

MILESTONES

“BELIEVE INTO”

Πιστεύω εἰς Χριστόν (*Pisteuō eis Christon*)

Many languages lack two distinct prepositions, one for expressing location in a place and another for expressing motion toward and entry into a place. In English we are able to distinguish these two notions using the prepositions *in* and *into*. New Testament Greek (unlike Modern Greek) is likewise able to distinguish them, employing ἐν (*en*) for location in a place and εἰς (*eis*) for motion toward and entry into a place. It was a happy coincidence—nay, the sovereignty of God—that New Testament Greek was among the few languages capable of making this distinction, for the authors of the New Testament employed the distinction to capture some of the profoundest truths regarding the believers’ organic union with Christ. As is well known, Paul alone speaks of the believers being *in* Christ well over a hundred times (Deissmann 1-2); what is less well known is that the apostles also tell us how we make our way into Christ—the believers come to be *in* Christ (ἐν Χριστῷ, *en Christō*) by their believing *into* Christ (εἰς Χριστόν, *eis Christon*).

The construction *believe into* is found most often in the writings of John, who speaks of believing *into* Christ over thirty times (John 2:11; 3:16, 18, 36; 4:39; 6:29, 35, 40; 7:5, 31, 38, 39, 48; 8:30; 9:35, 36; 10:42; 11:25, 26, 45, 48; 12:11, 37, 42, 44, 46; 14:1, 12; 16:9; 17:20; 1 John 5:10). But it can likewise be found in the writings of Matthew (Matt. 18:6), Mark (Mark 9:42), Luke (Acts 10:43; 19:4), Paul (Rom. 10:14; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 1:29), and Peter (1 Pet. 1:8). With the exception of James and Jude, then, all the authors of the New Testament employ this striking expression, and this consistent testimony of the apostles is all the more striking for the fact that this particular construction, *believe into*, appears to have been a new creation of the New Testament (Burton 480-481). No clear instances are present in the entirety of the body of Greek texts prior to and contemporaneous with the New Testament. The Septuagint—a Greek translation of the Old Testament often quoted in the New Testament—had itself innovated with the constructions *believe in* (ἐν, *en*) and *believe on* (ἐπί, *epi*), but even these did not seem satisfactory to the authors of the New Testament as they endeavored to put down in writing what they had seen

and experienced regarding faith. For while the Septuagint’s *believe in* and *believe on* can be found on occasion in the New Testament (e.g., Mark 1:15; Acts 9:42), the most common utterance by far is *believe into*.

Some have contended that we should not belabor these distinctions, arguing that during the writing of the New Testament the distinction between ἐν and εἰς was already collapsing. There is some truth to the claim, for there are instances in the New Testament where εἰς clearly does mean *in* rather than *into* (e.g., Mark 13:9; Luke 11:7). But the majority consensus of New Testament grammarians is that this confusion of ἐν and εἰς is limited to Mark and Luke; Paul and John show no clear evidence of confusion (Zerwick §106; Moulton et al. 3:255; Blass and Debrunner §205; Siebenthal 264, though Blass and Debrunner and Siebenthal think there are some few instances in John). Zerwick thus counsels that “apart from Mk Lk Acts, where it

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may stand for ἐν, the presumption is that εἰς is to be taken in its full sense” (§106). Moulton, in particular, is worth quoting at some length. He admits that some confusion of ἐν and εἰς is evident in the New Testament but argues that the authors of the New Testament were perfectly aware of the nuances of these prepositions and that we would expect them to employ their specialized use in combination with a word of significant import:

If it is a word of large content and extensive use, we naturally expect to find these alternative expressions made use of to define the different ideas connected with the word they qualify, so as to set up a series of phrases having a perfectly distinct meaning. In such a case we should expect to see the original force of these expressions, obsolete in contexts where there was nothing to quicken it, brought out vividly where the need of a distinction stimulated it into new life. (1:66-67)

One such “word of large content and extensive use,” he rightly contends, is *believe*:

A critical example is afforded by the construction of πιστεύω...The prepositional construction was...entirely on the lines of development of the Greek language, as we have seen. There was, moreover, a fitness in it for the use for which it was specialised. To repose one’s trust upon God or Christ was well expressed by πιστεύειν ἐπί, the dative suggesting more of the state, and the accusative more of the initial act of faith; while εἰς recalls at once the bringing of the soul *into* that mystical union which Paul loved to express by ἐν Χριστῷ. (1:67-68)

The majority of New Testament Greek grammarians are thus agreed that in Paul and John, at least, the distinction between ἐν and εἰς is a real one, and one of the most prominent grammarians recognized that the authors of the New Testament employed this distinction to capture the relationship between our believing *into* and our being *in* Christ.

