
The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON XIV : THANKSGIVING, INTERCESSION AND CONFESSIONAL MATERIAL IN PRAISE TO GOD — 1 : 15-23

Paul gives thanks for the readers

¹⁵ Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease to give thanks for you,

intercessory prayer-report

making mention of you in my prayers: ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know

what is the hope of His calling,

what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

¹⁹ and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe,

confessional material in praise of God's power in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ, leading into the next section

according to the working of His mighty power ²⁰ which 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 principality

and power

and might

and dominion,

and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

²² And He put all things under His feet,

and gave Him to be head over all things to the [congregation],

²³ which is His body,

the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (NKJV)

Thanksgiving with Prayer for the Believers' Knowledge of God and Their Awareness of the Significance of the Assembly (1:15-23)

Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead

Because of this I also, having heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and the love to all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of the glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the recognition of him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, for your knowing what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power to us who are believing, according to the working of the power of His might, which He wrought in the Christ, having raised him out of the dead,

from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. (KJV)

and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (NIV)

and did set [him] at His right hand in the heavenly [places], far above all principality, and authority, and might, and lordship, and every name named, not only in this age, but also in the coming one; and all things He did put under his feet, and did give him — head over all things to the assembly, which is his body, the fulness of Him who is filling the all in all, (Young's Literal Translation)

Vv. 22b~23

THREE OR FOUR EVIDENCES OF POWER? — These last few weeks we have studied evidences given by Paul of the power of God: God raising Christ from the dead, seating Him at His right hand, and placing all things under His feet. In doing so I was taking this verse “*and gave Him to be head over all things*” as a continuation of “*putting all things under His feet.*” But there are some that describe this verse as follows: “This is the final demonstration of the power of God listed by Paul.” I do not think it really matters but I like that separate emphasis. The chapter closes in this manner:

the last portion of confessional material devoted to this exalted Christ as given to the assemblies

and gave Him to be head over all things to the church,

followed by two descriptive clauses of the assemblies

which is His body

the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (Eph 1:22b, 23 NKJV)

THE MOST DIFFICULT VERSES IN EPHESIANS — “The final three clauses of the first chapter are some of the most difficult of the whole epistle for the commentator. Not only do they contain major problems of syntax and translation, but they also introduce key terms (head, church, body, and fullness), to which an immense amount of secondary literature has been devoted.” [Lincoln, 66] “The fourth and final action of God (v. 22b) introduces the church and relates Christ to it; with this half verse we begin one of the most difficult sections (vv. 22b-3) of the letter.” [Best, 181]

HUMBLING VERSES — I found these verses different than the others we have studied up to this point. Very few of those I read were willing to state anything with any degree of certainty. There were several commentaries that merely made a passing remark to the passage and continued on, almost in the sense of hoping no one would ask any questions. I can sympathize with those making a running remark; I often was way over my head in Greek syntax and the strengths / deficiencies of differing theories, and many times left my reading more confused than I was prior to beginning! So as we consider the difficulty of these verses, here are a couple thoughts:

- **NO ONE HAS ALL THE ANSWERS, NO ONE HAS ‘ARRIVED’** – One lesson we may derive from these verses is for us to appreciate the difficulty in Bible study. Sometimes things do not fall neatly into place. Sometimes after all our prayer and study we can still walk away confused. This is not to make any of us question our stance on the Word of God or any of our long-held doctrines (the so-called ‘Baptist Distinctives’) but rather to allow us to not be overly-dogmatic on every single issue. Sometimes we can get in our own little groups and talk between us and somehow fool ourselves into believing we have all the answers. We do not, nor does anyone else. *We are just sinners the Lord has called unto Himself and has opened our eyes to the truth of the Scriptures and called us to love and obey Him. But when we declare the Lord has opened our eyes does not mean there are no questions remaining. He wants us to pray and study His word to the best of our abilities so we can live obediently to His ways by His grace but we are never to think ‘we have arrived’.*
- **THE MAJESTY OF GOD AND HIS WORD** — Most of the questions surrounding these verses are not an issue of ‘Bible-denying liberals vs Bible believers’ but rather between good brethren who differ. There is seemingly no good answer to the details of these verses. *And what should we expect? Even in our eternal abode we will never fully understand the Lord and His workings; how much more is that true now in our finite, fallen condition? It is God’s Word; no one has all the answers. To understand the Scriptures completely would be to understand God. Perhaps God left verses such as these to humble us and to cause us to just stand in amazement at the wonder of who God is. If that is all we derive from this passage, that is not a bad lesson to learn!*

“AND GAVE HIM TO BE HEAD OVER ALL THINGS TO/FOR THE ASSEMBLY”

HE AND HE ALONE IS HEAD — ‘Him’ is emphatic by position; “He and no other is the Head” [Moule, 63]

