

Is Faith a Gift from God According to Ephesians 2:8?
A Grammatical Analysis
by John F. Hart

Preface

In this article, the grammatical pattern of Ephesians 2:8 is examined to determine if the clause “and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God” has any reference to the word “faith” in the preceding clause. It is widely agreed that grammatically *touto* (“this”) cannot refer directly to “faith.” Yet some theologians and commentators continue to hold that the clause “and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” relates conceptually to “faith” or to the act of believing. An examination of similar Greek constructions in the rest of the New Testament leads to the conclusion that *touto* (“this”) has as its only antecedent the concept found in the main verb(s) of the passage. Therefore, it is totally inappropriate to apply the word “this” (*touto*) in Ephesians 2:8–9 to the noun “faith” or to an implied act of believing.

Introduction

It is sometimes argued that people are so “dead in . . . transgressions and sins” (Ephesians 2:1) that they are incapable of responding to God. As a result, God must give them faith as a gift. Ephesians 2:8–9 is one of the primary passages claimed as evidence for such theology.¹ The phrase of importance to this viewpoint is found in v. 8b: “and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (NIV).² The issue is simply this: does the phrase “and *this* not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (italics added) refer to “faith” in the previous clause? While denying that Ephesians 2:8 teaches that faith is given as a divine gift, Stott nevertheless remarks, “Theologically, this is true. We must never think of salvation as a kind of transaction between God and us in which he contributes grace and we contribute faith. For we were dead, and had to be quickened before we could believe. No, Christ’s apostles clearly teach elsewhere that saving faith too is God’s gracious gift.”³ R. C. Sproul states,

¹ Gregory P. Sapaugh, “Is Faith a Gift? A Study of Ephesians 2:8,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 7 (Spring 1994): 31–43, supplies some contextual background that is not handled here. My article broadly agrees with his grammatical perspective, as well as handles some additional arguments by the “faith-is-a-gift” theology and further clarifies the grammatical details for a more comprehensive proof that Eph. 2:8 does not support the “faith-is-a-gift” interpretation.

² Unless stated otherwise, the NKJV will be used. However, since the NIV uses the word “this” for *touto* in Eph. 2:8b, it will be used for clarity when this verse is cited.

³ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians: God’s New Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 83. In a footnote after this statement, Stott cites Acts 18:27 and Phil. 1:29 as proof of the “faith-is-a-gift” theology. Although the scope of this

“Following Paul’s lead in Ephesians, Reformed theology teaches that faith itself is a gift given to the elect. God himself creates the faith in the believer’s heart. God fulfills the necessary condition for salvation, and he does so without condition.”⁴

As a starting point, it must be admitted that a teaching is not theologically true unless it can be exegetically established in Scripture.⁵ Evangelicals universally embrace the theological truth that salvation is a gift from God. This is grounded in repeated Scriptures: John 4:10; Romans 3:24; 4:4; 5:15, 16, 17; 6:23; Hebrews 6:4; James 1:17, 18; Revelation 21:6; 22:17⁶; and the text under consideration in this article. The words for “gift” (δωρεά [dōrea], δωρεάν [dōrean], χάρισμα [charisma]) are used of spiritual gifts (Romans 1:11; 12:6; 1 Corinthians 1:7; 12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6; 1 Peter 4:10) and of other God-given privileges or purposes (Romans 11:29; 1 Corinthians 7:7). Even “grace” is mentioned as a gift given by God (Ephesians 3:7; 4:7; cf. Romans 12:3, 6; 15:15; 1 Corinthians 1:4; 3:10; 2 Corinthians 8:1; Galatians 2:9; Ephesians 1:6; 3:8; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). But in stark contrast, “faith” is never mentioned unmistakably in Scripture as a gift from God. Given this significant silence, it is theologically suspect to argue that faith is a gift that God bestows on the elect at the point of salvation. The question posed in this article is, Can faith be viewed grammatically as a gift from God in Ephesians 2:8–9?