One additional objection to taking the force of *believe* with εἰς as implying motion into and rest in its object is the argument that in and of itself εἰς is not limited in meaning to ‘into’. This is true; εἰς has a variety of extended meanings in the Greek of the New Testament. But its radical sense is indeed ‘into’, and this radical sense is particularly prominent when followed by “nouns that denote an accessible place” (Bauer et al. s.v. “εἰς”) and when combined “with Verbs which express *rest in* a place, when a previous motion *into* or *to* it is implied” (Liddell and Scott s.v. “εἰς”). Christ is certainly an “accessible place,” as evidenced by Paul’s frequent reference to the believers’ being “in Christ” and by John’s frequent reference, based on the Lord’s own charge, to abide in Christ. And while, on the face of it, the verb *to believe* does not seem to imply motion and rest, there is ample evidence in the New Testament that its authors thought of it in precisely this way. One of the clearest examples is John’s near synonymous use of believing into the Son and coming to the Son (Harris 236). While these two themes run through the whole of John’s Gospel, they come into closest conjunction in John 6:35: “He who comes to Me shall by no means hunger, and he who believes into

Me shall by no means ever thirst.” Coming to the Lord and believing into Him are here used interchangeably, implying that John thinks of believing in terms of motion. And we can see this same notion hinted at in several other places in the New Testament: John tells us that he who believes “does not come into judgment but has passed out of death into life” (John 5:24). The Lord charged the crowd to “believe into the light” so that they would not “remain in darkness” (John 12:36, 46). Paul tells us that “we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand” (Rom. 5:2) and that “we who have believed enter into the rest” (Heb. 4:3). Faith, in short, is a great “door” (Acts 14:27) through which we enter into life, light, grace, and rest.

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The Lord Himself, of course, is all these things—He is the life (John 11:25); He is the light (John 12:46); He is the grace (Gal. 2:20; 1 Cor. 15:10); and He is the true rest (Matt. 11:28-29). Finally, one finds in the New Testament a close conjunction between believing and baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 18:8; Eph. 4:5), the latter being a sign of the former. To believe and to be baptized are not mere acts by which we signal our commitment to Christian teaching and the Christian church; just as we are baptized *into* Christ, *into* His death, and *into* His Body (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27; 1 Cor. 12:13), so too we believe *into* Him and thereby enter into Him as a realm for our existence, living, and function.

The authors of the New Testament thus clearly

thought of faith as a means for the believers to enter into an organic union with Christ and to thus partake of all that He is. In their attempt to communicate this great light in their writings, they were willing to introduce into the Greek language a new construction where no suitable turn of phrase was available. They cared little whether in doing so they struck the ear of their readers oddly. They cared only to faithfully set down what they had received from the Lord regarding the profoundest effect of their faith in Him: that believing was entering into Christ so as to be in Him and to abide in Him.

Credere in Christum

As Christianity spread outside of the Greek-speaking world, it became necessary to translate the New Testament into a variety of languages. Some of these languages were unable to capture the nuances of this newly coined Greek phrase, but one was—the language of the Romans and of the Roman Empire. Sometime near the end of the second century, the New Testament was translated into Latin in North Africa and from there spread throughout the Roman world, undergoing continual revision as it spread (Bogaert 505-507). Latin lacked two distinct prepositions corresponding to the Greek prepositions ἐν and εἰς, but Latin could nevertheless distinguish between the notions of location in a place and entry into a place by using the Latin preposition *in* and varying the grammatical case of the following noun or pronoun. Latin used *in* followed by a noun or pronoun in the ablative case for location in a place; it used *in* followed by a noun or pronoun in the accusative case for entry into a place. When the earliest Latin translators of the New Testament came upon the innovative construction *believe into*, they captured its sense by employing the verb *credere* (‘to believe’) followed by the preposition *in* and an object in the accusative case, implying that by their faith the believers make motion toward and enter into Christ as the object of their faith. In doing so, they, like the authors of the Greek New Testament before them, introduced into their language a new utterance, for this particular construction is peculiar to Latin Christian literature (TeSelle 349).