HEAD OVER ALL THINGS TO THE ASSEMBLY — and he gave him as head over everything to the assembly — καὶ αὐτὸν ἔδωκεν κεφαλὴν ὑπὲρ πάντα τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ [kai auton edoken kephalēn huper panta tē ekklēsia] “Christ is therefore God’s gift to the Church. He as Head over all things and as Head of the Church is a love gift of God the Father to the Church.” [Wuest, 56] Since Christ is the head of everything, He has been given to the assemblies. “[C]hrist the head over all things to the church. Not the head of the church ... but the head over all things to the church, which is a very different thought. It means that by virtue of his sacrificial expiation here upon the earth, and the atonement made in heaven based upon that expiation on the cross, he received the name which is above every name, was made King of kings and Lord of lords, that he now holds in his hand the scepter of universal dominion, and that he is over all things to, or in behalf of, the church. We see him express this thought when by anticipation he commands his church, assembled upon a mountain in Galilee, about 500 being present, to go out and preach the gospel to every creature. The statement, ‘And all authority in heaven and upon earth is given unto me,’ means that he is the head of all things to the church; that he exercises the entire sovereignty of the universe in behalf of the church. Oftentimes when we get a little frightened or blue, become intimidated either by the formidable adversaries with whom we have to cope or by the insuperable obstacles that block our pathway, we are prone to forget that the Savior is head over all things in our behalf; that there is nothing hard for him; that when it comes to exercising his power in behalf of the church there are no limitations; that we can draw on him to the last possibility.... Consider carefully what that means. Every attribute of God is made contributory to the church — infinite love, infinite justice, infinite compassion, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, all engaged to help the church in the accomplishment of its mission. Note carefully that this headship is headship of an organization.” [Carroll, 100ff] “[T]his last part of the thanksgiving and its use of confessional material is dominated by the concept of the Church. Here is its first explicit mention, but it is immediately given an exalted status, for Christ as cosmic Lord has been given to the Church. [Paul] has elaborated on the supremacy God has given to Christ in relation to the cosmos in vv 20-22a, but now all these statements about his lordship over the cosmos are subordinated to a statement about God’s purpose for Christ in regard to the Church.” [Lincoln, 66f]

WHILE NOT STATED HERE, CHRIST IS HEAD OF THE CHURCH — I think the distinction above is important, but it is just as important to note Christ is the head of the church:

“and He is the head of the body, the church” (Col 1:18a NKJV)

“For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.” (Eph 5:23 NKJV)

“but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ — from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” (Eph 4:15,16 NKJV)

The above verses prove the Bible teaches Christ is the Head of the church; all B. H. Carroll, Andrew Lincoln and others are saying is that these verses are not saying Christ is the Head of the church but rather God has given Christ as the Head of all things in the universe to the church! If we are not careful, we can gloss over distinctions like this without thinking.

“HEAD”

STRICTLY SPEAKING, “HEAD” AND “BODY” ARE KEPT SEPARATE — Lincoln points out that strictly speaking, “head” and “body” are kept separate here: Christ’s headship refers to his relation to the cosmos and then “body” is brought in as a description of the Church to which Christ is given. But Andrew Lincoln continues by adding the following: “Nevertheless, because the two images are in close juxtaposition here, because they have been brought very closely together in the influential letter to the Colossians (cf. 1:18; 2:19), and because later in Ephesians they will also be brought more closely together (cf. 4:15; 5:23), something more needs to be said about the relationship between them.” [Lincoln, 68]

THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF CHRIST’S ASSEMBLIES — In the juxtaposition of cosmic and ecclesiological perspectives found in this clause, *the writer has taken a confessional formulation about Christ’s cosmic lordship and subordinated it to his interest in the Church’s welfare. All the supremacy and power God has given to Christ he has given to be used on behalf of the Church. In this way the Church is seen to have a special role in God’s purposes for the cosmos.* [Lincoln, 70]

KEEPING THE SCRIPTURES IN THEIR ORIGINAL SETTING — “Some have been tempted to see them simply as part of one physiological model, in which the head contains the brain which directs the nervous system of the rest of the body and on which the body is dependent. Bedale holds that this is to be guilty of serious anachronism: for this metaphor, which is ‘natural’ to us, would be unintelligible to St. Paul or his readers, who had no idea of the real function of the central nervous system. Barth is less inclined to dismiss the physiological model and shows from his investigation of the neurological knowledge of the time that *Hippocrates (c. 460-380 BCE) and Galen (186-92 CE) did see the brain as the strongest force in a person, ruling the nerves and coordinating what went on in the body. However, another strand in Greek thought, represented*

a·nach·ro·nism – noun:
something or someone that is
not in its correct historical or
chronological time

