

RETHINKING THE USE OF ἐπὶ IN EPHESIANS 2:10

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The importance of prepositions in theology should not be underestimated.² Consider, for example, John's use of πρὸς in John 1:1. The preposition in this passage helps to reinforce and refine Trinitarian thinking. Consider also Paul's interchange between διὰ, εἰς, and ἐκ in his presentation of God's righteousness through faith in Romans 3:22-26. Taken to be more than stylistic, these prepositions provide subtle, yet important, nuances in the relationship between faith and justification.

Assuming, then, the importance of the Greek preposition in theology, our present discussion focuses upon Ephesians 2:10. In particular we focus upon the use of ἐπὶ with the dative in Ephesians 2:10. Historically this prepositional phrase has been understood to communicate purpose (rendered "for") in many translations³, commentaries,⁴ and

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²Murray J. Harris, *Prepositions And Theology In The Greek New Testament: An Essential Reference Resource For Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 14. Harris insists, "I have long believed—and taught—that there are four areas of Greek grammar that produce the most handsome dividends when special attention is given to understand them. These "Big Four" are the aorist, the genitive case, the article, and prepositions. Of prepositions it has been rightly said, 'An in-depth knowledge of a language is not attained until one has total mastery of its prepositional system.'" Ibid. See also Dan Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament With Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indexes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 364-89. Wallace states, "A proper understanding of prepositions is vital to exegesis. Many an exegetical debate has turned on the use of a particular preposition." Ibid., 357.

³A short survey of the various popular translations reveals that the preposition ἐπὶ with the dative Ephesians 2:10 is rendered "for" indicating purpose. The New King James Version, for example, reads, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for* good works..." The New American Standard Bible, the English Standard Bible, the NET Bible, and the Holman Christian Standard Bible, likewise render ἐπὶ with dative "for" indicating purpose. The New International Version assumes the idea of purpose rendering the preposition ἐπὶ as an infinitive. The passage reads, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *to do* good works..." Finally, the popular paraphrased version, the New Living Translation, expands upon this telic nuance and translates the passage, "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago."

⁴Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation and Commentary on Chapters 1—3*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 34 (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 249. Barth writes, "Eph. 2:10 gives the basic information on the necessity of 'good works.' In eternity, i.e., before the foundation of the world, when God loved his Son and elected the saints in him, he also prepared 'good works' for them." Ibid. Other examples include: J. Armitage Robinson, *Commentary on Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1979), 53. Robinson states "Not 'of works,' but 'unto works'. The Divine purpose is not achieved apart from the 'good works' of men: only it does not begin from them, but leads to them." Ibid. Also, Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (London: T&T Clark, 1998), 230. "Since God never acts purposelessly, he creates believers 'with a view to' the good works which they will perform, not that his original creation did not have this end in view." Ibid. Also, Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, in Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 181. "Believers are God's work, and the good deeds which he has purposed for us to

theological discussions.⁵ As such, Ephesians 2:10 provides, for many, a strategic meeting place between Paul's insistence upon the free gift of salvation (Eph. 2:9) and the necessity of good works tendered by those who are saved⁶ (Eph. 2:10).

Though one might be tempted to leave sleeping prepositions lie, it was this appearance and unexpected understanding of ἐπὶ in Ephesians 2:10 that recently caught our attention. The currently accepted rendering of this preposition in Ephesians 2:10 "for" (indicating purpose) did not seem to fit the usual understanding of how this construction functions. Upon checking the suggestions from various grammars, along with uses of ἐπὶ with the dative in Septuagintal, extra-biblical, and the New Testament literature, (especially Paul's use of ἐπὶ throughout his letters), we have concluded that restraint should be exercised before any telic sense to this prepositional phrase should be considered. The investigation of the literature mentioned above produced little evidence that ἐπὶ with the dative conveys a true sense of purpose. Additionally, an investigation as to how this prepositional rendering fits within the argument and grammatical particulars of Ephesians further reinforces our suggestion that ἐπὶ with the dative should be translated as something other than "for."

The substance of this paper tracks our investigation into the assessment mentioned above. We will look into the grammar of ἐπὶ with the dative. Second, we will overview occurrences of ἐπὶ with the dative in the Septuagint, the New Testament, and the Apostolic Fathers. Third, we will exegete certain passages in Paul's letters where this prepositional phrase has been understood to communicate 'purpose.' We will then focus our attention upon Ephesians 2:10. And finally, we will discuss some theological suggestions if one were to render ἐπὶ with the dative as something other than telic. While it has become our conviction that ἐπὶ with the dative should be rendered 'causal' ("upon," "on the basis of," or, "because"), it is our hope that anyone reading this paper would at least reconsider the possibility that ἐπὶ with the dative might be understood as something other than "for."

Grammar

An inquiry into the grammar of Ephesians 2:10 begins with a few observations about cases in general and the dative case in particular. Additionally, we will make brief observations about the meanings of prepositions when they are used with certain cases.

walk in, which are achieved only through his enabling power, can be thought of as already prepared in his mind and counsel from before eternity." Ibid.

⁵John Calvin *Institutio Christianae Religionis* 2.3.6, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, under the title *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 20-21 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 298. Calvin writes: "But Paul, to strip us, argues that we deserve nothing because 'we have been created in Christ...for good works, which God prepared beforehand [Eph 2:10, cf Vg.]. He means by these words that all parts of good works from their first impulse belong to God." Ibid.

⁶Alan P. Stanley, *Did Jesus Teach Salvation by Works? The Role of Works in Salvation in the Synoptic Gospels*, The Evangelical Theological Society Monograph Series, vol. 4 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006), 124. Stanley notes, "Paul's most comprehensive statement on works appears in Ephesians 2:9-10." Ibid. Stanley concludes, "In sum, although pre-conversion works count for nothing in Paul, post-conversion works clearly play an important part." Ibid., 126.

Finally, there will be an investigation into the multiple occurrences of ἐπὶ with the dative in the Septuagint, New Testament, and Apostolic Fathers.

The general function of cases with prepositions

For the sake of definition, we agree with Daniel Wallace who identifies cases according to form rather than function.⁷ Thus, the common understanding when relating the five accepted case-forms to their generally accepted functions in each case is described as having certain specific functional characteristics.⁸ The dative case (form) functions in three modes. These modalities have been called personal interest, location, and means or agency. In distinction to the dative case, the accusative case, “indicates measure, reference, intensity, or other adverbial quality.”⁹ Wallace, citing A. T. Robertson, agrees, writing, “The accusative measures an idea as to its content, scope, direction.”¹⁰ Wallace then adds, “*It [the accusative] is primarily used to **limit** the action of a verb as to **extent, direction, or goal***”¹¹ (Emphases Wallace’s).

Relating these basic case observations to prepositions allow several points to be made. First, of the seventeen proper prepositions¹² only four are in construct with the dative case. Second, these four prepositions (ἐν, ἐπὶ, παρὰ, and συν), when used with the dative, are not understood to communicate purpose. The dative is not, as noted above, the case that would normally express purpose. Finally, purpose, also indicated above, is inherent with the accusative case. Thus, proper prepositions communicating purpose (εἰς, ἐπὶ, κατά, and πρὸς) do so with the accusative case.

These distinct prepositional nuances usually keep themselves within the general sense of the case function.¹³ Prepositions used to indicate purpose, as one might expect,

⁷Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 34. Wallace writes, “[C]ase is a matter of *form* rather than *function*. Each case has one form but many functions.” Ibid. Thus, when we refer to the dative case throughout this study we will do so from a five-case perspective. If a cited grammarian writes from the eight-case perspective this will be noted.

⁸Gerald L. Stevens, *New Testament Greek*, 2nd edition (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997), 41-44. Citing Stevens assessment of case function we find, “The nominative case is the case of designation or naming—usually the subject of the sentence...genitives *describe*, but some further show possession or ownership, specification or kind...the ablative shows *origin, source, separation, departure*...the dative indicates *personal interest*...the locative indicates *location* or position (the ‘in’ case)...instrumental use points to *means* or *agency*...the accusative is *extension*...the vocative is the case of direct address.” Ibid.

⁹Ibid., 43. This distinction should be noted when considering Paul’s use of the accusative to communicate purpose.

¹⁰Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 178.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar Of The Greek New Testament In The Light of Historical Research* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1934), 569-70. After a brief discussion concerning the historical ambiguity of prepositions with certain cases Robertson writes, “But in the N. T. the matter has not developed that far and the cases are not so blurred, though the range of the prepositions in the matter of cases is greatly limited. The seventeen “proper” prepositions (ἀμφὶ drops out) in the N. T. use the cases as will be now shown.” Ibid.

¹³F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 123; Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek J. H. Moulton*, (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1998), 110-25. The authors cite several examples where certain prepositions are substituted unexpectedly for others

do so with the accusative case—the case of verbal “extent, direction, or goal.”¹⁴ In the interest of our study, Dana and Mantey point out that ἐπὶ with the locative (function stressed in their eight case presentation) communicates, “*upon, on, at, over, before*, emphasizing position.”¹⁵ Further, Wallace does not list purpose as a use of ἐπὶ with the dative, rather, he limits its nuances to spatial, temporal, and causal.¹⁶ At first glance, then one might say that ἐπὶ with the dative should not be expected to communicate purpose. We would anticipate ἐπὶ used with the accusative case for such an emphasis.

Moving forward in our investigation of ἐπὶ with the dative in Ephesians 2:10 it will be important for us to keep in mind the natural functions of prepositions with the cases and how these cases function in the language. While limiting our investigation to Septuagintal, New Testament, and some post New Testament literature, one might expect to find most, if not all the uses of ἐπὶ with the dative communicating nuances in keeping with the dative, locative, or instrumental function.

