably from the sickbed. Notice that it is the Lord who will raise him up. It is not the elders, nor the prayer, nor the oil, but the Lord.

James’ assertion that “the prayer of faith” would save the sick is reminiscent of the words of Jesus: “Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them” (Mark 11:24).

Even if James were referring to someone that is terminally ill, he was not prescribing what could be called “the last rites” for that person. I say this because the purpose of calling for the elders was not to prepare a sick person for dying but to pray that that person would get well.

The cause for a sick person’s illness may be that he has “committed (*pepoieekos*) sins (*hamartias*).” The word here for sins is *hamartias*, which originally meant to miss the mark in some way. In the New Testament the word *hamartias* can refer to all kinds of infractions or wrongs. The sins that a person has committed may, in some cases, be directly responsible for that person’s illness, but it is hypothetical that sins are the cause here. For the text says “if (*k’an*) he has committed (*ee pepoieekos*) sins.” *K’an* is a contraction of *kai ean*. The use of *ean* with a verb (*eimi*) in the subjunctive mode shows that it is not certain that the person involved is sick as a result of sins. He or she may be sick from no discernable reason. The possibility, however, of the sick person’s having committed

sins that caused his or her illness is not excluded here. If sins are present, they will “be forgiven” (*aphetheesetai*).

It is up to the Lord, however, to decide whether or not the prayers of the elders will bring a sick person back to health, because prayer for the sick is basically a request. Prayer is not a magical formula. For that reason people should pray, as Jesus did, “not as I will, but as You will” (Mat 26:39).

Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. (Jam 5:16)

The sick bed is just as a good a place from which to confess “trespasses” (*hamartias*) as any another place. The proximity of verse 15 (in which praying for the sick is discussed) to verse 16 (in which the confessing of sins is also discussed) makes one think that praying and confessing go hand in hand.

The sick bed is not the only place, however, from which confessions of sins are appropriate, because James said, “Confess” (*exomologeisthe*) to “one another” (*allelois*). The Greek word for “confess” (*exomologeisthe*) is composed of *ek*, which means “out,” and *homo*, which means “the same,” and *lego*, which means, “I speak.” The resultant meaning is that a Christian should give verbal agreement to whatever justifiable charge is brought against him, whether the charge is brought by his own conscience or by someone else.

James’ use of the word *allelois* (to one another) suggests that members of the church should be confessing their sins to one another at all (appropriate) times and in all (appropriate) places. The confession of fault does not need to be restricted to the presence of elders, however.

Christians should be continually praying for each other. James said, “and pray (*proseuchesthe*) for one another (*alleelon*).” *Proseuchesthe* is from *proseuchomai* which means “I pray.” Everyone is greatly blessed who has a “righteous” person praying for him (or her), because “the effective, fervent prayer (*deesis*) of a righteous (*dikaios*) man avails (*energoumene*) much.” There is only one word in the Greek text behind the words “the effective, fervent prayer,” which appear in some English texts. It is the noun *deesis*. It refers to “a request” that is made of God. It is from the verb *deomai*, which means, “I beseech” someone. The translators who prepared the KJV and the NKJV versions of the Bible may have felt that if they said that prayer avails much, that would be too weak; so they added the words “effective, fervent.” But the words “effective, fervent” in the translation sound over drawn and can be misleading; for, although the request of a righteous man is effective, its effectiveness does not depend primarily on the passion with which the request is prayed. James was emphasizing how effective the request of a righteous man can be. He said it is “*polu ischuei*” (very strong) in its working (*energoumene*).

Righteousness may, therefore, be more important in prayer than is fervor. All of the above is a strong argument for having Biblical elders to lead a congregation. The prayers of such men are worth more than gold.

Here are some conclusions that can be drawn from Jam 5:13-16: One of them is that James was not speaking about a “healing service” in an assembly of the church. Rather, he was describing what might take place privately in a home, if a patient requests it. James was also not speaking about “extreme unction,” in which a priest prays for a dying person and anoints that person to absolve him or her from sins in order to prepare him or her for dying. Instead, James was speaking about what might be done to restore a person’s health.

Another conclusion that can be drawn is that elders are to play an active role in the lives of the members of their congregation. What role that the anointing of oil plays is difficult to decide. Some people think of the oil mentioned here as medicine, but a difficulty with such an idea is that, although people in the first century knew that oil was good for some ailments, they certainly also knew it was not good for all ailments. Other people think that the oil mentioned here worked miraculously. They point to the fact that the apostles anointed sick people with oil and healed them (Mark 6:13). But against the idea that oil worked miraculously is the fact that probably not all elders in the first century were endowed with miraculous healing powers, and James would not have enjoined all elders to exercise powers that only some of them possessed.

Another way to think about the anointing is to view it as an act of obedience. If the Holy Spirit said (through James) that elders should “anoint” and “pray,” that is the thing for them to do. They can let God decide what He wants to do about it.

36

1 Peter 5:1-7

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:
(1 Pet 5:1)

The admonition contained in 1 Pet 5:1-7 is addressed to the official elders of a congregation, not just to elderly men in general. This is shown by the fact that the apostle Peter spoke in 1 Pet 5:3 of people having been “entrusted” to the elders. Peter identified himself with other elders as being a “fellow elder.”

Shepherd the flock of God which is among you,
serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly,
not for dishonest gain but eagerly; (1 Pet 5:2)

The apostle Peter commanded his fellow elders to “shepherd (*poimane*) the flock of God.” He also reminded them that the flock does not belong to them. He called it the “flock of God” (1 Pet 5:2). *Poimane* (shepherd) is in the command form. Shepherding involves a lot of things: It involves protecting the flock, leading it and providing pasture and water for it. It also involves helping the flock when one of them is sick or hurt. In addition, it involves seeking a sheep that is lost.

The command to “shepherd” extends only to the flock “which is among (*to en humin*) you.” It does not extend to flocks in other places. This is a very important point, for it was the failure of the leaders of the church in Rome to heed this point that led them to extend their authority all around the world. Elders of mission-minded churches need to pay special attention to this point.

The expression “serving as overseers” (1 Pet 5:2) is not found in all of the ancient manuscripts of this passage. It may have been added later by some scribe in order to form a better sentence. There are, however, other passages that refer to elders as “overseers.”

Elders should not serve by “constraint” (*mee anangkeastos*). *Anangkeazo* means “I force” or “I compel” someone to do something. Some ancient manuscripts add that the elder’s service should be done *kata theon* (according to God). This indicates that elders (overseers) serve with reference to Him.

The apostle Peter used two adverbs to describe the attitude that elders ought to have toward the service they render. They should do it “willingly” (*hekousios*) and “eagerly” (*prothumos*). The first of

these suggests a commitment of the mind to their work while the second suggests a commitment of the heart.

The fact that elders were told not to serve for the money suggests that some elders may have been paid for their work. Money is here referred to as “dishonest gain” (NKJV). The Greek text has *aischrokerdos*, which is “shameful gain.” *Aischrokerdos* is similar to the word used in Titus 1:7. If money should be an elder’s primary motivation for serving, then it becomes “shameful gain.”

Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being
ensamples to the flock. (1 Pet 5:3)

The apostle Peter laid a very large and important restriction upon the elders (overseers). They should not serve “as being lords over God’s heritage” (1 Pet 5:3). I have quoted here from the KJV because it more nearly matches *meed’ hos katakurienontes*, which means not ruling over people so as to press them down.

