TOWARD A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF EPHESIANS:
A Life Worthy of the Calling

© 2003 WAYNE T. SLUSSER
All Rights Reserved
INTRODUCTION

What is characteristic about Ephesians that attracts so many different views, purpose statements, and theological themes from New Testament scholars today? Is it the possibility of a non-Pauline authorship? Is it the fact that Ephesians covers so much theology that it is difficult to provide an all-encompassing theme? Or is it the difficulty in deciphering the structure of Ephesians due to the unique setting of the first chapter? These and possibly other questions have provided scholars with more questions and complications than answers.

This paper makes a claim toward a biblical theology of Ephesians that helps to answer the above questions, realizing, however, that a final solution is not in the scope of this work. The goal in writing a biblical theology of a particular New Testament book, in this case Ephesians is to bring to light the thinking and theology of the author. This not only requires that one understand the thinking of Paul but also to properly estimate the presentation of specific themes and their relationship throughout the whole book.¹ It is necessary to show the relationship between the development of the themes located throughout the book and the structure of the book itself.² The structure of Ephesians points to three major themes, the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The focus

---

¹ This writer readily assumes Pauline authorship. It is not within the scope of this paper, however, to present a formal defense of such authorship. Notable scholars who hold to Pauline authorship include Markus Barth, F. F. Bruce, Harold Hoehner, Peter T. O’Brien, and Stanley E. Porter. Those that are uncertain or against Pauline authorship include James D. G. Dunn, Andrew T. Lincoln, and Ralph P. Martin. For bibliographic references see Harold W. Hoehner, Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 9-18.

² Further details concerning how the structure of Ephesians helps to understand the themes of the book is discussed later in this paper in the section entitled Letter Structure of Ephesians.
however is not on the person or deity of each one, but rather on their ministry as it relates to the Father’s plan to place the believer in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. The emphasis of this paper is on the work of the Holy Spirit.

**Definition of Biblical Theology**

If a biblical theology of Ephesians is to be explained and examined, then a proper definition of the term biblical theology is necessary. This discipline is under much scrutiny and is defined differently by many scholars. Scholars understand biblical theology at several levels, hence the possible confusion as to its definition. In its more narrow sense, some scholars will define biblical theology as a discipline that considers one specific book or author or time period.\(^3\) It may also trace a particular theological theme throughout a corpus (e.g. the theme of grace in Pauline literature, or the theme of love in Johannine literature, etc.).\(^4\) In a broader sense, biblical theology may encompass an entire Testament.\(^5\) In the broadest sense, a unified theology of the entire Bible is also possible.\(^6\) This is known as a whole-Bible approach.

---

\(^3\) Stallard states, “I follow the lead of many scholars in limiting Biblical Theology as a discipline to a single author, time period, or type of literature given in the Bible. For example, I would attempt a biblical theology of the Pentateuch (one author and time frame) in the Old Testament. I would also see biblical theology in the New Testament as I studied Johannine theology (the writings of John) or Pauline theology (the letters of Paul)” (Michael D. Stallard, course notes for TH1, Seminar in Advanced Theological Method, Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, PA fall 2001, 22.).


\(^6\) A representative author is Charles H. H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). Grudem includes the study of both Old and New Testaments within his definition. He writes, “Biblical theology gives special attention to the teachings of *individual authors and sections* of Scripture, and to the place of each teaching in the *historical development of*
This paper assumes a somewhat narrow definition. Biblical theology is that discipline which seeks to understand a single author, time period, or type of literature within its historical and cultural context.\(^7\) This paper is limited to the letter of Ephesians. Some scholars may respond that this is an unwarranted limitation of the application of biblical theology. However, biblical theology is foremost a complement of exegesis.

Biblical theology is an exegetically-based, inductive, systematic exposition of the theology of the biblical text which employs the terminology of the text and reflects the contextual emphases of the text in their historical, cultural setting in light of antecedent texts in the historical progress of their writing for the purposes of determining what the biblical authors believed.\(^8\)

Thus an interpreter engages biblical theology to avoid unwarranted theologizing or proof-texting. Having defined biblical theology, the question still remains as to how one should go about implementing this discipline. According to many scholars, this also poses problems. A method of biblical theology has three basic components.

**Exegetically-based**

The task of biblical theology must be exegetical. Biblical theology must begin with a careful study of the original text at several levels. Carson states it is “impossible to

---

7 Ladd claims that, “Biblical theology. . . is not initially concerned with the final meaning of the teachings of the Bible or their relevance for today. This is the task of systematic theology. Biblical theology has the task of expounding the theology found in the Bible in its own historical setting, and its own terms, categories, and thought forms” (George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 20). Bock agrees by also stating that “biblical theology is an attempt to study the individual contributions of a given writer or a given period to the canon’s message. It combines analysis and synthesis” (Darrell L. Bock, *Introduction to A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck [Chicago: Moody Press, 1994], 13).

have any sort of responsible biblical theology apart from careful, responsible exegesis. Moreover, responsible exegesis of entire texts . . . is the working material of biblical theology.”

He further defines responsible exegesis as that which focuses on “linguistic analysis, both lexis (analysis of the vocabulary) and syntax (analysis of the way words are related to each other) . . . . It will also analyze the text at the level of the clause, the level of the sentence, the level of the discourse, and the level of the genre.”

Employment of the Terminology of the Text

The task of biblical theology works inductively from the biblical text. The primary or controlling factor is the employment of the terminology of the text. The vocabulary of the text is the basis by which the theologian identifies his categories. The text itself sets the agenda. Carson emphatically explains the importance of using the text by saying, “The text must never be domesticated by or made subservient to other interests (even if those interests are legitimate ones).”

It cannot be stressed enough how important this step is in the methodology of biblical theology. Two major New Testament theology works surface as examples of the

---


two approaches to a biblical theology organization of the New Testament: Guthrie’s *New Testament Theology* and Ladd’s *A New Testament Theology*. Guthrie’s work is more of a systematic approach. He builds his New Testament theology by using categories from systematic theology as the unifying structure and substructure, though he discusses each category and subcategory an author at a time. On the other hand, Ladd’s work is more of an author/literary genre approach. By this, he has organized his New Testament theology by authors and uses the theological categories that the biblical authors used.

For the purposes of this paper, the methodology of the latter work is preferred.

**Examination of Antecedent Revelation**

The task of biblical theology is to interpret the text in light of antecedent revelation. The theologian cannot ignore the fact that God wrote his word in light of progressive revelation. Therefore, when writing a biblical theology of a book of the New Testament, the theologian must be aware of any previous revelation that the biblical author may have used. However a caution that must be taken into consideration is that the theologian must not use the text in question (e.g., Ephesians) to go back to previous texts (e.g., Old Testament) and reinterpret them.

