

The Head is Full in his Body

Paul wrote:

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²²And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Eph. 1:15-23, *NRSV*)

This passage, though complicated by certain factors, especially at verses 22-23,¹ is basically Paul's prayer that the church might see the amazing richness of all that God has done. In particular, this involves the readers having a revelation of the nature of the church itself.

First, there is the matter of hope: 'that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you'. Then, and related to hope, there is the matter of 'the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints'.² Next there is the knowledge of the surpassing greatness of God's power which is for³ us who believe. This leads fourthly, into the explanation that this power has particular expression in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ. 'God put in subjection all things under his feet and gave him [as] head above all things to the church'.⁴

At each point it is a revelation of the nature of the church which is in focus. Indeed, I would suggest that the overall point of the letter to the Ephesians is the place of the church in the eternal purpose of God.

OUR HOPE

God's plan for 'the fullness of the times' is the 'summing up' of all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10). 'Fullness' here refers to the completion of the times, the periods of history. God's plan, or perhaps his 'administration',⁵ has been made known to us

¹ This is not the place to canvass the range of possibilities. Reference to commentaries will reveal the issues involved: see Marcus Barth, *Ephesians 1-3* (AB) Doubleday, New York, 1974; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians* (NICNT), Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1984; A. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC), Word, Dallas, 1990; Peter. T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Pillar), Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1999, etc.

² τίς ὁ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης τῆς κληρονομίας αὐτοῦ ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις. Two problems face us, the difficulty of translation itself, since the Greek often cannot be translated *literally* into sensible English, and the fact that a translation must penetrate the mind of the writer as well as simply convey his words. Translators must also be commentators and the commentaries mentioned in *note 1* highlight the problems faced in dealing with this letter. The moment we begin to ask questions concerning the text we realise that simplistic or superficial answers are inadequate. Indeed, a growing sense of wonder emerges.

³ Gk εἰς.

⁴ Gk καὶ πάντα ὑπέταξεν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸν ἔδωκεν κεφαλὴν ὑπὲρ πάντα τῆ ἐκκλησία.

⁵ Gk οἰκονομίαν.

(Eph. 1:9).⁶ It remains a mystery, that is, it can only be known by revelation and not by the exercise of human reason alone, but the startling dimensions of the plan are now plain. The intention is to bring all the diverse elements in creation, things heavenly and things earthly, into unity in Christ.⁷ Both those who first set their hope on the Messiah (a reference to the first believers in general or to Jewish believers in particular?) and those who later believed in him on hearing the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation, were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise (Eph. 1:12-13). The Spirit had been promised, as in Joel 2:28ff.⁸ and the believers were ‘sealed’ by him. However, Ephesians 4:30 indicates that the sealing was with a purpose, namely securing us for the day of redemption, so that the promise referred to may also mean that to receive the Spirit is to be saved in hope (Rom. 8:24). The sealing marked the believers as God’s possession (cf. Titus 2:14 and Eph. 2:10) and also as those under his protection (see 1 Peter 1:3–5). The Holy Spirit is a deposit, down payment or pledge⁹ indicating that the full inheritance is yet to be experienced but is nonetheless guaranteed (Eph. 1:14; cf. 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5).

What is the goal for which we were sealed? The answer is that the Spirit is the guarantee that we will receive our inheritance, namely ‘redemption of the possession’.¹⁰ If we belong to God, having been redeemed through the blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7), then he will ensure that the fullness of that redemption is revealed in due time. This is similar to Romans 8:18-25, in particular verses 22-24:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now;²³ and not only the creation, but *we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.*²⁴ For in hope we were saved. (Rom. 8:22-24)

See also Isaiah 43:1-7, 21. As was just noted, the Holy Spirit has sealed us for the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30).