’Επὶ with the dative in the Septuagint

In overviewing the occurrences of ἐπὶ with the dative in Septuagintal literature the Greek text and search engine provided by Accordance version 10.1 were used.¹⁷ Our search resulted in 1,041 occurrences of this construction. Next we translated each occurrence and compared our assessment with an English version of the LXX by Sir Lancelot Brenton (also provided by Accordance). The following evaluations were done in order to qualify and quantify uses of ἐπὶ with the dative solely communicating purpose.

In the Pentateuch there were 182 occurrences of ἐπὶ with the dative case. Of these, 126 were determined to indicate spatiality, twenty indicated causality, ten indicated temporality, twenty-four were classified as “other,”¹⁸ and two were telic. The two passages which had the possibility of denoting purpose were Genesis 31:50 (31:52 Brenton) and Exodus 23:2. Both passages had been rendered “for [for the purpose of] evil.” Neither passage, however, *required* the telic nuance to make contextual sense.

The historical books yielded nearly the same results. Of the 266 occurrences of ἐπὶ with the dative, 192 were considered to be spatial, fifty-six causal, six temporal, ten “other,” and two occurrences showed purpose. These two passages were Ezra 6:18 and 3 Maccabees 6:13. Ezra 6:18 reads, “And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their separate orders, *for* the services of God...”. 3 Maccabees 6:13 reads, “And let the Gentiles cower today in fear of your invincible might, O honored One, who

that function in different cases. Several examples illustrating the “interchange of εἰς and ἐν can be found in § 206. Ibid.

¹⁴Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 178.

¹⁵H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (The Macmillan Company, 1957), 106.

¹⁶Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 376.

¹⁷Accordance provides the Revised edition of the LXX edited by Alfred Rahlfs and tagged by Bernard Taylor. Our search was conducted by entering ἐπὶ followed by preposition+dative case.

¹⁸The term “other” is used to cover a variety of possible nuances. To determine every use conclusively was outside the scope of my investigation. I was simply searching for the occurrences of the telic sense of this construction.

have power *to* save the nation of Jacob.”¹⁹ Of these two occurrences only 3 Maccabees seemed to require the telic nuance.

The poetical books contained 299 occurrences of ἐπὶ with the dative case. Two hundred-thirty occurrences were considered spatial, fifty-four causal, eight temporal, four “other,” and three had the potential of being rendered purpose. The three possibilities were Psalm 23:4 (24:4); Ecclesiastes 3:17, and Wisdom 2:23. Psalm 23:4 reads, “who has not lifted up his soul *to* vanity...”. Ecclesiastes 3:17 reads, “for there is a time for every action and *for* every work.” Finally, in the Wisdom of Solomon 2:23 we read, “for God created man *for* incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity.” Of the three, Wisdom 2:23 could easily be understood to be translated “in” due to its parallel structure with the phrase “in the image.”

The final category dealt with the prophetic literature. Two hundred-ninety four occurrences of ἐπὶ with the dative were found. One hundred-eighty nine were probably spatial. Another ninety-seven indicated causality. Only two occurrences seemed to be temporal. Three were classified as “other,” while three were potentially telic. The three possibilities are in Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Isaiah 58:13 reads, “if thou shall not lift up thy foot *to* work...”. Ezekiel 18:8 reads, “and shall not lend his silver *for* interest...”. Finally, Daniel 8:12 reads, “And a sin-offering was given *for* the sacrifice...”. It seemed best to leave these as examples of the telic use of ἐπὶ with the dative case. Other categories, however, might be made to fit the context.

To summarize, the Septuagint provides at least 1,041 occurrences of ἐπὶ with the dative case. Of these occurrences ten instances of ἐπὶ with the dative should probably be construed as telic. These possibilities amount to 0.96% of the preposition phrases under consideration.

ἐπὶ with the dative in the Apostolic Fathers

A second group of writings surveyed is the Apostolic Fathers. Once again the Greek text and search engine were those provided by Accordance version 10.1. As the prepositional phrases were assessed our conclusions were compared with the English translation found in the two volume set, *The Apostolic Fathers*, in The Loeb Classical Library, edited by G. P. Goold, with an English translation by Kirsopp Lake.

Our search uncovered eighty-two occurrences of ἐπὶ with the dative. Of these eighty-two occurrences, forty-one were considered spatial, fifteen were categorized as reference (with reference to), twenty-five were causal, and one was understood to be temporal. None of the eighty-two occurrences is understood to be telic.

ἐπὶ with the dative in the New Testament

The New Testament provided an additional 185 occurrences of ἐπὶ with the dative case. An overview of these occurrences indicated that non-Pauline New Testament writers used this construction 129 times. Matthew used ἐπὶ with the dative eighteen times. Mark uses ἐπὶ with the dative sixteen times. Luke and Acts supply another sixty

¹⁹Translation compared for the apocryphal portions of the LXX was, *The Oxford Annotated Apocrypha of the Old Testament*, RSV, Bruce M. Metzger, ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965.

examples. Johanne literature has twenty-two occurrences, and the General Epistles provide thirteen uses of ἐπὶ with the dative.

Matthew's eighteen occurrences included renderings such as "on/upon" (5x, e.g., Matthew 4:4), "at" (3x, e.g., "at" "upon" "over" His teaching, Matt 7:28), as well as the causal, "because," spatial, "on," and variations of these themes.

The other synoptic gospels used ἐπὶ with the dative in much the same manner as Matthew. With a few additions, such as Luke's uses of ἐπὶ rendered "against" in Luke 12:52-53, there were no apparent uses of ἐπὶ with the dative suggesting the idea of 'purpose.' Agreeing with this assessment, there were no renditions in the popular English versions (see fn 2) demonstrating the telic nuance.

The Gospel of John followed the Synoptics with what may be described as typical narrative nuances. John uses ἐπὶ to communicate either the spatial idea, rendered "on," "upon," "about," and "over," or the temporal idea (whether actual or logical), rendered "on" or "about." There appears to be no telic use of ἐπὶ with the dative in John's literature. Finally, as observed with the synoptic literature, the popular English versions also do not reflect any telic nuance in John's uses of ἐπὶ with the dative.

Our last New Testament literary grouping, the General Epistles, similarly, demonstrates no telic uses of ἐπὶ with the dative. Hebrews 2:13 serves as a typical example found in these letters, reading, καὶ πάλιν Ἐγὼ ἔσομαι πεποιθὼς ἐπ' αὐτῷ ("and again I will trust *in* Him"). Neither the grammars nor our English renderings give any indication that this construction in these letters functions to denote purpose. Instead these letters, almost without exception, use this preposition to indicate the idea of "in," "on," or "upon."

Having reviewed the 129 uses of ἐπὶ with the dative outside of Paul's letters, we conclude that the New Testament authors did not use this preposition with the dative case to express purpose. This conclusion corresponds with the major grammars and lexicons addressing the subject, as well as the better-known English versions of the New Testament.

ἐπὶ with the dative in Paul's letters

We now turn our attention to Pauline literature. Here we discovered that Paul used ἐπὶ with the dative fifty-six times. As with the other New Testament authors, Paul's normal use of ἐπὶ with the dative expresses spatiality, temporality, conditionality, and causality. Renderings such as "on," "upon," "in," "over," and "because/ on the basis of" provide adequate translations for fifty-one of Paul's fifty-six uses.²⁰ While a discussion

²⁰Conceding that there could be endless discussion as to the best nuance for some of these passages, a personal assessment of Paul's use of ἐπὶ with the dative yields these results: In the epistle to the Romans Paul uses ἐπὶ with the dative twelve times. Appropriate translations include "by" (1x), "upon" (3x), "by/upon" (1x), "against/upon" (1x), "in" (3x), "because" (1x), and "over" (2x). In the Corinthian letters we find twenty occurrences of ἐπὶ with the dative. The causal nuance occurs at least ten times; the idea of condition occurs at least three times; a temporal idea occurs at least five times; while a local/spatial idea occurs twice. Galatians provides one of the questionable passages, usually taken as purpose "for." This passage will be discussed in the body of this article. The Prison Epistles supply twelve occurrences of ἐπὶ with the dative. Of these twelve occurrences two passages have been classified indicating purpose and will be discussed in detail (Philippians 3:12 and Ephesians 2:10). Of the remaining ten occurrences nuances depicting local, spatial, causal, or temporal ideas adequately capture the sense of the preposition.

concerning the precise function of each occurrence could prove beneficial, a survey of grammars²¹ indicated that only five Pauline passages have been assessed to potentially communicate purpose. A. T. Robertson observes

The idea of aim or purpose seems to come in cases like ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς, (Eph. 2:10), ἐφ' ᾧ καὶ κατελημψεν (Ph. 3:12). Note also Gal. 5:13, ἐπ' ἐλευθερίᾳ; 1 Th. 4:7, οὐκ ἐπ' ἀκαταπείᾳ (cf. ἐν ἀγιασμῷ), ἐπὶ καταστροφῇ (2 Tim. 2:14).²²

While not our primary focus, that a consensus among advanced grammars locates purpose in five texts warrants investigation. These passages are Galatians 5:13; Philippians 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 4:7; 2 Timothy 2:14, and of course, the primary passage under consideration, Ephesians 2:10. Leaving Ephesians 2:10 for the bulk of our discussion, we will briefly discuss the other four passages in their canonical order of appearance.

Galatians 5:13

Galatians 5:13 reads “For you were called *to* freedom...” (NASB). The rendering “to” is from ἐπὶ with the dative and is understood by many to communicate a final or purpose/result nuance.²³ In reviewing other English versions we discovered that the NET and ESV both rendered the preposition in the same manner, while the NIV rendered the preposition “to be.” Generally, the telic sense has been assumed in this passage. That said, a closer investigation into the context indicates that there might be other viable, even preferred, options.

