

# *The Ecclesia as Christ's Complement*

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*... The ecclesia, which is His Body, the complement by which He is completing the all in all (Ephesians 1:22-23).*

**T**he word “Body” is here used for the first time in this epistle, and is connected with the word “ecclesia.” It will be used again on several occasions later in this letter, and it is similarly used about the same number of times in the Colossian epistle. For example,

*... and He is the Head of the Body, the ecclesia (Colossians 1:18).*

Back in Romans 12:4-5 we were told,

*For even as, in one body, we have many members, yet all the members have not the same function, thus we, who are many, are one Body in Christ, yet individually members of one another.*

A similar picture with rather more detail is presented to us in I Corinthians 12, beginning at verse 12, and running through to the end of the chapter. In both of these Scriptures, the emphasis is on the diversity in the body, and the comparison is with the various members of a human body with their widely differing functions. None can be dispensed with – none can say to another, “*I have no need of you*” – all are essential to the well-being of the body, and they are united by being under the direction of the head, that is, the brain. For in the illustration given to us in this Corinthian letter, some of the members of the Body are part of the Head.

Here, in Ephesians, we have a different presentation. The Body is distinct from the Head, yet subservient to it. The body is a composite whole – a unit, though consisting of many members, and the emphasis is on the unity, and distinctions as between members are almost completely lost in the glory of the singleness of the whole. When we come to the second half of this epistle, we shall see how great a stress is laid on the unity which should prevail among believers. Look, for instance, how many times the word “one” occurs in the opening verses of the fourth chapter; the one Body is evaluated with the one spirit, the one expectation,

the one Lord, the one faith, the one baptism and the one God. Later in the same chapter, when different ones are given different functions (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers), it is with a view to *“the upbuilding of the Body of Christ, unto the end that we should all attain to the unity of the faith and of the realization of the son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the complement of the Christ”* (Ephesians 4:11-13).

In the phrase we have just quoted, we find the divinely ordained standard of maturity for the saints of today – *“the measure of the stature of the complement of the Christ,”* and the use of the word *“complement”* in this connection only illustrates its importance in the last verse of the first chapter, where it is applied to the ecclesia which is the Body of Christ. If this word is to be the basis of our maturity in Christ, it behooves us to have a true understanding of its meaning. Happily, this is not difficult to obtain, although we may be slow in grasping its full implications.

The word translated *“complement”* is the Greek *pleroma*, which means *“filling,”* or *“that which is put in to fill.”* It is not *“fulness,”* the state of being full, as the *Authorized Version* renders the word in this passage, but that which is put in to make full – to fill up where there is obviously room for that filling. A homely illustration of this can be seen in the slice of cake, which a woman who has just been baking takes out of the whole to see if the interior is satisfactory. The slice is the complement of the cake. While it is out, the cake is incomplete; put it back, and the cake is whole again.

A far better illustration, since much more detail is provided, is given us back in Genesis 2:18-25. In verse 18, we find God saying that it is not good for the human to be alone, and deciding to make him *“a helper as his complement”* (*Concordant Version*). The *Authorized Version* says, a *“help meet [suitable] for him,”* but this does not convey the full meaning of the passage.

The next verse goes on to tell us that *“Yahweh Elohim, having formed from the ground ...”* We pause for a moment to remind ourselves that God had formed man from the ground; was He now going to form another being from the ground to be man’s helper?

No, the passage goes on to explain that God, having formed *“all field life and every flyer of the heavens”* brings them to the human (Adam) for them to be named, and the names that Adam gave them were accepted by God. Thus God established and confirmed man’s headship and dominance over the lower creation. Yet (and this is the important point) in all these, God does not find for the human *“a helper as his complement.”* Why?

Why was it that, in all that had been created, there was not one that could be found to be a complement for man? Surely, because all these were external, and of different species, and the one that was to be his complement must come from within, and be of the same kind. The complement is that which fills up, and there could be no filling up if the place were not first made vacant. Adam, before that which was formed into woman was taken from him, was complete in himself; afterwards, the woman made him complete.

In Genesis 1:28, Adam had been given a command to *“Be fruitful and increase and fill the earth ...”* Now, with the making of woman, it becomes clear that he could not fulfill this injunction of God except through the medium of the one who was his complement.

All this illustrates a very great truth regarding Christ and the ecclesia. Just as woman is the complement of man, so the ecclesia is the complement of Christ. The analogy is the same ... for His complement, too, must come from within, and that is why we find ourselves, if we are members of that ecclesia which is His Body, “*chosen in Him before the disruption of the world*” (Ephesians 1:4).

Let us carry the analogy a little further. Prior to the stupor falling upon Adam, that which was to form the essential nature of the woman lay latent within him, unseen and unknown except to God Who had created humanity and Who, in the day when they were created, had called their name Adam (Genesis 5:2). Similarly, prior to the time when the stupor of death fell upon Christ, that which was to form the essence of the ecclesia lay (figuratively) concealed within Him. (The ecclesia was chosen in Him before the disruption of the world [Ephesians 1:4] and was presented with the gift of grace in Christ Jesus even before the eons began [II Timothy 1:9]).

