

RUF Bible Study – Ephesians
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Ephesians 1:15-23²

Ephesians 1:15-23 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far 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 one to come. 22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

I want to go back to the first part of chapter one because Paul introduces this section with “For this reason.” For what reason? If you look back to the first part of this chapter, you see that Paul starts with grace and peace and then moves on to election and predestination. Many of us think that grace and peace are the exact opposite of predestination – in fact, nothing hampers grace and peace more, we say.

But we’d be wrong, at least according to Paul. What is Paul’s perspective on this? Perhaps it’s a new perspective for you. Think of it this way: Your brother, my son, has made it to the state wrestling tournament as a high school senior. We go to the tournament, and he makes it through to the finals. As he approaches his final match, I, as his dad, think of his life; it all flashes before my eyes. How he’s grown up; his practices, his falls, his bumps and bruises. I’m so proud of him, win or lose.

But here’s the problem. He’s wrestling someone else. Another person. Maybe this other boy has to win this match to get a scholarship. Maybe he’ll get chewed out from his dad if he loses. Maybe his coach won’t be satisfied with anything except huge victory. What do I cheer?

“Pin him!”

Any father would cheer for his brother, wouldn’t he? I have been there, I am here, I always will be there for you, son. I’m so proud of you. I’m on your team. Win!

This is what God is saying to his people here. This is a letter to the saints, to Christians. God has other things to say to nonbelievers, just as the wrestler’s father would talk to his son’s opponent in a different way after the match. But it’s entirely appropriate to say things to your children that other people wouldn’t understand. God is saying to his children, I have always been there, I am here, and I always will be there.³

That’s the reason for this next section. That’s reassuring to us when we wonder if our God is there for us in the midst of this crazy life. And what prompts Paul to keep going.

Faith and Love

After Paul catches his breath and connects us with what has gone before, he begins another long sentence, which is this passage. But he starts with saying this, “*I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and your love toward all the saints.*”

Paul commends their lives, their thinking and their doing, their minds and hearts and how that plays out in their midst. He has heard how much they love each other. We’re going to talk a ton about belief and faith in these first three chapters especially, but let me point out that love has to be there as well. Even as we understand Paul’s point in 1:1-14, we are not to become the predestination club on campus. We are to show forth our faith and love. This is attractive, noticeable, and meaningful in the world. In one serious sense, this is incredibly evangelistic. Notice how many times “evangelism methods” can be found in the Bible. And then contrast that with how many times ministry takes place either in homes or outside. How many times is food present? Meals seem terribly important, as do relationships. Tracts seem to not be mentioned at all.

It’s this information that he hears that prompts him to prayer and praise. That they have faith and love, that as they are drawn closer to Christ and learn more and more what that means, they are therefore subsequently drawn closer to each other.

I can do no better than to quote Eugene Peterson at length here and hope to learn from him as he challenges our Christian communities.

“Overall, the most distinctive thing about Christian love is that it is commanded. Not urged, not encouraged, not striven for as a goal, but commanded: “The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also” (1 John 4:21). And commanded not as one item among others but as the non-negotiable centerpiece of the community’s life.

The task is daunting, but also unavoidable: nothing less than *community* (nobody goes it alone in this business); nothing other than *love* (God will settle for nothing less than the mature us, our essential humanity).

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² Sources: commentaries by Tom Wright, Peter O’Brien, John Stott, J.M. Boice; sermons by Rev. Tim Keller, Rev. Rob Rayburn, Dr. Sinclair Ferguson and Dr. Bryan Chapell

³ Illustration from Dr. Chapell’s message on this - see www.covenantseminary.edu

If community could be imposed it would at least be manageable. Coercion can provide uniformity and perfect order, but the result is not community; it is an ugly parody of community; it is Naziism. Community can flourish only in freedom. So the love that defines our common lives, even though commanded, has to be unforced, personal, freely given by the members of the community; ours must be lifetimes of accumulated acts of love – likely flawed, imperfect, juvenile, sputtery, but still love. Despite ourselves, loyal love...