**Summary of Biblical Theology**

The task of biblical theology is first and foremost a complement of exegesis. There is no substitute for a literal grammatical-historical exegesis of the original text. Second, it is an inductive study of the text of Scripture. It organizes the subject matter

---


13 Ladd, *A New Testament Theology*
(theological themes) in such a way that it preserves corpus distinctions. “Biblical theology... is a discipline that would perceive and state the theology contained in, or implied by, the biblical texts themselves.” Biblical theology must not replace exegesis, systematic theology, or historical theology but rather serves as a bridge discipline that links “historically oriented biblical studies on the one hand and dogmatic theology and related fields on the other.” Therefore, the task of biblical theology seems to offer the most promise and the least risk of distorting the biblical material by identifying theological themes that the biblical authors themselves included.

It is now that a closer look at Ephesians is necessary. This paper will implement the methodology discussed above and present a biblical theology that incorporates the background, letter structure, and theological themes of Ephesians.

BACKGROUND OF EPHESIANS

The letter to the Ephesians is one of those books of the Bible that causes the Christian believer to reflect on the glory of God because of what he has done. Several scholars have classified Ephesians as one of the most influential documents ever written in the Christian church. It is considered the “quintessence of Paulinism.” Brown claims,


16 All English references will be taken from the KJV and all Greek references will be taken from Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, ed., The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text, 2d ed. (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1985).

“only Romans could match Ephesians as a candidate for exercising the most influence on Christian thought and spirituality.”18 At the same time, it is important to note that Paul wrote Ephesians to address matters that relate to believers in first century Ephesus.

Ephesians is simply a letter that urges believers, on the basis of their union with Christ, to change their inner being and character in a radical way. It is a combination of theology (chaps. 1-3) and exhortation (chaps. 4-6). Paul, in a rather eloquent way, discusses God and his work, Christ and the gospel, life with God’s Spirit, and the right way to live.19 One of the more comprehensive statements about Ephesians is given by O’Brien: “In light of God’s magnificent saving purposes (spelled out in chaps. 1-3) . . . those who are recipients of ‘every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ’ (1:3) are urged to live a life worthy of the calling they have received (4:1).”20

---


City and Destination of Ephesians

It has been traditionally understood that Ephesians was written to the believers in Ephesus of Asia Minor.\(^{21}\) However, some scholars have observed that certain manuscripts omit the words \(\text{\textit{\gamma\iota\text{-}E\Pi\varepsilon\nu\sigma\omega}}\) ("in Ephesus"). Due to this textual problem, some scholars have suggested that the destination of Ephesians was not Ephesus.\(^{22}\) The textual evidence favors the longer reading \(\text{\textit{\gamma\iota\text{-}E\Pi\varepsilon\nu\sigma\omega}}\).\(^{23}\) It is not inconceivable that there were other churches in the area in which this letter was intended.\(^{24}\)

The city of Ephesus is located on the West Coast of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). It was a harbor city at the mouth of the Cayster River. It was considered one of the most thriving harbor cities in Asia Minor, which was ranked with Rome, Alexandria, and Syrian Antioch. It was also considered the largest trading center in Asia Minor. Hoehner summarizes Ephesus in this way,

Ephesus was a very influential city in Paul’s day. Its influence both as a secular and religious center emanated to the other parts of the Roman Empire. It seems that Paul selected strategic cities from which the influence of the gospel would spread to the surrounding areas. Many cities such as Ephesus were places where the cross-pollination of ideas was present.\(^{25}\)

\(^{21}\) Scholars who hold to Ephesus as the destination for Ephesians include Clinton E. Arnold, Harold Hoehner (who mentions that this position is gaining support by Gnilka, Conzelmann, and Lindemann), and Ralph P. Martin.

\(^{22}\) Scholars who hold this position include Ernest Best, Andrew T. Lincoln, Peter T. O’Brien, and Klyne Snodgrass.

\(^{23}\) For a rather comprehensive treatment of the textual evidence and discussion of this study see the article by Clinton E. Arnold, “Ephesians, Letter to the,” in Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 243-45.

\(^{24}\) Hoehner states that Paul was in Ephesus on his third missionary journey and probably ministered for about two and a half years. He probably established many churches both in the city and in the outlying village areas (Ephesians, 79).

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 89.
Purpose of Ephesians

Some scholars have suggested that due to the general nature of the letter and because no particular problem is raised in the book, there is a bit of uncertainty as to the purpose of the letter to the Ephesians. Arnold suggests that just because the letter is less specific does not mean that it does not speak to specific needs and problems faced by its readers.26

Hoehner and O’Brien present several different views. They range from Dahl’s suggestion that the letter instructs newly converted Gentiles on the meaning of baptism, to Arnold’s view of Ephesians as a pastoral letter that addresses a group of churches concerning their involvement in spiritual powers, to Snodgrass’s identity formation in Christ.27 Scholars today seem to have their own purpose and main theme in mind. Does this pose a problem to those who study Ephesians? Will this further the understanding of the book or is it a hindrance to its meaning by believers today?

This paper proposes that the purpose is tied to the structure of the letter. Paul is writing so that believers might better understand the hope of his calling, the richness of his inheritance, and the mighty working of his power (1:18-19) so that the believer may live a life that is worthy of God’s calling (4:1). It is against this purpose that the interpreter builds a biblical theology of Ephesians.

26 Arnold, “Ephesians, Letter to the,” 245; O’Brien agrees: “There is no reason, in principle, why a letter could not be general in nature and written for the purpose of instructing and edifying Christians over a wide area or in a range of congregations” (The Letter to the Ephesians, 51).

27 For further research concerning the different proposed purposes of Ephesians see Hoehner, Ephesians, 97-106 and O’Brien, The Letter to the Ephesians, 51-57.
LETTER STRUCTURE AND GENRE OF EPHESIANS

Paul usually wrote his letters to instruct, give advice, encourage, and reprimand and he adopted a typical pattern or structure to do so. He was concerned with the life situation of his readers, but treated each situation as unique and important; thus, the structure and content of his letters vary.28

Doty explains:

I argue . . . that in his letters a genre or subgenre was created, and that our task is that of identifying the stages and steps in generic construction. Instead of arguing that there is one clearly identified Pauline form, I argue that there is a basic understanding of structure by which Paul wrote, but that this basic understanding could be modified on occasion, and that the basic understanding itself was something that came into being only gradually.29

The genre of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is similar to and follows the normal pattern of the Hellenistic letters of Paul’s day.30

---

28 Marion L. Soards adds, “Paul wrote to address specific, problematic situations that existed in particular churches. He sought through letters to extend his influence in order to assure desired results, so that in every communication Paul always strives to build up the congregation addressed” (“The Life and Writings of Paul,” in The New Testament Today, ed. Mark Powell [Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1999], 88). William H. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr. agree, “Epistles are also the most ‘occasional.’ In other words, the authors wrote the epistles for specific occasions to address individual audiences who were facing unique problems” (Introduction to Biblical Interpretation [Nashville, TN: Word, 1993] 352).