by Aristotle and the Stoics, ascribed priority to the heart, and this, of course, was the view found in the OT and Jewish thinking where the heart was the center of the personality and its reason and will. In comparison to the terminology of Hippocrates and Galen, Colossians and Ephesians speak of the head and the body, not the brain and the nerves, and there are no clear parallels in Hippocrates or Galen to the notion of the body's growth from the head (Col 2:19; Eph 4:15, 16). Although he toys with it as an explanation, Barth eventually has to concede that *the physiology of Paul's time cannot be considered the key to the head-body imagery of this letter.... Elsewhere in Greek thought where the city or state was depicted as a body, the ruler could be seen as 'head' of the body. In addition, the body was used as an image for the cosmos and in that context 'head' sometimes occurred with it.*" [Lincoln, 68f] Obviously there was even an ancient connection between the head and the body but we should be careful of using modern medical knowledge as a basis for what Paul is writing. *The important lesson to glean from this is that we must be careful to divorce our cultural considerations and place ourselves in the original hearer's setting as much as possible.*

USES OF THE WORD 'HEAD' — head = kephalē = in the sense of 'ruler, leader' in the OT usage. "In its LXX usage κεφαλή [kephalē, 'head'] often translates the Hebrew [rō's], *in the sense of 'ruler' or 'leader'* (e.g., Deut 28:13; Judg 10:18a; 11:11; 2 Sam 22:44; Isa 7:8,9), *the notion of authority being connected with that of priority in the use of the Hebrew term.*" [Lincoln, 67] Best notes that the Greek word used for "head" is used physically of the uppermost part of the body and then in a similar way applied to such things as the tops of mountains. *As a metaphor it ranges in meaning from overlordship to source or origin. "Of these meanings in Greek and Roman literature the latter [source, origin] is rare in respect of people though occurring more regularly in relation to rivers.... In relation to people the two meanings are not unrelated. In a patriarchal society the husband in a family functions as both its biological source and its ruler. If Christ is understood as the Second Adam he might then be regarded as both origin and ruler of believers.*" [Best, 193] "Perhaps if Old Testament notions of 'head' are combined with Greek medical ideas regarding the function of the head in relation to the body and its members, then *the head is to be understood as 'inspiring, ruling, guiding, combining, sustaining power, the mainspring of its activity, the centre of its unity, and the seat of its life'. Instead of separating Christ from his body, the head is shown to be 'the cohesive and enabling factor for the body'.*" [O'Brien, 148] "'Head' expresses, first, *sovereignty or rulership*. When we say the husband is the head of the family, we mean he is the ruler of the family. Head expresses in the next sense *the source of vital connection*. In this letter to the Ephesians, ... that vital connection between the head and every member of the body is greatly emphasized and elaborated.... The head of the church also carries with it the idea of *authority*, which is called the key to power." [Carroll, 99f] "A word combining the idea of exaltation with that of the vital union necessary to an organism. The ascended Lord presides over His Church, but more — He is to it the constant Cause and mighty Source of spiritual vitality." [Moule, 63]

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED ... —

- political: the city / state was often pictured as the body with community of life; its ruler being the head
- from the OT: ruler, sovereignty, leader with the notion of authority being connected with priority
- from Greek-Roman literature: origin, source; e.g., head of rivers, peaks of mountains
- patriarchal family: the husband is both the biological source plus its ruler; adding NT references: sympathizing with it, loving it as a man loves his own flesh, intimate union; cp. Christ as our Second Adam
- Greek medical: inspiring, ruling, guiding, combining, sustaining power, the mainspring of its activity, the centre of its unity, the seat and source of its life, the cohesive and enabling factor for the body, ever present with it

“WHICH IS HIS BODY”

NOT A MERE CORPORATION WITH NO RELATIONSHIP TO THE LEADER BUT AN ORGANIC UNION

ANIMATED BY THE HEAD — which (indeed) is his body — *τις ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ* [hētis estin to sōma autou]

“which is” or “which (indeed) is.” “Body” normally refers to the physical body of a human or animal, although twice it refers to celestial and terrestrial bodies and three times to plant bodies. Paul clearly states believers are members of the body of Christ (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:12-14, 27; Eph 5:30). When the metaphor is one of the human body, this can be used to illustrate a living relation to Christ, subject to Him, animated by Him, and having His power operating in it. *“The relation between Christ and the Church, therefore, is not an external relation, or one simply of Superior and inferior, Sovereign and subject, but one of life and incorporation. The Church is not merely an institution ruled by Him as President, a Kingdom in which He is the Supreme Authority, or a vast company of men in moral sympathy with Him, but a Society which is in vital connection with Him, having the source of its life in Him, sustained and directed by His power, the instrument also by which He works.”* [Wuest, 56f]