After our Lord’s rousing from among the dead, the ecclesia begins to have a separate existence, beginning with the call of Saul of Tarsus and continuing even to the present day. At some point the ecclesia will be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air. Then He will be presenting to Himself a “*glorified ecclesia, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that it may be holy and flawless*” (Ephesians 5:27).

Reverting to the original illustration of Adam and the woman, later named Eve, we notice that once the complement became a separate entity, the one from whom it was taken could only fulfill the purpose of God through the medium of the complement. Adam fulfilled the positive command of God in Genesis 1:28 to “*be fruitful and increase and fill the earth*” through the medium of Eve, though previously he had done things, such as the naming of animals, on his own.

Similarly Christ, having fulfilled (as God’s Complement) the prime purpose for which He came to earth – namely, the complete vanquishing and destruction of sin so that it no longer remains an insurmountable barrier between God and His creation (“*It is finished – it is accomplished*” [John 19:30]) – is now seated at God’s right hand, waiting until the ecclesia, which is His Body, is ready to be presented to Him; after which He will proceed to carry out, through His complement, the great work for which all creation is waiting while groaning and travailing together until now (Romans 8:18-22). The ecclesia is the complement by which He is completing the all in all.

But now let us pick up another important point. The original form of humanity was determined by God when He first created it, but the continuation of that form in all subsequent generations is the function of the woman. Man provides the life, the energizing power, but woman perpetuates the form. This is her part in the ministry of maintaining and expanding the human race. God has ordained it to be this way, and because of this we today are in the same form as Adam was many centuries ago. Because of this, too, the Lord Jesus was able to be born in the likeness of humanity, and to be called by Paul “*the last Adam*” (I Corinthians 15:45).

Now, does not all this provide us with a beautiful illustration of the ministry allotted to the ecclesia which is the complement of Christ? Is it not our function to maintain and perpetuate

the work of grace (in accord with the gift of grace made to us in Christ Jesus before eonian times) so that that work shall remain unchanged and unadulterated for all the generations of the eon of the eons – that is, until God’s purpose is completed? Just as woman, as man’s complement, maintains the form of humanity throughout all generations, so the ecclesia, as Christ’s complement, maintains the form of the ministry which God has begun in Christ, so that God shall find,

*Glory in the ecclesia, and in Christ Jesus, for all the generations of the eon of the eons.  
Amen! (Ephesians 3:21).*

Christ Himself provides the power for this ministry; He is the Life, the driving force behind it; but God has so ordained matters that it is our role to see that there is no deviation from the form that that ministry shall take. It is a ministry of grace – consistent grace, perpetual grace, undiluted grace – for grace is the basis of ultimate salvation and the path to complete reconciliation.

The form of the ministry of the ecclesia was determined by God even before the eons began. There are two ministries which date from pre-eonian times: the ministry of Christ and the ministry of the ecclesia. The ministry of Christ is one of life, in accord with the promise of life made in Him before times eonian (Titus 1:2). Christ, as God’s Complement, fulfills His promise of life, for all God’s promises are “Yes” and “Amen” in Christ (II Corinthians 1:20). Christ never deviates from His mission as Life-giver. The promise of life is centered in Him. He is the Resurrection and the Life; the Way, the Truth and the Life; the Bread of Life. “As, in Adam, all are dying, thus also, in Christ, shall all be vivified” (I Corinthians 15:22; see also John 6:35; 11:25; 14:6).

From before eonian times, God determined that all should have life, and He appointed His Son to be the means by which the promise of life should be fulfilled. At Golgotha Jesus said, “It is accomplished.” Even in His death He guarantees life. Life for all is now a certainty; so much so that Paul, when he announces in I Corinthians 15:20 that Christ is roused from among the dead, can (in the space of a mere nine verses) go right on to declare that God will be “All in all.”

Yet God has also determined, again from before eonian times, that the basis of ultimate salvation shall be His Own grace and not the works of the creature, and thus the ecclesia is appointed, as Christ’s complement, to supplement the ministry of life which Christ is operating. So, from Golgotha onwards God begins to display His grace, first to the members of the ecclesia itself, as they are called one by one from among the sons of humanity, and then through the ecclesia to all creation. For it is a ministry not limited to the earth, but is to be displayed in the eons to come among the celestials as well. Like the ministry of life, it will not cease until the “All in all” has been completed.

The ministry of the ecclesia – this ministry of grace and conciliation – is not one suddenly conceived by God to take over where other ministries fall short, although it does just that. It succeeds while others fail simply because it is entirely of God, dependent on Him and Him alone. **It is the longest dated ministry in the universe apart from that of Christ Himself.** God’s purpose is defined as the purpose of the eons (Ephesians 3:11). The ministry

of the ecclesia dates, therefore, from before God put any single part of His purpose into operation. It was conceived in the very earliest counsels of God, and has remained unaffected by anything that has transpired since.

How wonderful it is that the whole future of the universe depends on those primal decisions of God – to bestow life through His Son and to display grace through the ecclesia! It is just impossible to grasp, in full measure, the honor which God has bestowed on us as members of that ecclesia, but the nearer we attain “*to the measure of the stature of the complement of the Christ,*” the closer we grow to maturity.

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