



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume X
Issue 229

The Ecclesia as Christ's Complement

by – John H. Essex (1907-1991)

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

The 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

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Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

ISSN: 1936-9360

Volume X, No. 229 – February 23, 2010

This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7)
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25)
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1)
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12)
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13)
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15)
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13).
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with
 - ... total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14)
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ECCLESIA (continued from page 2169)

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.

Grace and Truth Magazine
Nottingham, England

God's Vast Love

by – E.H. Robison (1885-1932)

Most thinking is fathered by a wish and mothered by a fear. It is well, therefore, to look to our ruling desires and dominant fears if we would escape the natural prejudices which warp our thinking. This is true in respect to strictly mundane matters where we, in some measure, know our way around. Yet it is more notably the case in spiritual things, where we could know nothing at all except by revelation; and if our concepts of revelation are warped by pagan philosophy, we shall understand God's purposes but poorly, indeed.

Paul, God's mouthpiece to the Gentiles, says on this point:

Now the soulish man is not receiving the things which are of the spirit of God, for they are stupidity to him, and he is not able to know them, seeing that they are spiritually examined (I Corinthians 2:14).

A "soulish" man is simply one who relies on his senses to guide him in his concepts of what God is like and of what He intends to do to and for the human race.

Would we show much love for our human friends if we never read the letters they take the trouble to write us about what they intend to do; or if we read them so superficially or with such cock-sureness of what we think they are going to say that what they do say makes no impression? Yet we do those very things with God's Word.

He says: "In Christ all shall be vivified" (I Corinthians 15:22), and we say, "Oh no: that means He is going to make some dead."

He says He is going to "head up all in the Christ – both that in the heavens and that on the earth" (Ephesians 1:10), and we say, "He will certainly scatter part of it."

When God gives us a glimpse into His purpose to

"reconcile all to Him" (Colossians 1:20), we object that He will forever antagonize some. We just know better than God does, that's all.

When God's Word tells us that God is to be "All in all" (I Corinthians 15:28), our prejudices tell us that He means only "All in some." We feel that God is not even God over all, to say nothing of being God in all. The majestic human will must be glorified at any cost.

But let's have done with human feelings as a guide to divine revelation. Our feelings vary greatly, often affected by the most trivial circumstances.

"That which the eye did not perceive, and the ear did not hear, and to which the heart of man did not ascend whatever, God makes ready for those who are loving Him" – that which could not be known by sensuous perception, "to us God reveals them through His spirit" (I Corinthians 2:9-10).

There you are: follow your natural judgment and miss the truth; give heed to the Word of God and have a wisdom which comes from no other source. It all depends on what you want: divine truth or self flattery. The two things will not stay in the same heart at the same time.

When we read of the living God being "the Savior of all mankind" (I Timothy 4:10); when we learn that the Son of Man shall draw all to Himself (John 12:32) as the universal center of gravity; when it is made plain to us that God our Savior "wills that all mankind be saved and come into a realization of the truth" (I Timothy 2:4), and that Christ Jesus is the One giving Himself "a correspondent Ransom for all" (I Timothy 2:6) – the same "all" that God wills to be saved (2:4) and for whom believers should pray (2:1); when God's benevolent determination to be "annulling the acts of the Adversary" (I John 3:8) is revealed to us; when we are informed that death, being the "last enemy," will be abolished (I Corinthians 15:26), we as believers have no ►

course open to us but to believe.

These are matters concerning which we could know nothing except as God tells us; and this is what God has told us. The slight difficulties which suggest themselves are practically all traceable to the presence of ecclesiastical philosophy in our minds or to faults in our English translations of the Sacred Scriptures.

God's Word, being true, makes every man who does not speak in accord with it a liar (Romans 3:4).

But men make His love too narrow
By false limits of their own,
And they magnify His justice
With a zeal He will not own.

For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man's mind;
And the heart of our Creator
Is most wonderfully kind.

One reason, probably the principal reason, why we are so slow to believe in the kindness of God's heart is our innate subconsciousness of sin and its attendant fear of the consequences; and there is no way to escape this fear except by repose in what God in Christ has done to rescue us. There is no place to hear what God has done except in His Word, for "*faith is out of tidings, yet tidings through a declaration of Christ*" (Romans 10:17).