While Hoehner repeats some of the same ancient medical views as expressed by Lincoln above, I thought it best to keep the quote intact: “How does Paul view the relationship of the head with the body? The Jews, Stoics, and a philosopher like Aristotle saw the heart as the seat of life. On the other hand, physicians in the past such as Hippocrates (469-399 BC) and Galen (ca. AD 129-199) had thought that the brain directed the members of the body. Philosophers such as Plato, and later Philo, followed this model. Both elements are in Paul's writings for he talks about the heart as an expression of will or volition (1 Cor 4:5; Eph 5:19; 6:22) and of thought and understanding (Rom 1:21; 10:6; Eph 1:18), but he also talks about the head as the source of sustenance of the body (Col 2:19; Eph 4:15-16). Paul's companion Luke, the physician (Col 4:14), may have informed him of the role that the head plays in controlling the body. In the present context it is clear that the ascended Christ is preeminent over all and that God subjects 'everything' under his feet and gave Christ to the church as head over everything. It is the church that is directed by Christ or, in other words, it is the body that is directed by the head. It is interesting to note that in the NT the body of Christ is made analogous

only to the human body, and thus there is a clear rather than an abstract idea of its function and the relationship of the various members of the body to each other. **One good reason to use the human body as an analogy is that it conveys the idea of an organic unity that is animated by the head. It is not like a corporation where the employees may have no relationship with the head and / or other employees. On the contrary, the body depicts that each member is integrally bound to the head and to each other. This is appropriate for this context because of the contrast it presents. God subjected all creation under his feet, including friends and enemies alike. On the other hand, he gave Christ, the head of everything, to the church whose members have an integral relationship with Christ. The members of the body of Christ are bound to each other and are related to Christ as our redeemer, sustainer, and head.** [Hoehner, 292] “A metaphor which suggests not only vital union with the Head, but that the will of the Head is exercised through the members. They are His instruments.” [Moule, 64] “But we come next to a new thought — that the church is his body. Wherever that expression occurs it implies not so much an organization as an organism. An organism is a living thing. John the Baptist, after he was beheaded, had no life. There was a vital relation between the body of John the Baptist and his head. When his head was severed his body died.” [Carroll, 102f]

BELIEVERS ARE BOUND TOGETHER WITH CHRIST AND WITH EACH OTHER — Best comments that the metaphor “body of Christ” stresses the relation of believers with each other and to Christ: **“Believers are together with one another and with Christ.”** [Best, 192]

A LIVING UNION WITH THE HEAD — “It means more than saying that the Church is the company of the disciples of Christ, the people of God; it expresses the essential union of His people with Him (as in the parable of the vine and the branches in John xv) — the same life of God flows through all; and it speaks of the whole as functioning in obedience to Him, carrying out His work in the world.” [Foulkes, 66]

COSMOS / CITY AND STATE RELATIONSHIPS — Best notes the cosmos was regularly pictured as a body in Greco-Roman literature. It is also used of the state, city or empire. Occasionally even a household is depicted as a being. Lincoln: the notion of the universe as a gigantic cosmic body was fairly widespread. In the Greco-Roman world it was also common to compare the cosmos to a body. Another common application of the image of the body was to the social entity of the state in which the individual members have responsibility for each other and for the whole. Philo talks of parts of the nation being welded into one and the same fellowship as though it were a single body. Jewish speculations about the physical body of Adam which included all humanity have been suggested as a further possible source for Paul’s view of the body of Christ which incorporated the new humanity. [Lincoln, 69f]

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED ... —

- we must be careful to divorce things we now know through modern medical research and consider what Paul would have been thinking as he wrote these words; this is not to deny there may be deeper truths that we now know today that people in Paul’s time were ignorant but it is to emphasize the original intent of Paul’s statements
- the OT and Jewish thought as well as some philosophers as Aristotle and the Stoics understood the heart to be the seat of life; however ancient physicians such as Hippocrates (and Dr. Luke?) and some philosophers such as Plato and the Jewish Philo considered the brain to direct the members of the body
- the body is in a living relationship with Christ; contra a mere external relationship as a Superior and inferior, or a Sovereign and subject
- the body is in vital connection with Him, directed by His power, the instrument also by which He works
- the body is a unity, bound to one another and with Christ; whether the body is used as a metaphor for the human body, a political entity as a state or empire, or even as the entire cosmos, in each metaphor is the essential characteristic of unity, the members being a part of a whole
- the body as a social entity of a household, the city, state or empire in which individual members have responsibilities to each other and to the whole, as well as fellowship and cooperation

“THE FULNESS OF HIM WHO FILLS ALL IN ALL”

the fullness of him who fills all in all, the fullness of him who is being filled entirely — τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν πληρουμένου [to plērōma tou ta panta en pasin plēroumenou] **“One scholar has said that this clause contains ‘an unsolved enigma’ (Mitton) and that in it Paul ‘intends to say something very important, but precisely what that is cannot be determined with any degree of certainty.’”** [Lincoln, 72] I will follow Harold Hoehner’s outline and begin with a brief discussion of the words involved (Hoehner, pages 294–304).