Other references to hope in Ephesians build on this. In Ephesians 2:6-7 Paul writes that God raised us with Christ and seated us in the heavenly places with him so that in the ages to come God might demonstrate ‘the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus’. How will he demonstrate that? He will do so by having his own possession fully redeemed before him. Always and forever the church is the trophy of grace. (Furthermore, by his proclamation of the boundless

⁶ In writing this I willingly apply directly to us today what Paul wrote to the Ephesians and to others. The same applies to other New Testament writings. That does not imply that questions of the historical context are unimportant, but that those questions are useful insofar as they bring us to the immediate application. Emil Brunner has the following comment:

“The Pauline teaching is the means through which God Himself wants to teach us; Paul’s Epistle to the Romans is a letter from God to us, mankind today. It remains the great problem of interpretation, hitherto never entirely solved, how to unite these two things: the keen attention to what Paul wanted to say to that community then, and the search for what God wants to say to us through Paul today. In the end, the question is whether the reader will really allow God to speak to him, or whether he evades God by hiding behind ‘Paul’, behind ‘the past’.” (*The Letter to the Romans*, Lutterworth, London, 1959, p. 12)

⁷ There seems little doubt that the word ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι, in the New Testament used only here and at Rom. 13:9, is related to the word κεφάλαιον and not κεφαλή, but the similarity to κεφαλή and the way that word is used later in the chapter ought to make us wary of assuming that no connection is intended; see Eph. 1:22. The same principle applies with regard to πλήρωμα in verses 10 and 23. Peter O’Brien simply asserts: ‘The term πλήρωμα (‘fullness’) is not used here in a technical theological sense.’ He gives no reason for this, but I would ask why ordinary ‘non technical’ readers, including the original audience, should not first assume a similar meaning in both instances.

⁸ See the recent study, *Jesus the Man of the Spirit*, available at <http://www.newcreation.org.au>.

⁹ Gk ἄρραβὼν.

¹⁰ ἀπολύτρωσιν τῆς περιποιήσεως.

riches of Christ to the Gentiles, so that everyone can see the plan of the mystery of God, the church is already a declaration of the truth of God to ‘the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places’ (Eph. 3:10.)

Israel of old had a measure of that hope revealed to them (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10-12). Gentiles, the nations, on the other hand, were

at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (Eph. 2:12)

Now that Jews and Gentiles have become one in Christ (Eph. 2:15), It follows that as there is one body and one Spirit, so there is one hope that belongs to our calling (Eph. 4:4).

HIS INHERITANCE

Paul’s prayer is addressed to ‘the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of glory’ (Eph. 1:17). The prayer is that the readers might know ‘the riches of the glory of his inheritance among the saints’ (Eph. 1:18). The Father of glory has an inheritance of glory, meaning that whatever inheritance we may obtain, all the inheritance is ultimately God’s. He will have his possession, and that possession will be ‘glorious’ (Eph. 5:27).¹¹

This principle is set out in Ephesians 1:3-5.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, ...

We were chosen ‘in Christ before the foundation of the world’ in order that we may belong to him totally (be holy) and be blameless, that is without any fault which would exclude us from being used in his service. These two words, holy and blameless, were used in the Old Testament ‘to describe the unblemished animals set apart for God as ... sacrifices’¹² and also for ethical purity, as in Psalm 15:2, where the issue is coming into the presence of God on his ‘holy hill’, that is, the temple, (Ps. 15:1). This is taken further in Ephesians 2:21-22.

In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²²in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

God’s intention is to have his worshipping people, declaring his praise, not simply in his temple so much as *as* his temple, the place where he himself dwells.

Furthermore, the people who worship will do so in intimacy with the God and *Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ. Hence, ‘He destined us for adoption [as his children/sons¹³] through Jesus Christ’.

¹¹ There is some difficulty in determining the precise meanings of some of the important words used in this subject, as the writers seem unable to agree on which aspect of meaning applies. In this case, ‘glorious’ translates Gk ἔνδοξος, but while G. Kittel (TDNT, II, p 254) says, ‘in no case do we have any reminiscence of the divine δόξα in the NT ἔνδοξος’, S. Aalen (NIDNTT, II, 51) says, ‘The adj. ἔνδοξος (4 times) means glorious; ... in Eph. 5:27 [it is to be linked with the conception that ‘believers share the glory’ linked with God]’. Even if, with the NRSV, we translate it as ‘splendour’, however, we still need to ask where the previously inglorious bride (cf. Ezek. 16:9) obtained her splendour. The only answer is, from the Father of glory.

¹² O’Brien, *Ephesians*, p. 100f.

¹³ The word υἱοθεσίαν, derived from υἱός (son) simply means ‘adoption’, and may apply to both sons and daughters, hence the NRSV’s ‘children’.