The Interpretive Options

There are broadly four options for the grammar and theology of the verse. Wallace nicely summarizes these: “This is the most debated text in terms of the antecedent of the demonstrative pronoun, *touto*. The standard

article is limited to Eph. 2:8, the following short comments are appropriate concerning the two verses noted by Stott. Acts 18:27 does not contain the words “faith,” “gift,” or synonymous terms and therefore does not explicitly support Stott’s thesis. Phil. 1:29 means only that God has graciously given us the privilege and opportunity of believing on His Son and being eternally forgiven. For a view that is similar to Stott’s, see Arthur G. Patzia, *Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon*, NIBCOT, ed. W. Ward Gasque, vol. 10 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990; electronic text, OakTree Software, Version 1.5).

⁴ R. C. Sproul, *Grace Unknown: The Heart of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 156.

⁵ Roy L. Aldrich, “The Gift of God,” *BSac* 122 (July 65): 253, states, “Many passages, and whole books of the New Testament, are written to prove salvation is a gift of God and not the reward for good works. But where are the passages to prove that saving faith is the gift of God? Is not this theory a deduction from the doctrine of election rather than an induction from the teaching of the Word?”

⁶ See Rev. 21:6 and 22:17 in REB and NRSV.

interpretations include: (1) ‘grace’ as antecedent, (2) ‘faith’ as antecedent, (3) the concept of a grace-by-faith salvation as antecedent, and (4) καὶ τοῦτο [*kai touto*] having an adverbial force with no antecedent (‘and especially’).⁷

Occasionally it is argued that the word “this” (Greek, *touto*) points back to the word “faith” in the same verse (Wallace’s second option).⁸ This is impossible grammatically. Those who are more conversant with Greek point out that the demonstrative pronoun in verse 8 cannot refer back to the word “grace” or to the word “faith” because of the nature of the Greek construction. Wallace again succinctly describes the impossibility of these two viewpoints: “The first and second options suffer from the fact that τοῦτο [*touto*, ‘this’] is neuter while χάριτι [*chariti*, ‘grace’] and πίστεως [*pisteōs*, ‘faith’] are feminine.” He then presents the counterresponse by the adherents of these views: “Some have argued that the gender shift causes no problem because (a) there are other examples in Greek literature in which a neuter demonstrative refers back to a noun of a different gender, and (b) the τοῦτο [*touto*, ‘this’] has been attracted to the gender of δῶρον [*dōron*, ‘gift’], the predicate nominative.”⁹

These arguments are inadequate for several reasons. First, extrabiblical Greek examples are rare and require extended individualized explanations while at the same time no clear NT examples can be produced.¹⁰ Second, the construction of Ephesians 2:8 does not parallel the normal patterns for gender shifts in the NT. Gender shifts in the NT almost always find the pronoun caught between an antecedent and a predicate nominative that differ in gender.¹¹

The third alternative interpretation is found plausible by Wallace because *touto* often has a conceptual antecedent. The fourth view, the adverbial use of *touto*, focuses on the verb of the sentence rather than any noun. It has no antecedent. The meaning would revolve around an intensification, and the word would be translated “and at that, and especially.”¹² Applying this view, Wallace translates Ephesians 2:8 this way: “and [you are saved] especially not

⁷ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 334.

⁸ Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1–3*, vol. 34 of Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 225.

⁹ Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 334.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 334 n. 51.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 334–35. For clarification, we include here one of the examples Wallace uses in his explanation. Matt. 13:38 reads, “the good seed [neuter, Gr. *sperma*], these [masculine plural of *touto*] are the sons [masculine, Gr. *huiōi*] of the kingdom.” The pronoun “these” has a neuter antecedent (“seed”), but is attracted to the masculine predicate nominative, “sons” (*ibid.*, 334).