DOES “FULNESS” (PLĒRŌMA) REFER TO CHRIST OR THE CHURCH? — Does ‘fulness’ in apposition (connected by syntax) to ‘him’ [αὐτόν , auton] in verse 22 or does it refer to ‘body’ [σῶμα , sōma] in this same verse? Hoehner argues the word ‘fulness’ relates back to ‘body’ for the following reasons; first, negatively:

- ‘body’ is in closer proximity than ‘him’
- the word for ‘fulness’ is neuter, whereas ‘him’ is masculine

- those who study Greek say that if ‘fulness’ refers back to ‘him’ in verse 22 then the intervening words ‘which is his body’ is “a useless insertion, and worse than useless, as serving only to separate ‘fulness’ from ‘he gave’ in verse 22” (Abbott, quoted by Hoehner)
- again, for those who know Greek it is said the only reason Paul would have made such a connection was if he were writing ‘under the influence of emotion’, i.e., through emotion Paul would be lax in his writing. But there is no indication of Paul being in that state of mind here in Ephesians.

Secondly then, positively:

- it is much more natural for ‘fulness’ to be in apposition to ‘body’ due to their close proximity
- ‘fulness’ and ‘body’ agree in gender, number and case (they are both in the nominative case, neuter and singular)
- while those arguing for ‘fulness’ here relating to ‘him’ (i.e., Christ) do so based on other verses stating Christ is the fulness of God (e.g., Col 1:19; 2:9); but that does not preclude a different concept here
- some who argue for ‘fulness’ relating to ‘him’ (i.e., Christ) do so because they say the only alternative is for this to mean the ‘body’ is the completion of Christ’ but as we will see below, that constriction is not necessarily true.

For those reasons Hoehner argues (and I agree) the word ‘fulness’ refers to the body = the church. Hoehner then continues to explain the differences between the usages of ‘fulness’ in Colossians and Ephesians: *Note in Col 1:19; 2:9 the word ‘fulness’ indicates God’s deity and in Eph 4:10 ‘fulness’ refers to God’s gifts to the church. In Eph 3:19 Paul prays that all believers might be filled with God’s fulness. In these contexts, fulness seems to point to God’s moral excellence, perfection, and power. Particularly in Eph 3:19 being filled with God’s fulness is to know the love of Christ. On the other hand, in the present context power is the center of the discussion, for God was demonstrating his power in that he gave Christ to the church as head over everything. The church, His body, is being filled with the moral excellence and power of God by Christ who in turn is being filled with the moral excellence and power of God. The fulness is the character, essence, and power of God that is filling the church. Lightfoot summed it up well when he wrote, “All the Divine graces which reside in Him are imparted to her; His ‘fulness’ is communicated to her: and thus she may be said to be His ‘fulness’ (i. 23).”* [Hoehner, 300]

THE NOUN ‘-MA’ FORM ‘PLĒRŌMA’ — ‘Fullness’ [πλήρωμα , plērōma] is used in the NT 17x and has the idea of *the result of filling, fullness, completeness, entirety*. It refers to fullness of content, such as the leftover bread that filled the baskets (Mk 6:43), a patch on a garment (Matt 9:16) or contents of the earth (1 Cor 10:26). It also refers to a full number of people (Rom 11:12, 25) and to a sense of totality or entirety, such as Jesus’ fullness of grace (John 1:16), God’s essence (Col 1:19) or deity (Col 2:9); Paul’s coming in the fullness of the blessings of Christ (Rom 13:10), believers’ maturing to the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13); filled with God’s fullness (Eph 3:19); and the church as the fullness of Christ (Eph 1:23). It is used to convey completeness as seen in the phrase “fullness of times” (Gal 4:4; Eph 1:10). *“This mysterious phrase has been much discussed. On the whole the inferences have taken one or other of two main lines. The word ‘fulness’ (plerōma), has been (1) explained to mean the receptacle of fulness, or filled receptacle; the vehicle, so to speak, in which the resources of the grace of Christ manifest their greatness, and which is filled by them.... The word has been (2) held to mean, in all doctrinal passages of the N.T., substantially, the ideal fulness, or totality, of Divine attributes or graces; as certainly in Col. ii. 9. Bishop Lightfoot discusses the word in an exhaustive essay. He shews that plerōma cannot naturally mean (as it has been taken to mean in some passages) the thing which fills a void. It is the filled condition of a thing, whether the thing be a rent to be mended, an ideal to be realized, or a prophetic plan to be ‘fulfilled.’”* [Moule, 64] Here are some further explanations of each view.