Love is the most context-specific act in the entire spectrum of human behavior. There is no other single human act more dependent on and immersed in immediate context. A dictionary is nearly worthless in understanding and practicing love. Acts of love cannot be canned and then used off the shelf. Every act of love requires creative and personal giving, responding and serving appropriate to – context specific to – both the person doing the loving and the person being loved. Because of the totally personal, particular, and uniquely contextual community dimensions involved in even the simplest act of love – the circumstantial complexity and inescapably local conditions – there is a sense in which we cannot tell a person how to love and so our Scriptures for the most part don't even try.

Instead of explanations or definitions or generalizations John settles for a name and story that goes with it: Jesus. 'We know love by this, that he [Jesus] laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. (1 John 3:16) Then he lets each of us find the particular but always personal and relational way to do it in the Jesus way: 'We love because he first loved us.'

We learn how to love by being loved. Love is not built into our genes."⁴

Amen. Insightful. Convicting. Will we be a community of faith and love?

Thanksgiving in Prayer

After giving us the reason he is prompted to pray for them, he delves into the prayer itself. This is amazing because Paul's chief fruit of worship and doxology is prayer and intercession. He says, "For this reason..." and then the first thing he does is engage in intercession for the people he is thinking about.

Dr. Sinclair Ferguson, in a message on this passage, states that the chief evidence of my love for services of worship will be the way in which they drive me to intercession, that those things may be shed abroad on God's people in every place, and in particularly on those Christian believers on whom I have a special bond of fellowship. He says that there is something wrong with me, if I love services of worship, if the reality of God's presence in my worship does not lead to the deep sense of longing of intercession in my prayer life."⁵

When we finish worshipping God, do we pray? Or better yet, why don't we? Dostoyevsky writes that one of the definitions of man is ungratefulness. It seems we humans have an insatiable capacity for it. We always want more and aren't thankful for what we have. I can certainly see this in my own life, and often come across it in yours. But Christianity counteracts that. Grace produces gratitude! This gratitude cannot be manipulated. Is the expression of an instinct that the gospel has transformed, and it pours out into our lives as we wish more and more people would experience this for themselves. When you worship, are you undone by how gracious God has been to you? Does that move you to intercede for your friends and family?

Understanding

It does for Paul, and he begins to pray. What does Paul pray? He prays for growth in knowledge because "Growth in knowledge is indispensable to growth in holiness."⁶

Can faith and reason go together? Though many will tell you they are like oil and water, in fact they are never contrasted in Scripture.

"Faith goes beyond reason, but rests on it. Knowledge is the ladder by which faith climbs higher, the springboard from which it leaps further... Thus knowledge and faith need each other. Faith cannot grow without a firm basis of knowledge; knowledge is sterile if it does not bring forth faith."⁷ The idea is that as you learn more, your appreciation and wonder grows with it. Like for you math people. When you started multiplying and doing fractions, that was okay, but sines and cosines and quantum physics and things like that⁸ open up deep mysteries to you. It just keeps getting cooler and cooler, even as you learn more and more. The Bible is supposed to be like that. Faith is supposed to be like that.

"Christianity is a religion of knowledge. It is for the head as well as the heart. But having said this, we must also stress that Christianity is not just 'head' knowledge. It is not a religion of ideas only. It is not merely a philosophy. Some Christians treat the faith as if it were, taking care to master Bible doctrines, thinking that when they have done this they have done all that needs to be done. They believe that in knowing the truth they have it all. This did not satisfy the apostle, and it should not satisfy us either."⁹

Rev. Rob Rayburn writes, "He prays that the Father would give them the Holy Spirit - not that they do not already have the Holy Spirit; he has said that they do in v. 13; he means a fuller measure of the Spirit's control, a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit's influence. He wants the Holy Spirit, if you will, more and more to cast his spell over their hearts and lives. And the way the Spirit will do that, Paul says, is by illumination, by the opening of the eyes of the heart and soul.

