



# SOUTHWESTERN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

THEOLOGY AND READING

THE CHURCH AS “ONE NEW MAN”

SANG-WONG (AARON) SON

## *The Church as “One New Man”: Ecclesiology and Anthropology in Ephesians<sup>1</sup>*

Sang-Won (Aaron) Son,  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary  
Fort Worth, Texas  
ason@swbts.edu

### Introduction

The church is one of the central themes of Ephesians,<sup>2</sup> and as such, it has been the subject of much scholarly debate.<sup>3</sup> Many scholars agree (1) that in Ephesians, Paul<sup>4</sup> uses the term ἐκκλησία and various church imag-

<sup>1</sup>In this article, the generic term “man” is used to designate human being, both man and woman, because there is no other English term that embraces both the individual and corporate dimensions of human personality.

<sup>2</sup>This is evident in the frequent use of the term ἐκκλησία and employment of various church images. The term ἐκκλησία is used nine times in Ephesians (1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 32). When the size of the letter is considered, this is probably more frequent than in any of the other Pauline letters. Ephesians is also full of church images: (1) the body of Christ (explicitly, 1:22–23; 4:12, 15–16; 5:23, 30; and implicitly, 2:16; 3:6; 4:4); (2) the bride of Christ (5:25–27); (3) the people of God (2:19; cf. “saints”—1:1, 18; 3:18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18 and “partakers of the promise”—3:6); (4) the family or household of God (2:19); and (5) the building or the temple of God (2:20–22).

Most commentators recognize the church as one of the central themes of Ephesians. For example, see Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3*, Anchor Bible 34a (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 35–36; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), xciii; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Ephesians: A Commentary*, trans. Helen Heron (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 293; Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 33; and Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 25.

<sup>3</sup>Best, *Ephesians*, 622–41, provides a helpful bibliography and an essay on the church in Ephesians.

<sup>4</sup>Although Paul’s authorship of Ephesians has been rigorously challenged, I accept its authenticity. Those who question Paul’s authorship normally rest their case on the unique words, writing style, and theological concepts of Ephesians, but it seems that they do not fully consider changing circumstances or subject matter, the use of non-authorial preformed traditions, and the role of the amanuensis. For a detailed argument for its authenticity, see Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids:

es to denote primarily the universal church rather than the local churches,<sup>5</sup> (2) that he places a strong emphasis on the unity of the church,<sup>6</sup> and (3) that he relates the church closely to the triune God.<sup>7</sup>

Interestingly, in Ephesians Paul often describes the church and her relationship to Christ by employing anthropological terms or images. For example, (1) he designates the church as the body of Christ and Christ as the head (Eph 1:22; 4:15; 5:23),<sup>8</sup> an image that is reminiscent of a human body. (2) He applies the “one flesh” concept that is derived from Genesis 2:24 and has significant anthropological implications to the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph 5:22–33).<sup>9</sup> (3) More importantly, he calls the church “one new man” (Eph 2:15) and compares the full-grown church to a mature or perfect man, whom he later identifies as Christ (Eph 4:13–15).

These expressions often occur in the same context and are conceptually connected together. Their close interconnection in usage and concept indicates that in Paul’s mind anthropology, Christology, and ecclesiology are inseparably interwoven together. Despite this close interconnection, however, anthropology has rarely been brought up in the discussion of the ecclesiology or Christology of Ephesians.

It is for this reason that this study examines a few passages in Ephesians in which Paul employs anthropological images to describe the church—namely, “the body of Christ,” “one flesh,” and “one new man.” The purpose of the study is basically twofold: (1) to determine how anthropology and ecclesiology are related to each other in Ephesians and (2) to know how one’s understanding of Paul’s anthropology affects his or her understanding of Paul’s ecclesiology and vice versa. This study may also bring some new insights to one’s understanding of the nature of the so-called universal church and her relationship to the local churches.

Baker Academic, 2002), 2–61. Cf. Best, *Ephesians*, 6–36, who examines basically the same evidences, but concludes against Paul’s authorship.

<sup>5</sup>For example, see Best, *Ephesians*, 33; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, xciii–xciv; Barth, *Ephesians 1–3*, 33; Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 294; and Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 112.

<sup>6</sup>For example, see Lincoln, *Ephesians*, xciv; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 237.