Since Galatians 5:13 provides the only instance of ἐπὶ with the dative in this letter, we are left with the argument of the epistle and immediate context of Galatians 5:13 to best determine Paul’s intended sense. For our purposes our investigation will

Renderings include “in,” “upon,” and “over.” The Thessalonian epistles add another four occurrences of ἐπὶ with the dative. Two of these occurrences are temporal, one occurrence is probably causal, while 1 Thessalonians 4:7 has been classified as purpose and will be discussed further. Finally, the Pastoral Epistles provide six examples of ἐπὶ with the dative. Four should be considered spatial, one occurrence condition, while another, 2 Timothy 2:14, has been classified by some as purpose (and will be discussed separately).

²¹These grammars include: F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* J. H. Moulton, (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1998); A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament In Light of Historical Research* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1934); H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (The Macmillan Company, 1957); Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996); and Murray J. Harris, *Prepositions And Theology In The Greek New Testament: An Essential Reference Resource For Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

²²A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament In Light of Historical Research* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1934), 605.

²³Timothy George, *Galatians*, in *The New American Commentary*, vol. 30 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 376. “George writes: “But you were called for a purpose—to be free!” Ibid.

involve Paul's discussion leading up to the conclusion of chapter four and continuing through the end of chapter five.

The argument of Galatians carefully guides the reader to conclude that with the coming of the Son of promise, Galatians 3:16, the believer has moved from the status of child under the tutelage of the Law to that of adult heir, free from the Law's bondage, 4:1-7. After a section in which Paul expresses his personal concern over the Galatians' spiritual state, 4:8-20, Paul drives home the reality of a believer's free status in Christ by allegorically using Hagar and her son in contrast with Sarah and her son. Paul's illustration leads the reader to conclude, from the Law itself, that those who are of faith are offspring of the freewoman and are, therefore, not in bondage to the Law. Thus, those who have faith in Christ, the Son of promise, are offspring of the free woman and have the status of adult heirs of this same promise.

In chapter five, having illustrated the reality of the Galatians' freedom from the Law by their birthright through Sarah, Paul reviews the deadening consequences of embracing the Law for spirituality, 5:2-4. The Apostle then counters this warning with a presentation of the spiritual life possible because of the freedom believers possess as a birthright in Christ. This spirituality is by the life-giving ministry of the Holy Spirit, 5:5-25.

Thus, the context leading to and surrounding Galatians 5:13 presents the reader with their status of freedom through their birth-relation to Christ. As offspring of the freewoman, believers are born free. Our freedom is not something the Christian pursues, rather, freedom is a condition granted to the Christian at rebirth. Freedom is our standing in Christ by promise (Galatians 4:31). Thomas Schreiner comments

Since the Galatians were born of the Spirit instead of the flesh, they were children of the Jerusalem above rather than of Hagar and were thereby children of the promise. Therefore, they are children of the free woman, belonging to the heavenly rather than the earthly Jerusalem."²⁴

Understood as such, Paul then exclaims "in freedom Christ set you free..."²⁵ (Galatians 5:1). Quite probably then, rather than encouraging the Galatians with the purpose to pursue freedom, Paul stresses freedom already possessed because of a believer's rebirth. We are born in freedom. To this notion J. Louis Martyn agrees stating, "Freedom is the condition given by God in the realm of deliverance from slavery, the space God has created by calling the church into being."²⁶ This sense of origin and spiritual realm (place) lends further credence to Paul's insistence that Christians do not

²⁴Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, vol. 9, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 306. While Schreiner does indicate Paul's allegory stresses the nature of the believer's origin/birth, he takes the dative "for freedom" in 5:1 as "probably a dative of purpose." Ibid. 307.

²⁵As Paul moves from illustration to exhortation he tells his readers, Τῇ ἐλευθερίᾳ ἡμᾶς Χριστὸς ἡλευθέρωσεν· στήκετε οὖν καὶ μὴ πάλιν ζυγῷ δουλείας ἐνέχεσθε ("In freedom Christ set us free..." Galatians 5:1. Note that the English word rendered "for" in some versions (e.g., NASB) is a simple dative and may have a number of viable nuances. Since the believer was "born" of the free woman (Sarah's offspring) the most normal understanding should be "in." Believers were born "in" freedom (i.e., not the offspring of the slave woman). The believer was not born *for* freedom. Freedom has been their status since the day of their new birth. Rather than freedom being our purpose, freedom is our birthright.

²⁶J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 33A (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 447.

entangle themselves in the bondage of the Mosaic Law, 5:2-4, but rather, through the law of Christ (love) experience and express their true, free relationship with God, a relationship of faith, Galatians 5:5-6. This free relationship with God through faith in Christ is enlivened by the Spirit, Galatians 5:5-25. As the flesh (our humanness) and the Law work together to empower sin (see Romans 7:4-14 for Paul's detailed explanation) eventuating in death, so the Christian born free in Christ from this deadly collaboration should, by the Spirit, live to produce the fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:16-25. The Christian is born in freedom. This freedom becomes the qualitative basis for life in the Spirit.

Thus we can see, at least in this instance, ἐπὶ with a dative not only does not *require* a telic nuance, the telic nuance may even weaken Paul's point about birthright and the basis for true spirituality. Perhaps the more common understanding of ἐπὶ with the dative as spatial "in" serves the text and the context well. The idea of "in" certainly serves the immediate context of this letter and the theological context Paul establishes regarding the Law and flesh apart from Christ. Finally, ἐπὶ with the dative rendered "in" best captures Paul's teaching about our spiritual freedom and the Spirit in Christ elsewhere in his writings (consider Romans 8:2).

Philippians 3:12

A second passage singled out by grammars as an example of ἐπὶ with the dative denoting purpose is that of Philippians 3:12. Here we read, "but I press on so that I may lay hold of that *for* [ἐπὶ] which I was also laid hold of by Christ" (NASB [italics added]). Unlike the Galatians passage, the English versions lack consensus in this passage regarding the rendering of this preposition. Thus, while the NET Bible and the NIV maintain the telic nuance, the ESV renders the entire phrase as causal, "because Christ Jesus has made me His own."

Perhaps the variations in certain translations might be explained by Paul's use of ἐφ' ᾧ found here and in several other passages (cf. Rom. 5:12; 2 Cor. 5:4; Phil 4:10). F. Blass and A. Debrunner note that this ἐφ' ᾧ construction indicates cause (i.e., "For the reason that," "because").²⁷ Moises Silva concurs, writing

A second, and interesting, question is the force of ἐφ' ᾧ in v.12b. The traditional interpretation takes this construction as indicating aim or purpose, in which case the clause acts in effect as the object of the verb καταλάβω: "if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus" (so KJV, similarly NASB, NIV). This view is preferred by some writers and can be supported grammatically. Against it, however, is the omission of the direct object with ἔλαβον (v. 12a) and with κατειληπέναι (v. 13a), which suggest that *katalabo* too is used absolutely. Moreover, the construction ἐφ' ᾧ is clearly used as a causal expression by Paul in Rom. 5:12 and 2 Cor. 5:4 and makes very good

²⁷F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 123.

sense here: “I hope to reach it inasmuch as I myself have already been reached by Christ.”²⁸

Along with these observations Peter T. O’Brien adds

In words that recall his conversion on the Damascus road Paul asserts that the risen and exalted Lord Jesus had mightily arrested him and set his life in a new direction. He had been turned right around in his tracks. Assuming that ἐφ’ ᾧ is being used idiomatically to mean ‘because’ (note also Rom. 5:12; 2 Cor. 5:4; Phil. 4:10), the clause provides the motive for Paul’s intense desire of laying hold on Christ, namely because Christ had laid hold on him.²⁹

Philippians 3:12, then, may be understood as causal in light of the idiomatic use of the preposition ἐπὶ. Grammarians and commentators attest to this nuance.³⁰ An acceptable, and perhaps preferred, reading translates ἐφ’ ᾧ as causal. Thus, a second possible example of ἐπὶ with the dative usually rendered as “for” is better understood as the more common nuances “because.” Perhaps the preferred grammatical reading would be, “but I press on so that I may lay hold of that because I also was laid hold of by Jesus Christ.”

1 Thessalonians 4:7

1 Thessalonians 4:7 represents a third passage in which we might find a telic use of ἐπὶ with the dative. The New American Standard reads “For God has not called us *for the purpose* [ἐπὶ] of impurity, but in sanctification” [italics added for identification]. Other versions supply similar renderings. Instead of “for the purpose of” the ESV simply states “for.” The NET Bible translates the passage, “For God did not call us to impurity but in holiness.” Finally, the NIV expands both the ἐπὶ with the dative in the first part of the verse and the ἐν with the dative in the second portion. The NIV renders these prepositions as infinitives so that the passage reads, “For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.”

In analyzing this passage we ought to pay attention to the close association of the prepositions ἐπὶ and ἐν. Both prepositions, because of their contextual and grammatical proximity, would tend to communicate the same nuance.³¹ Interestingly both prepositions share similar resultant meanings when used with the dative. In sharing the same meanings, these prepositions most likely reinforce the same intended sense Paul

²⁸Moises Silva, *Philippians*, The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 201.

²⁹Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 425.

³⁰Harris, *Prepositions and Theology*, 139. “There is general unanimity among grammarians that ἐφ’ ᾧ means ‘because,’ ... Such a sense certainly fits the context in Ro 5:12; 2 Co 5:4; Php 3:12...” Ibid.

³¹Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, in Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 199. In a footnote Green notes “the difference between *epi* plus the dative *akatharsia* (“to impurity”) and *en* plus the dative *hagiasmo* (“to holiness”) is purely stylistic.” Ibid.

wants to communicate. Additionally, we also note that ἐν nowhere indicates purpose. Thus, a normal use of both ἐπὶ and ἐν likely emphasizes spatiality, “in.”³² When we consider Paul’s previous use of ἐν ἁγιασμῷ in 4:4, which stresses the sphere in which one should “possess his own vessel,” the normal and expected sense of ἐν with the dative in 1 Thessalonians 4:7 would indicate that Paul was stressing the sphere of God’s call, namely, God called the Thessalonians “in” holiness. As indicated above, certain versions make the same assessment. Now since both prepositions likely communicate the same nuance it may be best to understand ἐπὶ ἀκαθαρσίᾳ as “in uncleanness.” To further reinforce this understanding, a previous use of ἀκαθαρσίᾳ in this epistle bolsters the idea of spatiality. In 1 Thessalonians 2:3 Paul reminds the church that his presentation of the gospel was not “in impurity.” So then, in 4:7, Paul exhorts the Thessalonian Christians to live morally pure on the basis that their call to salvation was not *in* [ἐπὶ] impurity but in [ἐν] holiness.