⁴ Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 326-327

⁵ Sinclair Ferguson, sermon found on www.pcp.org

⁶ Stott, 54

⁷ Stott, 67

⁸ I can't even think of words that could go in this sentence.

⁹ Boice, 40

In other words, Paul hopes that, by the Spirit's work in them, the truth that has already been revealed, the doctrine they already know, of God the Father, of Christ the Savior, and of the Holy Spirit, would gain such a mastery of their thinking and feeling that more and more they would live as they believed, they would live their doctrine, they would be in daily action what they know themselves to be in the salvation of God. Christians are soon to be in heaven; they have been enrolled among the people of the living God himself, among his holy ones; and they stand under and are guarded by and provided for by the Almighty's infinite power. Well, then, says Paul, when that truth more fully captures their hearts, as only the Holy Spirit can make happen, they will live in abounding joy, in perpetual thanksgiving, and in confident effectiveness."¹⁰

Paul is praying for knowledge and enlightenment. Let me ask you: how would that prayer be answered?

"Divine illumination and human thought belong together. All our thinking is unproductive without the Spirit of truth; yet his enlightenment is not intended to save us the trouble of using our minds. It is precisely as we ponder what God has done in Christ that the Spirit will open our eyes to grasp its implications."¹¹

How would this prayer be answered unless you read your Bible, sit under appropriate Bible teaching, study it on your own, hide it in your heart through memorization, discuss it with your friends? We'll come back to this in a moment.

Do you hunger and thirst for the words of God?

Heart

Paul keeps us from a purely cognitive approach to this passage when he begins to talk about the eyes of our heart.

Remember that the Ephesian Christians were converted in the context of a powerful idolatry. All around them people were crying out, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" The cultic activity of the temple prostitutes would have been all around. If you were an Ephesian Christian, you would be a marginalized person if anyone heard you saying "Great is God!" instead.

Are you in that situation – what is the parallel in your world? People are crying out in idolatry; people are worshipping the body and sex and money and achievements and saying Great is Diana!, and you are embarrassed and ashamed to answer. You feel marginalized. What do you need prayed for you?

Many of us would merely like strength for the morning, to make it through the day, to be left alone. But Paul prays something different. He doesn't just pray around the edges, but goes to the heart of it, no matter what the individual situations may be. That they may know God in Jesus Christ.¹² Paul says, that at the end of the day, the thing that will make the difference in my life is knowing God.

He prays for them and for us, "May the eyes of our hearts be opened to discover who God is." What is the difference if I start with a needle toward my elbow and my eye? You probably won't worry to much if I get near my elbow, but you'll start to get incredibly nervous the closer I get to my eye. Because it's so sensitive.

Can you stick your finger in your eye and move it around on it? I'll bet you can – if you've worn contacts in your life. You get used to it, but if you haven't you probably rarely would ever do such a thing.

When I had my laser eye surgery a few years ago, I felt this way. You're going to take a powerful laser and slit open my eye, take off some skin and put it back? What if you mess up? As scary as eye surgery is, what about a *cardio-ophthalmic* surgeon who works on the eyes of your heart? Many of you will do anything to avoid this precise surgery of your heart.

For this prayer to be effective, you must abandon your self sufficiency.

The quintessential example of this is the Road to Emmaus in Luke 24:13-34 *That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. 16 But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. 18 Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" 19 And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. 22 Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, 23 and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." 25 And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" 27 **And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.** 28 So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, 29 but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. 31 **And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.** And he vanished from their sight. 32 They said to each other, "**Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?**" 33 And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, 34 saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" [emphasis mine]*

¹⁰ Rayburn sermon

¹¹ Stott, 67

¹² Sinclair Ferguson thoughts

God showed himself to them, and they finally saw him for who he was. Their response was, “*Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?*” That is what will happen to you to see Christ in all his glory, majesty and power.