30 Some scholars however, interpret Ephesians based on a rhetorical analysis. Probably the biggest advocate of this view is Andrew T. Lincoln, Ephesians, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Waco, TX: Word, 1990), xlii-xlvi. One of his students Jeal states that chapters 1-3 and 4-6 of Ephesians are difficult to reconcile to each other. He concludes that an epistolary analysis does not lead to an adequate explanation of how the two sections fit together. Therefore, the rhetorical approach is necessary. Roy R. Jeal (Integrating Theology and Ethics in Ephesians: The Ethos of Communication, Studies in Bible and Early Christianity, vol. 43 [Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 2000], 7-13). There are however, some problems to interpreting Ephesians based on rhetorical analysis. (1) There seems to be somewhat of a problem in mixing the genre of speech and letter writing. Although both genres were readily used, they served two different purposes. Ephesians is not a speech to be read in the courts or to serve as a persuasion device. (2) Those who advocate a rhetorical approach assume Paul was learned in the ancient form of rhetoric of his day. This claim is not supported. There is no concrete evidence that Paul was trained in the rhetoric of his day. (3) The fathers of the early church, who had received rhetorical training, did not interpret Paul’s letters from the perspective of rhetorical theory. Further discussion on point (3) can be found in P. H. Kern, Rhetoric and Galations.
The typical pattern of the Hellenistic letter contains a threefold division: an opening, the main body of the letter, and closing. Ephesians has a typical opening (1:1-2) where the author, addressee, and greeting are found. It also contains a typical closing (6:23, 24). Although the opening and closing of the letter help to reveal a Hellenistic pattern, the body of the letter is not easily detected. The body of Paul’s letters shows considerable variety, for it is here more than anywhere else that they reflect the different epistolary situations. Some suggest that the body begins at 1:3 and includes an extended praise section (1:3-14), prayers of thanksgiving and intercession and doxology (1:15-23; 3:14-19; 20-21), and sections of instruction (2:1-22; 3:1-13). Hence, Ephesians is a letter.


O’Brien in conclusion states, “Paul’s letters, then, ought not to be interpreted ‘through the grid of the ancient rhetorical rules’, and the notion that ‘this method better than any other holds the hermeneutical key that will unlock the true meaning of the apostle’s writings’ is seriously flawed. . . It is more appropriate that attention be directed to the apostle’s own internal method of argument” (Letter to the Ephesians, 79-80).

31 It is clear that Paul adopted the Hellenistic letter patterns of his day. The importance of the letter format provides two advantages for the interpreter. (1) The letter format provides clues to identify the structure so that the interpreter can locate the major letter sections (e.g. introduction, thanksgiving, body, etc.). (2) It assists the interpreter to identify possible relationships between sections. For example, the thanksgiving section provides topics that the author will develop later in the letter.

similar to other Pauline letters, because the sections of prayer and instruction are
followed by the exhortation section (4:1-6:22).

At this point, it must be noted that Paul did have a clear sense of the importance
of structure as he wrote his letters. He was not, however, locked into that structure. He
rearranged the sections of a Hellenistic letter so that they best complemented his
message. Doty explains:

Reference to this probable outline does not mean that we assume that when Paul
was writing or paused in his dictation, he thought, “Well, now, I’ve finished part
3.a—on to 3.b.” Nor are we to assume that Paul decided which itemized sections
taken together should compromise a letter to a particular situation, and then set
about meeting such criteria. Rather, as Robert W. Funk notes . . ., “It is simply the
way Paul writes letters.”32

The structure of this letter is similar to other Pauline letters. It consists of two
main parts: doctrine or theology (chaps. 1-3) and exhortation or ethics (chaps. 4-6). The
theology serves as a solid foundation for their life before others (Eph. 1:18-19).
Ephesians 4:1 serves as a transition between the theology and exhortation. Paul exhorts
the believers to live a life (exhortation) worthy of the calling (theology).33 Lincoln
summarizes the two halves of Ephesians in this way. He writes,

The first part of the letter treated believers’ identity in terms of their status and
position and one of the most striking expressions of that position was that they
had been seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (cf. 2.6). The second part of
the letter treated what it meant to live out such a calling in the world and in its
exhortations repeatedly used the verb ‘to walk’ (cf. 4.1; 4.17; 5.2; 5.8; 5.15). Now
the concluding call combines the emphases on sitting and walking in its

32 Doty, 44.

33 The two halves of Ephesians presents a problem for some scholars today because of the lack of
connection between chapters 1-3 and 4-6. Representative of those who can see a lack of coherence between
the two halves of Ephesians is Roy R. Jeal. He lists five reasons to the apparent disparity between the
theological and exhortation sections. His basic premise is that there is no clear connection between the two
sections and the separation between the two sections is unlike any other Pauline epistle (Integrating
Theology and Ethics in Ephesians: The Ethos in Communication, 7-13).
exhortation to the readers to stand, that is, to maintain and appropriate their position of strength and victory as they live worthily of their calling in this world in the face of the opposition of evil cosmic forces.34

Figure one shows the major sections of Ephesians and the corresponding parallels.35


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hellenistic Letter</th>
<th>Paragraph</th>
<th>Explanation or theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1:1, 2</td>
<td>Introduction to the letter (sender, addressee, greeting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thanksgiving/Body</td>
<td>1:3-3:21</td>
<td>Explanation of God’s eternal plan and purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1:3-14</td>
<td>Anthem of extended praise directed to God (euology)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1:15-23</td>
<td>Paul’s prayer for the believers to know wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2:1-10</td>
<td>Hope of his calling: death to life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2:11-22</td>
<td>Riches of his inheritance: aliens to fellow citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3:1-21</td>
<td>Greatness of his mighty working power:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3:1-13</td>
<td>Paul’s ministry and instruction concerning the mystery (church)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3:14-21</td>
<td>Paul’s prayer for the believers to use the wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenesis</td>
<td>4:1-6:22</td>
<td>Application of God’s eternal plan and purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:1-24</td>
<td>Hope of his calling: walking worthily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:25-5:16</td>
<td>Riches of his inheritance: walking as dear children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5:17-6:22</td>
<td>Greatness of his power: submitting to the Spirit in life’s daily activities and using this power against the schemes of the devil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>6:23, 24</td>
<td>Conclusion to the letter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Explanation of God’s Eternal Plan and Purpose

Commentaries devote their attention to 1:3-14 due to its content and unique position within the letter. Following the introduction, a typical Pauline letter will include a thanksgiving section. However, due to the fact that Paul wants to focus on the Father because of his eternal plan and purpose of salvation, he introduces a berakah. This is unique to Paul’s letters. The implementation of this extended eulogy is purposely placed for emphasis. It is here that Paul integrates the thanksgiving and body sections.