¹² This option is held by BDAG, s.v. “*houtos*” (1, b, γ).

by your own doing; it is the gift of God.”¹³ In a footnote showing how the third and fourth options work out in the uses of the phrase *kai touto* in the NT, he states:

For what it is worth, an examination of all 22 instances of καὶ τοῦτο [*kai touto*] in the NT (not including Eph 2:8) yielded the following results: 14 or 15 had a conceptual referent (e.g., Luke 3:20; 5:6; John 11:28; 18:38; John [*sic*] 20:20; Acts 7:60; 1 Cor 7:37; Phil 1:9; Heb 6:3 [Phil 1:28 was probable]); four were adverbial (Rom 13:11; 1 Cor 6:6, 8; 3 John 5 [Heb 11:12 is listed by BAGD as adverbial, but the plural is used (καὶ ταῦτα [*kai tauta*]), following more closely the Attic idiom]); three involved the same gender (Luke 2:12; 13:8; 1 John 4:3); no clear examples involved different genders (though Phil 1:28 was possible).¹⁴

Wallace arrives at the following conclusion: “whether faith is seen as a gift here or anywhere else in the NT is not addressed by this [i.e., by Greek grammar]. . . . Nevertheless, syntactical considerations do tend toward one of the latter two views.”¹⁵ In Wallace’s opinion, “If faith is not meritorious, but is instead the *reception* of the gift of salvation, then it is not a gift per se. Such a view does not preclude the notion that for faith to save, the Spirit of God must initiate the conversion process.”¹⁶

Sapaugh, in his article on this issue, favors the third view, adding several theological/contextual clues that bolster the grammar. First, elsewhere one’s personal faith is addressed as the means of appropriating salvation. Romans 4:5 is an excellent example: “But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, *his* faith is accounted for righteousness” (italics added).¹⁷ References to “Abraham’s faith” (Romans 4:12, 16) or “his faith” (Romans 4:5) are used repeatedly. One should remember that this context involves Paul’s primary treatise on justification by faith. Yet there is no mention that God gave Abraham this faith. Paul also mentions at times his own personal faith without a reference to the fact that God gave it to him as a gift (“my faith,” Romans 1:12). Other references such as “your faith” or “their faith” are numerous in the NT (Matthew 9:2, 22, 29; Mark 2:5; 5:34; 10:52; Luke 5:20; 7:50; 8:25, 48; 17:19; 18:42; 22:32; Romans 1:8; 12; 3:3; 4:5, 12,

¹³ Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 335.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 335 n. 56.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 335. Yet later in his grammar, he adds, “On the one hand, this extended use of pronouns also makes them susceptible to misinterpretation. For example, in Eph 2:8 we read . . . (‘for by grace you are saved through faith; and *this* is not of yourselves’). To what does τοῦτο refer? Is it ‘grace,’ ‘faith,’ or something altogether different? The antecedent is anything but clear” (italics original). *Ibid.*, 371.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 335 n. 53.

¹⁷ Sapaugh, “Is Faith a Gift?” 40–41.

16; 1 Corinthians 2:5; 15:14, 17; 2 Corinthians 10:15; Philippians 2:17; Colossians 1:4; 2:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:8; 3:2, 5, 10; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; Philemon 6; 1 Peter 1:9, 21; 2 Peter 1:5).

Second, the phrase “[this is] not by works” in 2:9 is parallel to “and this [is] not from yourselves” in 2:8. A diagram of the verse in the NIV will be helpful in showing the parallel. Note that “this is” is added for sense in 2:9 and shows the parallel more clearly.

- 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—
and this [is] not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—
2:9 [this is] not by works, so that no one can boast.

Sapaugh notes that it would be rather meaningless if Paul were reminding his readers that faith is not by works.¹⁸ Wood writes, “To state that faith is neither of ourselves nor of works is to elaborate the obvious.”¹⁹ So the phrase “and this” (*kai touto*) cannot logically refer to faith. Sapaugh concludes that the demonstrative pronoun refers back to the entire preceding clause, “for by grace you have been saved through faith.”²⁰ This, again, is Wallace’s third option: the conceptual antecedent.