The KJV (in 1 Pet 5:3) also calls the people that are entrusted to the elders, “God’s heritage” (*ton kleeron*). The Greek word *kleeros* means a “lot.” As you will recall, lots were sometimes cast in making decisions. The Land of Canaan, for example, was divided out to the different tribes by casting lots (Josh 14:2). The sections of the land that were apportioned by lots were then passed down as an inheritance through subsequent generations.

The “lot” (or portion) that God received was the children of Israel themselves (Deu 32:9). As a result, they became also His “inheritance” (Isa 19:25). The apostle Peter reminded elders that they are not to “lord it over” the people of the church for the people are “God’s heritage.”

Elders (overseers) are to be “examples to the flock” (*tupoi tou poimniou*) (1 Pet 5:3). They should pattern themselves after the “Chief Shepherd” (*archipoimenos*); so that when the “Chief

Shepherd” appears, He will reward them with “a crown of glory that does not fade away” (1 Pet 5:4).

Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submis-sive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time... (1 Pet 5:5-6)

Younger members of the church should be submissive to elderly members, especially to those who are the official overseers of the congregation. Younger members should not look upon their being submissive as a grievous burden, for all Christians are to be submissive to each other. Even elders (overseers) are to be submissive, in certain ways, both to their fellow elders (overseers) and to the members of the congregation as a whole.

The elders (overseers) are to “be clothed (*engkombosasthe*) with humility” (1 Pet 5:5). The Greek word that is translated “be clothed with” portrays the elders as tying an apron around the mid-rift in order to be ready to serve. Elders should be humble because “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet 5:5).

...casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. (1 Pet 5:7)

It would be a mistake for elders to think that they bear the burden of their work alone. They can be assured that God cares for them just as much as He does for the flock. Since God is a caring God, elders can cast their “care upon Him” (1 Pet 5:7).

***WOMEN'S ROLE
FROM
THE GREEK***

Although Jesus' apostles were all men, no one should think that Jesus did not associate with women. In His earthly family, Jesus had His mother and several sisters (Mark 6:3). Further, women were among those whom He healed (Mat 9:20-22) and among those to whom He forgave sins (e.g. Luke 7:47). Some of those from whom He cast out demons were women (Luke 8:2), and women were among those who came to hear Him preach (Mat 14:21). Jesus used all the opportunities that presented themselves to teach women (e.g. John 4:7-41).

There were women in the group that traveled around the country with Jesus and His disciples (Luke 8:2-3). They helped take care of some of His and His apostles' physical needs (Mat 27:55). We know the names of some of those women: Among them were Mary the wife of Zebedee, Mary the mother of James and Joses, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and others. Among His closest friends were Mary and Martha, who were sisters of His friend Lazarus; and Jesus visited in their home from time to time.

Women were (and are) important to Jesus. He was (and is) important to them. In fact, Jesus is the best friend that women ever had. He taught that women should no longer be looked upon as sex objects, and He taught that marriage should be for life. Jesus also taught that a man should not divorce his wife simply by giving her a document of divorcement.

Jesus' first appearance after His resurrection was to a woman. Women were among His followers, and women were members of the early church. They had (and have) an important role to play in the church, even though men and women play different roles in the church.

We may not fully understand why the roles of men and women are different, but we should recognize that they are. It would be unwise to ignore what the New Testament says about how the roles of men and women differ.

A woman's role is so many-sided and so important that I do not presume to be able to comprehend it fully or to describe it adequately. I can only point to the Scriptures with the confidence that they will shed light on the subject.

37

Dorcas

Acts 9:36-42

At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds that she did. But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. (And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, 'Tabitha, arise.' And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.

Dorcas (also called “Tabitha”) lived at Joppa, on the Mediterranean coast. She is a good example of what discipleship means for a woman.

Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, described Dorcas as being “full of good works and charitable deeds.” Her deeds brought her much love from the people, whom she helped; but unfortunately, Dorcas took sick and died, whereupon her friends sent for Peter, who was at Lydda, nearby; and he came quickly. When Peter arrived, he found all the widows whom Dorcas had helped standing around weeping. They showed him the “tunics” (*chitonas*) and “garments” (*himatia*) Dorcas had made for them.

Then Peter ushered the widows out of the room, knelt down, prayed to God, and said to Dorcas, “Tabitha, arise.” She opened her eyes and sat up. That this happened became known far and wide.

The result was that Dorcas’ godly life, along with her death and restoration to life, resulted in many people believing on the Lord Jesus. Thus, by means of her faithful service, Dorcas was able to accomplish more for the Lord than she could perhaps have done had she been a famous gospel preacher.

38

Aquila and Priscilla

***Acts 18:2,18-19,26; Romans 16:3;
1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19***

Aquila and his wife Priscilla worked for the Lord as a team. They took the apostle Paul into their home when Paul came to Corinth. They also allowed Paul to ply his trade with them (Acts 18:1-3).

Paul showed his appreciation for Aquila and Priscilla by taking them with him when he departed from Corinth. He left them in Ephesus while he made a quick trip to Antioch and Jerusalem.

While Aquila and Priscilla were in Ephesus, they met a man named Apollos, whom they taught “the things of the Lord” (Acts 18:24-26). Both Aquila and Priscilla were active in teaching Apollos (Acts 18:25). They provide an example of how a husband and wife can work together as a team in leading people to Jesus. Even if Aquila and Priscilla had done nothing other than host the apostle Paul in Corinth and lead Apollos to the truth in Ephesus, they would still have been a great blessing.

Yet, following these events, Aquila and Priscilla returned to Rome, whence they had come. To them, the Apostle Paul sent greetings in a letter to the saints in Rome (Rom 16:3). Paul mentioned Priscilla before he mentioned Aquila (the husband) in his letter to the Romans. This makes one wonder if perhaps Priscilla were not the more prominent of the two in Paul’s thinking. If she was, it might have been because of the nature of their ministry, which might be called a “hospitality ministry.” In a hospitality ministry a wife would naturally be assumed to play a prominent role, since she is the hostess of the home.

The apostle Paul said that Priscilla and Aquila were his “fellow workers in Christ Jesus” (Rom 16:3). He also said that they had risked their own necks for his life. He said, further, that he and all the churches of the Gentiles were grateful to them (Rom 16:4).

Paul sent greetings to the church that met in the home of Aquila and Priscilla in Rome (Rom 16:5). This shows that in Rome they were still opening their home to others.

39

Phoebe “Our Sister”

Rom 16:1-2

In his letter to the saints in Rome, the apostle Paul introduced to them a certain sister from Cenchrea. Her name was “Phoebe.” Paul called her “our sister.” She was either already in Rome or on her way to Rome at the time when Paul wrote.

The apostle Paul had some very nice things to say about Phoebe. He said that she had been “a servant” (*diakonos*) of the church in Cenchrea. The Greek word that Paul used for “servant” (*diakonos*). It is in the masculine gender, not feminine. Therefore, she was not a “deaconess” of the Cenchrean church (Rom 16:1). Instead, this dear sister was—as all Christians should be—a faithful servant (*diakonos*) of Christ.

The apostle Paul encouraged the Roman brethren to render to Phoebe whatever assistance she might need (Rom 16:2). They should render her assistance, especially in view of the fact that she herself had helped so many people, Paul included.