This eulogy section establishes the model to encourage the Ephesian believers to offer praise to God. This section consists of three sections, each of which ends with the refrain εἰς ἐπαινὸν τῆς δόξης σωτῆρος (“to the praise of his glory,” vv. 6, 12, 14). There is a progression and explanation of God’s eternal plan and purpose which includes the election or call of the Father (1:3-6), redemption through the Son (1:7-12), and sealing through the means of the Holy Spirit (1:13-14).

The progression throughout 1:3-14 emphasizes that God is the origin and source of salvation, hence the refrain “to the praise of his glory.” His eternal plan and purpose is mediated through Christ. Verses 7 and 13 begin with ἐν ὧν (“in whom”) referring to

---

36 O’Brien states the berakah are extended eulogies or sections of blessing. These eulogies resemble some Old Testament examples of blessings such as Ps. 41:13; 72:18, 19; 106:48 (Peter T. O’Brien, “Ephesians I: An Unusual Introduction to a New Testament Letter,” NTS 25 [1978-79]: 504-16).

37 Ibid. 509, O’Brien states that Eph. 1:3-14 is an “ad hoc” prosaic creation in which the author, by means of exalted liturgical language (some of which was possibly borrowed from early Christian worship), praises God for His glorious plan of salvation, and edifies the readers.” Sanders claims, “It is a breakthrough for the understanding of the letter in general to realize that Eph 1:3-14 can be named a summa of the entire letter, if . . . only in a narrow sense” (Jack T. Sanders, “Hymnic Elements in Ephesians 1-3,” ZNW 56 [1965]: 230).

38 Hoehner, Ephesians, 159.
Christ. The Ephesian believers have redemption, an inheritance, and are sealed as part of the eternal plan of the Father.

Paul’s emphatic purpose for this section is simply to show the Ephesian believers that God’s purposes in Christ and the Holy Spirit deserve both meditation and adoration. Through this outpouring of adoration, Paul hopes to stimulate a response by reminding them of God’s blessing on their life through their redemption.39 “The eulogy of 1.3-14 could not provide a clearer reminder that the ultimate cause and source of the readers’ present experience and status is God himself.”40

Paul’s emphasis on the Trinity is also evident in the parenesis section, which ties together the two halves of Ephesians. In figure 2 the arrow shows the correlation between the explanation and application of God’s eternal plan and purpose.

The second paragraph (1:15-23), contains the thanksgiving.41 Scholars have characterized this section as one of the most formal elements in the Pauline letter. Smetana for example, says that it “is indeed a miniature letter itself. It acts as a table of contents, giving a summary of what is to come, and is in essence a digest of the whole letter.”42

41 Paul begins the paragraph with διὰ τούτο κἀγώ (“Wherefore, I also” or “For this reason, I also”) linking it back to the preceding paragraph (1:3-14).
While the thanksgiving formula is in verse 16, Paul introduces the thanksgiving section in verse 15 with a causal participle ἀκούσας τὴν καθ’ ὑμᾶς πίστιν (“after hearing of your faith,”). The reason why Paul gives thanks is because he heard of their faith in Christ and their love toward the saints.

The thanksgiving section signals the three major themes of the letter. In verse 17, Paul introduces the content of the prayer with a ἵνα clause. In verse 18, Paul introduces a purpose clause εἰς τὸ εἰδέναι (“that you might know”). The content of what Paul wants the believers to know is introduced by three τίς/τί clauses. These are the three main themes. The three themes are: (1) τίς ἐστιν ἡ ἐλπὶς τῆς κλήσεως αὐτοῦ (“what is the hope of his calling”), (2) καὶ τίς ὁ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης τῆς κληρονομίας αὐτοῦ ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις (“and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,”), and (3) καὶ τί τὸ ὑπερβάλλον μέγεθος τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ εἰς ἡμᾶς τοὺς πιστεύοντας (“and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe”).

The next three paragraphs (2:1-10, 11-22, 3:1-13) contain instruction. He discusses details related to the hope of his calling, passing from death to life (2:1-10). He discusses the riches of his inheritance, strangers to fellow heirs (2:11-22). And he discusses the greatness of his mighty power, as it strengthened Paul in his ministry as he instructs them concerning the mystery of the church (3:1-13).

The final paragraph (3:14-21) contains a prayer for the believers that they may use the wisdom they have received. This prayer report contains two petitions. One is for

---

43 This normal pattern includes the verb εὐχαριστεῖν (“I give thanks”). Other thanksgiving sections in Pauline writings include Rom. (1:8ff.), 1 Cor. (1:4ff.), Phil. (1:3ff.), Col. (1:3ff.), 1 Thess. (1:2ff.), 2 Thess. (1:3ff.), Philemon (4ff.). If the pastorals are included then 1 Tim. 1:12ff. and 2 Tim. 1:3ff. open with χάριν ἔχω rather than εὐχαριστεῖν.
strength (3:16-17) and the other is for knowledge (3:18-19). The paragraph ends with a
doxology (3:20-21). It is “a short spontaneous ascription of praise to God which
frequently appears as a concluding formula to prayers, hymnic expressions, and sections
of Paul’s letters.”

In summary, Paul’s first half of Ephesians is one unit (1:3-3:21). This is where
Paul praises God for his intervention on behalf of the Gentile believers, thanks God for
the believer’s faithfulness, petitions God for wisdom for the Gentile believers, and
instructs the believers concerning their position in Christ.

**Application of God’s Eternal Plan and Purpose**

The second half of Ephesians (4:1-6:22) is the parenetical section of the letter. It
is here that Paul exhorts the Christian believers to exhibit a conduct worthy of the calling
and the necessity to stand strong against the schemes of the devil.