Hoehner offers an identical opinion about this verse:

The real problem is with the demonstrative pronoun, τοῦτο, “this.” Barth states, “The neuter pronoun, ‘this,’ may refer to one of three things: the ‘grace,’ the verb ‘saved,’ the noun ‘faith.’” Some commentators think that it refers to πίστειως [“faith”], the nearest preceding pronoun. A serious objection to this is that the feminine noun does not match the neuter gender of the pronoun. The same problem is raised with “grace,” a feminine noun. Some would have it refer back to ἔστε σεσωσμένοι [“you have been saved”], but again the antecedent would be a masculine participle. Furthermore, to refer back to any one of these words seems to be redundant. Rather than any particular word, it seems best to conclude that τοῦτο refers back to the preceding section. This is common, and there are numerous illustrations of such in Ephesians. For example, in 1:15 τοῦτο refers back to the contents of 1:3–14, in 3:1 it refers back to 2:11–22, and in 3:14 it refers back to 3:1–13.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ A. Skevington Wood, “Ephesians,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 37. Foulkes is of the opinion that the second part of v. 8 would need a parenthesis to maintain a “faith-is-a-gift” interpretation since v. 9 clearly refers to salvation, and not faith. Francis Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 75.

²⁰ Ibid., 39.

Therefore, in the present context, τοῦτο refers back to 2:4–8a, and more specifically to 2:8a, the concept of salvation by grace through faith.²¹

In another writing, Hoehner states the same conclusion with these words: “Thus it refers back to the *concept* of salvation (2:4–8a), whose basis is grace and means is faith. This salvation does not have its source in man (it is ‘not from yourselves’), but rather, its source is God’s grace for ‘it is the gift of God.’”²² Hoehner, like Sapaugh, is also taking Wallace’s third grammatical option, i.e., that in Ephesians 2:8 *touto* refers to a preceding concept as is true in many other occurrences of the neuter pronoun.

The Reluctance to Accept the Grammatical Conclusions

Contrary to other grammarians and expositors, O’Brien appears to hold that the grammar in Ephesians 2:8 is not against the view that τοῦτο refers to “faith.” He writes:

Some have taken *this* to refer specifically to “faith,” which immediately precedes. The point being made, then, is that the response of faith does not come from any human source but is God’s gift. This interpretation is grammatically possible, assuming that the term denotes “faith” and not Christ’s “faithfulness,” and it is consistent with Pauline teaching elsewhere (cf. Phil. 1:29). However, the context demands that this be understood of salvation by grace as a whole, including the faith (or faithfulness) through which it is received.²³

²¹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 342–43. Hoehner lists the following exegetes who are in agreement with this conclusion: Theophylact, Calvin, Alford, Abbott, Salmond, Robinson, Schlier, Gaugler, Gnlika, Schnackenburg, Bruce, Lincoln, Best, O’Brien, Muddiman, and A. T. Robertson. In my opinion, the listing of O’Brien should be modified since he holds that grammatically *touto* could refer to “faith,” but rejects this based on context. See the following paragraphs of this article.

²² Harold W. Hoehner, “Ephesians,” *Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 624 (italics original). One should note that Hoehner’s examples are not close syntactically to Eph. 2:8. Unlike 2:8b, Eph. 1:15; 3:1 and 3:14 all use *touto* in a prepositional phrase. The examples listed in the analysis below may be more parallel to Eph. 2:8b than those cited by Hoehner. Nevertheless, his analysis is valid.

²³ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar NT Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 175. In favor of the view that sees “faith” as the antecedent, O’Brien cites G. B. Caird, *Paul’s Letters from Prison: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, in the Revised Standard Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 53, and without documentation Augustine, C. Hodge, and E. K. Simpson (O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 175 n. 89). He also states (ibid., n. 90) that A. T.