Mind: our worst fears about sin and its deserts are well founded; and all that pagan religions (in whatever land) have done is to chafe the sore that is already there; all that human ethics and philosophies have done is to try to get people to forget without any authoritative ground for forgetting. All that pleasure seekers and jazz makers can do is to occupy the attention, to keep it away from the thought of sin.

Yet the honest truth is we are in a bad way unless God has done something about it. The pertinent question is, "Did Christ appear in order to put away sin once for all by the sacrifice of Himself?" (Hebrews 9:26). If He did, the penalty not only was paid but is paid; and no one can be asked to suffer pain of any pitch, intensity or duration as a penalty, or be called upon to "satisfy" a justice which Christ Himself has already fully vindicated. Is the grace, the undeserved kindness of God to be

thus frustrated by human additions? "*Not by me,*" says Paul (Galatians 2:21).

Furthermore, is Christ Jesus, having begun the good work, unable to bring it to completion? Is He unable to cope with sin so that it will never cease to be? Is the law and its death penalty to exist when death is abolished? Are there to be tortured or even dead enemies when all things in heaven and earth are reconciled to God – brought into grateful, friendly appreciation of His loving kindness? Is God, with all power and wisdom concentrated in His risen Son, unable to bring to bear influences which will affect the motives, the inmost preferences of every individual, as He did with Abel, with Saul of Tarsus, and with every one of us who believe? Is not Christ the "*power of God*" as well as the "*wisdom of God*" (I Corinthians 1:24)?

What say the Scriptures?

I John 3:4 – Sin is lawlessness.

Romans 3:20 – Through law is the recognition of sin.

Romans 7:8 – Apart from law sin is dead.

Sin, as a judicial technicality, is thus identified with laws; but what has been actually done about it?

Galatians 3:13 – Christ reclaims us from the curse of the law, becoming a curse for our sakes.

John 1:29 – Lo! the Lamb of God Which is taking away the sin of the world!

Hebrews 9:26 – Since then, He must often be suffering from the disruption of the world, yet now, once, at the conclusion of the eons, for the repudiation of sin through His sacrifice, is He manifest.

II Corinthians 5:19 – Not reckoning their offenses to them.

II Peter 2:24 – Who Himself carries up our sins in His body on to the pole.

Is the mighty Maker so poor a workman that He will have to discard the most of His work? Or will He gather up the fragments so that nothing will be

lost? What humanly conducted factory could rate for efficiency if it had to dump most, or even much of its product into some hellhole or offal place of perdition?

Of course there are parables and other statements, most of them applying to Christ's thousand-year reign as the Son of Man, or to the immediate preparation for that reign, which speak in a different tone. **Right here it is well to note that the greatest single cause of confusion in Scripture study consists in failure to discern correctly the times, seasons, dispensations, classes, etc., which are in God's plan.**

The thousand-year reign of Christ, often called the millennium, is something of a reversion, in that it goes back to law. It gives men the flawless rule, the righteous government which they think they need to have a fair "chance." It is given to them to prove that they need something more. The present dispensation, however, is one in which grace reigns and not law (Romans 5:21). The same will be true in the eon to follow the millennium, although even the judgments of Christ's reign are disciplinary rather than penal; for when the Lamb of God bore away the sin of the world, He bore it all away – not our sins up to date with a running account thereafter, which would benefit us none, seeing we were born after His sacrifice was made.

No act of sin is now or will ever be the cause of condemnatory sentence or of penal suffering on the part of anybody. Thank God for that. There is discipline, however; but what a difference to the heart of faith!

For the love of Christ is constraining us, judging this, that, if one died for the sake of all, consequently all died. And He died for the sake of all that those who are living should by no means still be living to themselves, but to the One dying and being roused for their sakes.

The dying is finished. Sin is dealt with in its judicial aspects, though we still experience it for discipline of faith until our change comes (Philippians 3:20, 21). The almighty Head of the New Creation is dealing now principally with ignorance and unbelief. These obscure the light of the glory of God as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ no less than sin.