<sup>7</sup>The church is the body of Christ and the temple of God where the Spirit dwells. Best, *Ephesians*, 622–41, provides a good summary of the church’s relationship to the triune God evident in Ephesians.

<sup>8</sup>I have dealt with this concept elsewhere. See Sang-Won A. Son, *Corporate Elements in Pauline Anthropology*, *Analecta Biblica* 148 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2001), 83–120.

<sup>9</sup>For anthropological implications of “one flesh,” see Son, *Corporate Elements*, 147–77.

### "The Body of Christ"<sup>10</sup>

Paul's reference to the church as the body of Christ occurs first in his intercessory prayer (Eph 1:15–23). At the conclusion of his prayer, he states, "And He [God] . . . made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body" (Eph 1:22b–23).<sup>11</sup> Two things are distinctively noticeable in this statement: (1) Paul uses the term ἐκκλησία to denote the church and specifically identifies it as the body of Christ. (2) He incorporates the "head" image into his "body" image to emphasize the cosmic role of Christ.<sup>12</sup>

Paul mentions one body in his discussion of the unity of Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:11–22). While explaining the work of Christ that brought reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles, he states, "that He [Christ] might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross" (Eph 2:16). It is uncertain what "one body" specifically denotes. Some scholars insist that it refers to the individual body of Christ in the sense of "his flesh" as in the previous verse (Eph 2:14),<sup>13</sup> but it is more likely that the church is in view. The reasons are as follows: (1) If Paul had the individual body of Christ in mind, he would have said "his body" rather than "one body."<sup>14</sup> (2) The underlying idea of the passage is the unity of two groups of people in Christ,

<sup>10</sup>Paul's references to the church as the body of Christ occur in four of his letters: 1 Corinthians, Romans, Colossians, and Ephesians. The basic thought that underlies this image remains the same in all four letters. In Colossians and Ephesians, however, Paul introduces a new concept, namely, Christ as the Head of the church, and uses the body image not only to speak of the unity and the diversity of the church as in 1 Corinthians and Romans, but also to point out the growing aspect of the church. For full discussion, see Son, *Corporate Elements*, 83–120.

<sup>11</sup>All translations are mine unless stated otherwise.

<sup>12</sup>Christ is depicted as the Head of the church also in Eph 4:15; 5:23; Col 1:19; 2:9, 10. The word κεφαλή occurs in 1 Corinthians 11:3 without reference to the church. The meaning of κεφαλή has been much debated. See Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard de Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 378–87; E. Earle Ellis, *Pauline Theology: Ministry and Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 41; Heinrich Schlier, "κεφαλή," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3:673–81; Stephen Bedale, "The Meaning of κεφαλή in the Pauline Epistles," *Journal of Theological Studies* 5 (October 1954): 211–15; and W. Grudem, "Does κεφαλή Mean 'Source' or 'Authority over' in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples," *Trinity Journal* 6 ns (Spring 1985): 38–95.

<sup>13</sup>For example, see Ernst Percy, *Der Leib Christi (soma Christou) in den paulinischen Homologoumena und Antilegomena* (Lund: Harrassowitz, 1942), 39, 42; Lucien Cerfaux, *The Church in the Theology of St. Paul*, trans. Geoffrey Webb and Adrian Walker (New York: Herder and Herder, 1959), 326; and Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Church in the New Testament*, trans. W.J. O'Hare (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 174–75. Schnackenburg, however, seems to have changed his view. In his commentary on Ephesians, he states that "one body" refers to the church. See Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 117.

<sup>14</sup>C.F.D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 77; Best, *Ephesians*, 265.

namely, Jews and Gentiles. The “one body (ἐνὶ σώματι)” in verse 16 is clearly parallel to “one (ἓν)” in verse 14 and “one new man (ἓνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον)” in verse 15. All three expressions, therefore, must denote the same entity. Moreover, (3) the phrase “in one body” occurs also in Colossians 3:15, and there it clearly refers to the church.

In a similar context to the previous passage, Paul states that “the Gentiles are to become fellow heirs (συγκληρονόμα), members of the same body (σύσσωμα), and partakers (συμμέτοχα) of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph 3:6). The phrase “in Christ Jesus” seems to modify all three nouns. The phrase “the same body . . . in Christ Jesus” is, then, not much different from “one body in Christ” (Rom 12:5) and the underlying idea is basically the same as that of the previous passage (Eph 2:16), namely, the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ.