Phoebe’s name is recorded in Scripture for subsequent generations to read. As a result, nearly two thousand years later, we still speak of her and hold her up as an example. By doing good deeds and helping others she was able to bring more honor to herself and glory to God than if she had been a great preacher.

40

A Head Covering for Women

1 Corinthians 11:1-16

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you. But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God. Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is

a dishonor to him? But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering. But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.

The apostle Paul praised the brethren in Corinth for having kept certain “traditions” (*paradoseis*) that he had delivered to them (1 Cor 11:2). The Greek word *paradosis* (traditions) means a teaching, or a custom, that is handed down (or over) from one person or group of people to another. Paul was specifically concerned about the “tradition” of women wearing a covering of some kind on their heads when they prayed or prophesied. Let us look at this rather long passage (1 Cor 11:1-16) verse by verse.

The Relationship Between Men and Women

Before the apostle Paul got into a discussion of a covering for women, he explained certain things in general about the relationship between men and women.

Paul wanted the Corinthian brethren to know that Christ is the rightful head of every man. He also wanted them to know that, the rightful head of every (married) woman is her man (husband). This is similar to the relationship between Christ and God. Paul said,

The head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. (1 Cor 11:3)

Paul did not think that the fact that Christ is subject to God lessened Christ’s honor in any way. Nor did he think that a man’s being subject to Christ lessens a man’s honor in any way. Similarly, a woman’s being subject to a good man does not lessen her honor in any way. To the contrary, it increases her honor.

Should a Man Take His Hat Off When He Prays or Prophecies?

Before the apostle Paul got into a discussion of whether or not a woman should wear a covering when she prays or prophesies, he discussed what men should do, as regarding a head covering. He said,

Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered (*kata kephalees echon*), dis-honors his head. (1 Cor 11:4)

The Greek expression *kata kephalees echon* means to have something on the head. This expression does not identify what type of covering the apostle Paul had in mind that a man might have on his head. Paul may have been thinking of the possibility that a man be wearing some kind of a hat or shawl when he prays or prophesies.

What Paul said was that if a man prays or prophesies (presumably in public) with a covering (shawl, hat, or whatever it was), he “dishonors (*kataischunei*) his head.” That is, he “dishonors” Christ, who is a man’s head.

How serious an infraction would that be? Well, the word *kataischuno* (I dishonor) is a composite word, composed of the verb *aischuno* (I shame) and the preposition *kata*. The word *kata* intensifies the negative implication of the word *aischuno* (I shame). So it sounds pretty serious.

Today, in Western countries, even people who have no knowledge of Bible knowledge would think it strange of a man to addresses an assembly (of any kind) with his hat on. Some people might think that a man who did this was showing disrespect to the ladies present. But that is not the reason that the apostle Paul gave, as to why a man should remove his head covering when he prays or

prophesies. The reason Paul gave is that it would dishonor Christ if he did not remove his head covering.

Should a Woman Have a Covering When She Prays or Prophesies?

Just as a man should not have a covering on his head he prays or prophesies, so a woman should have a covering on her head when she prays or prophesies. The apostle Paul said,

But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered (*akatakalypto*) dishonors her head. (1 Cor 11:5)

Whom does she dishonor? She dishonors her husband. I am not sure that I know just why her praying or prophesying without a head covering dishonors her husband. Perhaps it is because she would be sending an unclear signal as to whether or not she is in subjection to her husband, but that is just a guess on my part.

If a wife were to make a public display of her piety by praying or prophesying in a more public way, it might put her husband “in the shade,” so to speak, unless she gave some signal of her submission to him.

If she does not give some signal that she is under her husbands’ authority, people might ask, “Why is she out there praying and prophesying, instead of her husband? Does she not respect him?”

Or, people might ask, “Where is the ‘gentle and quiet spirit’ (1 Pet 3:4) that a Christian woman is supposed to display?” So as to avoid such questions being asked may be the reason why Paul said this.

Did the Apostle Paul Want Women to Wear a Veil?

Paul did not define the type of covering that he had in mind for a woman to wear. Perhaps, it didn't matter to him what kind of covering she wore. Some people think he was speaking of a "veil," and for that reason they discount the whole idea of a covering, as being merely an oriental custom.

I doubt, however, that Paul was necessarily thinking of a veil. I don't recall ever having seen a picture (or a statue) from antiquity of a Greek woman wearing a veil. (I do not say that no such picture or statue exists but that I do not recall ever having seen one.)

My son-in-law, Tom Black, recently showed me a photograph of a statuette of a Greek woman wearing a kind of a shawl that was draped, not around her face, but over her head and around her shoulders. The statuette was made in the fourth century BC. It is kept in the Amphipolis Museum in northern Greece. The apostle Paul may have had something like this in mind.

In India I have seen Indian women come into the assembly, who, as they enter the assembly, drape the end of their colorful saris over their head. Since women in antiquity wore flowing robes, Paul may have had something like this in mind.

What Is Wrong With a Woman Praying or Prophecyng Without a Head Covering?

The apostle Paul felt that it would be inappropriate for a woman to step forth in public with her head uncovered. It would be as inappropriate as it would be if she were to step forth with her head shaved. Paul said,

For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn.
But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or
shaved, let her be covered. (1 Cor 11:6)

Paul recommended (I think he said so, facetiously) that a woman who insisted on praying or prophesying with her uncovered head should “be shorn.”

What does all this add up to? A good wife is (as the apostle Paul said) “the glory (*doxa*)” of her husband (1 Cor 11:7). The word *doxa* can mean “glory, splendor, or grandeur.” It can also mean “praise, honor or pride.” It can even mean “brightness or brilliance.” If a wife is all (or any) of these things to her husband, she is an adornment for him. Therefore, she should do her best to cast a good light on him.

The Gift of Prophecy

It seems quite clear that certain women in the early days of Christianity had the gift of prophecy. Philip the evangelist, for example, had four daughters that prophesied (Acts 21:9).

Prophecy can be thought of in at least two ways: It can be thought of as a foretelling the future or as a speaking out for God. The fact that certain women in the early days of the church could foretell the future and speak for God does not necessarily mean that women (or men) have the gift of prophecy today. The apostle Paul said,

But whether there are prophecies, they will fail
(*katargeetheetesontai*) (1 Cor 13:8)

The word *katargeetheetesontai* is a future passive form of the verb *katargeo*, which means “to render ineffective, nullify, cancel, destroy, abolish, or do away with.” Paul did not simply say that prophecies

would cease. He said they would be stopped. The future passive form shows that he meant that someone would do away with them.

Who would do away with the prophecies? Obviously, it would be the One who inspired prophecies in the first place. He would be the one who would do away with them. That is, God would stop them.

Even though prophetic revelations from God and the ability to foretell the future in a prophetic way have stopped, women can still speak out for God in various ways. They can, for example, share with others what God has said in the Bible. Therefore, their ability to speak effectively for God today may depend upon their familiarity with the Holy Scriptures.

Where Did the Women in New Testament Times Use Their Prophetic Gifts?

There are two unnecessary assumptions that are sometimes made. First, it is not necessary to assume that the women in the early days, who had prophetic gifts, used their gifts to preach in the assembly of the saints. To be sure, some of the women in Corinth may have been preaching in the assembly; but if they were, it was improper for them to have been doing so, for the apostle Paul said,

Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak. (1 Cor 14:34)

The other unnecessary assumption is that women with prophetic gifts spoke publicly before groups of men and women outside of the assembly. Those women that had prophetic gifts may have found ample opportunity to exercise their gifts by speaking privately with friends and neighbors, as they met them on the streets or at the market place. Or, they may have spoken with their

family members and acquaintances in the privacy of their own homes, or in the homes of others.