We see this choice in the history of Israel. Romans 9:4 says that God gave Israel ‘the adoption’. Moses was told to confront Pharaoh, saying:

Thus says the LORD: Israel is my firstborn son. ²³I said to you, ‘Let my son go that he may worship me.’ (Ex. 4:22-23)

When Israel was at Sinai, God’s message to them was:

Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, ⁶but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites. (Ex. 19:5-6).

Israel was chosen (Deut 7:7-8) to be a priestly kingdom and a holy nation, thus to be holy and blameless, and if they obeyed him then they would be the LORD’s ‘treasured possession’. This phrase ‘treasured possession’ is repeated in Exodus 23:22¹⁴; Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2 (‘a holy people ... his treasured possession’) and 26:18, then in the New Testament at Titus 2:13-14:

our great God and saviour Jesus Christ ... gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself *a people of his own* who are zealous for good deeds.

Although Ephesians is clear that this great privilege is no longer restricted to Israel (2:11ff.), Paul is also clear that the purpose established before the foundation of the world and worked out through Israel and her Messiah (Christ) has now come to us. While we are not Israel, the privileges of Israel are fulfilled in us who believe. Peter, also repeating the language used of Israel,¹⁵ wrote:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Pet. 2:9-10)

We are God’s inheritance, his own possession, and so Paul prays that we might have a revelation of the amazing dimensions of what that means, since it involves not only our election but also our being redeemed from all iniquity and our purification, so that we might be holy and blameless. Hence:

...Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷so as to present the church to himself in glory¹⁶, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind — yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish (blameless). (Eph. 5:25-27)

HIS POWER FOR US

What power could possibly accomplish the formation of a people who are totally without blame and holy in love? It should be said that if there is a people who have been so completely purified, then that could only be through a great act of atonement. Certainly there is no ‘legal fiction’ whereby those who are designated ‘justified’ or ‘righteous’ are still unrighteous. If God calls them righteous then that is what they are. All other questions about sin in the believer can hardly limit the degree of justification.

¹⁴ LXX only; not in the Hebrew.

¹⁵ Some argue that 1 Peter was written to Christian Jews, see D. W. B. Robinson, *Faith's Framework*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1996, p.108f.

¹⁶ See n. 11 above.

We have, then, the statement:

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸that he lavished on us. (Eph. 1:7-8)

‘In him’ is really ‘in whom’ and refers to ‘the beloved’ of verse 6, meaning Christ. As we have seen, to be a people of God’s own possession is to be a redeemed people (cf. Isa. 43:1) and redemption is nothing less than the forgiveness of our sins. But for our sins to be forgiven there must be the shedding of blood (Heb. 9:22). There is redemption through his blood, because ‘it is the blood that makes atonement’ (Lev. 17:11; cf. Lev. 1:3-5).

If righteousness is *imputed*, it must be *imparted*. That does not imply that people will ever be righteous *of themselves*; that is not ever an issue. Our righteousness is only Christ (1 Cor. 1:30) but if we are ‘in him’ then we are truly righteous. Righteousness is imparted *because* it is imputed. The phrases, ‘in him’ or ‘in Christ’, ‘in the beloved’ etc. occur regularly in Paul’s writings.¹⁷ This is linked with the description of the church as the body of Christ and Christ the head.

To be ‘in Christ’ has been understood in many ways and we are not interested in pursuing that area here.¹⁸ It is possibly sufficient to say that Paul could see far beyond metaphors to the reality of the church, so that we need not treat the language of Paul as if it was some how dependent on the way others had used the words, such as body, head, fulness etc. He told the Ephesians that, from his letter, they can understand why he says what he says:

the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, ⁴a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. ⁵In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: ⁶that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (Eph. 3:3-6)

I want to suggest that Paul writes as one who has received from God (cf. Gal. 1:11-12, 15) a revelation which opened up to him the whole nature of the church.¹⁹ The language used is determined by the revelation and not the revelation by the language.

The church is ‘in Christ’, it is his body, it is the fulness of him who fills all in all. But to say this, Paul must first tell us that it required all the power of God to effect that. Certainly, a person does not just join himself to the church, make a commitment or whatever. From the angle of what Paul has seen, all that would seem so trivial. No, we have been saved by grace through faith, and even the faith we exercise is his gift, so that there is no place for us to claim anything as coming from us; ‘we are what *he* has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life’ (Eph. 2:10). So Paul has seen and longs and prays for the

¹⁷ It is one of the characteristic motifs, used ‘more than eighty times’ according to James D. G. Dunn (‘Pauline Christology: Shaping the Fundamental Structures’ in *The Christ and The Spirit: Volume 1 Christology*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1998, p. 233). See the more extensive treatment in his *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1998, p. 390–412.