Paul employs the body image again in Ephesians 4:4, 11–16. The general context of the passage is very similar to that of 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, namely, the unity of the church expressed in the diversity of the spiritual gifts. Although it is uncertain what “one body (ἓν σῶμα)” in verse 4 denotes,<sup>15</sup> the “body of Christ (τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ)” in verse 12 clearly refers to the church. Here Paul depicts the church as an organic body that grows and once again identifies Christ as the head.<sup>16</sup>

An explicit reference to the church as the body of Christ and Christ as the head occurs once more in Paul’s household instructions for Christian wives and husbands (Eph 5:22–33). His exhortation is that wives submit to their husbands as the church to Christ (Eph 5:22–24) and that husbands love their wives as being their own bodies,<sup>17</sup> as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (Eph 5:25–33). To support his instructions

<sup>15</sup>The majority of commentators think that it refers to the church, and I agree with them. See Best, *Ephesians*, 366; Bruce, *Ephesians*, 336; O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 281; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 514; and Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 238. Cf. Barth, *Ephesians*, vol. II, 464.

<sup>16</sup>Here the head appears to be a part of the body analogy, but in verse 16 Paul carefully distinguishes the Head (Christ) from the body (church) by saying, “the head, from whom (ἡ κεφαλὴ, Χριστός, ἐξ οὗ),” that is, from Christ, rather than “the head, from which.” If he had regarded the head as a part of the body analogy, he would have used the feminine relative pronoun rather than the masculine. For Paul the church is the complete body of Christ and not merely a headless body.

<sup>17</sup>The phrase ὡς τὰ ἑαυτῶν σώματα in Ephesians 5:28 can also mean “as you love your own bodies,” but in view of Ephesians 5:23 where the wife is implied as the body of her husband and of Genesis 2:24 cited at Ephesians 5:31, it seems more accurate to translate the phrase “as being your own bodies.” So, Best, *One Body*, 177; Ellis, *Pauline Theology*, 41; T.K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1897), 170–71; Barth, *Ephesians*, 629–30; Franz Mussner, *Der Brief an die Epheser* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 1982), 159. Otherwise, see Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 378, who insists that the phrase must mean “as you love yourself.”

for the wife’s submission to her husband (Eph 5:22–24), Paul appeals to the headship of the husband over his wife and that of Christ over the church. He thus states, “For the husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church, himself being the savior of the body” (Eph 5:23). There is no doubt that the body here denotes the body of Christ that is the church.<sup>18</sup> To support his instructions for the husband’s love for his wife (Eph 5:25–32), Paul appeals to Christ’s sacrificial love for the church. He then states, “We are members of his body” (Eph 5:30). This statement is not much different from saying, “Your bodies are members of Christ” (1 Cor 6:15) and “You are . . . members of it [Christ’s body]” (1 Cor 12:27).

Paul’s designation of the church as the body of Christ raises a number of questions. In what sense is the church the body of Christ? How is this body related to the individual body of Christ? Should one understand Paul’s expressions literally or metaphorically? More importantly for this study, what does Paul’s concept of the church as the body of Christ and Christ as the head say about his view of human existence? Before answering these questions, it seems necessary to examine Paul’s concept of “one flesh” because it is inextricably connected with the body of Christ in Ephesians and has significant anthropological implications.

### The “One Flesh” Unity

Paul refers to “one flesh (μία σάρξ)” in his household instructions for wives and husbands (Eph 5:22–33).<sup>19</sup> To provide a biblical basis for his argument, he cites Genesis 2:24 at verse 31: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.” A question often arises as to the role of Genesis 2:24 in Paul’s argument—whether it relates only to the second half of his discussion that deals with the “one body” unity between the husband and the wife (5:25–29) or also to the first half that speaks of the headship of the husband over his wife (5:22–24). J.P. Sampley, for example, argues that Genesis 2:24 relates to the whole passage which includes Paul’s discussion

<sup>18</sup>A question has been raised as to whether the last phrase αὐτός σωτήρ τοῦ σώματος refers only to the relationship between Christ and the church (e.g., Barth, *Ephesians*, 614–17; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 370; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 742–43) or also to that between the husband and the wife (e.g., W. Foerster, “σωτήρ,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 7:1016). Bruce, *Ephesians*, 385, suggests that it may refer to the husband’s role as his wife’s protector.