God had called the Thessalonians in holiness, not in impurity. For this reason, stressing the nature of God’s call in their lives, the Christians at Thessalonica should live in sexually purity. There seems no *necessity* for translating ἐπὶ, (and especially in parallel construct with ἐν) to depict purpose. The argument warranting moral purity can be understood through the character of our holy calling. God has not called us in impurity but in holiness.

2 Timothy 2:14

2 Timothy 2:14 represents the final passage in which some have understood ἐπὶ with the dative to denote purpose. The NASB reads: “not to wrangle about words, which is useless *and leads* to the ruin of the hearers.” The ESV translates this last phrase: “but only ruins the hearers.” The NET Bible expands this phrase: “it just brings ruin on those who listen.” Lastly, the NIV reads: “and only ruins those who listen.”

Reviewing the translations we discover that they do not attempt to clearly communicate any telic nuance. Considering the primary uses of ἐπὶ with the dative, however, the causal (or consecutive³³) nuance fits nicely. As such the passage might read: “Remind them about these things solemnly warning in God’s presence not to quarrel about words, which is useful for nothing, *because* it leads to the ruin of the hearers.”

This causal or consecutive understanding fits nicely with I. Howard Marshall’s conclusion that this last phrase conveys a resultant meaning. Marshall writes, “A second independent phrase follows expressing the result of the disputes somewhat ironically. Ἐπὶ with the dat. has the force ‘with the result of.’”³⁴ Hence, ἐπὶ καταστροφῇ τῶν ἀκουόντων should be rendered “*because* of the ruin of the hearers.” The result embedded in this last clause lends itself easily to the notion that ἐπὶ with the dative

³²Consider also Paul’s use of *en hagiasmo* in 2 Thess 2:13 in which the preposition stresses the nature of the calling while pointing out the instrument of salvation as the Holy Spirit.

³³Turner, *Syntax*, 272.

³⁴I. Howard Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, in International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1999), 747. See also, George W. Knight III, *Commentary On The Pastoral Epistles*, in New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 410. Knight states, “The outcome is he ‘ruin’ or ‘destruction’...” Ibid.

communicates the idea of logical concession. As such the entire phrase should be understood to indicate the reason (not purpose) for avoiding useless discussions.

Summary of the Grammar

Thus far, our grammatical overview has surveyed 1,307 occurrences of ἐπὶ with the dative case. If our assessments of these occurrences are remotely correct one discovers that the telic force of ἐπὶ with the dative governs between 0.765% and 0.994% of its uses. While some may still want to attach the telic nuance “for” (perhaps due to our familiarity with certain English renditions) to the passages above, the telic use of ἐπὶ with the dative is remote at best. Evidence in the New Testament, to this point, leads us to believe that ἐπὶ with the dative should be understood to communicate spatiality, temporality, or causality.

Reviewing our investigation thus far, we have seen that in the New Testament, of the 129 occurrences of this construction outside of Paul’s letters, there are no examples of ἐπὶ with the dative rendered to indicate purpose. In Paul’s literature the preposition in question occurs fifty-six times with the dative case. After a further survey of leading grammars we discovered a general consensus that of all the uses of ἐπὶ with the dative only five passages were identified as possibly signifying purpose. Of these five, it has been demonstrated that in the initial four texts examined the telic nuance should not be considered the *required* understanding. The preposition ἐπὶ in Galatians 5:13, in light of the argument and immediate context, should be understood to communicate a spatial sense, “in.” The ἐφ’ ᾧ in Philippians 3:12, far from generating any consensus of opinion regarding its sense, might very well express cause. The ἐπὶ in 1 Thessalonians 4:7, when seen in its parallel construction with ἐν, and with a context that has already stressed the character of the “call” to salvation, should be understood to emphasize the “sphere” in which believers are called. Finally, 2 Timothy 2:14 provides a fine example of an explanatory clause.

With at least 184 occurrences of ἐπὶ with the dative case investigated, we are left with one final occurrence that has been rendered with the nuance of purpose, namely Ephesians 2:10. It is to this passage that we now turn our attention.

Reconsidering ἐπὶ With The Dative In Ephesians 2:10

Of the five passages potentially indicating purpose, Ephesians 2:10 may represent the most theologically significant. Commentaries and theologies alike cite Ephesians 2:10 to substantiate the balance between faith alone and faith that works in Pauline theology.³⁵ Alan Stanley, for example, uses Ephesians 2:10 almost exclusively to demonstrate what Paul understood concerning the good works of a Christian. Stanley writes

Paul’s most comprehensive statement on works appears in Ephesians 2:9-10. Here he states that salvation “is not from works” (οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων). Yet at the same time believers are “God’s workmanship (ποίημα) created in Christ Jesus for good works (ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς) which God has prepared beforehand (προητοίμασεν) in

³⁵See footnote no. 3 for some examples.

order that we might walk (πειπατήσωμεν) in them.” If Paul had said nothing else about works these two verses would almost be enough.³⁶

Regarding the significance of this preposition under consideration, Stanley adds

Even though salvation is not by works it is quite clearly for good works. Every believer has been created for this. More than once Paul asserts that Christians have been delivered from the unscrupulous in order that we might do good works (Tit 2:14; cf. Rom 6:1-14).³⁷

To these sentiments a variety of scholars add their observations emphasizing the theological importance of this text. Markus Barth points out

Eph 2:10 gives the basic information on the necessity of “good works.” In eternity, i.e. before the foundation of the world, when God loved his Son and elected the saints in him, he also prepared “good works” for them. If there is meaning in the term “pre-existence” at all, then the “good works” of the saints share in it.³⁸

Finally, Thomas R. Schreiner, stressing the effectuality of divine salvific grace, notes, “Grace has ordained that believers will do good works (Eph. 2:10).”³⁹ From this statement Schreiner adds, in a footnote, “In this context Paul emphasizes the good works that believers *will* do, not the good works that they *must* do (see Lincoln 1990: 115-16; Hoehner 2002: 348-49).”⁴⁰

Ephesians 2:10, then, represents a theologically rich passage bearing many lofty and practical implications. Yet to maintain Ephesians 2:10 as the Pauline connection between salvation as a free gift and the inevitability of good works *requires* the preposition ἐπὶ with the dative to signify purpose. If this nuance should remain as commonly rendered, Ephesians 2:10 would be the only example in the New Testament requiring a telic understanding. This ‘requirement’ is the focus of our reconsideration.

For the scope of this inquiry our consideration of the grammatical signification of ἐπὶ with the dative case in Ephesians 2:10 will proceed by answering several basic questions. First, does Ephesians’ argument (larger context) *necessitate* ἐπὶ with the dative to communicate purpose? Second, do the textual particulars of Ephesians 2:10 *require* a telic sense from this preposition? Third, would another understanding of this preposition better relate to the argument of the epistle and the particulars of Ephesians 2:10? And finally, without diminishing any of the richness of this text, what would this passage tell us if ἐπὶ was understood as something other than telic?

³⁶Stanley, Did Jesus Teach Salvation by Works?, 124.

³⁷Ibid., 125-26.

³⁸Barth, *Ephesians*, 249.

³⁹Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 349.

⁴⁰Ibid. n. 26.

Ephesians' argument and ἐπὶ in Ephesians 2:10

The first context necessary in understanding Ephesians 2:10 is the overall argument of the book. By understanding how the author assembles and proceeds with the whole letter we should better be able to go back and understand the parts. In this instance the parts being evaluated are ἐπὶ with the dative in Ephesians 2:10.

To determine the purpose and specific message of Ephesians with precision, however, poses a problem. A brief survey of introductory resources reveals a certain ambiguity in discerning any fixed purpose or occasion for Paul's letter to the Ephesians.⁴¹ Thus we discover that while Ephesians does not lack for a wealth of important content,⁴² Paul, unlike in his letters to the Romans, Galatians, or Philippians, never discloses a specific motivation or occasion for writing this letter.

What we might do to discover Paul's purpose for this letter is piece together evidences that may help us form an assumption about this letters' purpose from the biblical data we possess. For instance, Acts tells us that Paul had spent several years serving Christ with the Ephesians, Acts 18:10; Acts 20:31. This extended ministry led to the development of some deep and abiding relationships with the Ephesian Christians, consider Acts 20:17-38. Now, at the time Paul wrote this epistle, news of Paul's imprisonment had reached the churches, Ephesians 3:1; 4:1. Perhaps then, one might begin to assume that the Apostle, because of his long-standing relationship with the Ephesians, and with the news of his imprisonment, focused upon certain theological themes in order to encourage the readers' faith in Christ, consider Ephesians 3:13. Perhaps by investigating these themes within Ephesians we might discover something of Paul's message and achieve greater clarity concerning Ephesians 2:10.

So, while no singular theme or purpose is specifically mentioned, throughout the letter we see Paul presenting detailed vignettes about God's majestic plans, purposes, and provisions in Christ. In addition, we find Paul presenting the Christian readers with a foundation for their new identity. Paul, by extolling the gracious works of God through Christ, encourages these Christians toward faithfulness in living a Spirit-filled lifestyle. Clinton E. Arnold observes

As people who are united with Christ, believers have redemption, forgiveness of sins, a heavenly existence, access to the Father, knowledge of the truth, and the

⁴¹D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Vol. II, The Pauline Epistles* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1977), 266. "The purpose of the Apostle in writing Ephesians is nowhere indicated in the epistle but must be gathered from its occasion and contents." Ibid. Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 97-106. "Since no particular problem is raised in the book, there has been much discussion over the years on the purpose of Ephesians." Ibid., 97. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC, 42 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1990), lxxiv. In scholars' attempts to find Paul's purpose from within the setting of the epistle, Lincoln observes, "Ephesians proves a source of frustration. It simply does not contain references to a specific setting or problems," Ibid. Other sources consulted include: Barth, Markus. *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1—3*. The Anchor Bible. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1974. Hawthorne, Gerald F. and Ralph P. Martin, editors. *Dictionary of Paul's Letters*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993. Tenney, Merrill C. *New Testament Survey, Revised*. Revised by Walter M. Dunnnett. Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985.