By the fourth century so many different Latin versions of the Bible were in use that Jerome (d. 420) complained: “There are almost as many forms of texts as there are copies” (NPNF² 6:488). As a solution, Pope Damasus (d. 384) commissioned Jerome to produce a standardized Latin text of the Gospels (possibly even of the entire Bible), and today the fully standardized

Latin Bible is known as the Vulgate. Jerome began this project by revising older Latin translations of the four Gospels, and he thankfully preserved the faithful work of the early translators with respect to the construction *believe into*, making it available to readers of the Latin Bible to this very day. It might be argued that these early Latin translators were unaware of the nuances of the Greek language. But this is clearly not the case, for the Vulgate does not always translate the Greek εἰς using the Latin *in* followed by an accusative object. Indeed, in Mark 13:9 and Luke 11:7, identified above as places where εἰς clearly does mean *in* rather than *into*, the Vulgate correctly uses *in* plus the ablative, indicating

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location within a place rather than motion into a place. It also on occasion translates *believe into* (εἰς) using *in* plus the ablative (e.g., 1 John 5:10), in particular whenever the New Testament speaks of believing into the *name* of the Lord (e.g., John 1:12; 2:23). We have all the reason to believe, therefore, that Jerome and the earlier Latin translators carefully considered the meaning of the Greek preposition εἰς and deliberately preserved the sense of *believe into* when they translated it the way that they did.

Their faithful work did not go unnoticed by Latin-speaking writers, for Augustine of Hippo (d. 430), working from one of the older Latin biblical texts of John’s Gospel, clearly distinguishes between two kinds of believing—believing God and believing *into* God.

To believe God is simply to believe what God says. Anyone, even demons, can believe God in this way. But commenting on John 6:29 (in “Homily 29” in WSA III/12), Augustine argues that the work of God is not to believe Christ but to believe *into* Christ:

“This is the work of God, that you believe into Him whom He sent” [John 6:29]. “That you believe into Him (*credatis in eum* [accusative]),” not, “that you believe Him (*credatis ei* [dative]).” But if you believe into Him (*credit in eum*), you believe Him; however, it does not follow that one who believes Him believes into Him (*credit in eum*). For the demons indeed believed Him, but they did not believe into Him (*non credebant in eum*). And also on the other hand, we can say of the apostles themselves that we believe Paul, but

“This is” in fact “the work of God, that you should believe into Him whom He sent” [John 6:29]. He did not say “that you should believe Him (*credatis ei* [dative])” or “that you should believe something about Him (*credatis eum* [accusative without the preposition])” but said, on the contrary, “that you should believe into Him (*credatis in eum* [accusative with the preposition]).” We heard the eloquence of the prophets. We believe them, but we do not believe into them (*non credimus in eos*). We heard the apostles who proclaimed. We believe their proclamations, but we do not believe into the apostles (*in eos non credimus*). We do not believe into Paul (*non credimus in Paulum*), but we do believe Paul. . . Indeed, not only the holy apostles and teachers, but also we ourselves, who should not be compared with them in even the smallest ways, say every day, “Believe me”; we never dare to say, “Believe into me (*crede in me*).” “Believe me”; who doesn’t say this? “Believe into me (*crede in me*)”; who says this, or who says this who isn’t insane? (BA 77/B:344, 346)

“What is it therefore to believe into Him? It is by believing to love, by believing to esteem, by believing to go into Him and to be incorporated with His members.” —Augustine

we cannot say that we believe into Paul (*credimus in Paulum*); that we believe Peter, but not that we believe into Peter (*credimus in Petrum*). “For to the one believing into Him (*credenti enim in eum*) who justifies the wicked, his faith is counted for righteousness.” What is it therefore to believe into Him (*credere in eum*)? It is by believing to love, by believing to esteem, by believing to go into Him (*credendo in eum ire*) and to be incorporated with His members. That, therefore, is the faith which God requires from us. (CCSL 36:287)