<sup>19</sup>The context of Ephesians 5:22–33 is very similar to that of 1 Corinthians 6:12–20. In both passages Paul (1) deals with the sexual union, (2) cites Genesis 2:24 to support his argument, and (3) applies the “one flesh” concept to both the human relationship and to the relationship between Christ and a believer or the church.

of the headship of the husband over his wife (5:22–31).<sup>20</sup> His argument is, however, not convincing for a number of reasons: (1) Paul's citation of Genesis 2:24 is directly related to the section where he exhorts husbands to love their wives as being their own bodies. (2) The underlying concept of Genesis 2:24 is the one flesh unity between Adam and Eve and thus between husband and wife in marriage and not subordination. It is true that Paul's concept of the headship of the husband over his wife is also grounded in Genesis, but it is grounded in the idea of Adam's priority and pre-eminence in creation (1:27–28, 2:18–22, 3:6, 13) rather than in the idea of one flesh (Gen 2:24).<sup>21</sup> (3) The body and the head are not one and the same imagery,<sup>22</sup> although these two images often merge together in Paul's writings.<sup>23</sup> They are two unique images and each has its own meaning and can be used without the other.<sup>24</sup> An exegetical confusion arises when these images are treated as if they are one and the same and understood in light of the body metaphor employed in 1 Corinthians 12:12–27. In a sense, the wife is the body of her husband, but the wife does not form "the rump or trunk of the body of which the husband is the head."<sup>25</sup> They together form a complete one flesh unity. Paul's citation of Genesis 2:24, therefore, qualifies only the second section (Eph 5:25–29) that deals with the one body relationship between the husband and the wife.

Significant for this study is Paul's application of the one flesh concept that is derived from Genesis 2:24 and has significant anthropological implications to the relationship between Christ and the church.<sup>26</sup> Right after citing Genesis 2:24 at Ephesians 5:31, he states: "This mystery is great, and I am speaking in regard to Christ and the church" (Eph 5:32). In Paul's mind, the one body unity that believers form together with Christ has something in common with the one flesh unity created between the husband and the wife in marriage.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>20</sup>J.P. Sampley, *And the Two Shall Become One Flesh: A Study of Tradition in Ephesians 5:21–33* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 32–34, 113–16.

<sup>21</sup>See 1 Cor 11:7–9, 1 Tim 2:13–14, and 2 Cor 11:3.

<sup>22</sup>See above, note 16.

<sup>23</sup>Eph 1:22–23; 4:15–16; 5:22–33; Col 1:18; 2:19.

<sup>24</sup>Thus, the head image is used without the body image in 1 Cor 11:3–10 and Col 2:10.

<sup>25</sup>Ernest Best, *One Body in Christ: A Study in the Relationship of the Church to Christ in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul* (London: S.P.C.K., 1955), 179.

<sup>26</sup>A similar application of the one flesh concept derived from Genesis 2:24 occurs in 1 Corinthians 6:12–20 in which Paul talks about the unity created in the sexual relationship between a believer and a prostitute and the unity created between Christ and a believer.

<sup>27</sup>As he discusses the relationship between Christ and the church, Paul employs another image, namely, the church as the bride of Christ. Although he does not use the term "bride," the image is clearly seen in his expressions employed in Ephesians 5:26–27: "that he [Christ] might sanctify her [church], having cleansed her by the washing of water

Now more questions beg for answers: What does the one body (flesh) unity created between Adam and Eve, between husband and wife, and between Christ and the church denote? In what sense is the one flesh unity created between two individual human beings comparable to the corporate unity created between Christ and the church? More importantly, what is the fundamental assumption that underlies these expressions? Paul’s idea of the church as one new man (Eph 2:15) seems to provide a bridge between Paul’s anthropology and his ecclesiology.

### “One New Man”

While speaking of the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ (Eph 2:11–22), Paul states, “that He [Christ] might create in Himself one new man out of the two (ἓνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον)” (Eph 2:15). The first exegetical question is whether “one new man” should be understood individually or corporately? In other words, are Jewish and Gentile believers created as individuals into a new type of humanity or as groups into a new corporate person? Some scholars insist that “one new man” denotes a new individual self or nature for the following reasons: (1) If Paul had a new corporate community in mind, he would not have changed the neuter (ἓν) in verse 14 to the masculine (ἓνα) in verse 15. (2) “One new man” is identical with “the new man” in Ephesians 4:24, which denotes a transformed individual being. (3) The idea of one new man is basically the same as a new creation in 2 Corinthians 5:17 and in Galatians 6:15.<sup>28</sup> This argument, however, ignores the literary context in which “one new man” occurs and understands Paul’s expressions, “the new man” and “a new creation,” too individually.