Plērōma = ‘that which is completed’ — “The question has been discussed whether πλήρωμα [plērōma] has an active or a passive sense, whether it describes the filling substance or the filled receptacle, and not unfrequently critics have arrived at the result that different grammatical senses must be attached to it in different passages, even within the limits of the same epistle. Thus it has been maintained that the word has a passive sense ... in Ephes. i. 23 [the church which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all], and an active sense ... in Ephes. iii. 19 [that you may be filled with all the fullness of God]. Indeed so long as we see in πληροῦν [plērōun, ‘fulfill’] only the sense ‘to fill,’ and refuse to contemplate the sense ‘to complete’, it seems impossible to escape from the difficulties which meet us at every turn, otherwise than by assigning to its derivative πλήρωμα [plērōma] both an active and a passive sense; but the greatest violence is thus done to the connexion of theological ideas.” [Lightfoot, 257] Lightfoot then continues by explaining the Greek grammatical construction of words like plērōma “may signify the action itself regarded as complete, or the product of the action; but in any case *they give the result of the agency involved in the corresponding verb.... As πληροῦν [plērōun] is ‘to complete’, so πλήρωμα [plērōma] is ‘that which is completed’, i.e. the complement, the full tale, the entire number or quantity, the plenitude, the perfection.*” [Lightfoot, 257f] Per Hoehner, when this word ‘fulness’ (plērōma) is used with its corresponding verb ‘fills’ (plēroō) as it is here, it normally has the idea of *‘completeness, the absence of any gap or missing part.’*

Plērōma = ‘the thing filled, the filled-up receptacle’ — “Like other derivatives in [-ma] from the perfect passive, it would appear primarily to designate either (1) concrete, that thing on which the action denoted by the verb has passed: [e.g., the thing made, the thing done, the thing sown, the thing filled]: or (2) abstract, that occurrence whereby the action denoted has been exemplified.... *Here, the simple and primary meaning is by far the best, — ‘the thing filled’ — ‘the filled up receptacle’, the meaning being, that the church, being the Body of Christ, is dwelt in and filled by God: it is His [preroma] in an especial manner — His fulness abides in it, and is exemplified by it. The nearest approach to any*

*one word in English which may express it, is made by ‘fulness’, though it, as well as [pleroma], requires explaining, as importing not the inherent plenitude of God Himself, but that communicated plenitude of gifts and graces wherein He infuses Himself into His Church.” [Alford, 87] Kenneth Wuest: Pleroma is that which is or has been filled; used of a ship inasmuch as it is filled (i.e., manned) with sailors, rowers, and soldiers. **In the NT the body of believers, as that which is filled with the presence, power, agency, riches of God and of Christ.** [Wuest, 57]*

EVEN ‘SCHOLARS’ ARE ONLY HUMAN — *The comments above illustrate the fact that as educated and studied as anyone can possibly be, they are still only human and their comments must be compared with what the scriptures have to say.* For example, several prominent works come to mind when one wants to study resources which emphasize the original languages: Greek dictionaries such as Vine’s and Kittel’s, Kenneth Wuest’s *Word Studies* and his *Translation of the NT*, A T Robertson’s *Word Pictures*, *The Expositor’s Greek NT*, Marvin Vincent’s *Word Studies in the NT*, commentaries by H. G. C. Moule, F. F. Bruce, Henry Alford, Joseph B. Lightfoot, and more current, Robert Mounce. These are all worthy additions to anyone’s library. But note that Joseph Lightfoot and Henry Alford, both respected students of the Greek, study this word in detail yet come to different conclusions. And as I have read several other’s opinions, they are not the only differing opinions. What does that tell us? For one thing (and so as to not ‘throw the baby out with the bath water’), ***I think it proper to respect those who have studied the Word of God — if I had a Bible question, I would rather ask Pastor than someone recently saved! People who study the scriptures should be respected and should be inquired upon when a question arises. But as evidenced above, even the most studied of men can be wrong. Whatever we are told by either men who are studied or by what we read in books, we must always make it a matter of prayer and compare what is being said with the Word of God. No one, not even the so-called ‘scholars’ (whoever they are!), are not infallible.***

“WHO FILLS” DEFINED

who fills — πληρουμένου [plēroumenou] this word causes some debate because it could be either passive (‘of him who is being filled’) or what is called the ‘middle voice’ (‘of him who is filling’). While it could be passive, Alford argues against that usage and suggests the sense is ‘the fulness (the receptacle, filled and possessed) of Him who filleth’ or ‘is filling’, continual action. He says this is supported by Eph 4:10, 11 where it says *‘He who went down is the same also who went up far above all the heavens, in order that He may fill all things – and He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, ...’*. [Alford, 67] H. G. C. Moule agrees: *“The form (middle) of the verb suggests intensity and richness of action; a power which is indeed living and life-giving.”* [Moule, 65] It should be noted however there are those who disagree and understand this word in the passive sense.

GRAMMAR TECHNICALITIES — Forgive the detailed Greek grammar but here is a break-down of the word ‘who fills’ for those who may be interested. The Greek word itself is πληρουμένου [plēroumenou] and is a ‘participle [verbal adjective] present middle genitive [possessive] masculine singular’ as defined by BibleWorks. Since it is an adjective it has ‘gender – number – case = masculine, singular, genitive’ and they must agree with nouns they modify. Since it is a verb it also has ‘tense – voice = present middle.’ While BibleWorks defines it as being in the middle voice, it must be noted (as others have mentioned in their commentaries) that it could actually be middle or passive voice since both those declensions are identical. If it were passive, the sense would be ‘of him who is being filled’ and if in the middle voice the sense would be something like ‘of him who is filling (for himself?).’ Being in the middle voice it could also be taken in the active sense which would then be something like ‘he who fills.’ As one considers the possible differences in just this one word alone, one begins to appreciate the difficulty in understanding exactly what Paul is saying in these verses.