Augustine’s grasp of Greek was weaker than he would have liked (WSA I/1:52-55), but the faithful work of the early Latin translators enabled him to see something regarding the intrinsic work of faith. Augustine realized that the faith counted by God as righteousness entails believing into Christ—that is, moving into Christ, “to go into Him.” In going into Christ, the believers are incorporated into Him as members of His mystical Body.

In another sermon (“Sermon 130A” in WSA III/11) Augustine insists that no mere human being would have the audacity to say, “Believe into me.” To do so, according to Augustine, would be insane, for we cannot enter into a mere human being by our believing:

The contrast that Augustine makes here between believing someone, believing something about someone, and believing *into* someone is again striking, clearly indicating that Augustine was aware of the novelty of the latter Latin construction. Latin speakers, according to Augustine, were accustomed to saying that they believed others or that they believed various things. But they never said, in normal Latin speech, that they believed *into* some person. The striking new utterance in the Latin Bible and its absence in normal Latin parlance prod the reader to see the profound difference between faith in Christ and any other kind of common believing. Because faith in Christ, unlike any other kind of believing, brings the believer into Christ, a new phrase was needed in Latin (as it was in Greek) to capture this new reality. And since this new phrase entails motion into the object of belief, Augustine contends that no one would be so audacious as to say, “Believe into me,” unless, perhaps, they were “insane.”

As is well known, Augustine most commonly identifies saving faith as faith operating through love. And this has caused many interpreters of Augustine to reduce his understanding of *credere in* with an accusative object to little more than faith operating through love. It seems that this mistaken understanding goes all the way back to Augustine’s own congregants, for in this same sermon Augustine responds to a challenge (whether real or imagined) that if saving faith is merely faith operating through love, there is in fact no reason we cannot believe into Paul, since we certainly love Paul. Augustine responds by again expounding on the uniting function of faith, and at least here he identifies this uniting function of faith as prior to and enabling the believers’ love for Christ:

Someone could indeed respond to me and advise that I speak more carefully: “You said that to believe into Christ (*credere in Christum*) is to love Christ, and you said that we should believe into Christ (*credere nos debere in Christum*) but not believe into Paul (*non autem credere in Paulum*); should we not love Paul then?” Now, just as we made a distinction between two kinds of believing, so we should also distinguish loving itself. I love Paul even though I don’t believe into Paul (*non credo in Paulum*). But I don’t love Christ unless I first believe into Christ (*nisi credidero in Christum*). I certainly love Paul, but by loving him I don’t go into Paul (*non—diligendo—eo in Paulum*). I will be with Paul; I won’t be in Paul. “Indeed what is Apollos, what is Paul? Ministers through whom you believed,” not “into whom you believed (*in quos credidistis*).” So, brothers, it is necessary to believe into God (*credere in deum*), by believing and loving to go into Christ (*ire in Christum*). “Believe into God (*credite in deum*),” says Christ Himself, “and believe into Me (*in me credite*)” [John 14:1]. What prophet dared to say this, what patriarch dared to say this, what apostle dared to say this, what martyr dared to say this, what angel dared to say this? (BA 77/B:354)

Here again Augustine identifies genuine Christian faith as faith that brings the believer into Christ, and he clearly thinks of this uniting function of faith as prior to the believers’ love for Christ. Love certainly unites the believers to Christ, according to Augustine, but believing has its own uniting function, which operates prior to union with Christ through love.