The assemblies in those early days may have been quite different from the carefully planned and sometimes highly orchestrated “church services” of today.

We should not envision those early Christians sitting in neat rows in beautiful church buildings. Church buildings had not been built yet. Early Christians came together wherever they could find a place to meet. Sometimes they met in homes. Sometimes they met out in the open, perhaps under a tree, if the weather were good. Or sometimes they met in caves for the sake of safety.

Those meetings of early Christians appear to have been very informal and very unstructured. In fact, the apostle Paul encouraged the Corinthians to bring a little more structure into their meetings. He said,

Let all things be done decently and in order. (1 Cor 14:39)

In addition, people in those days did not have wristwatches, as we do today. They told time by looking at a sundial or by observing the sky. So brethren showed up at different times for their gatherings. Those that were slaves could not always get off from their work whenever they chose. So the apostle Paul told the brethren,

When you come together to eat, wait for one another. (1 Cor 11:33)

Indeed, they may not have set a time for when their meetings were supposed to begin, or to close. Their meetings were so informal that some of the brethren felt free to unpack food they had brought and to eat it (1 Cor 11:33-34).

During the time before the meetings began, and after they were over, there would have been plenty of opportunity for women to use their gifts to encourage and instruct the brethren and others, who may have been present. While doing this, they needed to have a covering of some kind.

Could Women Speak in the Assembly if They Wore a Headdress?

Godly women, who were aware of their propensity for dropping a comment here and there, would likely come to the assembly prepared, wearing a shawl or a headdress, so they could share with others their prompting from the Spirit.

Still, there is no indication that either the gift of prophecy or the wearing of headdress gave them license to speak publicly in an assembly. Even with a headdress, their admonitions were to be given to others privately—one on one—and not to the whole assembly.

A Symbol of Authority

The apostle Paul said that a women should have “authority” (or “a symbol of authority,” as the NKJV and other say) on her head “because of the angels” (1 Cor 11:10). Leading up to this verse, Paul enumerated the reasons why a woman should have a covering when she prays or prophesies. Here are the reasons that he gave:

1. A woman should wear a covering when she prays or prophesies because she “is the glory of man” (*doxa andros*). Paul said,

For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. (1 Cor 11:7)

To be sure, everyone knows, even today, that women are special, even glorious. They are glorious in a lot of ways. For one, they are usually far more beautiful than men. In addition, God has endowed them with certain attributes (such as gentleness and kindness) that most men have to strive to attain.

2. The Apostle Paul's second reason why a woman should wear a covering when she prays or prophesies is because she is "from man" (*ex andros*). Paul said,

For man is not from woman, but woman from man.
(1 Cor 11:8)

Paul's wording reflects the fact that God created Eve from a bone taken from Adam's side (Gen 2:21-23).

3. The apostle Paul's third reason as to why a woman should wear a covering when she prays or prophesies is because woman was created "for the man (*dia ton andra*)."

Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. (1 Cor 11:9)

This reflects the words that God spoke when He said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him" (Gen 2:18), and truly, a good wife is a "help" to a man.

4. The apostle Paul's forth reason as to why a woman should wear a covering when she prays or prophesies is because she ought to have a "symbol of authority on her head." Paul said,

For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. (1 Cor 11:10)

A woman should have authority (or a symbol of authority) on her head “because of the angels (*dia tous aggelous*).”

What About the “Angels”?

Paul did not recommend that a woman wear a covering because he thought that either the Jews or the Gentiles might think it improper for a woman to be talking with a man unless she wore a headdress. Rather, He seemed more concerned more about “the angels.”

The suggestion has been made that Paul was concerned lest angels be tempted to lie with Christian women in a carnal way, but that is a silly suggestion. God’s holy angels would not be interested in human women in that way.

A better suggestion would be that women (and men, too) should live in a godly way that would not disappoint or discourage those magnificent creatures (angels) whom God has ordained to watch over them.

A still better suggestion would be that those evangelists who brought the gospel to people are also “angels” (meaning messengers) of the gospel. Those are ones who need encouragement and who might be tempted by human women.

Christ’s Teaching Elevated Marriage to a New Height

Christ brought an enhanced perception of the mutual dependency of a man and his wife (Gal 3:28). The apostle Paul said,

Neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. (1 Cor 11:11)

That is to say, men and women need each other. Neither of them is complete without the other, and neither of them is more important in the eyes of God than the other. Paul said,

For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God. (1 Cor 11:12)

Long Hair for Women

Sometimes men can be seen today with long hair, and women with short hair. Generally speaking, however, it is more natural for men to have short hair and for women to have long hair. The apostle Paul said,

Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? (1 Cor 11:14)

Paul also said,

But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering. (1 Cor 11:15)

The apostle Paul seems to have been pointing to a woman's hair as an argument that would bolster his point of view that it is natural for women to have a head covering of some kind. He does not seem to have been saying that a woman's hair is a replacement for a covering.

Should a Woman Wear a Covering in the Assembly?

The answer as to whether or not a woman should wear a covering at the assembly of the church seems to turn on whether or not she is thought to be “praying” in the assembly. We know from what Paul said (1 Cor 14:33-35) that she should not be prophesying (teaching) in the assembly, but can she be considered to be praying?

If she is thought to be “praying,” then these following remarks from the apostle Paul should be considered. Paul said,

Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray (*proseuchesthai*) to God with her head uncovered?
(1 Cor 11:13)

The word *proseuchomai* (from which *preseuchesthai* is an infinitive) usually means to pray out loud, but it may not always imply a spoken prayer. Surely, a silent prayer is also “praying,” just as saying “Amen” to a prayer is “praying.” So the pertinent question seems to be, “Is a woman ‘praying’ (in the sense of *proseuchomai*) when she sits in the assembly and listens to some man speak a prayer and says, ‘Amen?’”

If a person comes to the conclusion that a woman is praying in the assembly when she quietly listen to a prayer and agrees with it, then the consistent view of 1 Cor 11:13 would seem to be that she should wear a head covering of some kind. If she is not “praying,” she would not need a covering.

A parallel question would be, “Is a man thought to be ‘praying’ (in the sense of *proseuchomai*), as he sits in the assembly and listens to a brother say a prayer? If he is, he should take his hat off. If he is not, he could presumable wear his hat in the assembly, as far as the Scriptures are concerned. If we conclude that both men and women are praying in the assembly when they listen to the prayers

of others and say (or think), “Amen,” it would seem appropriate for a woman to wear a covering and for a man to take off his hat. The apostle Paul said,

Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? (1 Cor 11:13)

This question seems to imply that it would not be proper for a woman to pray with her head uncovered.

No Such Custom

The apostle Paul brought his discussion of women’s covering to a close by saying,

But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom (*sunetheian*), nor do the churches of God. (1 Cor 11:16)

Who did the apostle Paul think might be contentious about what he had said? Did he think the brethren who were in favor of women wearing a covering in the assembly would be contentious? Or did Paul think that brethren who thought that a covering was unnecessary might be contentious with what he had said?

This latter seems more likely. No one would expect Paul to turn around and say that a covering made no difference after he had just made an elaborate argument in favor of a covering.