⁴²Hiebert, *Introduction*, 267. "It is generally conceded that Ephesians is the deepest book in the New Testament. Its vision for the purpose of God stretches from eternity to eternity." Ibid.

gift of the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13-14; see Holy Spirit). They possess a new existence created by God and characterized by righteousness (Eph 4:24).⁴³

When reading Ephesians, then, it seems that the various themes initiated by Paul merge into what may well be the central focus of this letter. Paul, in his attempt to encourage this church, presents the grand theme of God's work in providing salvation through the Son as administrated by the indwelling and unifying enablement of the Holy Spirit. Occasioned by his continued imprisonment and earthly trials, Paul writes to encourage the Ephesians with the magnificent details about God's provision for their salvation in and through Christ. Certainly the letter to the Ephesians informs us about the riches of God's grace in bringing sinners to an exalted status in Christ. God's glorious salvation⁴⁴, then, may well serve as the grand theme of Ephesians. For Paul, in Ephesians, God's provisional work in providing for salvation is rooted in eternity past, realized in our historical present, and projected as the guaranteed expectation of the future. This theme of divine salvation encompasses the redemptive work of Christ, the Church, the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and the ethics of the Christian life through union with Christ by the Spirit as God's new creation. This glorious salvation, the rescue and re-creation of humanity from the ravages of sin, represents the grand work of God and, perhaps, best captures the message of Ephesians.

Briefly, then, the argument of Ephesians may unfold in the following manner. After his customary greeting, 1:1-2, Paul explains how God has provided for salvation through Christ, 1:3-14. For Paul, God's work in rescuing mankind begins before time. Paul relates how God, in eternity past, has blessed the redeemed, choosing them to holiness and predestinating them to sonship, 1:3-6. Paul then points out that God has, in this present age, provided redemption, namely, the forgiveness of sins, through Christ, Ephesians 1:7-10; how God has graciously lavished this grace, while making His eternal purposes known to them through the Messiah; and, in 1:11-12, that God now works every detail according to His purpose so that the Church would be to the praise of God's glory. Finally, in 1:13-14, we learn that God has sealed the redeemed with the down payment of their inheritance, the Holy Spirit, guaranteeing their glorious future. Everything necessary for one's salvation has been planned, provided for, and guaranteed by our gracious heavenly Father. For Paul, our salvation is entirely God's work.

As the letter continues, Paul's prayer for the Ephesians, 1:15-23, provides closure for and transition from this letter's lengthy introduction. Paul prays that their insight about God's gracious provision through Christ would include their comprehension about

⁴³Clinton E. Arnold, "Ephesians," in *Dictionary of Paul's Letters*, Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, editors (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 247.

⁴⁴This assessment fits well with the plausible understanding of $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omicron$ in Ephesians 2:8. Wallace comments "More plausible is the third view, viz., that $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omicron$ refers to the concept of a grace-by-faith salvation. As we have seen, $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omicron$ regularly takes a conceptual antecedent." Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, 335. Lincoln writes, " $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omicron$ is probably best taken, therefore, as referring to the preceding clause as a whole, and thus to the whole process of salvation it describes." Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 112. O'Brien writes, "the context demands that *this* be understood of salvation by grace as a whole..." O'Brien, *Ephesians*, PNTC 175. Finally, Best observes, " $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omicron$ must therefore be given a more general reference and, with the great majority of modern commentators, taken to refer to the whole of v. 8a (for the usage see Rom 13.11; 1 Cor 6.6,8; Phil 1.28; cf BDR §290 n. 7)." Best, *Ephesians*, ICC 226.

the hope of their future with God, the riches of grace that God has invested in them, and their experience of the resurrection power God has demonstrated on their behalf in Christ.

It is this mention of resurrection power that moves the letter from what God has done *for* the believer (ch. 1:3-14) to what God has done *to* the believer. Now Paul reminds the Ephesians that prior to knowing Christ by faith, they, like everyone else, were spiritually dead, 2:1-3. This reminder about spiritual death provides the occasion to introduce God's work of salvation as a re-creative act. This re-creation represents what God has done *to* the Christian. God gives life to the dead and raises the redeemed into the heavens, united with Christ, where the "saved" stand as an eternal testimony of God's transformative favor (the power of the resurrection mentioned in 1:19ff.), Ephesians 2:4-7. These works, added to the gracious provisions in Christ described in chapter one, immediately direct us to our passage.

Everything in this epistle thus far recounts what the Father has done for us through Christ and what God has done to us in Christ. To this point in Ephesians everything has been about God's works. It is no wonder that Paul stresses that this salvation is not of man's works. Salvation is entirely beyond anything man could do for himself. The salvation Paul presents is *God's* work. Positioned at such a high point in this letter, Ephesians 2:10 seems to serve as a summary marker at the pinnacle to all that Paul has written. To paraphrase Paul's intentions, Ephesians 2:10 might read, "For we, chosen, adopted, redeemed, made alive from the dead, and seated with Christ in heavenly places, are God's masterwork, having been created in Christ Jesus (1:3—2:7, esp. 2:4-7).

As the letter moves beyond the passage of our interest, Ephesians further describes God's gracious saving work. Having told his readers what God has done for them and to them, Paul now tells his readers what God has done *with* the redeemed, Ephesians 2:11—3:21. Paul tells us that God's re-creative redemptive power has brought the Gentiles to the promises through the blood of Christ having torn down the Jewish wall of separation (the Law), so that He might fashion Jew and Gentile together into one holy dwelling place by the Spirit. Chapters two and three emphasize what God has done with us (making the two into one) in Christ.

The details found in chapters one, two, and three present God's glorious salvation before time, in history, and for all eternity. Having presented his theological foundations, Paul now, as with several of his letters, applies these glorious truths in chapters four through six. Here the Apostle emphasizes the lifestyle expected of those so rescued by God's good works. Chapters four through six encourage the readers to godliness featuring themes introduced earlier. The Christian's living union with Christ the head, 4:11-16, as the new creation, 4:24, on the basis of the infilling of the Holy Spirit, 5:18ff. and the necessity of God's mighty power, 6:10ff., are all requisites for Christian spirituality. These features necessary for godliness are those detailed by Paul as the "works" God prepared beforehand making the godly lifestyle possible.

Taking this discussion back to Ephesians 2:10 it may very well be that Ephesians 2:10 offers a climactic summary of all that Paul has conveyed to his readers. Paul tells us, the reader, that apart from anything we might contribute to this grand salvation, we are *God's* workmanship. Taking ἐν with the dative in Ephesians 2:10 to be telic seems to deflect Paul's focus upon the works of God mentioned by Paul thus far and then introduces an entirely new theme. This new theme, however, theologically justified to alleviate the tensions between salvation as a "free gift" and the stated necessities of

good works by the redeemed, seems argumentatively unwarranted at this time. As part of a summary, by simply rendering this prepositional phrase in one of its more acceptable nuances, the passage would keep the focus upon God's good works as the foundation for proper Christian spirituality introduced later in this epistle. In keeping with the argument and context of this letter, Paul is summarily telling us that we are created in Christ Jesus *on the basis of* (on, upon) the good works which *God* has done (ch. 1—2). God's good works through Christ serve as the basis for proper Christian living. In contrast to man's efforts and self-determinations, the divine works of election, forgiveness, sealing, regeneration, and positional exaltation comprise God's work done beforehand and serve as the foundational means upon which the believer should live his life. In answering our first question, namely, "does Ephesians' argument *require* ἐπὶ with the dative to communicate purpose?" The answer should be "no." The *necessity* of ἐπὶ with the dative conveying a telic nuance does not seem warranted by the argument and context of this epistle. That said we now must investigate the details of the passage in question.

The particulars of Ephesians 2:10 and ἐπὶ with the dative

The second question in our investigation involves the particulars of Ephesians 2:10, namely, 'Do the textual particulars *require* ἐπὶ to communicate purpose?' Our passage reads, αὐτοῦ γάρ ἐσμεν ποίημα, κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς οἷς προητοίμασεν ὁ θεὸς ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν ["for we are His masterwork, having been created in Christ Jesus *on the basis of* good works which God prepared before, so that we might live by them"] (translation the author's). From this text several observations need to be made.

First, Ephesians 2:10 *is* grammatically and logically connected to what has immediately preceded. The postpositive γάρ provides a further explanation or reason to what was just stated in 2:8-9. The Ephesians were "saved" by grace. Salvation, discussed in unparalleled fashion with a singular focus upon what God has done in Christ, has been presented as not being from any human work. Furthermore, God's provision for man's salvation does not leave any room for the redeemed taking any credit for what God has done. "For" in 2:10 suitably introduces a summary explanation for the "saved" not being able to "brag." Simply stated, salvation is not by human merit nor can anyone boast about his contribution "*because* [γάρ] we are His (God's) workmanship..." It is God who has provided everything and, further, has 're-created' us, raising us from the dead.

Not only does the explanatory particle connect this passage with what preceded, but we see that Paul's focus remains on God and His work by the emphatic position of αὐτοῦ. Hoehner notes, "The possessive pronoun, αὐτοῦ, 'his' placed first in the sentence emphasizes that it is God's workmanship."⁴⁵ Our text, from the outset, maintains the epistle's stress upon God and His initiatory grace in providing salvation.