THIS ‘FILLING’ IS A CONTINUAL ACTION — *“The present participle would indicate a constant filling, and thus a dynamic rather than a static relation between Christ and God.”* [Best, 185]

“WHO FILLS ALL IN ALL”

who fills all in all — τοῦ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν πληρουμένου [ta panta en pasin plēroumenou] The ‘all in all’ [ta panta en pasin] is literally, ‘all things in all things’ or ‘all things with all things’ but could be considered adverbly, “wholly, entirely, absolutely.” This same or similar phrase is used three other times in the NT:

‘who is working the all in all’ (1 Cor 12:6 YLT) ὁ ἐνεργῶν τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν [ho energōn ta panta en pasin] Here it could be taken as an adverbial phrase meaning ‘God works always or continually,’ or it could have two separate ideas, ‘God works all things in everyone.’

‘that God may be the all in all’ (1 Cor 15:28 YLT) ἵνα ᾗ ὁ θεὸς τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν [hina ēi ho theos ta panta en pasin]

‘but the all and in all – Christ’ (Col 3:11 YLT; note the addition of the word ‘and’ in this phrase) ἀλλὰ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν Χριστός [alla ta panta kai en pasin Christos]

These examples are interesting but since they can be taken in several different ways themselves, it does not help us interpret our phrase in Eph 1:23.

Here are the different ways in which this phrase is understood by different Bible students:

- **as an adverbial phrase, 'in every respect'** – *“‘In all or every’ corresponds either to the use of the singular expression ‘in every respect’ which occurs elsewhere in Paul (10x in 2 Cor), or to a phrase from the Jewish philosopher Philo. With all the powers which go forth from Him Christ rules over and among all the forces which have become subject to Him (v. 22a), giving life to the whole Church (v. 22b).”* [Kittel’s Theological Dictionary, vol 6, p 292]
- **believers only** – *“This designation of the function of the Church is amplified yet further; it is not only His body, it is intended to be the fulness of him that filleth all in all. We may paraphrase this by saying that it is God’s purpose that the Church should be the full expression of Jesus Christ, who Himself fills everything there is. Colossians i. 19 and ii. 9 speak of all the divine fullness indwelling Christ Himself, that is to say He is filled by, and is the full expression of, the Godhead. Colossians ii. 10 continues ‘in him ye are made full’ (RV). In this sense Christians are intended to be ‘filled unto all the fulness of God’ (iii. 19, RV and compare Jn. i. 14, 16), that is, to receive the fulness of the attributes and gifts of God that it is possible for men to receive. In this same way iv. 13 describes the Christian’s growth to spiritual maturity as development ‘unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.’”* [Foulke, 66] *“The reference is to the Son, Who is in view through the immediate context. His vital connexion with His true Church is such that it not only is the Receptacle of His Divine grace, but is actually pervaded everywhere by His spiritual omnipresence.... [I]n other words, He is the Cause of all the holiness that is in all His members; whatever in them is filled with grace, He fills it.”* [Moule, 65] *The sense would therefore be, ‘to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who is filling the church.’*
- **not the physical cosmos but all rational beings, both spiritual and human** – Quoting freely from Kittel’s: Eph 1:23 is to much the same effect. ‘The all’ or ‘all things’ is not used for the all-embracing cosmos on its natural side. It denotes the totality of cosmic beings endowed with will and capable of decision, not men alone, hence the neuter plural; it covers both v. 22a (*‘and He put all things under His feet’*) and 22b (*‘and gave Him to be head over all things to the church’*). *‘In all or every’ corresponds either to the use of the singular expression ‘in every respect’ which occurs elsewhere in Paul (10x in 2 Cor), or to a phrase from the Jewish philosopher Philo. With all the powers which go forth from Him Christ rules over and among all the forces which have become subject to Him (v. 22a), giving life to the whole Church (v. 22b).* [Kittel’s Theological Dictionary, vol 6, p 292]
- **the entire universe, all creation** – Alford takes the ‘all things’ to refer to the entire universe, with the church being the special receptacle and abiding place, ‘with all things’ meaning ‘who is the bestower of all, wherever found.’ In 4:10 Alford notes *‘that He might fill all things’ is a reference to Christ filling all things (i.e., the universe) with His presence, His sovereignty, His working by the Spirit.* *“The apostle Paul ... assures us that this [rebellious, chaotic] state of affairs will not last forever. Although many things seem chaotic to us, the Lord contains them all within the boundaries of His sovereign rule. This is the point of Ephesians 1:23, which speaks of the fullness of Christ filling all in all. The sense here is not a physical or spatial filling, although the Son of God, according to His divinity, possesses the attribute of omnipresence (He is present in all locations); rather, the idea is that the exalted Christ pervades all of creation with His controlling power. God directs all things to their appointed ends in His eternal plan to make His reign manifest over all creation and unite everything in heaven and earth in submission to our Savior. Jesus, in turn, will hand the kingdom over to His Father in order that ‘God may be all in all’ (1 Cor. 15:20–28). Currently, this reign is acknowledged in a special way in the church, which is Christ’s body (Eph. 1:22–23), but at His return the entire universe will see Jesus as the point of order in creation, and the “chaotic” rebellion against His righteous rule shall end (Rev. 19:11–21).”* [R. C. Sproul, <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/fullness-christ>; Oct 5, 2013] *The sense would therefore be, ‘to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills the universe with His sovereign reign.’*