Paul introduces the beginning of this parenetical section with the typical structural
cue, a verb with the particle followed by a personal pronoun παρακαλέω υμᾶς (“I
beseech you therefore”). This is a fairly fixed pattern found in Paul. The formula marks
the transition from the thanksgiving/body section to the paranesis. Although this section
in Ephesians is quite long, Paul ties the thanksgiving/body to the parenesis by
reintroducing themes from the former into the later.

---


45 Other parenetical sections in Pauline writings include Rom. (12:1ff.), 1 Cor. (1:10ff.), 2 Cor.
with έρωτας (“to ask, to request”) in place of παρακαλέω.
The first and second paragraph forms the first major section of the parenesis. In the first paragraph (4:1-16) Paul urges believers to walk worthy of God’s calling. This is manifested through the unity of the church. The purpose for the ministry of the gifts given to them by God is to build up the church’s knowledge of God’s eternal plan and purpose. The second paragraph (4:17-24) contrasts the believer’s transformation with his previous conduct as an unbelieving Gentile.

The second section focuses on his inheritance. This section consists of three paragraphs (4:25-32, 5:1-8a, 5:8b-16). In this section, the believer is to walk in light, love, and wisdom. Paul uses the verb περιπατέω ("to conduct one’s life, comport oneself, behave, live as a habit of conduct") to express that it is the believer’s conduct or way of life that must exemplify Christ.

The third section (5:17-6:22) focuses on the greatness of his power. In this section Paul defines the relationship of being filled by the means of and submitting to the Holy Spirit as it applies to three areas of life: husbands and wives, children and parents, and slaves and masters (5:17-6:9). The last paragraph in this section (6:10-22) brings the letter of Ephesians “to a climax by a call to the believers to be strong in the Lord and to

---


put on God’s mighty armour as they engage in a spiritual warfare with the powers of evil.”

In summary, Paul’s second half of Ephesians is the parenesis (4:1-6:22). He ties the parenesis to the thanksgiving/body section by showing the relationship of the Father’s call and the lifestyle of that call. Hendrix summarizes Ephesians in this way, “Ephesians is an epistolary decree in which the author recites the universal benefactions of God and Christ and proceeds to stipulate the appropriate honors, understood as the moral obligations of the beneficiaries.”

The “Big Idea” of Ephesians

The structure and organization of Ephesians helps the interpreter to identify the “big idea.” The study of the biblical theology of Ephesians should be consistent with the main theological themes of the book. In short, the big idea is an attempt to capture the intent of Paul’s message in one sentence, which is collaborated from the structural and relational analysis of Ephesians. The big idea of Ephesians is this: Because believers are called by God, they are exhorted to walk worthy of God’s calling by imitating Christ in their lives as they are filled by the means of and submit to the Holy Spirit.

---


50 The concept of the “big idea” refers to the central idea, proposition, theme, thesis statement, or main thought.

51 Longacre states, “A skillfully constructed macrostructure [i.e., big idea] can typically be captured in a line or two. The macrostructure can be shown to have an effect on the relative inclusion, balance, and elaboration of detail throughout the text” (Robert E. Longacre, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence, A Text Theoretical and Textlinguistic Analysis of Genesis 37 and 39-48* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989], 17).
TOWARD A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF EPHESIANS

Introduction

To this point this paper explained that a proper methodology of a biblical theology of Ephesians comes from the employment of the terminology and phraseology that Paul uses. A discussion concerning the background of Ephesians provided information to understand the context of the letter of Ephesians. The letter structure of Ephesians was also examined.

The discussion of the letter structure provided the recognition of the two major sections, the theology and parenetical sections, of the letter. After providing a listing and brief explanation of the three theological themes above found in 1:18-19, an attempt toward a biblical theology of Ephesians is in order. Although three themes are discussed below, this revised paper deals with the last theological theme concerning the Holy Spirit.

The purpose of this introduction section is to show the relationship between the structure and theological themes of Ephesians (see figure 2), thus providing a look toward a biblical theology. As previously discussed, Ephesians has two major sections. The first section is the thanksgiving/body (1:3-3:21). The second section is the parenesis (4:1-6:22). Paul ties the theology section to the parenesis section using the phrase αξίως περιπατήσαι τής κλήσεως ἡς ἐκλήθητε (“that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,”) in 4:1 with the phrase καθώς ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ (“according as he hath chosen us in him”) found in 1:4. In addition Paul uses three major themes in 1:18-19 which provide coherence and tie the two sections together. Figure two shows the relationship of the two sections of the letter.
Fig. 2. Relationship of the Theology and Parenetical Sections

Explaination of God’s eternal plan and purpose

**Chapters 1-3**
- Persons of the Trinity
- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

**Chapter 1:18, 19**
- “what is the hope of his calling”
- “what the riches of the glory of his inheritance”
- “what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe”

**Chapters 4-6**
- Persons of the Trinity
- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

**Chapter 4:1-24**

**Chapter 4:25-5:16**

**Chapter 5:17-6:22**
“What is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe”

The third theological theme that Paul includes in his prayer is in 1:19, that is, God’s surpassing and extraordinary power that effectually worked to raise Christ from the dead. Put simply, it is God’s power, the ability of God himself. It is this power that is eìς ἡμᾶς τοὺς πιστεύοντας (“directed to those who believe”).

This power provides the strength to live according to the daily demands and withstand the schemes of the devil.52 It is this power, God’s power, that works through the believer.

The power comes from the Father, however, it is manifested by the means of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life. How this power is manifested is the subject of this section of the paper that moves toward a biblical theology of Ephesians. Paul intricately details characteristics concerning the Holy Spirit. These characteristics are listed and discussed below not according to importance, necessarily, but are discussed as they occur in the letter to the Ephesians.

Sealing by the means of the Holy Spirit (1:13-14; 4:30)

The sealing of the Holy Spirit demonstrates that believers truly belong to God.53 Although this is the work of the Father, the Spirit is the intermediate agent through which

---

52 The preposition εἰς could have the idea to include the sense of ἐν. This would give the impression that God’s power is at work ‘within’ the believer (see Hoehner, 269; Lincoln, 61).

53 Thomas Schreiner states the act of sealing this way, “The gift of the Spirit documents that believers truly belong to God, and the Spirit is the mark of his ownership in the hearts of believers.” (Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ, [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001], 262.)