Should a Congregation Pass a Law That Requires Women to Wear a Hat in the Assembly?

No, a church should not be in the business of passing laws. That would violate the freedom that Christians have in Christ. Let the women decide for themselves whether or not they should

wear a hat in the assembly. Christian women are intelligent and they can make their own decision.

41

In the Assembly

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, and has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if anything is revealed to another, who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let

him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order.

Many of the early Christian men came to the assembly of the church prepared to make a presentation of some kind. Some of them had a “psalm,” others a “teaching,” others a message in a “tongue” (foreign language), still others a “revelation,” and some an “interpretation” (of Scripture) to present.

These presentations were permissible, and welcomed; but they should all be given within certain guidelines (1 Cor 14:26-33). The presentations should not be given for show, or purely for entertainment, but for “edification” (*oikodomeen*) (1 Cor 14:26). The word *oikodomeen* is from *oikodomeo*, which means “I build a house.” The purpose of all these presentations should be to build up the people.

There were, no doubt, many different languages spoken in the city of Corinth, since it was a world-renown trade center. The apostle Paul set a limit on how many foreign-language speakers (tongue-speakers) should be allowed to speak in any given assembly. “Two,” he said, “or at most three” (1 Cor 14:27). (It is no joy to listen to someone speaking a language that is not understood.)

Paul also said that the foreign-language (tongue) speakers should not all speak at once, but “each in turn,” and someone should interpret (1 Cor 14:27). If no interpreter were present, Paul said that the foreign-language speaker should “keep silent in the church” (*sigato en ekleesia*) (1 Cor 14:28). The verb *sigato* is in the imperative mood (command form). The command form indicates that Paul intended for the brethren to respect what he said. If a

person had a message that could only be spoken in a “tongue” (foreign language), and if no interpreter were present, that person should deliver his admonition to himself privately (1 Cor 14:28).

What was true for those who spoke in tongues (foreign languages) was also true for the prophets: Only two or three of them should speak in the assembly (1 Cor 14:29) and the others should “judge” (*diakrinetosan*). *Diakrino* means “I evaluate,” or “I consider,” what is said.

It could happen that a brother might receive a divine revelation while he was seated in the assembly, and he might feel compelled to speak out, immediately. In such a case, the person that is already speaking should yield the floor, so that no two people speak at the same time. Paul said, “Let the first keep silent” (*sigato*) (1 Cor 14:30). Here, again, we see the verb *sigao* (keep silent) in the imperative mood (command form).

Paul was willing for all the brothers to speak, who had the gift of prophecy, but they should do it “one by one,” so that everyone could learn and be encouraged (1 Cor 14:31).

This shows that the assembly should be a learning experience for all and should provide an opportunity for all to “be encouraged.” The apostle Paul made a very revealing remark, however, about the prophets. He said,

The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. (1 Cor 14:32)

What this means is that, even though a person feels that he has received a revelation from God, he can still control how, when, and where he speaks it. In other words, he should not use his divine revelation as an excuse to disrupt the assembly, because “God is not the author of confusion but of peace” (1 Cor 14:33).

Let Your Women Keep Silent in the Churches

The apostle Paul laid his finger on another source of confusion in the Corinthian church. He said, “Let your women keep silent (*sigatosan*) in the churches (*en tais ekklesiais*)” (1 Cor 14:34). The word *ekklesia* means “assembly.” (An assembly is composed of those who have been “called out” to a gathering.) This is third time that Paul has used the word *sigao* in these verses.

It is clear what *sigato* means regarding the tongue speaker if no interpreter was present: It meant that the tongue speaker should keep quiet (1 Cor 14:28).

It is also clear what *sigato* means regarding the person who yields the floor to the man who feels that he must immediately share the revelation that he has just received: The original speaker should keep quiet (1 Cor 14:30).

Likewise, it is also clear what *sigatosan* means with regards to women. They are to “keep silent” in the assembly. *Sigatosan* is also in the command form.

Paul explained why women should “keep silent” in the assembly. He said, “for they are not permitted to speak (*lalein*)” (1 Cor 14:34). This does not mean that women may not even whisper a word to a brother, to a sister, or to a child sitting nearby. It also does not mean that they cannot sing with the congregation. The word *laleo* brings with it the idea of someone’s speaking in continuous way, which means that women are not to make speeches in the assembly. Instead, they are to be “submissive” (*hupotassesthosan*). This, too, is in the command form. In fact, all of the injunctions in these verses in 1 Cor 14:26-40, which say “let” someone do something, are command forms. (The English language, unfortunately, does not have a command form in the third person. Therefore, all direct commands in English can only be in the second person. We cannot say, for example, “He do

something.” That would be baby talk. In English we need the helping word “let” to frame a command in the third person.)

Now, look at the verses in this passage (1 Cor 14:26-40) in which the helping word “let” is used to express a command:

<i>Verse</i>	<i>“Let” command</i>
26	Let all things be done for edification.
27	Let one interpret.
28	Let him keep silent in the church.
28	Let him speak to himself and to God.
29	Let two or three prophets speak.
29	Let the others judge.
30	Let the first keep silent.
34	Let your women keep silent in the churches.
35	Let them ask their husbands at home.
37	Let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are commands of the Lord.
38	Let him be ignorant.
40	Let all things be done decently and in order.

All these expressions are in the imperative mood (command form). They sound a little weak in English, yet they are still commands. Although the apostle Paul did not speak unkindly or harshly, it is clear that he intended for his instructions to be carried out.

The main reason why there must be order in the assembly is so that teaching can be done and encouragement given. In 1 Cor 14, heavy emphasis is placed on clear and intelligible teaching and encouraging.

The gathering of Christians should not be exclusively a “praise service.” It should be a teaching and learning experience as well. (All praise and no teaching makes for an uninformed congregation.)

The apostle Paul said that women in the church are to be “submissive” (*hupotassesthosan*) (1 Cor 14:34). The word *hupotassesthosan* is an aorest passive imperative form of *hupotasso*. *Hupotasso* means, “I put someone (or something) in subjection.” This injunction should also be translated as one of the “let them” phrases.

In addition, the apostle Paul said that the Law (of Moses) foretold that women would be in submission. He was referring, no doubt, to Genesis 3:16, which says, “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” However, a Christian husband would be wise to make it as easy as possible for his wife to be in submission to him.

Early gatherings of Christians seem to have included a question and answer session. Some of the women in Corinth may have been taking undue advantage of the opportunity to ask questions. The apostle Paul said it would be better for them to ask questions of their own husbands at home rather than in the assembly (1 Cor 14:35). Unmarried women and women whose husbands do not know the Scriptures need help, of course, from another source. This is where the older women of the church should step in. They should teach the younger women. See Titus 2:3-5.

In thinking about this passage, I asked my wife why it is “shameful for women to speak in church.” Her reply was, “Because it dishonors their head (husband).” That is, a woman’s speaking out in the assembly puts her husband to shame because he should be the one to speak out. For that reason, when the wife speaks out in the assembly, it shows that she does not properly respect her husband.

The apostle Paul anticipated that some of the brethren in Corinth would resist what he had said concerning their public assemblies. So he asked them, “did the word of God come originally from you” (1 Cor 14:36)? Obviously, it did not. Then he

asked, "Or was it you only that it reached?" Obviously, it had not, for the gospel had spread over the whole Mediterranean world and beyond.