Friends, what is your greatest need? Not a new Bible. We live in a day when there are, as crazy as it sounds, too many kinds out there now to help you with your Christian life. Here’s what my search for study bibles on amazon.com turned up: The New Interpreters Study Bible, the Reformation Study Bible, The Catholic Study Bible, the Personal Size Study Bible, the Oxford Scofield Study Bible, the Life Application Study Bible, the Concordia Study Bible, the Cambridge Annotated Study Bible, the New Inductive Study Bible, the Jewish Study Bible, the Teen Study Bible, the Quest Study Bible, the Rainbow Study Bible, the NIV Women of Faith Study Bible, the Life in the Spirit Study Bible, the Women’s Study Bible, the Catholic Rainbow Study Bible, the Kids Study Bible, the Teen Study Bible, the African American Study Bible, the Men’s Study Bible and on and on.

There have never been so many Bibles. But so what? I guarantee you that your granny with her miniscule-print King James knew the Bible far better than any most people these days. Because she read it. She studied it. She prayed it.

We need to be enlightened that we may know things that we’ve already been given. Not to be caught up in the mania for looking for the extra, secret things. We already have it all; it is already ours because of Jesus Christ. May we take hold of it.

Hope

He prays that the eyes of their hearts may be opened so that they may know the *hope* to which God has called them. Hope in the Bible, as you may know is not something that is uncertain. Like “I hope it won’t rain today.” The Biblical word hope means something absolutely certain but not yet truly realized. There is a certainty of future glory that has not yet been realized in my life, and this transforms the present life.

If you go and spend time at a nursing home, you’ll find many of the people looking back to better days. They are sad, sad people. But others have a different perspective – they’re looking forward to the glory that is soon to be theirs. Eternity is long and glorious and this life is but a brief span. They know to see everything in the light of eternity and glory and not eternity and glory in light of everything else.

This is the hope of God’s call. We have an expectation that God called us for something?

You know when you call Pizza Shuttle and the person asks, “How may I help you?” “Uh.... I want to order a *pizza*.” What else would it be?

God has called us to belong to Jesus Christ, into the fellowship of Jesus Christ, to be saints with a holy calling, to liberation from the judgment of God’s law, to freedom, to harmonious fellowship across race and class barriers, to peace in Christ, to a life of forbearing love with God and within the Christian community, to a life of opposition by the world, to holiness to suffering, to glory, to an altogether new life in which we know, love, obey and serve Christ, enjoy fellowship with him and with each other, and look beyond our present suffering to the hope which will one day be revealed.

Do you have hope? Do you see that if you are in Christ, you should have hope? That everything the has, you have?

Inheritance

In Paul’s prayer, he has this line: “*To the riches of God’s glorious inheritance of the saints.*”

Remember that we read this earlier in the chapter: *In love we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.*

We have been adopted and because of that we *receive* an inheritance, and we *are* God’s inheritance.

Let me tell you a few adoption stories: Several of the RUF campus ministers have adopted children lately, and they’ve all been different. One southern family adopted a black child into his family, despite the racist protests of his extended relations. Another adopted two siblings into their family of three, making five kids. And Kevin Twit went to China to adopt a daughter. The Twits have a movie about this which you can see at: <http://homepage.mac.com/kevintwit/iMovieTheater33.html>. Warning: this will reduce you to a weeping mess, because your heart cannot help but be melted. When you think of the time, money, energy, prayers and love that it takes to get Amelia into the Twit family, you start to see God’s love.

Dr. Chapell tells a story of a couple at the seminary that couldn’t have children. They decided to adopt a girl whose mother wanted to have her instead of abort, and whose father was nowhere to be found. They anxiously awaited the day, praying for this child, already loving him ahead of time. Then they received the terrible news that this child had a disease and wouldn’t live longer than a month. The question was asked: Do you want a different baby? No! They answered through tears. However long we will have to love our child is only a small picture of the love God has for us, and is grace and redemption breaking into the world. A powerful testimony of love despite the flaws of the loved.