Danker defines σφραγίζω as “to mark with a seal as a means of identification, mark, seal” (A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, 980); Louw and Nida define σφραγίζω as “to put a mark on something, primarily to indicate ownership” (A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains 2d ed., 444).
God seals the believer. It is probably best to translate ἐσφραγίσθητε τῷ πνεύματι τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τῷ ἁγίῳ as (“you were sealed by the means of the Holy Spirit of promise”). This interpretation communicates the dative of means more clearly. The sealing of the Holy Spirit on the believer’s life ὃς ἐστιν ἄρραβῶν τῆς κληρονομίας ἡμῶν (“who is the earnest of our inheritance”) is the initial installment on the believer. Therefore, the sealing of the Holy Spirit is the believers’ inheritance until Christ comes back again.

This poses a question as to what the phrase τῷ πνεύματι τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τῷ ἁγίῳ (“Holy Spirit of promise”) means. Although it only occurs one time in Ephesians (1:13), its significance is important. It signals the relationship between the theology (1-3) and exhortation (4-6) sections of Ephesians. The interpretation of the phrase “Holy Spirit of Promise”, has been taken several different ways. The proposals range from being interpreted as a Semitism meaning the Holy Spirit promised in the OT Scriptures (Joel 2:28-29; Ezek 36:26-27) to Christ’s promise to his disciples that he would send the Spirit (Luke 24:49; John 14:16-17; 15:26) to the Holy Spirit bringing the promise of glory yet to come. Due to the relationship between 1:14 and 4:30, the latter interpretation is

---

54 It is best to view the “Holy Spirit of promise” as a dative of means/instrument for two reasons. (1) The grammatical structure found in 1:3-14 emphasizes that God is the origin and source of salvation. His eternal plan and purpose is mediated through Christ, hence the use of the relative pronoun ἐν ὑμῖν. And the initial installment or sealing is because of the work of Christ on the cross but the instrument that is used in the act of sealing is the Holy Spirit. (2) Typically ὑπὸ + genitive is used for ultimate agency, whereas the dative is used for intermediate agency (see Wallace’s discussion 162-65).

55 Hoehner’s discussion states that the word ἄρραβὼν refers to money that was used as a down payment. It is the first installment with a guarantee that the rest will follow. Hoehner’s conclusion is that the promised Holy Spirit is the present deposit or initial installment of the believers’ future inheritance (Ephesians, 241-42).

Paul also uses ἄρραβὼν in 2 Corinthians 1:22 to state that God sealed the believers and gave them the Holy Spirit in their hearts as a down payment of more to come.
preferred. This interpretation ties the theology and exhortation sections of Ephesians together. Paul explains the believers’ theological position in Christ in 1:3 and 1:13-14. This then leads to the practical outworking in the believers’ life. As a believer, his behavior impacts the Holy Spirit who has sealed him. Therefore, explaining Paul’s exhortation to “not grieve the Spirit.” The sealing of the Holy Spirit provides the believer with the foundation to live a life worthy of the inheritance both now and yet to come.

**Revealing through the Holy Spirit (1:17; 3:5, 17-20)**

What exactly is the Holy Spirit revealing to the believers is a question that complicates matters. Or is this verse referring to the human spirit as it relates to an attitude or spiritual disposition toward insight and the openness of revelation. To consider 1:17 πνεῦμα σοφίας και ἀποκαλύψεως (“the spirit of wisdom and revelation”), the interpreter must first look at the terms Paul is using. σοφίας is a word that has the

---

56 Schreiner explains, “The Spirit is the down payment of the eschatological inheritance, which will involve the redemption of God’s possession (Eph 1:14). Believers are sealed for the day of redemption (Eph 4:30), which means that their obtaining eschatological redemption is certain, and yet it is not ours now. The ‘day of redemption’ (Eph 4:30) is not yet here. Thus, believers are already redeemed and freed in Christ Jesus, and at the same time this redemption is not yet consummated or completed” (Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory, 232).

57 Paul’s exhortation is based on the fact that as a believer, the person is sealed until Christ comes back again. And because he has been sealed, his lifestyle must demonstrate his position in Christ so as not to grieve the Spirit’s work.

The sealing by the means of the Holy Spirit demonstrates how the relationship between structure and content occurs. Paul’s use of σφραγίζω “seal” in the body of the letter is to explain the believers’ theological position. He again uses this same phraseology in the parenetical section of the letter to provide the reason for a proper lifestyle, namely, the believer is sealed.

58 Those who hold the view that it is referring to the human spirit base this view mostly on its anarthrous usage. However, the anarthrous usage does not guarantee that it is human spirit due to the numerous references in the NT to the Holy Spirit with no preceding article. Those who hold the view that it refers to the Holy Spirit state that the characteristics of ‘wisdom’ and ‘revelation’ cannot come from humans. Therefore, they must come from the Holy Spirit.
meaning of insight and not the impartation of knowledge. In the context of 1:17, Paul is using σοφίας because he does not want to assume that the believers know all there is to know about their position in Christ. He also includes ἀποκάλυψις. Paul’s use of this term demonstrates that the believer needs the Spirit in order to understand the things of God. Therefore, Paul provides the combination of these two terms to state that the believer needs the Holy Spirit in order to provide insight and understanding.

Paul continues the concept of understanding the hidden things of God in 3:5. It is here that he states the mystery was revealed to God’s apostles and prophets by the means of the Spirit. This corresponds with 1:17 where the Spirit is providing the believer with

59 Hoehner further discusses this term by stating that σοφία occurs fifty-one times in the NT and Paul uses it twenty-eight times. Paul predominately uses this term when contrasting human and divine wisdom, especially in 1 Cor. 1:17-2:13. The indication within the context of this passage, demonstrates that only the wisdom of God transforms man. Hoehner concludes, “wisdom is the true insight of known facts or ‘insight into the true nature of things’” (Ephesians, 211).

Jürgen Goetzmann states, “In the later Pauline Epistles, wisdom is understood as a gift of the grace of God (Eph. 1:8, 17; Col. 1:9, along with synesis, insight, understanding, and phronesis; insight, understanding), in which the believer may grow” (“Wisdom,” New International Dictionary of the New Testament, Colin Brown ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986], 3:1032).

60 Ἀποκάλυψις is used eighteen times in the NT, fifteen by Paul. It always has theological significance and it refers to the unveiling of things that are hidden in God. Therefore, expressing an action by the Holy Spirit because it is only he that can reveal the things of God, not the human spirit. Herman Ridderbos echoes this thought, “The Spirit is also the Spirit of knowledge and of revelation (Eph 1:17), the intermediary of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, who cannot be known through human wisdom” (Paul: An Outline of His Theology, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], 223).