In a third sermon (“Sermon 144” in WSA III/4), Augustine again explains the great significance of faith. Here he emphasizes the mutual character of our union with Christ. Faith not only brings the believer into Christ but also brings Christ into the believer:

It makes quite the difference whether one believes that He is the Christ (*credat ipsum Christum* [accusative without the preposition]) or whether one believes into Christ (*credat in Christum* [accusative with the preposition]). For even the demons believed that He was the Christ, yet the demons did not believe into Christ (*nec tamen in Christum daemones crediderunt*)... So then, the one who believes into Christ (*in Christum credit*), by believing into Christ (*credendo in Christum*), Christ comes into him, and in a certain way he is united to Him and is made a member in His Body. (PL 38:788)

On at least three occasions, then, Augustine expounds on the function of faith to bring the believer into Christ. And while Augustine’s distinctions between different kinds of believing are perfectly clear in Latin, English translators of Augustine’s works have tended to blunt Augustine’s point by translating *credere in* with an accusative object as “believe in” instead of “believe

into.” Edmund Hill, for example, translates the first quote from Augustine above as follows: “What then does it mean, to believe in him? By believing to love (*amare*) him, by believing to cherish (*diligere*) him, to go to him by believing and be incorporated in his members” (WSA III/12:493). Augustine’s *believe into* (*credere in*) is translated “believe in,” and his *go into Him* (*in eum ire*) is translated “go to him.” Such hesitancy to bring the Latin construction fully into English makes it difficult for readers to understand the distinctions so important to Augustine’s overall point—that faith brings the believers *into* Christ, causing them “to go into” Christ. Because of the general inadequacy

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of available English translations of these passages, we have had to freshly translate the passages quoted above, doing our best to preserve Augustine’s insights on this novel Latin construction.

Augustine’s comments on believing into Christ would have widespread reach, appearing hundreds of times in significant works of biblical and systematic theology across the Western Christian traditions for centuries to come—including works by the Catholic apologist John Adam Moehler (d. 1838) (122n3), the Lutheran scholastic Johann Gerhard (d. 1637) (19:115-116), the Reformed theologian Johannes Cocceius (d. 1669) (485), the Anglican theologian Jeremy Taylor (d. 1667) (WWJT 2:305), and the father of Puritan theology, William Perkins (d. 1602) (WVP 5:323).

This widespread appropriation of Augustine’s comments likely resulted from their appearance in two of the most influential works of medieval Christendom. Almost seven hundred years after Augustine’s

death, Peter Lombard (d. 1160) summarized Augustine’s insight on the uniting function of faith in his famous *Sentences* (3:98-99), which would become a standard theological textbook for the next four hundred years. During the same century, Augustine’s comments were included in the *Glossa Ordinaria* (in its commentary on Romans 4:5 [63]), the most important and influential annotated Bible of the medieval period, providing commentary on nearly every verse of the Bible from numerous patristic and medieval writers. The reproduction of Augustine’s insight in the most influential medieval textbook of theology and in the most influential medieval annotated Bible ensured that Augustine’s understanding of the distinction between believing and believing *into* would be available to thousands of Latin-speaking theologians and biblical scholars all over Europe for centuries to come.

“Bileue into Christ”

One of those Latin-speaking scholars was an English theologian by the name of John Wycliffe (d. 1384), the man responsible for the first complete translation of the Bible from the Latin Vulgate into the English

passages above in *On the Truth of Holy Scriptures* (119) and draws attention to the importance of the distinction between *believing* and *believing into* in a number of other places (e.g., *De civili dominio* 2:66; *Sermones* 1:294). While it is difficult to say exactly how much Wycliffe was directly involved in the work of biblical translation, “the very strong contemporary evidence linking Wyclif with the translation implies that at the least he initiated the project and actively supervised it” (Dove 81), and the earliest versions of the Wycliffite Bible (known as the EV) seem to have been completed within Wycliffe’s lifetime. Given his likely involvement in these early versions and his familiarity with Augustine’s comments, it is no surprise that the early versions of the Wycliffite Bible matched the innovations of the Greek and Latin New Testaments with its own English innovation, consistently translating the Vulgate’s *credere in* with an accusative object as “bileue into”—the Middle English equivalent of *believe into*. John 9:35 reads, “Bileuest thou into the sone of God”; John 11:26 reads, “Bileueth into me”; and John 14:1 reads, “Thee bileuen into God, bileue thee into me” (Manchester 63v, 64v, 66v).