Some insist that the demonstrative pronoun looks back to the entire preceding clause *while at the same time applying to some or all of its parts individually*. In this way, “faith” can still be viewed as part of the gift that God gives to us. When Paul says, “and this . . . is a gift of God,” he is referring to grace as a gift from God, salvation as a gift from God, *and* faith as a gift from God. Similarly, some trace the demonstrative pronoun back to a so-called “act of believing”—a concept resident in the noun “faith.”²⁴ MacArthur defends both of the latter approaches. He suggests that the antecedent to “this” (*touto*) in Ephesians 2:8 is the concept of believing resident in the word “faith.” He writes, “Even faith is ‘not of ourselves’; it is included in ‘the gift of God.’ Some no-lordship advocates object to this interpretation. They point out that ‘faith’ (*pistis*) is feminine, while ‘that’ (*touto*) is neuter. Grammatically, the pronoun ‘that’ has no clear antecedent. It refers not to the noun, *faith*, but more likely to the (understood) act of believing. It could possibly refer to the whole of salvation. Either way, the meaning is inescapable: Faith is God’s gracious gift.”²⁵

As MacArthur points out, the “faith-is-a-gift” perspective is relevant to the Lordship/Free Grace debate. From the Lordship perspective, the sovereign God who must give the gift of faith certifies that genuine faith produces a consistent, holy lifestyle. However, even Charles Ryrie, a Free Grace adherent, similarly includes faith in the gift of salvation described in Ephesians 2:8.²⁶ Regardless, it seems that the “faith-is-a-gift” interpretation in Ephesians 2:8 is supererogatory. To say that the demonstrative pronoun refers to the “understood act of believing” when it cannot grammatically refer to the word “faith” appears to force the text to make a theological statement that

Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1919), 157, concludes that the grammar is possible but the context weighs against such a view.

²⁴ A. R. Fausset, “Ephesians,” in Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary Critical, Experimental, and Practical on the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 404.

²⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Faith Works* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 69. Cf. also Schreiner, “In Ephesians 2:8–9, Paul says that the salvation event ‘is the gift of God’; this event includes the whole saving process of grace, faith and salvation. Scholars, of course, continue to dispute this reading, but Romans 8:30 seems to confirm that faith is a gift.” T. R. Schreiner, “Election,” *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond et al. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2000), 452.

²⁶ “And yet the whole of salvation, including faith, is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8–9).” Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation: What It Means to Believe in Jesus Christ* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989), 96.

cannot be supported exegetically or grammatically. In other words, the interpreter sidesteps the grammar and makes *touto* refer to “faith” after all. Furthermore, it simply is not true that regardless of the antecedent to *touto*, one must inescapably conclude from Ephesians 2:8 that faith is a gift from God. It can be demonstrated that *touto* refers to the “whole of salvation” *without* implying that “faith” is a gift from God. This is what the remainder of this article seeks to do.

Further Grammatical Considerations

It is so obvious that faith (or the act of believing) is not a result of works that most commentators reject this conclusion outright. But beyond this contextual clue, might the grammar be more definite? Simply stating that *touto* takes a conceptual antecedent implied in a preceding phrase or clause may lack specificity. Is the conceptual antecedent the act of believing that is resident in the word “faith” or is it the concept of a gracious salvation received through faith? When grammarians state that *touto* refers to a preceding concept, they may be implying that this concept *is primarily resident in the preceding verb or verbs*. Note Robertson’s remarks: “In Eph. 2:8 . . . there is no reference to πίστεως [“faith”] in τοῦτο, but rather to the idea of salvation in the clause before.”²⁷ Although Robertson does not say it directly, he is implying that the concept of salvation in Ephesians 2:8 is resident in the central preceding verb, “you have been saved.” The demonstrative pronoun does not relate to the preceding nouns.

The study of this grammatical pattern has isolated the use of “this” (*touto*) in the NT where its function is very similar to its function in Ephesians 2:8. This has included two factors. First, the study analyzes the places where *touto* clearly refers to an antecedent, and not postcedent. In these passages, therefore, it refers to what precedes as it does in Ephesians 2:8. In these structures, *touto* generally (but not exclusively) appears in the middle or end of a sentence, rather than at the beginning.