Paul’s discussion in Ephesians 2:11–22 is thematically connected with Ephesians 2:1–10 and ultimately with Ephesians 1:20–23. After speaking of God’s power which was demonstrated in His raising and seating of Christ at His right hand (Eph 1:20–23), Paul describes the effect of Christ’s resurrection and seating at the right hand of God for individual believers: God made them alive, raised them up and seated them together with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph 2:1–10). In the present passage (Eph 2:11–22), Paul explains that as believers, Jews and Gentiles alike, are reconciled to God through Christ, they are also reconciled to one another

with the word, that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.” The citation of Genesis 2:24 that immediately follows also supports the idea that Paul depicts the church as the bride of Christ as Eve was the bride of Adam. Cf. 2 Cor 12:2–3.

<sup>28</sup>Best, *Ephesians*, 261–62 provides a concise summary of this argument and a list of scholars in support.



in Christ, thus forming a corporate solidarity with Christ and with other believers in Christ. The focus of the passage is, therefore, not on the reconciliation of individual believers with God, but on the unity of two groups of people in Christ. In other words, Paul's attention has shifted from the vertical reconciliation of individual believers with God to the horizontal reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles in Christ.<sup>29</sup>

The idea of Christ uniting two groups of people in one is repeatedly expressed in the middle section (Eph 2:14–16). This can be easily noticed when the text is arranged as follows:

v. 14	For he is our peace,			
	who <i>has made</i>	<u>both</u>	<b>one</b>	and
	<i>has broken . . .</i>			
v. 15	<i>has abolished . . .</i>			
	so that he <i>might create</i> in him	<u>the two</u>	into	<b>one new</b>
				<b>man . . .</b>
v. 16	and that he <i>might reconcile</i>	<u>both</u>	in	<b>one body</b>

In this layout, “the two” (v. 15) is parallel to “both” (vv. 14, 16),<sup>30</sup> and they all denote the two groups of people, namely, Jews and Gentiles. “One new man” (v. 15) is parallel to “one” (v. 14) and “one body” (v. 16), and they all denote a corporate unity created in Christ. Various images employed in 2:19–22 vividly illustrate this corporate unity that believers form with Christ and with one another in Christ.<sup>31</sup>

Why does Paul call the church one new man? In what sense is the church one new man? How does Christ create this one new man in Himself?<sup>32</sup> Although the specific reference to the church as one new man

<sup>29</sup>See Darrell L. Bock, “‘The New Man’ as Community in Colossians and Ephesians,” in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands: Biblical and Leadership Studies in Honor of Donald K. Campbell*, eds. Charles H. Dyer and Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 161, where he emphatically states, “contextually this [one new man] cannot be a reference to some entity inside an individual. The context is once again thoroughly social and racial in nature. Jew and Gentile are reconciled into one new body, the church.”

<sup>30</sup>The neuter, τὰ ἀμφοτέρω is used in verse 14 because it refers to two parties of classes under which Jews and Gentiles are grouped. Cf. Gal 3:22; 1 Cor 1:27f; Heb 7:7. See Best, *Ephesians*, 252; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 368.

<sup>31</sup>The images change from membership of a city to that of a household, to the building which contains the household, then to the temple of God, that is, the dwelling place of God. The body image is also implied in the expression “joined together and grows” (cf. Col 2:19). As the various parts of the body make up the single whole body and as the various parts of the building create the single whole building, so believers form a corporate solidarity. They are organically and structurally connected to Christ the cornerstone and to one another.