Given Wycliffe’s familiarity with Augustine’s comments on believing into Christ, it is no surprise that the early versions of the Wycliffite Bible matched the innovations of the Greek and Latin New Testaments with its own English innovation: “bileue into” — the Middle English equivalent of *believe into*.

language—the translation that came to be known as the Wycliffite Bible. Wycliffe was clearly aware of Augustine’s insights regarding the significance of believing *into* Christ, for he quotes the first of Augustine’s

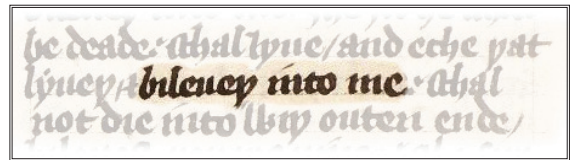


Image provided by The John Rylands Research Institute and Library, The University of Manchester. Highlighted text reads, “bileueth into me,” from John 11:26 (Manchester 64v).

Despite the faithfulness of these early Wycliffite Bible translators, it is one of the great tragedies of the history of English biblical translation that the later revision of the Wycliffite Bible (known as the LV) undid this faithful translation by replacing all but a few instances of *believe into* with *believe in* (the Forshall and Madden edition of the LV retains *believe into* in: John 12:37; 17:20; Rom. 10:14; 1 Pet. 1:8). Whether Wycliffe himself was directly involved in this decision is unknown; what is known is that the LV was produced sometime well after his death (Hudson 158). Since that time, no English translation of the Bible, to the best of our knowledge, has employed the English phrase *believe into* except for the Holy Bible Recovery Version (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 2003).

English-speaking theologians and biblical scholars continue to draw attention to this innovative phrase in the Greek New Testament. Leon Morris notes that the Greek construction “literally...means to believe

‘into,’” denoting “a faith which, so to speak, takes a man out of himself, and puts him into Christ” (358). Jouette Bassler affirms that “for Paul, believing in Christ meant believing *into* Christ” (4). Sinclair Ferguson says of our union with Christ, “Its full realization takes place in our own existence when the Spirit unites us to Christ by faith. In Paul’s idiosyncratic language, we ‘believe *into* [*pisteuein eis*] Christ” (110). R. T. France says that “John’s special expression ‘believe into’ is...closely

The preposition translated ‘in’ (Gk. *eis*) is striking, for *eis* ordinarily means ‘into,’ giving the sense that genuine faith in Christ in a sense brings people ‘into’ Christ, so that they rest in and become united with Christ. (This same expression is found in 3:16, 18, 36; 6:35; 7:38; 12:44, 46; 14:12; 1 John 5:10.) (2046)

But English Bible translations continue to render the construction inadequately in the text of the Bible itself (despite the fact that Leon Morris was one of the translators of the 1978 New International Version and R. T. France was a member of the NIV Committee on Bible Translation responsible for the 2011 revision). For the vast majority of English Bible readers, then, the innovative phrase of the Greek New Testament, the Latin New Testament, and the earliest English New Testament remains entirely hidden. Thankfully, the Recovery Version has recovered this lost utterance for English readers, consistently employing the phrase *believe into* and explaining that the word *into* “implies that the believer has an organic union with Christ through believing into Him” (Lee, Phil. 1:29, note 1).

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related to Paul’s language about the incorporation of believers ‘into’ the body of Christ, so that they are ‘in Christ’” (225). According to Francis Moloney, “A sense of ‘motion’ from one place to another is...found in a famous Johannine expression which almost defies translation. For John, true faith is ‘faith *into*’ (Greek: *pisteuein eis*) Christ. It may be difficult in English, but it reflected the concrete experience of the earliest Christians” (37). Sam K. Williams notes the parallel between believing into Christ and being baptized into Christ:

Just as Paul can say that one comes to be “in Christ” by being baptized into Christ, so he can say that one *believes* into Christ. In this second expression, too, *eis* implies movement, change, the transfer from one order of existence to another. Thus to “believe into Christ” is the *means* by which one comes to be “in Christ.” (443)

Some English study Bibles have helpfully drawn attention to the phrase in footnotes. In particular, the *ESV Study Bible* includes a commendable note on John 11:25 highlighting the literal meaning of the Greek phrase along with its implications for the believers’ union with Christ:

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