A third observation involves the word ποίημα. This term defines God's "project." The redeemed are God's masterwork.⁴⁶ In one succinct term Paul brings the divine works of chapters one and two together (and especially 2:4-6) summarizing that salvation results in God's "new creation." This term joins with other ideas in the text and context to which

⁴⁵Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 346.

⁴⁶Ibid., Regarding ποίημα Hoehner comments, "God's masterwork or 'his workmanship' is a good translation." Ibid.

O'Brien points out that "here in Ephesians 2:10, which stresses what believers are because of God, the cluster of creation terms, including this word and *created*, along with *good works*, is applied directly to the new creation."⁴⁷ Paul tells his readers that those who are the benefactors of God's saving grace are, by God's re-creative act, God's 'masterwork.'

If what has been stated were not enough, Paul further defines God's creative activity telling us that Christians "have been created in Christ Jesus." The aorist passive participle 'having been created,' not only communicates that this work is a fact,⁴⁸ and that the divine creative work was the basis for the believer's status as God's masterwork,⁴⁹ but that, due to the passive voice, the creative act is something that is done to the believer. The divine masterwork of the new creation, their new reality and identity in Christ, is something that God did to the Ephesians.

Finally, regarding this phrase, we are reminded that God's re-creative act is "in Christ Jesus." Andrew T. Lincoln comments as to the significance of this phrase.

"In Christ Jesus" here is shorthand for "through God's activity in Christ." Christ is seen as the mediator of the new creation just as much as he was of the original one (Cf. Col 1:16). Paul himself saw the salvation God had inaugurated through Christ as a new creation (cf. Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17), and that perspective is reflected in Ephesians not only here but also in 2:15 and 4:24. God's action of making believers alive with Christ, of raising them up and exalting them with Christ, provided a new start within the world's history. It was more than simply a restoration of conditions before the fall; it involved, rather, the creation of a new humanity as men and women were brought to that destiny God had purposed but which before Christ had not been reached... The new creation, which in its widest sense includes the summing up of all things in Christ (cf. 1:9, 10), has already begun as a movement in history in the lives of men and women.⁵⁰

As we see, everything to this moment in Paul's letter extols the magnificence of God's work in Christ on behalf of mankind. God's salvific works are graciously provided. These works are in Christ. In Christ dead sinners are re-created into living saints. This re-creation cannot be merited nor improved upon ('not of works'). We are His masterwork, having been created in Christ Jesus. The particulars of the text, to this point, do not seem to warrant any movement away from God's work in providing for and administering salvation.

Now we arrive at the prepositional phrase under consideration. That believers have been re-created to do good works is not in question. There are many passages, even entire chapters in the New Testament, exhorting and encouraging believers unto love and good works (e.g., Ephesians 4:12—6:18). The very nature of the believer as a new

⁴⁷Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 178.

⁴⁸Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 554-55. Wallace discusses the general aspect of the aorist tense as being like a snapshot of the entire action.

⁴⁹The aorist tense participle communicates antecedent action to the present tense and present status the believer found in the verb ἐσμεν.

⁵⁰Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1990), 114.

creation might also be argued as a theological proving ground for a believer's good works. The question being considered is simply, 'Do the context and the grammar *require*, or even strongly suggest, that Paul is introducing the moral purposes for a believer's salvation at this moment in this epistle by using ἐπὶ with the dative to denote purpose? Considering the overwhelming sense of this passage, the use of ἐπὶ with the dative throughout the literature surveyed, as well as in Paul's letters (denoting purpose 0.76% of the time), perhaps it should be suggested that, in contrast to a believer's works (already dismissed as having any part in procuring the free gift of salvation, 2:8-9), the good works being mentioned here are those accomplished by God (e.g., ch 1:3—2:9). Without question God is the subject of the verb προητοίμασεν. Additionally, whatever else might be said about these good works, God is the One, to this point in this letter, who acted beforehand. Scholarship agrees with this assessment. Without exception the various commentaries and articles reviewed recognize that these good works (the most logical antecedent of οἷς in this context) are good works prepared by God. While some authors have insisted that the notion of "good works" are always descriptive of man's works,⁵¹ and, taken as such, these "good works" prepared by God beforehand refer to an ethical emphasis in God's saving grace "before the believer was created in Christ Jesus,"⁵² the theological conundrum created by the assumption that these are the future good works of the believer that God has foreordained can only be solved in the labyrinth of one's theological system, not from the exegesis of this text. This assumed focus upon the inevitable good works of the Christian does not appear to be an obvious part of the present argument, immediate context, or grammar within Ephesians 2:10. Allowing the passage to maintain its focus upon all that God has done on behalf of mankind in providing salvation in Christ certainly satisfies the normal sense of ἐπὶ with the dative, the grammatical data, and the argumentative flow of Ephesians. The Ephesian Christians are God's new creative "masterwork." To be such, they have been created in Christ Jesus on the basis of good works (namely, the necessary provisions of salvation), which God prepared beforehand. Thus, these "good works," seen as a direct reference to redemption, continue to deflect any notion of merit by those trusting Christ. This gracious "new

⁵¹John F. Hart, "Does Philippians 1:6 Guarantee Progressive Sanctification? Part 2" *JOTGES* 9:2 (Autumn 96), 33-60. p. 60. Taking exception to the idea that God is mentioned as the One doing good works, Hart notes that, "The word *ergon* ('work, deed') modified by *agathos* ('good') occurs 14 times in the NT (Acts 9:36; Rom 2:7; 13:3; 2 Cor 9:8; Eph 2:10; Phil 1:6; Col 1:10; 2 Thess 2:17; 1 Tim 2:10; 5:10; 2 Tim 2:21; 3:17; Titus 1:16; 3:1). It never refers to 'salvation.' In each NT use the focus is on believers meeting the practical, earthly needs of others. Occasionally the phrase contains obvious overtones of financial or material giving (Acts 9:36; 2 Cor 9:8; and perhaps 1 Tim 5:10). Cf. also the verbal form, *agathoergein* ('to do good') in 1 Tim 6:18, where material sharing is in view and the word *koinoanikos* ('generous') occurs. The other occurrence of this compound verb is used with God as the subject, but not of salvation ('he did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons,' Acts 14:19)" Ibid.

To Hart's data we respond in brief. First, Philippians 1:6, the focus of Hart's article, allows God as the One who has begun a good work (the context allows for the Philippians' participation in the gospel as that which God has initiated). Second, we are not restricted to passages using *ergon* + *agathos* to determine that God does good works and that these works are related to salvation. Third, Paul uses the phrase "prepared beforehand" in a context of God's work (as it is in Ephesians 2:10) in Romans 9:23, ἵνα γνωρίσῃ τὸν πλοῦτον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ σκεύη ἐλέους, ἃ προητοίμασεν εἰς δόξαν. Finally, God is the subject of the verb προητοίμασεν in Ephesians 2:10 necessitating that, whatever one's position regarding ἐπὶ with the dative, God is preparing the good works beforehand. Thus, good works may properly be associated with God in reference to His work of salvation.

⁵²Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 349.

creation” is on the basis of (or if one prefers, “because of”) God’s good works. We propose, therefore, that it is God’s good works in providing salvation that have been prepared beforehand. These are the divine works providing for and enlivening salvation, which have been extolled by Paul and, as we will see, make New Covenant spirituality possible.

In sum, answering our second question, “Do the textual particulars of Ephesians 2:10 *require* the telic force of ἐπὶ with the dative?” The answer is “no.” In fact, the normal rendering of ἐπὶ with the dative, “on,” “upon,” “because of,” best captures the logical flow and grammatical particulars of the passage.

’Επὶ with the dative as “causal” in Ephesians 2:10

Our answer to the third question posited above, “Would another understanding of this preposition better relate to the particulars of Ephesians 2:10 as well as the argument of this epistle?” has become apparent. Of the commonly understood renderings of ἐπὶ with the dative, a causal nuance, “on,” “upon,” “because of,” or even, “on the basis of” relates well to both New Testament grammar in general and Paul’s uses in particular⁵³. Furthermore, this causal rendering fits extremely well to both the immediate context of this passage and argument of Ephesians. By rendering this preposition as causal the focus remains trained upon the works of God as these works relate to God’s provision for salvation. What seems to create hesitation in accepting ἐπὶ with the dative as anything other than purpose is the assumed damage this exegetical move would do to theological issues involving Christian sanctification and the inevitability of good works in the lives of those who are God’s “workmanship.” As to the various interpretive traditions and any damages incurred to these traditions by making a move, we will address in a third section of this article.

Regardless of what side of the justification/sanctification discussion one resides, we should all concede that exegesis and theological presuppositions should coexist cooperatively informing each other. As we have already stated, assuming a translation other than purpose for this prepositional phrase does not negate the responsibility of believers to engage in good works. Yet, by maintaining one’s focus upon God’s gracious provisions for salvation and spiritual life our attention is fixed upon the purpose for God’s “good works” in Christ. God’s purpose is identified by the final clause at the conclusion of 2:10. The ἵνα clause, namely, ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν states the purpose for what God has accomplished in Christ. The stated purpose for God’s re-creative activities in Christ on behalf of mankind is that the redeemed would live their lives “in (perhaps ‘by’) God’s good works in Christ.” It is in Christ that God has provided the “life” that makes Christian living possible (consider Ephesians 4:15-16). It is the new creation (God’s good works) and our union with the “life-giving Spirit,” Jesus Christ (see 1 Corinthians 15: 44), that the divine provisions to live the life anticipated under the New Covenant becomes possible. By maintaining that the “good works” are what God has prepared beforehand in and through Christ we discover the foundation for Christian life and the purpose for God’s riches in Christ. Those re-created “in Christ” have this

⁵³ Paul regularly expresses aim or purpose with prepositional phrases using εἰς, see Philippians 1:11 “for God’s glory”; Romans 8:15, “unto [for] fear”; Ephesians 1:5; 1:12; 1:14; or by using εἰς τὸ and the infinitive, see Ephesians 1:12; 1:18.

dynamic union (God's good work prepared beforehand) as the basis for "life." This "life" is God's doing, His new creation. This life is in Christ. This life is Christ (Colossians 3:4). And, as the reader will soon be informed (ch 4—6), this "life" is by the Spirit. The particulars of Ephesians 2:10 should be understood to maintain Paul's emphasis upon the glorious good works of the Heavenly Father through Christ on behalf of the redeemed. The "saved" are His masterwork, having been created in Christ Jesus on the basis of good works, which God prepared beforehand, for the purpose that the redeemed might have the capability for spiritual life. Thus we find that by taking ἐπὶ with the dative case to communicate causality ("on the basis of") the passage maintains both Paul's intended focus upon God's gracious provisions in and through Christ as well as giving definitive substance to the purpose clause at the close of the passage.