61 Lincoln provides the factors that help to come to the conclusion that πνεῦμα is a reference to the Holy Spirit. He states, “They include the explicit mention of the divine Spirit in connection with revelation in 3:5 (cf. also 1 Cor 2:6-16), the apparent dependence on Col 1:9 where ‘spiritual’ refers to the Spirit, and the close verbal parallel to Rom 8:15 where πνεῦμα υἱόθεσις, ‘Spirit of adoption,’ is to be taken as a reference to God’s Spirit. So this is a petition for the Spirit himself to be at work, giving insights into and unveiling aspects of the purpose of God in Christ” (Ephesians, 57). Also see Hoehner’s discussion, 256-69.

62 Hoehner, 444 and O’Brien, 232 both take ἐν πνεῦματι as a dative of instrument. This expresses the means by which the mystery was revealed to the apostles and prophets. Hoehner summarizes that, “Verses 3-5 clearly show that the mystery was not revealed to Paul alone but also to the apostles and prophets. Furthermore, the mystery was revealed to the apostles and prophets, not by Paul, but by the Holy Spirit” (Ephesians, 444).
the insight and the disclosing of hidden things concerning God. Although this passage warrants further discussion, the conclusion that it is the Holy Spirit that provides insight to the believer seems to fit best.

**Having access by the means of the Holy Spirit (2:18; 4:3-4)**

The content of this larger paragraph (2:11-22) proclaims Christ as the part of the Godhead that through his death, reconciles the Jew and Gentile into one body. Specifically in v. 17, Christ preached peace with the result that the Jew and Gentile would have access to God the Father. It is only through Christ that this privilege occurs.

The phrase **ὁτι δι' αὐτοῦ ἔχωμεν τὴν προσαγωγὴν** (“so that Having access through him”) represents the freedom of approach. The continual access to the Father is because of the peace that was accomplished through Christ’s death. The basis for access is Christ’s death but the means of access is the Holy Spirit.

The unity of the Spirit is brought out by the use of the preposition with the numeral **ἐν ἕνι πνεύματι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα** (“in one Spirit to God”). This similar

---

63 It seems reasonable that Paul’s prayer in 3:17-20 provides some theological similarities with 1:17. Paul is praying with similar terminology to that of 1:17, that is, that the believers “might be strengthened by his Spirit.” Paul is praying for the Spirit’s power to help the believer understand (comprehend and know) the greatness and vastness of the Love of Christ, whereas in 1:17 he is praying for the believers’ insight to the things of God (wisdom and revelation) namely, the content of the three τίς clauses. It is in 3:20 that Paul states that God is able to do above all that we ask. And he is doing it through/by the means of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Paul’s diligence in prayer is for the believers’ ability to grasp God’s calling (1:18 and 4:1). See also Col 1:9-11.

64 After stating the content of what Christ preached in v. 17, peace, Paul begins v. 18 with a ὅτι clause to indicate the result of Christ’s preaching. That result providing the believer with access to God. It is best to take this ὅτι clause as one of result (see BDAG, 732 and Hoehner, 388).

65 See BDAG, 876; Louw and Nida, 397. **προσαγωγήν** occurs in three places in the NT, with Rom. 5:1-2 being the most parallel. Paul uses **προσαγωγήν** in Romans to express the idea that the believer now has access to God and is tied to grace. The believer is no longer at war with God. Here in Ephesians is the idea that the believer has access to God by the means of the Spirit because of Christ’s death on the cross.
construction in v. 16 ἐνι σῶματι τῷ θεῷ (“in one body to God”) also provides the characteristic that the body (Jews and Gentiles) is one. The unity of the Holy Spirit empowers the union of Jews and Gentiles in their access to God. It is possible to have a unity of the body and access to God because of the Spirit.

Paul continues his discussion of unity of the Spirit in 4:3-4. Paul’s exclamation of σπουδάζοντες τηρεῖν τὴν ἕνωσιν τοῦ πνεύματος (“endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit”) urgently provides an exhortation to the believers to maintain the unity of the Spirit which has already been established.66 This emphasis of unity continues in 4:4. Paul states that there is one Spirit. Because there is unity in the Godhead, there is unity in the body of believers.

The unity of the Spirit in 2:18 provides access to the Father, a theological position that Christ’s death on the cross provided for the Jews and the Gentiles. This position of the believer is the basis for their behavior that Paul urgently exhorts them to maintain in 4:3-4, namely the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Therefore, this ties the relationship of the theological and parenetical sections of the letter of Ephesians together.

---

66 τὴν ἕνωσιν τοῦ πνεύματος (“unity of the Spirit”) is probably best interpreted as a genitive of production (see Wallace, 105). It is the Spirit that produces unity. O’Brien states, “The church’s unity is described as the unity of the Spirit and not the readers’ own achievement. God has inaugurated this unity in Christ, through the events described in Ephesians 2:11-22, as a result of which believers, Jew and Gentile together, have access to God ‘in one Spirit’ (2:18)” Letter to the Ephesians, 279. Schreiner agrees, “The church is not called to create unity but to preserve the unity that already exists. The basis of this unity is proclaimed again in Ephesians 4:4-6” Paul, 339.
Indwelling through the manner of the Holy Spirit (2:22)

God’s dwelling place in OT times was the temple. In the NT times, he dwells in the believer and in the body of believers.⁶⁷ God’s dwelling place in the body of believers is by the means of the Holy Spirit (ἐν πνεύματι). O’Brien states, “Here in Ephesians 2 the temple is God’s heavenly abode, the place of his dwelling. Yet that temple is his people in whom he lives by his Spirit.”⁶⁸ The dwelling place of God is referring to that body of believers that are being built together ἐν υἱῷ (“in Christ”). Consequently, this building is taking place into a dwelling place of God, through the manner by which God dwells, namely the Holy Spirit.

Filling by the means of the Holy Spirit (5:18)

Paul exhorts his readers πληρώσθε ἐν πνεύματι (“to be continually filled with the Spirit”). This command is the last of three contrasts that Paul uses to explain walking in wisdom versus walking in foolishness in 5:15-18. The question remains, is Paul referring to a filling of the human spirit where the believer is to be filled in spirit, or is Paul referring to a filling by the Holy Spirit where the believer is continually being filled by the means of God’s Spirit?

---

⁶⁷ In OT times, God’s dwelling place was the temple (1 Kings 8:13). In the NT, Paul refers to the body of individual Christians as being the temple of the Holy Spirit in 1 Cor. 6:19 and he refers to the body of believers as being the temple of the Holy Spirit in 1 Cor. 3:16.

