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## Ephesians—5

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In this study we shall be looking at the images that Paul uses for the church. When we read the Bible, it is often difficult to put ourselves in the position of the original writer, because we are already familiar with what we are going to read. But when Paul wrote this letter he had no preconceived idea; he described the church as it was, using images that came to mind. Sometimes our prior knowledge robs us of the impact of what is written, so we need to see it with new eyes, as if we were reading it for the first time.

### One new man

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The fundamental image that Paul uses of the church is “one new man” in Ephesians 2:15. In Greek there are at least two words that are commonly translated “new”.

- The word *neos* means *or recent or younger*. It is used of “new wine” in Matthew 9:17, for example. It indicates something that is similar to what went before but *more recent or younger*. From this we derive English words like neophyte, neonate, and so on.
- The word *kainos* means *fresh or new* in the sense of *a new beginning*. It is used in the phrase “the new covenant” in Hebrews 8:8, 13; 12:24.

This second word (*kainos*) is the one Paul uses in Ephesians 2:15, when he says that Christ has created “in himself one new man”. This new man is a new beginning, not just a more recent version of the old. It supersedes the one that went before.

The word translated “man” in this phrase is *anthropos*, meaning a *person or humanity* in the general sense (from which we get anthropology, the study of people). It is not *man* as distinct from *woman*.

What Jesus has done is to bring into being—we might almost say “bring to birth”—a new humanity that did not exist before. This new humanity includes some who were Jews and others who were Gentiles. It is *not* the same as the nation of Israel, and neither does it *exclude* the nation of Israel (see Romans 11:2)—it is open to all, both Jews and Gentiles. In terms of covenants, though, it constitutes the *true* Israel as Paul implies in Romans 2:28, 29; 9:6.

This is why Paul refers to this new humanity as “the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16). M.R. Vincent explains this verse as follows:

*“All” will refer to the individual Christians, Jewish and Gentile, and Israel of God to the same Christians, regarded collectively, and forming the true messianic community.*

*—M.R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament*

The work of Christ on the Cross was preparatory to the creation of this new humanity, but the new humanity itself did not come into being until the day of Pentecost when the church was born.

### Images of the church

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Vincent, in the comment quoted above, uses the word “community”. While this word does not occur in many versions of the English New Testament, it could easily have been used to translate the Greek word *koinonia*, which is translated *fellowship, communion, distribution, or sharing*. Whereas these words express *abstract* qualities of the new humanity, *community* expresses what it *is*. We can see the community in action in several passages in Acts.



## A temple

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*The whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

—Ephesians 2:21, 22

David had intended to build a temple for the Lord (see 2 Samuel ch. 7), but he was forbidden to do so (see 1 Kings 8:18, 19). Instead, the Lord told him that his son would build the house, and so it was Solomon who built the temple in Jerusalem. David was a man of war (see 1 Kings 5:3), but Solomon was a man of peace and rest (his name means Peace) who lived in the good of all the warfare that had gone before. In the same way, the Lord Jesus did not begin to build His church while He was on the earth, because that was the time of His warfare against sin and Satan. But when He ascended and sat down at the right hand of the Father, He began to build.

*As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house.*

—1 Peter 2:4, 5

Notice that the temple was built of “living stones”—that is, quarried, native stones, not bricks. Bricks are all the same; stones are all different, and they must be shaped to fit into place. We are not to be bricks in the house of God, all looking the same. Instead, the Lord places us alongside other living stones, and shapes us until we all fit together. The stones for Solomon’s temple were quarried and shaped in Lebanon, then transported to Jerusalem. By the time they arrived in Jerusalem, no more shaping was required, and the building was erected without the sound of hammers (see 1 Kings 6:7). In the same way, we are all being shaped while here on earth, so that when the complete temple is assembled it may be done silently, once for all.

Paul often uses the analogy of a building when describing the church. In 1 Corinthians 3:9 he says, “You are...God’s building.” Note that the word “you” here is plural—you collectively are God’s building. Similarly, in v.16 he says that “you are God’s temple, and...God’s Spirit dwells in you.”

The temple was not just a place to worship God. It was primarily a place for God to *live* in, where He could be in the midst of His people. Hear Solomon praying at the dedication of the temple:

*But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built! Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O LORD my God...that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you have said, ‘My name shall be there’...And listen to the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen in heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.*

—1 Kings 8:27-30

“Will God indeed dwell on the earth?” As soon as Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven, and the whole temple was filled with the glory of God (2 Chronicles 7:1, 2). That was God’s answer to the question. In the New Covenant, God dwelt on earth in the person of Christ. Of course God cannot be contained in a single building, however magnificent. But He comes by His Spirit to dwell in the hearts of all His people. The church, the new temple, is the “habitation of God by the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22), just as Jesus had promised in John 14:23.

Elsewhere Paul speaks of the church being “built up” or “edified” (for example, Romans 14:19; 1 Corinthians 14:3; Ephesians 2:21). Indeed, the word “edify” means “to build” – hence a building is an *edifice*. Paul himself was “a skilled master-builder” (1 Corinthians 3:10), and he warns those who build upon his foundation that they must build carefully and conscientiously, “gold, silver, and precious stones.” (He is not referring to what we build in our *own* lives in this passage, but what we build in the lives of *others*.)