Only a sense of one's own insufficiency-without-God-and-His-Christ can bring one to trust in that God and Christ. The churches are full of indoctrinated unbelievers. As long as they think they are self-sufficient, in unit or in group, they are going to stay unbelievers, no matter what they know; because faith is trust in a Person. Until they can sing with sincerity, as well as with truth, "nothing in my hand I bring," there will be no reconciliation, no lively appreciation of the fact that **His will is sweeter than our wish.**

Saul of Tarsus was certainly no small sinner, "foremost representative" he calls himself (I Timothy 1:15); he was ignorant and unbelieving (I Timothy 1:13); yet we see how the grace of God was shown to him. He was a calumniator, a persecutor, and an outrager or brutal person in his persecutions. It would be difficult to find a harder case; but one glimpse of his glorified Lord and that stony heart was melted down like butter. One word from that gracious voice, which spoke as never man spoke, and his ignorance of God as He is began to be dispelled. A few words from a heaven-sent and heaven-instructed brother, and unbelief dissolved like discontent on the bosom of a great calm.

"Who art Thou?" was his cry. "I am justice, whom thou disregardest" did the glorious One say? Not being taught by the Pharisees, He did not. "I am Jesus Savior!" How different. Not a condemner but a rescuer. The wrong-doer was arrested by love, and there broken, contrite he lay at the feet of his risen Lord.

All this, Paul tells us, was in the nature of a pattern of what God intended to do to and for other unbelievers who were to come to believe.

Therefore was I shown mercy, that in me, the foremost [sinner], Jesus Christ should be displaying all His patience, for a pattern of those who are about to be believing on Him for life eonian (I Timothy 1:16).

Saul was not punished for his iniquity. The One Whom he persecuted had already paid the penalty for the sin of persecution in Saul. There was no penalty, but much discipline. There is not only no future punishment for sin but no punishment now. "Sin reigns in death" only (Romans 5:21). Sin has no resurrection. In the death of Christ ►

sin came to an end and in the resurrection power of Christ “*grace reigns through righteousness,*” superabundant above sin and its consequences by virtue of the headship of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Man’s dread of a hell of torment is taught by the precepts of men, not by the Word of God. Read Romans 6:1-14 and see how simply the apostle presents the facts. Our horizon has been entirely filled by sin and sinners. It is like moaning over a debt that’s paid. Christ, not sin, should have the preeminence in all things.

And know this: **No sin however heinous, and no aggregation of sinners, however numerous or ignorant or willful, can bankrupt the riches of God’s grace or undo what was done on Calvary’s brow.** If peace is not made by the blood of His cross then it will not be made by any effort or righteousness of our own.

Now thanks be to God, Who always gives us a triumph in Christ!

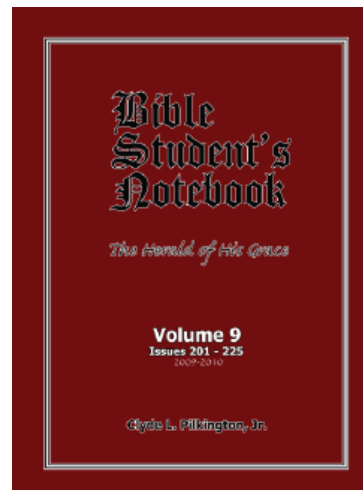
Since mine eyes were fixed on Jesus
I’ve lost sight of all beside
So enchained my spirit’s vision
Looking at the Crucified

(See also the author’s *Christ and Religion* that ran in BSN #183.)

Fredrik H. Robison had an interesting journey to the truth. He served as personal secretary to Charles Taze Russell, founder of *The Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society*. In 1909 he was given oversight of the Watchtower’s foreign operations and was a member of the five-man editorial committee of *The Watch Tower*, responsible for approving each and every article appearing in its columns. In 1918 he was one of the *Watchtower* officials charged with governmental sedition and sentenced to Federal prison. In 1922 his understanding of Scripture changed and he left *The Watchtower Bible & Tract Society* to successfully follow his conscience. Robison conducted independent Bible studies on the life and epistles of Paul in Washington, D.C., sponsored by some of his friends. He eventually authored very helpful articles (including this one: *God’s Vast Love*) that appeared in *Unsearchable Riches* magazine, and also wrote *Are Bride and Body Identical?* published by the *Concordant Publishing Concern*.

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