The apostle Paul also anticipated that some of the brethren, both men and women, would want to ignore what he had said. They would seek an excuse to ignore what He said, on the basis that they saw themselves as prophets or as "spiritual." So Paul said,

If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments (*entolee*) of the Lord. (1 Cor 14:37)

Paul used the word *entolee* (command) "of the Lord." Now, a command "of the Lord" is not to be lightly ignored. The apostle Paul foresaw the possibility that some brethren might desire to remain "ignorant" (*agnoei*) of what he had just said regarding bringing order into the proceedings of the assembly (1 Cor 14:38). The word *agnoeo* (ignorant) means "I do not know" or "I disregard." Paul used the *agnoeo* to refer to a person who refuses to acknowledge what he (Paul) had said.

The ancient Greek manuscripts disagree among themselves as to what comes next in this verse. Some of the manuscripts say, "Let him be ignorant (*agnoeitai*)," meaning if a person persists in ignorance, there is nothing anyone can do about it. Others manuscripts say, "He is (to be) ignored (*agnoeito*)," meaning the church should pass him by. Whichever reading is the original one, the results are the same. If a person will not abide by the apostolic injunctions that are designed to bring order into the assembly, he is to be shunted to the side, out of a leadership role.

The apostle Paul recognized that there were people in the early church who were gifted in miraculous ways, but he taught that they needed to tame their wilder inclinations. Paul also taught that

women are just as much members of the body of Christ as men (Gal 3:28), yet he placed restrictions on what women should do in the assembly.

42

The Relationship Between Men and Women in Marriage

Ephesians 5:21-33

...submitting to one another in the fear of God. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the

church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

The central idea in this passage about marriage is that love is the key to the relationship. In spite of this, Paul introduced his thoughts about love in marriage by talking about submission. That may seem strange to some people, but submission is the common duty of everyone, both men and women.

The necessity of submission comes from the fact that all humans are created beings. That means that they did not create themselves, and they do not own themselves. They belong to the One who made them and to the One who redeems them. Hence, they live at the pleasure of another.

Consequently, in their association in the church, they should act as befits a dependent status by “submitting (*hupotassomenoi*) to one another in the fear of God.”

Mutual submission is not only appropriate in the church but also in marriage. Since a Christian husband and his (Christian) wife are both brethren in the Lord, they are equal to each other before the Lord.

Therefore, they should submit to each other. Yet, while this is true, a wife occupies a position in marriage that is similar to the position of the church in its relationship to Christ. The apostle Paul said,

Just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. (Eph 5:24)

Being submissive to Christ does not demean the church. It is an honor for the church to be submissive to Christ, for the church belongs to Christ. Likewise, it is an honor for a wife to belong in

marriage to a good man and to wear his name. Further, a wife needs to be submissive to her husband so that her husband can look after her properly.

Every Christian woman that is thinking about marriage should be careful to choose a man, not solely for his money or his looks. She should think about whether or not he respects God and whether or not he will treat her properly. That is to say, before a woman entrusts herself to a man, she needs to be sure that he will put her welfare above his own. The apostle Paul gave instruction to husbands, as follows. He said,

love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church
and gave Himself for her. (Eph 5:25)

How much did Christ love the church? He loved her enough to die for her. Yet Christ's concern for the church did not stop with His dying for her. He sanctifies her (makes her holy).

He makes her holy by cleansing her with "the washing of water by the word" (Eph 5:26). Notice that Christ does not sanctify the church "by the word" alone, but by "the washing of water," which is prescribed "by the word." The "washing" here refers to baptism. A lot of people want to get rid of the "water" in this passage. They want get rid of it because they want to have a "washing" without "water." That is to say, they want to have salvation without baptism, yet there is no compelling reason to get rid of the "water." Instead, people need to come to an understanding of the importance of baptism in the process of becoming a Christian. Baptism is a part of the means that Christ uses to prepare worldly and unclean people for membership in His holy church.

The apostle Paul explained why Christ wants to sanctify the church. It is because He wants to present her to Himself as a "glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:27).

The apostle Paul said that a husband should be as deeply concerned about the welfare of his wife as he is about the welfare of his own body, for “he who loves his wife loves himself” (Eph 5:28). It is because of a man’s love for his wife that he “nourishes (*ektrephei*) and cherishes (*thalpei*)” her, just as the Lord does the church (Eph 5:29). The Greek word *ektrephei* means “he feeds” his wife, and the word *thalpei* means he “takes care” of her.

The apostle Paul conceded that the relationship between a husband and his wife is a “great mystery” (*musteerion*) (Eph 5:32). A “mystery” in the New Testament is something that was once kept secret but is at last revealed. So the best explanation of what a marriage should be can be found by observing the relationship between Christ and His church, as it is revealed in the Scriptures.

Although the members of the church are married to Christ, that does not mean that a man should not have his own wife or that a woman should not have her own husband (Eph 5:33). If a husband loves his wife and takes care of her properly, she will gladly submit to his lead. By the same token, if a wife respects her husband and follows his lead, he will find it easy to love and take care of her.

43

The Relationship Between Men and Women in the Church

1 Timothy 2:8-15

I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly

clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.

The apostle Paul had a clear concept of how both men and women should function in the church. Before Paul described a woman's role in this passage, however, he described what men should be doing. He said, "I desire (*boulomai*) therefore that the men (*tous andras*) pray everywhere." The word *boulomai* expresses Paul's desire and intention: Namely, He wanted men to be praying "everywhere."

Two things here show that the apostle Paul was thinking that the men should be doing the praying not the women. First, he used the word *andras*, which means "man." He did not use the word *anthropoi*, which would have referred, perhaps, to mankind in general. The word *andras*, however, refers to men as distinct from women.

The second thing that shows that Paul was thinking of men doing the praying, and not women, is that Paul made a clear distinction in this chapter (1 Tim 2:8-15) between the activities of men and women in general.

Praying seems to lie within the scope of a man's responsibility, while a woman has other responsibilities. This does not mean, of course, that women should not pray at all. Women can find many appropriate opportunities to pray. They can pray by themselves privately, or with other women, or with their own children. But

when men are present, it is best for women to step back and let the men take the lead. If they do step back, and do it willingly, they will avoid the embarrassment of someone having to say to them, "Now, you ladies be quiet."

The apostle Paul wanted the men to take the lead in religious matters. This included public praying. In most cases, if the men (of a congregation) will shoulder their role as spiritual leaders, and live Godly lives, most spiritual-minded women will gladly let them take the lead. When women assume the leadership in a congregation, it is likely because they have become frustrated with the poor leadership that the men have been giving and feel obligated to do something about it.

The hands that men are to be "lifting up" (*epairontas*) in prayer should be "holy (*hosious*) hands." The word *hosious* refers to hands of men, who do what is holy. Men who pray should be without "wrath" (*orgees*) and "doubting" (*dialogismou*). Unless they live without "wrath," they are not likely to have "holy hands." Further, unless they pray without "doubting," their prayers are not likely to be answered (Jam 1:6-7).

The apostle Paul also had a clear concept of what women should be like. He wanted women to dress modestly, "not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works" (1 Tim 2:9-10). Paul also wanted women to "learn (*manthaneto*) in silence." Rather, I should say that he actually "commanded" women to learn in silence, because the word "*manthaneto*" (let her learn) is in the imperative mode, a command. The Greek word *heesukia* would be better translated as "quietness" rather than "silence," for Paul did not mean that she should not speak at all.