Theology

A final question asks, "What would this passage tell us if ἐπὶ was not construed to be telic?" This final question concerns any interpretive consequences in replacing the familiar, but obscure rendering "for" with the more usual and expected translation "on," "upon," "on the basis of," or "because." In preparing to answer this question perhaps a brief excursion into the interpretive tradition behind this passage might be helpful.

A brief interpretive history behind Ephesians 2:10

At least since the writings of Augustine⁵⁴ an accepted understanding of the prepositional phrase under consideration in Ephesians 2:10 has been 'purpose.' This tradition can be found in Augustine's *A Treatise On Grace And Free Will*. In this work Augustine addresses questions arising from his struggle with the ideas that eternal life is presented as both a free gift and a reward for good works.⁵⁵ Augustine writes

This question, then seems to me to be of no means capable of solution, unless we understand that even those good works of ours, which are recompensed with eternal life, belong to the grace of God, because of what is said by the Lord Jesus: "Without me ye can do nothing." And the apostle himself, after saying, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast;" saw, of course, the possibility that men would think from this statement that good works are not necessary to those who believe, but that faith alone suffices for them; and again, the possibility of men's boasting of their good works, as if they were of themselves capable of performing them. To meet, therefore, the opinions on both sides, he immediately added, "For we are

⁵⁴ Augustine's works may well reflect his understanding derived from the Latin version of Scripture. In a brief perusal of the *Novae Vulgatae Bibliorum Sacrorum Editioni* we find that Ephesians 2:10 reads, "*creati in Christo Iesu in opera bona, quae praeparavit Deus...*" The Latin preposition in should not be taken to communicate purpose.

⁵⁵ Aurelius Augustin, *A Treatise On Grace And Free Will*, in *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, vol. v, Philip Schaff, ed., *Saint Augustin: Anti-Pelagian Writings* Robert Ernest Wallis and Benjamin B. Warfield, trans. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 451.

His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”⁵⁶

Augustine’s present interpretive influences should not be underestimated. Through the writings and influence of John Calvin, Augustinian traditions continue.⁵⁷ John Calvin, being informed by Augustine, perpetuates many of Augustine’s conclusions about evidential grace. Calvin’s use of Ephesians 2:10 to explain the relationship of grace and works also reflects and continues Augustine’s theology. Calvin insists, “He [Paul] means by these words that all parts of good works from their first impulse belong to God.”⁵⁸ Relating his view to the Augustinian tradition, Calvin continues

As Augustine teaches, grace precedes every good work; while will does not go before as its leader but follows after as its attendant...For while Augustine on several occasions says that the Lord anticipates an unwilling man that he may will, and follows a willing man that he may not will in vain, yet he makes God himself wholly the Author of good works.⁵⁹

The interpretive tradition, for our purposes, moves from Augustinian thoughts about “free grace”⁶⁰ through Calvin’s *Institutes*. On today’s theological landscape, Calvin’s interpretive influences upon Christian thought need no documentation. Today, writers from the entire spectrum of theology continue to wrestle with tensions between free grace and evidential works. Without exception the interpretive trajectory of Augustine through Calvin continues to inform this struggle. Ephesians 2:10, and especially one particular prepositional phrase, continues to be a centerpiece in the debate.

But suppose for a moment that ἐπὶ with the dative did not indicate purpose. What would Ephesians 2:10 communicate if ἐπὶ with the dative was translated “upon,” or “on the basis of”? To answer this question we have limited our discussion to three basic implications of a causal force to this prepositional phrase. The first implication is negative. Understanding ἐπὶ with the dative as causal diffuses (but does not eliminate) the emphasis about the believer’s evidential and, for some, necessary good works. Second, and positively, understanding ἐπὶ with the dative as causal continues the author’s

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Joseph T. Lienhard, “Calvin, John (1509-64),” in, *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, Allan D. Fitzgerald, general editor (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 116-21. Lienhard concludes his article with these words, “Catholics who have learned to read Aquinas first and then discover Augustine will be struck immediately by the paradoxical fact, that, although Augustine is a good deal more remote in terms of years, his mind is incomparably closer to ours. He is noticeably a modern thinker. A reason why we instantly recognize in the mind of Augustine a mind similar to our own is that via Calvin our minds are, to an astonishing degree, the progeny of Augustine’s.” Ibid. 120.

⁵⁸Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.6.

⁵⁹Ibid., 2.3.7.

⁶⁰Aurelius Augustin, *On the Spirit and the Letter*, in *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, vol. v, Philip Schaff, ed., *Saint Augustin: Anti-Pelagian Writings* Robert Ernest Wallis and Benjamin B. Warfield, trans. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 93. “Now, having duly considered and weighed all these circumstances and testimonies, we conclude that a man is not justified by the precepts of a holy life, but by faith in Jesus Christ,-- in a word, not by the law of works, but by the law of faith; not by the letter, but by the spirit; not by means of deeds, but by free grace.” Ibid.

concentration upon God's works with respect to salvation. Finally, in reconsidering the use of this preposition as causal, the purpose clause ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν, which does address the believer's lifestyle, identifies the purpose for God's good works in Christ, namely, the spiritual life of the redeemed finds its sustenance on the basis of the divine provisions (God's good works) in the New Covenant.

Diffusing the discussion about grace and works

So much has the Augustinian-Calvinist tradition influenced today's theological landscape that regardless of one's theological discipline, authors surveyed, without exception, refer to Ephesians 2:10 according to this interpretive tradition.⁶¹ Discussions about God's sovereignty and the believer's good works 'grace' many literary pages as scholars, shaped by the telic tradition, attempt to explain this passage. Citing one example, Alan Stanley writes

Augustine rightly distinguishes between pre-conversion and post-conversion works. No NT writer ever says that the latter do not save only the former (see Augustine on Eph 2:8-10). ...All humanity will be subject to judgment vis-à-vis eternal salvation (see esp. Matt 25:31-46). In the last analysis the decision as to who is saved will be made not on the basis of faith but works. Though we must remember *once again* the origin of these works—God's grace. Hence at judgment time God will indeed crown not so much our works but His own gifts.⁶² [Italics are Stanley's]

⁶¹Theological journals surveyed included *Trinity Theological Journal*; *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*; *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*; and, *Asbury Theological Journal*. Only a few examples are needed. All references to Ephesians 2:10 shared the same basic perspective. Brenda B. Colijn, "The Three Tenses of Salvation in Paul's Letters," [ATJ 22 (1990)] 30-42, p. 30. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do' (2:10). Although Paul emphasizes that works play no part in believers' past-tense salvation accomplished through Christ, he stresses that works play an integral part in the present." William G. Bjork, "A Critique of Zane Hodges' The Gospel Under Siege: A Review Article," JETS 30:4 (December 1987) 457-67. 458. "The one who is truly saved will possess a living faith that produces works of righteousness. These works do not earn a right standing with God but exhibit it before people. On this point both James and Paul agreed, as Acts 26:20; Rom 2:5-11; Eph 2:8-10; Gal 5:6; Titus 3:5, 8, 14 demonstrate." Robert Wilken, "A Surrejoinder to William D. Watkin's Rejoinder to My Critique of A House United?" [JOTGES 8:2 (Autumn 95)], 25-39; p. 34. "Believers are called to holiness (1 Pet 1:16). One of the reasons God has saved us is so that we will glorify Him by producing good works (Eph 2:8-10)," John D. Harvey, "The 'With Christ' Motif In Paul's Thought," [JETS 35:3 (September 1992)] 329-40; "God quickened us with Christ, he raised us with him, he seated us with him in heaven. From a perspective focused primarily on the future in 1 Thessalonians, Paul has moved to a perspective focused primarily on the past in Ephesians. One thing, however, remains the same: Both future anticipation and past participation have an impact on the present. Ephesians 2:4-6 cannot be divorced from 2:10, where Paul reminds his readers that along with quickening, raising and seating them God has prepared good works for them as well. The believer may be seated with Christ in heaven, but he is also living for Christ on earth." Ibid. 337.

⁶²Stanley, Did Jesus Teach Salvation by Works?, 321.

Curiously, Anthony B. Badger, writing from a free grace perspective, while discussing the problems certain passages create in adding “conditions” to salvation, also maintains the telic tradition of Ephesians 2:10. Badger states

The problem is that traditionally, evangelicals have not properly understood the passages in their context, nor have they distinguished the terms discussed above to obtain their correct meaning. But a successful session before Christ is not foreign to the Scriptures and such successful sessions before Christ ought to certainly be conditioned upon the obedience and faithfulness of His own. After all, believers are said to have been “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). These exhortations or warnings to believers take into account that the believer will not perform/obey automatically in this regard. It places the responsibility for growth, obedience, and discipleship directly on the child of God and doesn’t rely on God’s supernatural intervention to make sure the believer perseveres.⁶³

Certainly, most, including this author, would agree that ‘one prepositional phrase does not a theological position make.’ Understanding ἐπὶ with the dative here to something other than telic does not satisfy the discussion. However, in analyzing the use of ἐπὶ with the dative we might consider that Paul, rather than introducing (or even resolving) the tensions between the free gift and the responsibility to do good, continues his focus upon *God’s good works* as those works that have provided for and accomplished man’s salvation in Christ. Paul, in our estimation is not entering into the debate with this passage. The normal sense of ἐπὶ with the dative is “on,” “upon,” “because of,” or “on the basis of.” Taken in this way this prepositional phrase gathers together all the gracious works mentioned (i.e., 1:3—2:6) and declares them to be the “basis” for the Christian life. The normal reading of ἐπὶ with the dative delays (not dismisses) the discussion about the relationship of faith and works and relocates this discussion in the purpose clause at the end of this passage.