<sup>32</sup>The phrase ἐν αὐτῷ must denote Christ himself. αἴμα is too remote, σάρξ is feminine, and σῶμα does not occur until verse 16.

occurs only in this passage, it is not an isolated idea. In Ephesians 4:13, Paul compares the full-grown church to a mature or perfect man (ἀνὴρ τέλειος).<sup>33</sup> Of course, one must determine first whether the perfect man here denotes the manhood of individual believers, of the church, or of Christ. Some scholars argue that since the perfect man is contrasted to “children” (νήπιοι) in 4:14, it denotes the maturity of individual believers.<sup>34</sup> An individual connotation should not be completely excluded; however, the main drive in the context is not individual but corporate, because the church is seen as a corporate entity and not as disparate individuals.<sup>35</sup> For this reason, other scholars think that the perfect man is analogous to the one new man of Ephesians 2:15 and refers to the church.<sup>36</sup> It is true that the maturity of the church is the focus of the passage and the perfect man is closely related to the one new man of Ephesians 2:15, but it is not likely that the perfect man denotes the church. The perfect man is depicted not as the church that grows, but as the goal which the church must reach. The syntactical analysis supports this conclusion.

- v. 11 and He made some apostles, some prophets, . . .
- v. 12 for (πρός) the equipment of the saints  
for (εἰς) the work of ministry,  
for (εἰς) the building up of the body of Christ,
- v. 13 until we all may *attain*  
**to (εἰς) the unity of the faith . . .**  
**to (εἰς) a perfect man (ἄνδρα τέλειον),**  
**to (εἰς) the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,**  
so that we might be no longer children . . .

<sup>33</sup>Paul uses the word ἀνὴρ rather than ἄνθρωπος, but this change should not affect the meaning because both words are used interchangeably in Eph 5:22–33.

The word τέλειος is used 9 times in Paul’s letters: Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 2:6; 13:10; 14:20; Eph 4:13; Phil 3:15; Col 1:28, and 4:12. It has a wide range of meanings. It can mean “whole,” “mature,” “complete,” or “perfect.” Most commentators think that ἀνὴρ τέλειος denotes the church and thus τέλειος should be translated “mature” rather than “perfect” (e.g., Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 555; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 256; S. Hanson, *The Unity of the Church in the New Testament: Colossians and Ephesians* (Lexington, KY: American Theological Library Association, 1963), 159; Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 185; and O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 307). I, however, think that ἀνὴρ τέλειος denotes the corporate Christ and thus prefer to translate τέλειος as “perfect.” For helpful discussion, see Gerhard Delling, “τέλειος,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 8:67–78.

<sup>34</sup>E.g., C.L. Mitton, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), 154; John A. Allan, “The ‘In Christ’ Formula in Ephesians,” *New Testament Studies* 5 (October 1958): 61.

<sup>35</sup>So, Best, *Ephesians*, 401; O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 307.

<sup>36</sup>See Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 555n6, for the list of scholars who support this view.

v. 15      we may *grow*  
**to (εἰς) Him, who is the Head, Christ**

The verbs “attain (καταντήσωμεν)” (4:13) and “grow (αὐχήσωμεν)” (4:15) relate to “the building of the body of Christ (δικοδομήν τοῦ σωματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ)” (4:12). Four prepositional phrases in 4:13 and 15, each beginning with εἰς, are in parallel and all denote the goal which the church must reach.<sup>37</sup> An indefinite “perfect man (ἄνδρα τέλειον)” in 4:13 is specifically identified as Christ who is the Head (4:15). As the Head, Christ not only is the ultimate standard of the growth of the church, but also joins and upholds the church and supplies all the needs for its growth.

In some respects, Paul’s idea of Christ as the perfect man continues in the following passage (4:20–24) in which he makes a reference to “the old man (παλαιὸς ἄνθρωπος)” and “the new man (καινὸς ἄνθρωπος).”<sup>38</sup> Most Bible translators and commentators understand the old man and the new man as denoting the old nature and the new nature of an individual believer, but one should not completely ignore the corporate dimension or background of these expressions.

In Ephesians 4:20–21, Paul states: “You did not so learn Christ, assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus,”<sup>39</sup> and then adds three infinitive phrases in verses 22–24: ἀποθέσθαι ὑμᾶς . . . τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον, ἀνανεοῦσθαι τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ νοῦς ὑμῶν, and ἐνδύσασθαι τὸν καινὸν ἄνθρωπον. The function of these infinitives in the sentence is difficult to determine. Most scholars agree at least that these three infinitives relate back to the verb, “you were taught” (ἐδιδάχθητε), in verse 20<sup>40</sup> and function as the object of the verb, either in the sense of imperatives or indicatives.<sup>41</sup> When understood as imperatives, the meaning would be: “you were taught: Put off the old man, be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new man.” This translation, however, does not reflect the different tenses used in the infinitives. The first and the third infinitives (ἀποθέσθαι, ἐνδύσασθαι) are the aorist middle which typically denotes an inceptive action whereas the second infinitive is the present passive which denotes

<sup>37</sup>Best, *Ephesians*, 399.