Second, the study examines the places where *touto* is followed by the verb “is” (*eimi*) found either in the Greek or supplied in English by necessity (a normal Greek grammatical pattern). This pattern seems to be limited to Pauline passages except for Matthew 19:26 and Acts 27:34, with the latter employing the verb *huparchō* (“is”). Ephesians 2:8 does not have the verb “is” (*eimi*), but the verb is implied and is legitimately added in translation. It might be helpful to translate the last half of verse 8 thus: “and this [*is*] not of yourselves, [*this is*] a gift from God.” The verb “is” (in italics) is supplied

²⁷ A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 4th ed. (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 704.

twice. These two factors stated above seem more crucial than an isolated study of the phrase *kai touto* (“and this”).

In examining this grammatical formation, the following conclusion can be drawn. The Greek word *touto* always has reference to the preceding clause as a whole. But *touto* especially stresses the idea resident in the nearest main verb (or verbs) of the sentence. It seems helpful to take the preceding central verb (or verbs), transform it into a noun or gerund and add it to the *touto* clause. In Ephesians 2:8, the preceding verbal idea is “saved.” “Salvation” is the corresponding noun. So it could be paraphrased, “and this salvation (which comes by grace through faith) is not of yourselves; it is a gift from God; this salvation is not a result of works, that no one should boast.” In other words, instead of taking a noun in the passage (“faith”) and reading it more verbally (“this act of believing is a gift of God”), the grammatical pattern calls for taking the verbal idea (“saved”) and reading it more nominatively (“this salvation is a gift from God”). If this grammatical insight is correct, it is totally inappropriate to apply the word “this” (*touto*) to the word “faith” or “grace.”

These grammatical conclusions become evident when we examine similar grammatical structures as given in the following charts. The paraphrase in the middle column is an attempt to show the ultimate meaning of *touto* by taking the main verb in the sentence, changing the verbal concept to a noun or gerund, and restating the point of the *touto* clause. One can easily see that this method clarifies the meaning of the *touto* clause. In the third column, it is shown that attempts to apply *touto* to a word or phrase isolated from its function in the sentence are almost always irrelevant and meaningless. These charts, then, are designed to demonstrate that *touto* in Ephesians 2:8 cannot refer to “faith” as if Paul meant to say, “this faith is a gift from God.” *Touto* can only refer back to the previously mentioned salvation that comes by grace through faith.

PATTERN # 1: <i>touto</i> (“this”) with the verb <i>eimi</i> (“is”) present in the Greek²⁸		
Verse	Paraphrase	Inappropriate Applications
Matt. 19:25–26 When His disciples heard <i>it</i> , they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” But Jesus looked at <i>them</i> and said to them, “With men <u>this</u> (<i>touto</i>) <u>is</u> impossible, but with God all things are possible.”	“with men this <i>salvation</i> is impossible.”	•There are no clear alternatives in this verse but to apply “this” (<i>touto</i>) to the verbal idea “saved” in the disciples’ question. This observation helps sustain the conclusion of this study.
Eph. 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for <u>this</u> (<i>touto</i>) <u>is</u> right. (N.B. This example is found in the same book as the text under consideration, Eph. 2:8.)	“this <i>obedience</i> [to your parents] is right”	• <i>Touto</i> cannot apply to “parents” as in “a parent is right” since parents are not always right. Nor can it naturally apply to some “act of parenting” as being right. Such an idea is foreign to the intent of the verse.
Col. 3:20 Children, obey your parents in all things, for <u>this</u> (<i>touto</i>) <u>is</u> well pleasing to the Lord.	“for this <i>obedience</i> [to your parents] is well-pleasing to the Lord. ”	• <i>Touto</i> cannot apply to “parents,” since Paul did not intend to communicate the idea that “a parent is well-pleasing to the Lord” (see Eph. 6:1 above).
1 Tim. 5:4 let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for <u>this</u> (<i>touto</i>) <u>is</u> good and acceptable before God.	“for this <i>showing</i> [of piety] and this <i>repayment</i> [to one’s parents] is acceptable in the sight of God.”	• <i>Touto</i> cannot naturally apply to the word “home” (as in “the home is acceptable before God”) or to the noun “parents.” This is not at all Paul’s point. Note that <i>touto</i> primarily relates to the nearest verbs (Gr. infinitives, “to show piety” and “to repay”), but could include the main verb “learn.” But to apply <i>touto</i> to a so-called “act of parenting” in the passage is nonsensical.