⁶⁸ O’Brien, Letter to the Ephesians, 221. Schreiner agrees, “Paul clarifies that only those, and thus all those, who have the Spirit belong to God . . . God’s church is his temple, which is characterized by the indwelling of the Spirit (1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:22; cf. 2 Cor 6:16)” Paul, 261. κατοικητήριον refers to a dwelling place (see BDAG, 535; Hoehner for a lengthy discussion, 413). The genitive that follows τοῦ θεοῦ is probably a genitive of possession indicating that it is God’s dwelling place.
In order to begin the discussion on this verse, defining of terms is in order. The imperative πληρούσθε means to be filled with content.\(^{69}\) The believer is continually being filled with something. The issue is how the interpreter understands the dative ἐν πνεύματι and the content of the filling. The grammar in this verse suggests that ἐν πνεύματι is probably best taken as a dative of instrument or means.\(^{70}\) The translation would be stated in this way, “be continually filled by the means of the Spirit.” What is the content of the filling? Although it is not specifically mentioned here, it may refer to the fullness of the moral excellence and power of God that Paul mentions in 1:23.\(^{71}\) It is this fullness that enables the believer to walk worthy of his calling. If this is true of Paul’s thought, the

---

\(^{69}\) Danker defines πληροῦω as “to make full, fill; of persons fill with powers, qualities, etc.” BDAG, 828. Hoehner states that in the passive it could mean ‘be filled’ with the idea of being completely controlled by the powers that fill him, *Ephesians*, 703.

\(^{70}\) Hoehner, 703-04; O’Brien, 391-92 state that the dative ἐν πνεύματι is best taken as a dative of means or instrument for three reasons. (1) There is no other place in the NT where ἐν plus the dative referring to content after πληροῦω occurs (also see Wallace, 93). (2) There are other passages that have the ἐν πνεύματι construction and can be translated as by (1 Cor. 12:3; Rom. 15:16; Eph. 4:30). Therefore it seems best to translate ἐν πνεύματι as a dative of instrument. (3) Paul uses the term ‘spirit’ thirteen times and each time it refers to a spirit outside of them except for 2:2 (spirit of the devil) and 4:23 (possible human spirit). Therefore it seems unlikely that Paul is using the human spirit here in 5:18.

Wallace concludes that the phrase ἐν πνεύματι could be analyzed in this way. He uses the following reasons. (1) Eph. 3:19 makes a request that believers ‘be filled with all the fulness of God.’ The explicit content of πληροῦω is God’s fulness. (2) In Eph. 4:10 Christ is the agent of filling. (3) Paul then climaxes his argument in 5:18 “believers are to be filled by Christ by means of the Spirit with the content of the fullness of God” *Greek Grammar*, 375.

\(^{71}\) Hoehner adds, “Also, in the preceding verse (5:17), we are ‘to understand the will of the Lord,’ the Lord here referring to Christ. Hence, the Holy Spirit is the means by which believers are filled with Christ and his will. This is fitting because the parallel passage of the present verse is Col 3:16 where Paul states, ‘let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom, teaching, and admonishing one another with the singing of psalms, hymns, spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God’” *Ephesians*, 704. MacArthur states, “True communion with God is not induced by drunkenness, but by the Holy Spirit. Paul is not speaking of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling (Rom. 8:9) or the baptism by Christ with the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), because every Christian is indwelt and baptized by the Spirit at the time of salvation. He is rather giving a command for believers to live continually under the influence of the Spirit by letting the Word control them (Col 3:16) . . . . Being filled with the Spirit is living in the conscious presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, letting His mind, through the Word, dominate everything that is thought and done” (John MacArthur, Jr. *The MacArthur Study Bible*. electronic ed. [Nashville: Word Pub., 1997], c1997).
human spirit is not a possible translation because the human spirit cannot fill the believer with the excellence and power of God. The point is that the believer is to be filled by the Spirit so that the Spirit can change him into the image of Christ more and more.

One further piece of evidence that relates to the question is the participles that follow. The five participles that follow πληροῦσθε are λαλοῦντες (“speaking”), ἁδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες (“singing and making melody”), εὐχαριστοῦντες (“being thankful”), and ὑποσασώμενοι (“being submissive”). These participles are probably best understood as participles of result, which describe the outworking of the Spirit’s filling believers. The Spirit-filled Christian will be characterized by the actions of the participles. If the believer is to be filled in spirit, the power to fulfill the actions of these participles would not be characteristic in the believer. Further research is necessary in order to come to a better understanding of Paul’s intent in this particular passage.

Using the sword of the Spirit (6:17)

The μάχαιραν (“sword”) in this verse is a piece of weaponry for war. It was similar to a large knife or dagger. This was an offensive weapon for the soldier of war. Paul defines μάχαιραν with τοῦ πνεύματος (“of the Spirit”). The genitive here is probably a genitive of origin or source. This indicates the ‘sword given by the Spirit.’ Due to the nature of the weapon and given its case classification, Paul probably has the idea of

---

72 Wallace states, “that the participle of result is used to indicate the outcome or result of the action of the main verb . . . Result may fit well both syntactically and exegetically: Result participles are invariably present participles that follow the main verb; as well, the idea of result here would suggest that the way in which one measures his/her success in fulfilling the command of 5:18 is by the participles that follow” Greek Grammar, 639.
offensive empowerment by the Holy Spirit in a spiritual battle. Therefore, in the context of spiritual warfare, the believer is not left without an offensive weapon in order to fight the schemes of the devil.

**Praying in the power of the Holy Spirit (6:18)**

Paul is exhorting the believers to use the method of communication that you have already been given namely praying ἐν πνεύματι (“in the Spirit”). This figure points to the communication that the believer has in spiritual battles. The prayers of the believer are directed to God by the means of the Holy Spirit. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that will direct and help the believer to fight off the schemes of the devil. The believer can know that the same Holy Spirit that gives you confidence and access to God is guiding his prayers.

**Summary**

This paper, in its limited sense, demonstrates a methodology of biblical theology through the use of the terminology and phraseology of Paul. This methodology toward a biblical theology provides an explanation of one of Paul’s themes within Ephesians; namely, the work of God in the believers’ life as it is manifested by the means of the Holy Spirit. It is this effectual working of God’s power in the believers’ life that enables him to walk worthy of God’s call in his life.


Stallard, Michael D. course notes for TH1, Seminar in Advanced Theological Method, Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, PA, fall 2001.