Let me remind you that if you are adopted and loved, it is because of *him*. In him you receive this. Not because of you. Not because you’re the next Christian superstar, the 21st century Paul, the theologian or economist or journalist or teacher or mother or in a fraternity or sorority or anything that will set the world on fire. It’s because of *his love* that he has done this, just like it was because of the parent’s love that they went and adopted their children.

Kevin Twit told me that they spent three days in China with Amelia as a testing period. At the end of those three days, people were given the opportunity to back out of it. If you didn’t like the one you got, you could renege on it. Ugh.

God knew what it would take to adopt you. From the beginning of the world, he knew. Have you ever said, “Well, if I had known what it would be like, I’d have never started”? I have plenty of times.

God never says that. He knew it would cost him his very own son to make you his. He wasn’t surprised at the cost and paid it willingly to make *you* his sons and daughters.

And Jesus presents them to his father as a present. This is why I died, he says. I lay down my life for the sheep.

Malachi 3:16 says, *Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name. 17 “They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. 18 Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.* [emphasis mine]

Frankly, we’re embarrassed by this. How can I mean that much to you Father? It’s utterly astounding in the glory of it all. We get it all because of something we didn’t even do. We’re adopted into the family, and as thus, we’re entitled to all the riches of being a part of that family.

God’s call points back to the beginning of our Christian life; God’s inheritance points on to its end, to that final inheritance of which the Holy Spirit is the guarantee and which Peter describes as ‘imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.’”¹³

Do you understand and embrace your inheritance? Do you view yourself as loved in this way? Do you see what your Father has done to secure you as a part of his family?

Power

Paul spends three verses talking about God’s power: *19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far 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 one to come.*

He writes this that we may grasp the hyperbolic, mega and dynamic power of God¹⁴ The power of God is so great it cannot be measured. I want you to feel this power of Jesus Christ for you. Let me tell you...if that is the power of God in you than that power can defend and stabilize you and give you victory over every enemy.

Though Paul hits this here hard three times, and says that the place where you can see God’s power the most is in Jesus’ resurrection. John Stott writes, “The resurrection and ascension were a decisive demonstration of divine power. For if there are two powers which man cannot control, but which hold him in bondage, they are death and evil. Man is mortal; he cannot avoid death. Man is fallen; he cannot overcome evil. But God has conquered both, and therefore can rescue us from both.”¹⁵

Has Jesus’ resurrection from the dead become humdrum for you? Have you become used to it that you now consider it ordinary?

Let me remind you that death is not natural; it’s an invasion to our world. Mike Biggs mentioned this very thing when he visited Courtney Jewett after her mom died. He went into the room where he lay and she looked – dead. Not sleeping, not immobile, not almost-alive. Dead. Think of how crazy that is. What is it that just looks dead so you can tell, almost feel it? It’s the unnaturalness of it, the million of little things you perceive that you don’t recognize and realize connotes life.

We can postpone death, but we cannot escape it. When Jesus says in Mark 10:33-34 “*See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. 34 And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.*” The disciples skip over this last sentence because it is crazy. If he means he will rise and go to heaven then okay. But no, he’s talking about his body. This is impossible, we all know that. So do they. It cannot be done.