²⁸ Several verses that appear to have this grammatical pattern do not meet the criteria parallel to Eph. 2:8. E.g., when Jesus says “Take, eat; this [*touto*] is My body” (Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; cf. Mark 14:24), the neuter refers to the bread (masculine) being broken, but is attracted to the word “body” (neuter) in the predicate. See note 10 above.

PATTERN # 2: <i>touto</i> with the verb “is” (<i>eimi</i>) added (not present in the Greek)		
Verse	Paraphrase	Inappropriate Applications
Eph. 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and <u>this (<i>touto</i>) is</u> not your own doing; it is the gift of God (NRSV)	“and this <i>salvation</i> [which comes by grace through faith] is not your own doing”	•This is the text under evaluation.
Phil. 1:22a But if I live in the flesh, <u>this (<i>touto</i>) is</u> the fruit of my labour. (KJV)	“this <i>living</i> [in the flesh] is the fruit of my labor [=fruitful labor]”	• <i>Touto</i> cannot apply to “flesh” as in “the flesh is fruitful labor for me.”
1 Thess. 5:18 in everything give thanks; for <u>this (<i>touto</i>) is</u> the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.	“for this <i>thankfulness</i> [in everything] is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. ”	• <i>Touto</i> cannot individually apply to “everything” as if Paul also meant to say, “everything is God’s will for you.”
1 Cor. 6:6 But instead, one brother goes to law against another—and <u>this (<i>touto</i>) [is]</u> in front of unbelievers! (NIV)	“ and this <i>going to law</i> [against another] is in front of unbelievers.”	• <i>Touto</i> cannot apply separately to “another” as in “another is in front of unbelievers.”
1 Cor. 6:8 Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do <u>this (<i>touto</i>)</u> [lit., <i>this is</i>] to your brothers! (NIV)	“and this <i>cheating and this doing wrong</i> is against your brothers. ”	•There are no alternatives in this verse but to apply “this” to the two verbal ideas. This observation helps sustain the conclusion of this study.
1 Tim. 2:1–3 I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For <u>this is</u> good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior . . .	“this <i>making of supplications . . .</i> is good and acceptable to God.”	•The main verb in the previous verses is “make” (v. 1). “This is good and acceptable to God” could apply to “prayers,” etc., but not to “kings and all who are in authority.” God does not view all in authority as good and acceptable.
1 Pet. 2:20b But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, <u>this (<i>touto</i>) is</u> commendable before God.	“this <i>patience</i> [in doing good and suffering] is commendable before God.”	•“Do good” and “suffer” are Greek participles. <i>Touto</i> refers to the main verb, “take [it] patiently.” The point is not that doing good and suffering are commendable, but that endurance in righteous suffering is commendable.

<p>Heb. 13:17 Obey your leaders . . . for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this (<i>touto</i>) with joy and not with grief, for <u>this</u> (<i>touto</i>) <u>would be</u> unprofitable for you. (NASV)</p>	<p>“let them do this <i>keeping watch</i> [over your souls] <i>with joy</i>, for this <i>keeping watch</i> [over your souls by your leaders] <i>with grief</i> would be unprofitable for you”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The first <i>touto</i> cannot refer to “leaders” or to “souls” as in “let them do leaders with joy” (an absurd meaning). The second <i>touto</i> does not naturally apply to “grief” as in “grief would be unprofitable for you.” (The structure is more complex with two uses of <i>touto</i>.)
<p>Phil. 1:27–28 . . . [so that] I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and <u>that</u> (<i>touto</i>) [<u>is</u>] from God.</p> <p>N.B. 1:28b in the NRSV: “And <u>this is</u> God’s doing.”</p>	<p>“ and this <i>firm stand</i> [along with your striving together and inner peace] is from God.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •<i>Touto</i> cannot directly apply to “proof,” “perdition,” or “salvation,” which are all feminine. It also cannot logically apply to “adversaries” as in “adversaries are from God.” Other items may come “from God” such as salvation, but the stress in the passage is on standing firm in unity, contending for the faith, and resisting fear. The Greek main verb is “stand fast,” with “striving together,” and “[not] terrified” as modifying participles.

