

Englishman's Greek

Chapter 4

PRONOUNS

A **pronoun** is a word used **instead of a noun**. Without pronouns our language would be extremely tedious and monotonous!

Consider this sentence: John went to the library and he borrowed a book which he later gave to his brother who read it and who enjoyed it so much he wished he could keep it!

Without the use of pronouns the above sentence would need to be re-written as follows: John went to the library and John borrowed a book, the book John later gave to John's brother, the brother read the book and the brother enjoyed the book so much the brother wished the brother could keep the book! How thankful we should be for pronouns!

Every pronoun represents (takes the place of) a noun. To correctly interpret the Bible, we often must identify the noun (the antecedent) which is represented by the pronoun.

Guidelines for Selecting the Correct Antecedent

1. Usually the antecedent is obvious.

2. If the antecedent is not easily determined then...

- a) List the possibilities.
- b) Use common sense and ask yourself what makes the best sense.
- c) Study the context carefully, especially the preceding verses.
- d) Make sure your choice makes good sense theologically and doctrinally.
- e) Follow the **rule of simplicity**. Pronouns are used not to confuse but to simplify. The writer used a pronoun because he assumed that you could figure out the antecedent!
- f) The **nearest antecedent** is often but not always the correct one.

Examples and Exercises

1. 2 Corinthians 5:21. List the pronouns and identify the antecedent of each.
2. Psalm 110:1. List the pronouns and identify the antecedent of each.

3. Matthew 1:16--"of whom." Why is this theologically significant?
4. Matthew 3:11. Who is the Baptizer?
5. John 1:3. Who made all things? What is the nearest antecedent?
6. John 5:24. On Whom should we believe?
7. Romans 1:2. What did God promise before?
8. Romans 4:3. Identify the pronoun "it." Can you find a verse in the context which would help with this identification?
9. Romans 8:26. What is the antecedent of "itself"? Is this a good translation? (Is the Holy Spirit a Person or an "it"?)
10. Romans 10:18. Whose words? Compare Psalm 19.
11. 1 Cor. 2:10 What has God revealed to us?
12. Ephesians 1:6-7. Who has made us accepted (highly favored)? In Whom do we have redemption?
13. Ephesians 1:14--"which." Is this a good translation?
14. Colossians chapter 1--identify the antecedents of the following pronouns:

"which" (v.6)	"who" (v.8)	"who" (v.13)
"whom" (v.14)	"who" (v.15)	"him" (v.16)
"which" (v.27)	"whom" (v.28)	"which" (Col. 3:5)

15. 1 Thessalonians 4:15 (compare 1 Cor. 15:51) "we" How does this pronoun illustrate Paul's belief in the imminent return of the Lord Jesus?
16. 1 Thessalonians 5:3-10. The key to understanding the meaning of these verses is found in the use of pronouns. Note the contrast between "we" and "they." The unsaved are described by what pronoun? The saved are described by what pronoun?
17. 1 Timothy 2:15 "she" "they" Note: This unusual change from singular to plural will be explained in Chapter 10 (inverse parallelism or chiasmus).
18. Identify the antecedents:
 - Heb. 1:2 "he"
 - Heb. 1:3 "who"
 - Heb. 1:6 "him"
 - Heb. 1:11 "they, thou"

19. 1 John 1:1. "which" refers to what or to whom?

1 John 4:4. "he...he" Who does the first "he" refer to and who does the second "he" refer to?

1 John 5:20. Who is the true God?

20. 1 Timothy 3:16.

In this verse there is a textual variant. Some manuscripts have "God was manifested in the flesh." This is reflected in the KJV translation. Other manuscripts have "Who was manifested in the flesh." Is there much difference between the two? For the sake of argument, let's assume that "Who was manifested in the flesh" is the correct reading. The pronoun "who" refers to whom? [Go to verse 15. What is the nearest antecedent? Isn't Paul talking about "the living God"] Thus, if we fill in the antecedent, it would be saying, "**The living God** was manifested in the flesh." Is this very different from the KJV? In the KJV the fact that it is talking about God is clearly stated. In the other variant ("Who") the fact that it is talking about God is clearly implied since the pronoun refers to the living God. The deity of Christ is affirmed or applied either way. How foolish it would be to say that a mere man was manifested in the flesh! Are mere men are in the flesh so such hardly needs to be stated!

A KEY PASSAGE

A key passage where the identification of the antecedent of the pronoun is crucial is Ephesians 2:8. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and **that** not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God." Does the pronoun "that" refer to faith or to something else? This is a key theological question because many teach that this passage is saying that FAITH is the gift of God. In other words, they are identifying FAITH as the antecedent of the pronoun "that."

Some might argue that "faith" is the nearest antecedent: "For by grace are ye saved through **faith** and **that** not of yourselves" (Eph. 2:8). It is certainly true that "faith" is the nearest antecedent, but since there are a great number of cases in the New Testament where the nearest antecedent is not the correct one, we should be very careful before applying this "rule." There are other far more important considerations.

Here is the correct rule that Greek grammar demands be followed: **Pronouns agree with their antecedent in gender and number. Their case is determined by their use in their own clause.**

This rule argues forcefully against the identification of "faith" as the antecedent because "faith" does not agree with the pronoun in gender. The pronoun "that" (verse 8) is **NEUTER**, and the word "faith" (verse 8) is **FEMININE**. If Paul wanted his readers to understand the pronoun as referring to "faith," then there is no reason why he could not have used the feminine form of the pronoun [which would have been the Greek word **αυτη**]. This would have settled it. If Paul had used this feminine pronoun then it would be very clear and obvious that FAITH is the gift of God. Paul did **not** use the feminine pronoun.

Why then did Paul use the neuter pronoun? What is the antecedent? If Paul had wanted to refer to the idea contained in the main verb (the idea of being **SAVED**), then it would have been perfectly normal and appropriate for him to use the neuter gender. It would have been very natural for Paul to say, "For by grace **ARE YE SAVED** through faith and this thing that I'm talking about, namely salvation, is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God..." If Paul had wanted the pronoun to refer to the idea contained in the verb, the neuter form would be the one to use.

We need to carefully think through Ephesians 2:8-9 in order to correctly identify the antecedent. We must ask, "What is Paul talking about in Ephesians 2:8-9? What is his main point?" It is obvious that Paul is talking about HOW A PERSON IS SAVED. The main idea of the sentence is found in the verb "ARE YE SAVED" [or "YE ARE SAVED"]. How is a person saved? Ephesians 2:8-9 answers this key question. Salvation is by grace. Salvation is through faith. Salvation is not of yourselves. Salvation is the GIFT OF GOD. Salvation is not of works. Paul is not giving a dissertation on faith, but he is giving a brief dissertation on salvation. SALVATION is his main subject. Faith is mentioned because you cannot answer the question "HOW IS A PERSON SAVED?" without mentioning faith. A person is saved by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31). God's gracious gift of salvation must be personally received, and it is received by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

For a much more detailed analysis of Ephesians 2:8 and whether FAITH or SALVATION is the gift that Paul was referring to, see our document entitled, What is the "Gift of God" in Ephesians 2:8?

ASSIGNMENT

1. Solve the theological problem of 2 Timothy 2:26 "his will" (whose will?).

List the two possibilities and choose correct antecedent and give your reasons for your choice.

2. List all the pronouns in 1 Peter 2:21-3:7 and identify the antecedent of each.

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