<sup>38</sup>See also Col 3:9–10. Some scholars oppose this view because ἄνῆρ is used in Ephesians 4:13 but ἄνθρωπος is used in Ephesians 4:24, but as noted above (note 33), these two words are used interchangeably in Ephesians 5:22–33.

<sup>39</sup>See Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 594.

<sup>40</sup>Both infinitives and participles can sometimes function as imperatives, particularly in ethical codes (see Rom 12:9–15).

<sup>41</sup>For detailed discussion, see Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 598–602.

a repeated action.<sup>42</sup> Although the infinitive may not carry the same implications in regard to time as the indicative and participles do, Paul seems to have used these two different tenses intentionally.<sup>43</sup> If so, the tense difference should be reflected in translation and this can be done when the infinitives are understood as indicatives. The basic meaning then would be, “you are taught that you have already put off the old man and have put on the new man and are now continually being renewed in the spirit of your minds.” This meaning suits the overall context well and is supported by the parallel passage in Colossians in which Paul employs two aorist middle participles and one present passive participle: “you have put off the old man (ἀπεκδυσάμενοι τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον) . . . and have put on the new man (ἐνδυσάμενοι τὸν νέον), which is being renewed (τὸν ἀνακαινούμενον) in knowledge after the image of its Creator” (Col 3:9–10).<sup>44</sup> Significantly, in the Colossian passage Paul adds the following statement: “Here there is no Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all” (Col 3:11). This statement clearly echoes Paul’s statement in Galatians 3:27–29: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female; for you are all one (εἷς) in Christ Jesus.” What Paul says in these passages can be summarized as follows. When believers are baptized into Christ, they have put on the new man (Col 3:10) that is Christ (Gal 3:27).<sup>45</sup> As a result, they have become “one (εἷς) in Christ” (Gal 3:27) and they are to be continually renewed in the spirit or in knowledge after the image of its Creator.

Putting off or dying to the old man and putting on or rising with the new man are closely related to the idea of baptism and have significant ethical implications for the individual believers. This is evident in Romans 6:3–11 in which Paul states that those who have been baptized into Christ were baptized into his death and their old man (ὁ παλαιὸς ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος) was crucified with Christ, the body of sin was destroyed, and the death lost its dominion. Paul’s expressions—“putting off and putting on” and “dying and rising,” however, have a supra-individual significance. They are not employed primarily in the sense of the two segments of one’s personal conversion.<sup>46</sup> They are undoubtedly connected with Paul’s Adam-

<sup>42</sup>See Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 603 and Buist Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in the New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 362.

<sup>43</sup>Cf. Best, *Ephesians*, 433. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 359–64.

<sup>44</sup>Here Paul uses the aorist middle participles for “putting off” and “putting one,” but the present passive participle for “being renewed.”

<sup>45</sup>Also see Rom 13:14 where the idea of putting on Christ occurs.

<sup>46</sup>Ridderbos, *Paul*, 223.

Christ typology.<sup>47</sup> The new man denotes primarily Christ and the mode of existence in Christ. Correspondingly, the old man denotes Adam and the mode of existence in Adam. As believers are baptized into Christ, they have put off the old man Adam and have put on the new man Christ. They no longer belong to the old humanity that is subject to sin and death; instead, they belong to the new humanity that is characterized by righteousness and eternal life. In a spatial sense, they have been transferred from the sphere of existence in Adam to that in Christ.<sup>48</sup> Because of this fundamental change, they are encouraged to put off various vices that characterize the old man and put on various virtues that reflect the new man.<sup>49</sup>

In light of the above discussion, one can conclude that “one,” “one new man,” and “one body” (Eph 2:14–16) all denote the same corporate entity created in Christ, that is, the church. For Paul, the church is not an inanimate organization; it is an organic, living body. More specifically, it is the corporate body of Christ that is derived from, identified with, and embraced in the person of Christ who is the Head. Furthermore, it is a new corporate humanity that is created in Christ the perfect or new man and that bears the image of its Creator. To a certain extent, this inclusive corporate humanity transcends racial, gender, and social distinctions, but without eradicating the individual person’s distinctiveness.