PATTERN # 3 *touto* with the verb “is” (*huparchō*) present in the Greek

Verse	Paraphrase	Inappropriate Applications
<p>Acts 27:34 “Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for <u>this is</u> for your survival”</p>	<p>“and this <i>taking</i> [of nourishment] is for your survival”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Here <i>touto</i> relates to the nearest verbal idea (the infinitive “to take”) rather than the initial verb (“urge”). This is expressed by forming the verb into an English gerund.

Conclusion

In Calvin's commentary on Ephesians, Bloomfield has the following editorial comment:

It has been not a little debated, among both ancient and modern commentators, to what noun τοῦτο ["this"] should be referred. Some say, to πίστεως ["faith"]; others, to χάριτι ["grace"]; though on the sense of πίστις ["faith"] they differ in their views. The reference seems, however, to be neither to the one nor to the other, but to the subject of the foregoing *clause*, salvation by grace, through faith in Christ and his gospel; a view, I find, adopted by Dr. Chandler, Dean Tucker, Dr. MacKnight, and Dr. A. Clarke. And to show that this interpretation is not a mere novelty, I need only refer the reader to Theophylact, who thus explains: Οὐ τὴν πίστιν λέγει δῶρον Θεοῦ ἀλλὰ τὸ διὰ πίστεως σωθῆναι τοῦτο δῶρόν ἐστι Θεοῦ. "He does not say that faith is the gift of God; but to be saved by faith, this is the gift of God." Such also is the view adopted by Chrysostom and Theodoret.²⁹

Calvin in his commentary on Ephesians 2:9 wrote, "And here we must advert to a very common error in the interpretation of this passage. Many persons restrict the word *gift* to faith alone. But Paul is only restating the former sentiment. His meaning is, not that faith is the gift of God, but that salvation is given to us by God, or that we obtain it by the gift of God."³⁰

Wood's conclusion is interesting.

To what does τοῦτο (*touto*, "this") refer? The neuter is compatible with διὰ πίστεως (*dia pisteōs*, "through faith") or again it might be related to a verbal notion derived from πίστις (*pistis*, "faith"). Against this, however, is the connection with οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν (*ouk ex hymōn*, "not from yourselves") and οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων (*ouk ex ergōn*, "not of works"). To state that faith is neither of ourselves nor of works is to elaborate the obvious. For these reasons most modern commentators refer καὶ τοῦτο (*kai touto*, "and this") either to ἔστε σεσωσμένοι (*este sesōsmenoi*, "you have been saved") or preferably to the complete clause (RHG, p. 1182).³¹

²⁹ Taken from the footnote on Eph. 2:9 in John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, Calvin's Commentaries, trans. William Pringle (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 21:227–28.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ A. Skevington Wood, "Ephesians," *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelien (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 11:37.

In light of the grammatical conclusions above, I question Wood's and others' reasoning that *touto* is compatible with "through faith" or might be related to a verbal idea resident in the word "faith." Yet, in his final analysis Wood is correct. Ephesians 2:8 cannot be used to support a "faith-is-a-gift" theology.

John F. Hart is professor of Bible at Moody Bible Institute, where he has taught for twenty-four years. He graduated with a Th.M. from Dallas Theological Seminary and a Th.D. from Grace Theological Seminary. His publications include several articles in the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* and a chapter on demonology in *Overcoming the World Missions Crisis*, ed. Russell Penney (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001). He resides in Northwest Indiana with his wife of thirty-two years. Dr. Hart's e-mail address is john.hart@moody.edu.