A continued focus on the works of the Father

To this point in Ephesians Paul presents God’s gracious provisions necessary for the salvation of mankind. In the verses immediately preceding our text in question, Paul concludes that there isn’t anything we can do to provide for, improve upon, or earn this salvation, 2:8-9. The affirmation in 2:8-10 forms a summary exhortation, of sorts, implied by what has already been written. Paul has told the Ephesians that it is God who has chosen them, 1:4. It is God who has predestined their adoption, 1:5. It is the grace of God that has provided Christ as their redemption, even the forgiveness of sins, 1:7. It is God who has revealed His purposes in Christ and who works everything according to the counsel of His will, 1:10-11. God sealed the believer with the Holy Spirit, 1:14. God regenerated those dead in trespasses in sin, 2:4-5. God has raised believers with Christ and He has seated the regenerate in heavenly places, 2:5-6. We are His inheritance, 1:17, and, as Paul summarily explains, the saved are God’s masterwork, 2:10. By God’s grace,

⁶³Anthony B. Badger, “TULIP: A Free Grace Perspective Part 5: Perseverance of the Saints,” *JOTGES* 18:35 (Autumn 2005), 39.

not of ourselves, we have been created in Christ Jesus. This new creation, both individually and corporately, (cf. 2:11-22), exists “*because of* His good works which He prepared beforehand.” The context seems to insist that this summary explanation leads the reader to reflect upon all that God has done on his behalf. How we understand the free gift of salvation and the responsibility of the Christian to do good works should be unpacked from the only purpose/result clause in this passage, ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν. Taking ἐπὶ with the dative as causal maintains Paul’s emphasis and trajectory upon God’s “good” salvific works in providing the basis for the life of His people.

Relocating the foundation for the spiritual life of the Christian

The New Covenant inaugurated by Jesus Christ changed the potential for human spirituality forever. Many Old Testament prophets spoke of a day when God’s people would have all their transgressions forgiven, Jeremiah 31:34; Ezekiel 36:25; a day in which the redeemed would have a new spirit; a day in which God’s law would be written upon their hearts; and, a day characterized by the indwelling presence of God’s Spirit, Jeremiah 31:33-34; Ezekiel 36:25-26. These prophets spoke about a new covenant. Unlike the old covenant that was restricted to the abilities of human flesh (Romans 8:3), this new covenant would be characterized by a dynamic relationship with God and by the divinely given ability to obey God’s statutes, Ezekiel 36:27. For Israel, the primary object of God’s redemptive love in the prophetic contexts, this new covenant would also usher in a time of full national restoration, Ezekiel 37:24-28. For the believer, since Pentecost, the New Covenant represents a new life in Christ by the Spirit.

As Ephesians chapter two unfolds we discover that the New Covenant spirituality promised in the prophets has already begun. Robert H. Suh correctly observes,

[T]he gracious saving action of God lies at the heart of both Ezek 37:1-10 and Eph 2:1-10. The focus of both passages is not the dead status of sinful people, but rather the divine work of granting new life to his people, that is, God’s decisive action of recreation for his people.⁶⁴

God has, in Christ, on the basis of His own good works, provided redemption from Adam’s sin. This redemption is that which the Law of Moses could never accomplish or provide (consider Hebrews 10:4). God’s “good works prepared beforehand” in Christ are now the basis for spiritual life. The selecting process (election), the status of heir (adoption), the forgiveness of sin (redemption), the indwelling Guarantee (the Holy Spirit), and the regenerative life from the dead have all been accomplished. These divine “good-work” provisions graciously supply the Ephesian Christians the *basis* for true spirituality. The final clause (no pun intended) of Ephesians 2:10, which expresses “a distinct purpose conceived as the aim of the action indicated in

⁶⁴Robert H. Suh, “The Use of Ezekiel 37 In Ephesians 2,” [*JETS* 50:4 (December 2007) p. 726. Suh further observes, “In Ezekiel 37 this new creation from death to life anticipates its final fulfillment in the messianic age, whereas in Ephesians 2 it is depicted to have been already brought about through the redemptive work of Christ. Contrary to the life beforehand, which was marred by sin, the new creation brings about a perfect restoration and redemption.” Ibid.

the principal verb,⁶⁵ informs us about the purpose behind God's gracious acts on our behalf. This purpose is life!

As the final three chapters of Ephesians indicate, Christian spirituality is lived as the Spirit enlivens the Christian with the life of Christ. Paul's prayer closing chapter three, emphasizing the inner work of the Holy Spirit, introduces us to the dynamic reality of the Christian life. Ephesians four continues, informing us that the gracious gifts from Christ equip the saints to "grow up into Him, who is the Head, into Christ." Referring again to God's recreative activity we discover that Christian spirituality requires one to put on the "new creation that has been created after the likeness of God," (4:24 cp. w. 2:10). Chapters five and six indicate that it is only by the fullness of the Holy Spirit that the Christian and Christian community can experience and express fellowship, worship, gratitude, and servant-love that directly impacts marriage, family, and working out of social relationships (in this instance slave and master). Finally, God's mighty power becomes the stated means for believers to resist the schemes of the adversary, Ephesians 6:10. God's armor, only possible by being "strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might" is probably best understood as the reference to a godly life of righteousness, peace, faith, and hope, 6:10-17. The spiritual life ("walk"⁶⁶ in 2:10) expected of the Christian is now possible because of God's "good works prepared beforehand." God's good works, His provisions in and through Christ by the Spirit, represent the works in which we should walk. The works are what God has accomplished for us in Christ. The purpose for God's gracious provisions in Christ is life and the expression of this life through us. By taking ἐπὶ with the dative as causal Ephesians 2:10 specifically locates (ἐν αὐτοῖς) the divine provisions in Christ as the sphere in which the Christian can live for

⁶⁵H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto, Canada: The Macmillan Company, 1957), 283.

⁶⁶Suh, "Ezekiel 37 and Ephesians 2," Suh provides the following discussion linking this last clause in Ephesians 2:10 to the New Covenant language of Ezekiel. In doing so, Suh correctly identifies the purpose for God's graciousness in and through Christ, namely, spiritual life. "*Walking in the way of the Lord* (Ezek 37:24/Eph 2:10). Περιπατέω ("walking") in a figurative sense denotes walk of life (i.e. the conduct of one's life, with a strong moral overtone). The verb occurs about 95 times in the NT of which its figurative use is found mainly in the Pauline Epistles (Rom 8:4; 1 Cor 3:3; 2 Cor 5:7-9; 10:3; Gal 5:16; 1 Thess 2:12; 4:1; 2 Thess 3:6) and Johannine writings (John 11:9-10; 12:35-36; 1 John 1:6-7; 4:11, 19; 2 John 4, 6; 3 John 3-4). The corresponding Hebrew word הָלַךְ ("to walk"), as used in Ezek 37:24b, bears the same figurative meaning. When used figuratively, the word appears in Qal, Piel, and Hiphil throughout the OT, and often it accompanies the preposition Vb (Lev 18:4; Deut 8:6; 13:5; 30:16; Judg 2:22; 1 Kgs 3:3) as in Ezek 37:24b, describing the community and individual living in obedience or disobedience to the law that God has prescribed for them. In the περιπατέω is also used in a figurative manner to denote the same meaning (2 Kgs 20:3; Eccl 11:9). In Ezek 37:24b the LXX employs the word πορεύομαι rather than περιπατέω. This, however, is understandable when one observes the LXX'S preference for πορεύομαι rather than περιπατέω. In the LXX the word περιπατεῖν appears less frequently, and the notion of conducting one's way of life is more frequently expressed with the verb πορεύομαι (Deut 8:6; 10:12; 1 Kgs 3:14; Ps 119:1; Isa 33:15; Jer 7:23; Prov 28:6).

"The LXX, taking the simple conjunction *waw* of the MT in the beginning of the triad of expressions (...וַיְהִי כִּשְׁמֹעַ) as carrying a telic force, employs ὅτι to express purpose. Ephesians 2:10 keeps in line with the LXX of Ezek 37:24b by placing ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν in a purpose clause, yet with the conjunction ἵνα rather than ὅτι, probably because ἵνα was used more frequently to express purpose. Ephesians 2:10 is thus saying that believers are made new in Jesus so that they might walk in good works, while Ezek 37:24 states that the future Davidic Ruler will be made prince so that Israel might walk in God's ordinances and keep his statutes." Ibid.

God. By taking ἐπὶ with the dative as causal we lose nothing of the doctrines we may hold sacred (e.g., inevitable works by grace, or, the free and resistible responsibility of the believer to faithfully follow Christ) but gain an entirely new appreciation for and understanding of the provisions God has made in Christ by the Spirit for Christian living.

Concluding thoughts

While translating Ephesians in preparation for an evening course the appearance of ἐπὶ with the dative in Ephesians 2:10 caught my attention. My immediate impression was one of curiosity. This curiosity led to an investigation of portions of the massive materials available that shed light about this preposition. This investigation has led to the conviction that we should consider replacing the traditional and extremely rare telic understanding of ἐπὶ with the dative with the very common causal nuance. Understanding ἐπὶ with the dative as causal not only relates best to the vast grammatical data about this preposition, but carefully continues the argument of Ephesians drawing the readers' attention even more keenly to all that God has done for mankind in providing for salvation and spiritual life.