

The Quick and the Dead  
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Eph 3:14 – 15

(NA 28<sup>th</sup> ed.)

(Jub)

Τούτου χάριν κάμπτω τὰ γόνατά μου πρὸς τὸν πατέρα	For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
ἐξ οὗ πᾶσα πατριὰ ἐν οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς ὀνομάζεται	(of whom the whole family in the heavens and on earth is named)

Okay, the k and n of *knee* is sort of seen in the γ and ν of Greek. Notice that the third line has no Greek at all behind the English of the Jubilee version. Many modern translations skip this, like NIV, NASB, ESB, etc. It is a text critical problem. Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, Vaticanus, and papyrus 46 leave it out (2<sup>nd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> centuries). The majority text and some later uncials (mostly 5<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> centuries) have it in. Take your pick.

See how the Greek for “Father” (*patera*) sounds like “family” (*patria*). Some translations either gloss “fatherhood” instead of “family” (e.g. Phillips), or put that reading in a note (e.g. ESV). I am indebted to Paul Zell’s 2015 article in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* for my musings on this verse.

Glossing “all fatherhood” doesn’t seem to fit. An alternative is “every family.” But not every family on earth is Christian. After reviewing various Greek scholars, Zell concludes that *pasa* before an anarthrous noun means, “the whole.” Like, “the whole building” (Eph 2:21), the whole of Scripture (2 Tim 3:16), all creation (Col 1:23), “the whole assembly” (1 Chr 28:8 LXX), and so on. This is why I chose the Jubilee version for this verse.

If we allow this reading, Paul is saying that the whole family in heaven and on earth is named—or, derives its identity—from the Father of Jesus. According to Ephesians, the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Greek is broken down, and the Church is one people of faith. We are one body, one temple. “This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph 3:6, ESV).

So far so good. But what is the whole family in heaven and on earth? Zell suggests that this is a reference to the church today—united with those who have died and gone on to glory.

[T]hose saints who have finished the race and kept the faith ... are now victorious and at rest in heaven. Yet there are not two churches, but one. There is one church for whose benefit God has exalted his Son (1:20 – 22). ... Yes, there is one family that the Father names as his own, wherever its members are. (Zell 285 – 286)

How should we then live? Roman Catholics reason that since it is perfectly fine to ask a Christian to pray for you now, why not ask him to after he has died and gone to heaven? Then they have an official list of those judged to especially have the ear of the Lord, and they pray to that canonical bunch.

The other extreme is secularism. When someone dies, their story is over. There is nothing more they will ever do. They are history.

What about us? If the Roman way is overdone, and the secularist is short sighted, what is the best way to value our union with those who have gone before?

Perhaps we may be more courageous when we face our death, from some disease or actual persecution. For the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross (Heb 12:2).

Or perhaps this can help us see ourselves as citizens of heaven, and not merely of this nation (Phil 3:20). We are not really full participants in our culture. We stand apart from it to some extent, and find our identity with another culture altogether—one that is invisible now but potent and vibrantly real nevertheless. And so we can, like the prophets of old, declare the word of God to the people of our nation bravely. If you know what is needed to be said, in the name of Jesus, say it!

When Christians drink deeply of history, such as by reading biographies, we are reading about our family members. We are cut from the same cloth as them. The stories of the saints can encourage us in our present-day challenges, in a way that is beyond simply learning from the past.

My sister-in-law's father died a few days ago. When I ask her about it, she is glad to tell me that he is in heaven. Our unity with Christians who have passed on underpins our grief and loss with joy.

What about you? How does your union with those who have gone before change your thinking? What difference does it make for you?