The apostle Paul also said that a woman should learn "with all submission (*hupotagee*)" (1 Tim 2:11). The noun is associated with the verb *hupotasso*, which means, "I subordinate." The One who

subordinated women to their husbands is the same One who subordinated men to Christ.

The Apostle Paul Did Not Permit a Woman to Teach

Paul went on to say that he did “not permit (*ouk epitrepo*) a woman to teach” (*didaskein*) (1 Tim 2:12). Paul did not actually say that a woman should never under any circumstance ever teach a man. The word *didaskein* (to teach) implies teaching in some official (or semi-official) capacity. We know that Priscilla helped her husband, Aquila, teach Apollos (Acts 18:26). Paul also said that he did not “permit” (*ouk epitrepo*) a woman to “have authority over (*authentein*) a man” (1 Tim 2:12). One can identify in the word *autos* (self) in the word *authentein*. Paul did not permit a woman to exalt herself so as to exercise authority over a man in church affairs.

Did the apostle Paul have the authority from God to tell men and women what to do? Presumably, he did. He was an inspired apostle. His teaching about how men and women should function in the church was greatly needed in those days. How much did those men and women in the first century, some of whom had just come out of paganism, know about how they should serve Christ in His kingdom? Not very much, I suppose. Someone had to teach them. Similarly, how much would men and women know today about the way in which they should serve Christ in His kingdom unless they read it in the Bible? I think that wisdom lies on the side of caution. It would be better not to go against what the Bible says.

Now, we come to the crux of the matter. The apostle Paul said that women should be “in silence” (*heesuchia*) (1 Tim 2:12). The KJV and the NKJV have caused a lot of confusion here. These two versions give the impression that a woman should not speak at all, but that is not right. The Greek word *heesuchia* does not say that she should not speak at all, but that she should be “in quietness.”

Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words explains this thought very well. It says that the Greek adjective (*heesuchios*) indicates a "tranquility arising from within, causing no disturbance to others." So Paul did not say that a woman should learn without ever saying a word. What he said was that she should keep a low profile in all that she does. She should not be loud, self-assertive, or raucous in the assembly or anywhere else. Instead, she should be meek, gentle, and show the spirit of Christ all the time and everywhere.

In one very wonderful way a woman's special gift trumps anything a man can do. She is designed by God to bear children. What a privilege God has given her in that she can bestow life on others! The apostle Paul said, "She will be saved (*sotheesetai*) in childbearing (*teknogonias*)." That is, she does not need to preach, to lead public prayer, to direct singing, to teach a Bible class, or to do any of those things that men do, in order to please God. She will be saved (and salvation should be enough for anyone) through doing what God has equipped her to do. If she brings children into the world and trains them up to love the Lord, she will be doing a great service to the world.

There has been some discussion concerning this passage as to whether or not a woman's salvation depends on the kind of life she lives personally, or whether or not it depends on the kind of life her children live.

A discussion of this question has been brought to the fore because Paul said that "she" (singular) would be saved, "if they" (plural) continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control (1 Tim 2:15)." To whom does the word "they" refer? Does it refer to a women or does it refer to their children? Opinions differ on this point. One cannot tell from grammar which way it is, yet it may not make any practical difference. For if a woman "continues in faith, love, holiness, with self-control," her children will likely continue in

the same vein, and the results will probably be that both she and her children will be saved.

Not every woman, of course, is married and has children. Some women were married at one time but are no longer married. Others are married but have no children. It would be unreasonable, therefore, to construe Paul's words as implying that a woman has to be married and have children before she can be saved. What Paul seems to have been describing is the general framework within which godly women serve. There are exceptions, of course. God is aware that there are women who are not married or who cannot bear children. He loves them all the same and makes provision for them. They serve God in the ways that their circumstances allow.

There is no reason to think, however, that unmarried women are free from the restrictions that have been placed on married women and that they are entitled to speak out in the assembly in a way that married women are not permitted to do.

44

Honor Widows Who Are Really Widows

1 Timothy 5:3-16

Honor widows who are really widows. But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God. Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. And these things command, that they

may be blameless. But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work. But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some have already turned aside after Satan. If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.

A woman's being elderly and not having a husband does not necessarily qualify her to be honored as a "widow" and to receive financial aid from the church.

Of course, no person in the congregation should be neglected if that person is in need; but if a widow has children or grandchildren, they should feel responsible for taking care of their elderly relatives (1 Tim 5:4-8,16).

The apostle Paul gave specific instructions about who should be enrolled (*katalegestho*) as a widow. The Greek verb *katalegestho* is the passive imperative form of *katalego*, from which our word “catalogue” is derived. Paul seems to have envisioned that a list would be made up of the women who were worthy of financial help.

The apostle Paul described how to identify a widow that is worthy of financial help. She is one who is left alone, who trusts in God, and who continues in supplications and prayers night and day. It would be shameful for a congregation to neglect a woman such as this.

Paul had no intention, however, of enrolling old women who live in pleasure and who are dead spiritually (1 Tim 5:6). He said that the enrolled widows should:

1. Be at least 60 years of age.
2. Have been married to only one man.
3. Be well reported of for good works.
4. Have brought up children.
5. Have lodged strangers.
6. Have washed the saints’ feet.
7. Have relieved the afflicted.
8. Have diligently followed every good work.

What did the apostle Paul intend that the women should be doing who qualify for financial help from the congregation? Certainly he did not intend that they should sit around idle and live off of the church.

Should women who are enrolled assume some role of authority within the congregation? There is no indication that Paul had such a thing in mind. No doubt, as enrolled women they should continue doing what they have always done. That is, they should lodge strangers, wash saints’ feet, relieve the afflicted, and be

diligent in every good work. What a blessing it would be to have a cadre of godly women doing such things as these!

The apostle Paul also had recommendations for younger women. He said:

1. They should marry.
2. They should bear children.
3. They should manage the house.
4. They should give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully of them.

Some “modern” women look down on such activities as these, but they should not look down on them.

45

Reverent Behavior

Titus 2:3-5

...the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

The apostle Paul wrote to Titus that he should “speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1). Paul also told Titus to teach older women to be “reverent (*hieroprepeis*) in behavior (*en katasteemati*).” The word *katasteestma* (behavior)” refers to the way people do things, i.e. their habits. Older women should be “reverent” (*hieroprepeis*) in their habits. *Hieroprepeis* is a compound

word, composed of *hieros* which means “sacred,” in the way that priests and the temple were sacred.

Thus, Paul meant for older women to handle their daily affairs in a manner that would remind people of the reverential way that priests served in the temple.

The apostle Paul told Titus to teach older women not to be “slanderers” (*diabolous*). The word for “slander” (*diabolos*) in the Greek language is the same as the word for “devil” (*diabolos*). The only difference between them is that the first of them is an adjective while the other is a noun. The devil is known as the “accuser” (or slanderer) of people.

Older women also should not be “given (*dedoulomenas*) to much wine.” The word *dedoulomenas* is a perfect passive participle from the word *doulōo* which means “I enslave.” If a person is a slave to drink, you can be assured that it did not happen overnight, hence, the use of the perfect tense in Greek, which indicates something of long standing.

Further, older women should be “teachers of good things” (*kalodidaskalous*). The word *kalodidaskalos* is composed of the word *kalos*, which means “good” and *didaskalos*, which means “teacher.” Obviously there are different kinds of teachers (*didaskaloi*), some of them teach what is good (*kalos*) and others teach what is false.