“But God can do what no man can do. He raised Jesus from the dead. First, he arrested the natural process of decay, refusing to allow his Holy One to see corruption. Then he did not just reverse the process, restoring the dead Jesus to life, but transcended it. He raised Jesus to an altogether new life (immortal, glorious, and free), which nobody had ever experienced before, and which nobody has experienced since – or not yet.”¹⁶

What do you make of this? Was this real? Rudolph Bultmann is famous for his idea that yes, Christ has risen, but this was into the *kerygma*, in the recovered faith and in the triumphant proclamation of his disciples. That idea has taken root in liberal Christianity to a huge extent. But notice that Paul isn’t saying that what Christ accomplished was done so in the hearts of his believers. “What Paul sets forth here as a demonstration of divine power is what he accomplished in Christ, not in his followers.”¹⁷

“That power, the power which raised Jesus and which will transform the whole world and flood it with his glory is in fact already available for us (verse 19). This doesn’t mean we can become conjurers, performing spectacular tricks to impress people. Many of the things which God’s power achieves in us, such as putting secret sins to death and becoming people of prayer, remain hidden from the world and even, sometimes from other Christians.”¹⁸

¹³ Stott, 56-57

¹⁴ Sinclair Ferguson

¹⁵ Stott, 58

¹⁶ Stott, 59

¹⁷ Stott, 59

¹⁸ Wright, 16

This power is coursing through your veins. You are in Christ, aren't you? Because of what he has done, you have done it too. You have power.

Church

Paul finishes this prayer with this: *22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

Paul says that Jesus is lord of all – and at the end of the day that is all that really matters.

We see here Jesus Christ's enthronement over evil Paul refers to Ps. 110:1, *The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."*

Jesus has been given control of everything, even the angels and demons, which are real. Even, who is Satan is real. 1 Peter 5:8 says that Satan is real and is lion ready to devour you. In our own book here, Eph. 6:11, Paul writes that the spiritual dimension is not to be forgotten is and very present in our lives. We cannot resist Satan in our own strength. But if we first submit ourselves to God so that the power of God demonstrated in the exaltation of Christ above all rule and authority flows through us, the devil will flee us as he fled from Christ as the conclusion of his temptation in the wilderness."¹⁹

But Jesus has control over it all, every conceivable intelligent being. Every plant and animal, every vegetable and mineral. God had given Adam dominion over the earth and its creatures, which has been limited though not abdicated by the fall. All of these have been distorted, polluted, exploited – but now they all rest in Jesus, who will one day set everything right.

The culmination of all of this is Jesus Christ's headship of the church. Jesus is head over all things. God gave him as head-over-all-things *to the church which is his body*. For he whom God gave to the church to be its head was already head of the universe. Thus both the universe and church have in Jesus Christ the same head.

The church is Christ's body – he directs it. The church is Christ's fullness – he fills it. The church doesn't complete Christ, he fills it.

The church is to be a transforming power – indeed, through the presence of the risen Christ within, the greatest of all powers in this world. Those who belong to the church are changed; apart from the power of Christ in their lives they do not even belong to it. Then, having been changed and having become members of the church, they are to work through the power of Christ in the church to transform the world powerfully. The victory is not achieved by arms. It is not achieved by marches or by the force of power politics. It is the victory of transformed lives as, through the church which Christ fills, the rule of Christ is extended forcefully throughout the world."²⁰

Do you believe this? Do you love the church in this way? Do you make fun of her? Are you embarrassed by her? Are you making excuses for her? Do you avoid her at all costs? Do you give her only what you can, or do you give her your best? Do you pray for her? Do you long to see her thrive? Do you offer her your time and resources, your best?

May we love the church, for it is how Christ manifests his glory. May she flourish and grow.

The Church, by Derek Webb

*i have come with one purpose
to capture for myself a bride
by my life she is lovely
by my death she's justified*

*i have always been her husband
though many lovers she has known
so with water i will wash her
and by my word alone*

*so when you hear the sound of the water
you will know you're not alone*

*(chorus)
'cause i haven't come for only you
but for my people to pursue*

*you cannot care for me with no regard for her
if you love me you will love the church*

*i have long pursued her
as a harlot and a whore
but she will feast upon me
she will drink and thirst no more*

*so when you taste my flesh and my blood
you will know you're not alone*

*(chorus)
there is none that can replace her
though there are many who will try
and though some may be her bridesmaids
they can never be my bride*

¹⁹ Boice, 42

²⁰ Boice, 44