### Conclusion

This brief investigation confirms that in Ephesians Paul employs terms and images that are anthropologically significant to describe the nature of the church and her relationship to Christ and that these images are conceptually interwoven. The body of Christ is closely connected with the one new man of Ephesians 2:11–22, with the perfect man of Ephesians 4:7–16, and with the new man of Ephesians 4:24. It is conceptually intertwined with “one flesh” in Ephesians 5:25–32.

What connects these images together? What is the fundamental assumption that underlies them? That assumption seems to be Paul’s anthropology, that is, his view of man as individual and corporate. For Paul, the individual man is not an isolated unit. Even though a man is separated from other people by the limits of his physical body, his existence is by no means limited by his physical boundaries. In certain respects, he extends himself beyond his physical contours and forms a corporate solidarity with

<sup>47</sup>For a similar conclusion, see Andrew T. Lincoln, “The Theology of Ephesians,” in *The Theological of the Later Pauline Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 93–94.

<sup>48</sup>The idea of the special transfer is clearly expressed in Col 1:13.

<sup>49</sup>Cf. Col 3:5–17.

others, but without losing his own individuality. Adam, therefore, becomes "one flesh" with Eve (Gen 2:24). Likewise, the husband becomes one flesh with his wife in marriage and a believer (Eph 5:28–31), when joined with a prostitute in sexual union, becomes one flesh with her (1 Cor 6:16).

Man can form a corporate solidarity not only with other individuals but also with Christ, who also exists individually and corporately. As believers are baptized by the Spirit into Christ, therefore, they become one body with Christ and with other believers in Christ (Rom 6:3–5; 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:27–28). Paul's expressions, "the body of Christ," "one body in Christ," and "one new man in Christ" all denote this corporate reality. The corporate solidarity that the believer forms together with Christ involves the whole individual person, not just his soul or spirit, and is as real as the one flesh solidarity created between two individuals in the sexual union.

The church is the corporate body of Christ that is derived from and dependent upon Christ. It is the living body that is animated by the Spirit and the organic body that grows. It is, therefore, not just a structure, an organization, or even a collective society made up of the individual believers. In essence, it is the whole new corporate humanity, transformed in Christ and inclusive of all believers, that is derived from, identified with, and embraced in Christ the new man and the last Adam and that bears the image of its Creator. This means that the true nature of the church must be understood anthropologically in close relation to Christ the perfect man rather than sociologically as a human entity.

How does the Ephesian letter's understanding of the church affect one's understanding of the nature of the so-called universal church and her relationship to the local churches? It is impossible to explore this question to its full extent here. So, this study offers the following brief remarks to stimulate further discussion. (1) It is questionable that a sharp distinction between the universal church and the local churches ever occurred in Paul's mind. The church is after all a new corporate humanity created in Christ the perfect man. Paul may speak of a group of believers as the whole church manifested at a specific time and location, but he would never imagine multiple bodies of Christ or multiple humanities in Christ. (2) One must reject the notions that the church is simply an organization or a collective society of individual believers and that the universal church is the sum total of individual churches structurally connected together. The church that Paul envisions in Ephesians is an organism that all true believers form together with Christ and in Christ. It is the comprehensive human solidarity newly formed in Christ, the perfect man. (3) One must also refute the view that defines the universal church exclusively as an invisible, spiritual, and/or heavenly reality and places it over against the local churches that are visible,

physical, and/or earthly.<sup>50</sup> This view poses a danger of understanding the church in a Platonic dualistic sense. The church is the corporate body of Christ animated by the Spirit and inclusive of the whole person. In this sense, it is both physical and spiritual and both visible and invisible. The church is the new eschatological humanity that is already, in some sense, raised and seated together with Christ in the heavenly places but still exists on earth. In this sense, it is both heavenly and earthly.

<sup>50</sup>This view is expressed by Robert Banks and Peter T. O'Brien. See Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Cultural Setting*, Rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 37–43; O'Brien, "The Church as a Heavenly and Eschatological Entity," in *The Church in the Bible and the World*, ed. D.A. Carson (Exeter: Paternoster, 1987), 88–119, 307–11; and "Church," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald H. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 123–31, esp. 125–26.