It is very important for the church that older women teach younger women. Many times older women’s health and lack of education do not permit them to teach as they would like; but some older women are qualified and able to teach younger women, and they should do it. They can invite young women into their homes and teach them, or teach them at some other place. Younger women, who are making the transition from being foot-loose teenagers to being responsible wives and mothers, often have little or no concept of how to conduct themselves in their new role. They need the instruction and training that older women can give.

It should not be necessary to “admonish (*sophronidzōsin*) the young women to love their husbands.” Young women should naturally love their husbands, yet, sadly, they often do not. The Greek English dictionary that is in the back of The Greek New Testament put out by the United Bible Societies gives as translations for *sophronidzō* the words “train,” “teach,” or “advise.” The root meaning of *sophronidzō* is “I bring someone to his (or her) senses.” Older women should bring young women to their senses regarding their attitude toward their husbands.

Also, it should not be necessary to instruct young women “to love their children.” That, too, should come naturally, but sometimes it does not; for, sadly, some women abuse and neglect their children. Older women can help young women to learn what true love for children is. They can show them how to mold their children’s character rather than cater to their children’s whims. Older women might, perhaps, spend their time more profitably in training young mothers to teach their own children, than in conducting children’s Bible classes themselves. Let the mothers do that.

One of the most difficult things to teach young women is how to be “discreet” (*sophronas*). Discretion is the art of knowing what to do or what to say. I am not sure how this attribute can be taught, except perhaps by example.

Older woman should also teach young women to be “chaste” (*hagnas*), that is, to be “pure” and “holy.” Further, they should teach them to be “homemakers” (*oikourgous*). Here is where practical instruction can help. Older women have learned many shortcuts about cooking and running a household, which young women need to learn.

God wants women, both young and old, to be “good” (*agathas*). That is, He wants them to do all kinds of good and useful things. Notice that the attributes that are suggested for women in this

passage mostly concern practical matters. Men can afford to be more theoretical, but women need to have their feet on the ground.

It is not easy, of course, for a woman to be in subjection to her husband, if she knows that she has better judgment than he, yet she should try. The NKJV says that older women are to teach young women to be “obedient (*hupotassomenas*) to their own husbands.” It is not necessary, however, to translate *hupotassomenas* as “obedient.” “Being in submission” would be an adequate translation. Women are supposed to be “obedient” to their husbands in some respects, I suppose, but the word “obedient” does not really characterize the full extent of their relationship with their husbands. It leaves out of account the affection they share with each other. In a proper marriage a husband usually does what pleases his wife just as often as she does what pleases him. Yet someone has to take the lead.

In order for a husband to be able to lead, his wife needs to be submissive to him. Her submission is a gift that she bestows on him because she loves him. She gives it to him so that he can lead properly.

If Christian wives ignore the things mentioned above, non-Christian women might decide they did not want to be like them, and the word of God would be “blasphemed.”

46

Submission and Honor

1 Peter 3:1-7

Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct

accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward; arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel; rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror. Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

The apostle Peter said that everyone should be submissive to the government under which he lives (1 Pet 2:13-17). He also said that slaves should be submissive to their earthly masters (1 Pet 2:21). Further, Peter reminded his readers that Jesus humbly submitted to the humiliations that were heaped upon him (1 Pet 2:21-24).

In a similar vein, he said to Christian wives, “Be submissive (*hupotassomenai*) to your own husbands.”

It may not be any easier for wives to submit to their husband than it is for slaves to submit to their masters, or for citizens to submit to their government, or for men to submit to God, but that does not diminish the need for it.

The Greek word for “be submissive” is “*hupotassomai*.” It means to “take a subordinate place.” Some modern women, alas, do not like the idea of being subordinate to their husbands or to anyone. If they are not submissive to their husbands, however, they will likely frustrate their husbands’ efforts to take care of them properly.

A further reason why a Christian wife should be submissive, even to an unbelieving husband, is so that she can win Him for Jesus. It is hard to win a man for Jesus if his “Christian” wife does not respect him enough to submit to his leadership.

A Christian wife should not try to preach to her husband. The apostle Peter mentioned the possibility of a wife being able to win her husband “without a word.” Her husband will observe her “chaste” (*hagneen*) conduct” (*anastropheen*). The adjective *hagnos* (which is here translated “chaste”) means “holy.” It can even mean “saintly.” The noun *anastrophee* means a “manner of life.” So how a Christian wife lives can affect the eternal destiny of her husband.

The NKJV says the good conduct of wives should be “accompanied by fear” (*en phobo*). To render *phobo* as “fear” may be a little too strong in this case. The word *phobo* can also mean to “respect,” which is better here. Wives should respect their husbands.

47

Adornment

The apostle Peter spoke out strongly about women’s adornment. He said, “Do not let your adornment be merely outward; arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel; rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God” (1 Pet 3:3-4). Peter cited the example of saintly women of the past, who adorned themselves with “a gentle and quiet spirit.” Sarah is a prime example of a woman’s being subject to her husband. She called Abraham “Lord” (*kurion*) (Gen 18:12). The Greek word *kurios* means “lord” or “master.”

Christian women can be considered Sarah's daughters if they do good and are not afraid of any "terror" (1 Pet 3:6). Sarah had plenty of things happen to her that could have caused her to be terrified; but she was not terrified, because she, like other holy women of old, "trusted (*elpidzousai*) in God (*eis theon*)" (1 Pet 3:5). The word *elpidzo* means "I hope." The hope that Sarah and other holy women of old had was directed toward God (*eis theon*), and He took care of them.

The apostle Peter also had advice for husbands. He said that husbands should live with their wives "with understanding (*kata gnosis*)" (1 Pet 3:7). The word *gnosis* means knowledge. The expression *kata gnosis* can mean "with understanding" or "with consideration." Husbands should realize that women are in some ways weaker than men; and they should live with them accordingly, not expecting them to do things they cannot perform. A husband also should be "giving (*aponemontes*) honor to the wife" (1 Pet 3:7). The word *aponemontes* is a present participle from *aponemo*, which means "I show." It is not enough for a husband to honor his wife in his heart. He should show it. Since a present participle speaks of an ongoing action, a husband should keep on showing his wife that he honors her. If he does not, it is possible that their mutual prayers could be "hindered" (*enkeptesthai*). *Enkeptesthai* is a passive infinitive of *enkepto*, which means "I cut into" something. It gives the idea of slowing a person's progress down by interrupting the road on which he is travelling. If a husband is not considerate of his wife, his marriage will be unhappy and this may diminish his desire to pray. It may also be difficult for him to get his wife to pray with him. Further, if he is not respectful of his wife, God may not answer his prayers. In the event that a man's private prayers center on the conversion of his wife, how he treats her is especially important.

48

Closing Comments

My purpose in making the above observations from the Greek text is not to limit the service that women render but to expand it. There are many things women can do that men cannot do, and women need to concentrate on those things. Nothing will energize a congregation more quickly than for its women to step up to their God-given responsibilities. Think what joy it would be for elders if they can oversee a congregation in which the women are doing all they should! Think what a joy it would give a preacher to speak to such a congregation! Think how young men and young women would be attracted to such a congregation!

I truly believe that the future of the Lord's church is in the hands of the women. Women should not push men out of the leadership but build a fire under the men.