¹⁸ The matter is not unimportant, however. Another recent summary of the issues is by M. A. Seifrid, ‘In Christ’ in Gerald F. Hawthorne *et al* (Eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, IVP, Downers Grove, 1993, pp. 433-436.

¹⁹ This revelation included ‘the whole counsel of God’, though I am not sure that need imply that Paul’s understanding must have been fully formed at every point from the beginning. Using the language of 1 John, it would imply that having had an anointing from the Holy One he did have knowledge of all things so that he was functioning in the truth (1 John 2:20-21, 27).

readers to come to know ‘what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power’ (Eph. 1:19).

That power of God made dead sinners live (Eph. 2:1). Specifically,

God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:4-6)

We are in Christ now because we were in Christ when God raised him from the dead. Elsewhere, Paul adds that we were also in Christ when he was crucified as well as when he was raised. He told the Romans this quite plainly:

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For whoever has died is freed from sin. ⁸But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 6:1-11)

Likewise, Galatians 2:19-20:

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; ²⁰and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

So we are in the risen Christ and the risen Christ is in us: the head and the body together. Now what power is at work to effect that? The answer is ‘the power of his resurrection’ (Phil. 3:10).

God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²²And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church... (Eph. 1:20-22)

God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. The four Gospels testify to that and the early church proclaimed it at every opportunity, as the book of Acts shows. But here Paul is saying more than just that a human who was crucified, dead and buried was raised on the third day; he is saying that when Christ was raised from the dead a new humanity came to birth in him. When he was raised we were all raised from the dead! That does not mean that our bodies are yet redeemed or that we should have no struggles now, but it does mean that our future resurrection has been determined by the fact that are *now* in Christ seated in the heavenly places. Passages as Romans 8:18-25 and 1 Corinthians 15:12-57 also bear this out. No wonder Paul prays for the Ephesians to have a revelation of all this.

CHRIST'S HEADSHIP FOR US

Vast amounts of time and effort have been put into the question of what is meant by the church being the body of Christ and of what is meant by Christ being the head. I would suggest that my point above about the language being determined by the revelation might make the issue a little easier. For the moment, I want to stick to the text. Paul wrote:

And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Eph. 1:22-23).

The question of the body and its head comes in the context of the phrase, 'he has put all things under his feet'. That is a quotation from Psalm 8:6 and a strong reflection of Genesis 1:26-28. Both these passages say that 'Man' (*Adam*, who is 'male and female', Gen. 1:27) was created to have dominion over all creation. In Genesis the statement about dominion is given as a command, so that the dominion of Man is never to be seen as other than 'dominion in submission'. In other words, it is plain that the one who gave the command remains sovereign. But it is the glory of Man to be the image of God and to rule under God. Thus:

Yet you have made him a little lower than God, and crowned him with glory and honor. ⁶You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, (Ps. 8:5-6).²⁰

This rule ought to be understood as being significantly different from many other conceptions of rule or dominion. Adam's rule, as an expression (image) of the rule of God was to be as servant of God and of creation and not as an independent despot.

It was the de-glorifying of Adam that he chose to be independent. Thus Romans 3:23: 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God'. The 'all' refers to all in Adam. In the scriptures, Adam as male and female stands as far more than an individual human being; he is Man in God's image and all the purpose of God for the creation was to be done through him, as, for example, Man leads the creation in its worship (Gen. 2:15) and it is Man who determines the identity of all the lower orders of life (see Gen. 2:18-19).

So when Adam sinned it was all humanity which sinned and when Adam died as a consequence of that sin (Gen. 2:17) all humanity died.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned... ¹⁵But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. (Rom. 5:12, 15)

For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; ^{22f}for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. (1 Cor. 15:21-22)

You were dead through the trespasses and sins ²ⁱin which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. ⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us

²⁰ This is a modification of the *NRSV* text which has, for the sake of mild political correctness, inserted the plural in place of the singular. However accurately the *NRSV* might have represented the intention of Genesis 1:27 ('male and female he created them') it obscures the New Testament references to it.

⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— (Eph. 2:1-5)

When Paul writes of the sin of Adam and its consequences, he does so by contrasting that with the work of Christ. Christ, the Messiah of Israel, is ‘the last Adam’, ‘the second man’ (1 Cor. 15:45, 47). He is the one who, in his incarnation, is ‘the image of the invisible God’ (Col. 1:15).

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Col. 1:15-20)

Here is a close parallel to the passage in Ephesians 1. The man Jesus, standing not merely as an individual, is also the Christ, the Messiah of Israel, in whom all the purposes of God for creation are to be brought to completion. By being raised from the dead he has restored what was mutilated by the first Adam. Now humanity can stand complete. No longer are the former divisions between Jews and Gentiles a reality (Eph. 2:11-22), for in place of the fractured humanity there is now ‘one new man’ (Eph. 2:15). He has crucified the ‘old man’ (Rom. 6:6²¹) He has borne Adam’s guilt, and not only the guilt of individual members of Adam’s race. As P. T Forsyth put it:

What Christ presented to God for his complete joy and satisfaction was perfect racial obedience. It was not the perfect obedience of a saintly unity of the race. It was racial holiness. God’s holiness found itself again in the humbled holiness of Christ’s ‘public person’. He presented before God a race he created for holiness.²²

Because Christ did not come as a mere individual but as the one in whom a new race, a new Man, was to be created, it must be plain that without the new race, the church in its unity, he remains incomplete. Hence, God

has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Eph. 1:22-23)

Commentators argue their cases, but could it be that the one who fills all in all in this context is Christ, the last Adam, who fills all in all as the first Adam had been commanded to ‘fill the earth’? And as the first Adam had been given dominion, with all things under his feet, so now God has given all this to Christ, in order that he might be head of the race, his body the church.

It may sound strange to suggest that Christ is not full without the church, but given the eternal purpose of God it should not seem at all odd to argue that until the body is redeemed the head is not complete. In speaking about Christian maturity, the maturity of the Son and so on, we should, then, see the great significance of the church *being* the church. Paddling around in immaturity is not just a sad state for men and women in Christ; it is a complete denial of all that the head of the body has done. It is to stand in denial of the new creation and to work in opposition to the goal for

²¹ Gk ὁ παλαιὸς ἑμῶν ἄνθρωπος. Translations such as ‘old self’ really tend to make individualistic what is strongly corporate. The ‘old man’ of Romans 6:6 is the ‘one man’ of Romans 5:15–19. See also Ephesians 4:22 and Colossians 3:9.

²² P. T. Forsyth, *The Work of Christ*, Fontana, London, 1965, p. 118.

which we were redeemed. It is thus small wonder but still a deep tragedy that the church spends so much time and effort attempting to gain an independent glory.

There is one further aspect to this and that is found in Ephesians 5:22-33, some of which has already been addressed.

Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife just as *Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior*. ²⁴Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷so as to present the church to himself in *splendor*, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. ²⁸In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹For no one ever hates his own body, but *he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church*, ³⁰because *we are members of his body*. ³¹‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ ³²This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. ³³Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

Once again the church is understood as Christ’s body and he the head, but there is an added element which seems to determine (partly at least) why the term ‘body’ is used. It is the fact that over all of history human marriage, the joining together in ‘one flesh’ of a man and a woman, is the expression of the eternal plan of God, namely Christ and his church. God had always purposed to have a bride for his Son. Once again, it is a mystery, but Paul has seen that mystery by revelation and so human relationships are now so obvious. The church is the body of Christ because the church is the bride of Christ. This understanding was not limited to Paul either. John saw ‘the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband’ (Rev. 21:2). He was called to ‘come [see] the bride, the wife of the Lamb’ (Rev. 21:9).

Failure to be mature is to dishonor the Lamb who has redeemed us to be his bride. It is an extraordinary honor to be invited to ‘the marriage supper of the Lamb’ for when we come we do so, not as relatives of the family but as the bride herself, who has been given all things to make her ready.

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. ⁷Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; ⁸to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure’ — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. (Rev. 19:6-8)

These righteous deeds are nothing less than the good works which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life (Eph. 2:10). Only those engaging in the good works of the new creation (as distinct from the dead works of the old) are the bride of Christ. We do not become the bride of Christ by means of the good works but apart from them the whole spiritual blessing, the restoration of all things in Christ by the Spirit, cannot be known.