## A body

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In Ephesians 4:1-16 Paul describes the church as a body whose head is Christ (see also chapter 1:22, 23). The same imagery is used in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 to 14.

A body, like a family, has *members*, and things that happen to one member affect the whole body. You cannot have a pain in your hand and not know it in the rest of your body. The interactions of different members are described in detail in 1 Corinthians 12. Paul uses the word *body* nine times in Ephesians, and each time he is referring to the church (1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23, 30).

Christ is the *head* of the church (1:22; 4:15), the one who directs its activities. He is also its Saviour (5:23). The church is His body, the completion of Him, His visible manifestation on the earth. It is His flesh and bones (5:30)—exactly what Adam said of Eve in Genesis 2:23.

In Ephesians 4:12-16 we read about how the body is to grow (or be edified).

- It is a progressive building process, and it takes time (v.12, 13).
- The end result is a church that reflects the full stature of Christ (v.13); or, as he expresses it in 3:19, “filled to all the fulness of God,” just like Christ (Colossians 2:9).
- Its growth demands the contribution of all the members (v.16).
- It is *corporate* growth, not primarily individual growth, that Paul has in mind (3:18-21; 4:16). It is impossible for one person to be “filled to all the fulness of God,” but that is the destiny of the church as a whole.

## A bride

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In chapter 5:22-32 the church is described as the Bride of Christ, submitted to and glorified by her glorious Husband. This image is prominent in Revelation chapters 21 and 22. Here again we see the consummation of what was intended in the beginning: the Man and the Bride united in love. Eve was Adam’s “flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bones.” God has not given up His original purpose for mankind; He remains true to His original intention. In the last chapter of the Bible we see the picture of Eden restored—the garden, the tree of life, the river of the water of life, and the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 22; 19:7, 9).

In the Old Testament the Song of Songs describes in vivid detail the relationship between the Lover and His beloved. Far from being merely a celebration of romantic love, it pictures the love of Christ for His church, and her growing love for her Bridegroom.

This bride is to be finally presented to Jesus, “without spot or wrinkle or any such thing...holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27). What a day that will be!

## How we should live

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All these images of the church have a common theme: the church of Christ consists of a multitude of people who are all “members of his body” (Ephesians 5:30) as well as “members one of another” (Ephesians 4:25).

If we are members of His body, and members of one another, how then should we live?

As we have noticed several times, when Paul gives his instructions regarding practical living in chapters 4 and 5, he does not say, “Don’t do this because it is wrong,” or “Don’t do this because you’ll be punished.” Instead, he consistently appeals to our sense of calling (Ephesians 4:1). In effect, he says, “*Don’t do this because it would be a contradiction of who you are.*” He also appeals to the fact that what we do as individuals affects the church, the bride of Christ. His commands are not just to us as individuals, but to us all as members of this “holy and without blemish” church.

*You...were taught in him...to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*

—Ephesians 4:21-24 (ESV)

This translation, along with others, does us no favours because it translates the Greek *anthropos* as “self” instead of “man”. This translation severs the link between what Paul is saying and the whole concept of the old man and the new man. It also gives his words a definitely individualistic slant. (The KJV, RV, and other do translate it as “man”.) If instead we read it as “man”, and link it with the concept of “one new man” (Ephesians 2:15), it takes on a new aspect of plurality and corporateness. In effect, he says we have been taught (I hope you have) to forsake our own self-interest and to seek the interests of Christ and His church. Elsewhere he cites Timothy as one who had learned to do this:

*Timotheus...For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.*

—Philippians 2:19-21

Similarly in Ephesians 4:25-32 Paul's appeal is to remember that we are members one of another, and that *what we do affects our brothers and sisters*. We may be angry (v.26), but we must not let our anger settle and give the enemy a toehold. We must not steal (v.28)—why, because stealing is wrong? Of course it *is* wrong, but Paul doesn't say that. Instead he exhorts people to work and earn money. Again, why? So that we can become wealthy and get bigger and better houses and lots of toys? No: so that we “may have something to share with anyone in need.”

Corrupt speech is wrong; we know that. But Paul exhorts us to speak “such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear” (v.29). In other words, our speech is to build up, not to pull down.

Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and slander must stop. Why? Because they are wrong? They are, but that is not the reason Paul gives. They hurt the unity of the body of Christ (v.31, 32; compare v.2, 3).

Drunkenness is foolish. But Paul doesn't just say “don't do it”. Instead, he exhorts to be “filled with the Spirit, addressing *one another* in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart...submitting to *one another* out of reverence for Christ”.

In all these exhortations he emphasizes the corporate nature of the church. Relationships within our families are to be a reflection of those between Christ and His church (Ephesians 5:24, 25). Even our attitude to our boss is to reflect our relationship to Christ (Ephesians 6:5-7).

These are the ways in which we should “behave ourselves in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). This is why we should “above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Colossians 3:14). This is our calling as members of His body.