WHAT IS PAUL SAYING IN THESE VERSES?

‘WHICH IS HIS BODY’ IS PARENTHETICAL — ‘AND GOD PUT ALL THINGS UNDER HIS FEET, AND GAVE HIM TO BE HEAD OVER ALL THINGS TO THE CHURCH (WHICH IS HIS BODY), THE FULNESS OF HIM WHO FILLS ALL IN ALL’ — *“Another alternative has been proposed that brings the expression here nearer to that of Colossians. It is to take the words which is his body as parenthetical. Then Christ Himself is being described as the fulness of God.”* [Foulkes, 67] This is an interesting suggestion but it does not seem to have a following.

FULNESS = ‘FULL NUMBER’, THE TOTAL NUMBER OF THE ELECT — *“The word [fulness] does at times seem to have the meaning full number. Rom 11:12 and 11:25 (‘total number of elect Jews,’ ‘total number of elect Gentiles’) merit consideration here. And it is also true that, numerically speaking, the reference in Eph 1:23 is, indeed, to none other than the full number of the elect.”* [Hendriksen, 103f] *The meaning therefore would be as follows: ‘Gave Christ to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, that which Christ is filling to the full number of the elect.’*

‘FULNESS’ IS ACTIVE, ‘FILLING’ IS MIDDLE VOICE WITH A REFLEXIVE IDEA, AND ‘ALL IN ALL’ IS TAKEN AS AN ADJECTIVAL PHRASE — ‘THE CHURCH COMPLEMENTS CHRIST BECAUSE HE HIMSELF FULFILLS ALL THINGS IN ALL’ — Bible student Montgomer-Hitchcock writes, ‘As Christ is in us and we are in Christ, Christ becomes all things to us and we become all things through Christ. In this sense we may be said to fulfill Him who fulfills Himself in the ‘fulness’ of His self-realization. (quoted in Hoehner). The main obstacle to this view is just its complexity and it seems one needs

to read much more into it than what seems obvious.

‘FULNESS’ IS PASSIVE, ‘FILLING’ IS MIDDLE VOICE WITH A REFLEXIVE IDEA, AND ‘ALL IN ALL’ IS TAKEN AS AN ADVERBIAL PHRASE — ‘THE CHURCH IS FILLED BY CHRIST WHO COMPLETELY FILLS FOR HIMSELF’ — but this is confusing (Eadie, Ellicott, Salmond, McDonald). I am not even sure I understand this enough to say anything about it. Hoehner says the main problem with this view is understanding how Christ completely fills for Himself. “What does that mean?”

‘FULNESS’ IS PASSIVE, ‘FILLING’ IS MIDDLE VOICE WITH AN ACTIVE SENSE, AND ‘ALL IN ALL’ IS TAKEN AS AN ADVERBIAL PHRASE — ‘THE CHURCH IS FILLED BY CHRIST WHO FILLS ALL THINGS COMPLETELY OR ENTIRELY’ — so Barth, Caird, Lincoln, Arnold, Salmond. “Our decisions in regard to the three major areas of contention surrounding the last clause of the first chapter mean, then, that the writer’s overall thought is that the church is Christ’s fullness and that Christ is the one who is completely filling the cosmos. Here, as in 1:22b, ecclesiological and cosmic perspectives are juxtaposed in a way that underlines the Church’s special status, for *although Christ is in the process of filling the cosmos, at present it is only the Church which can actually be called his fullness. The Church appears, then, to be the focus for and medium of Christ’s presence and rule in the cosmos. This entails neither that the Church is the exclusive medium of Christ’s presence and rule nor that it will eventually fill the world.*” [Lincoln, 77] Hoehner argues against this because as above, this considers ‘filling’ as a middle voice with active sense, when Paul uses the same word in 4:10 but in the active form; why use it here in the middle form with an active sense? Hoehner also states it is difficult to understand the meaning of ‘all in all’ in this case, is Christ filling only the church or the universe as well?

‘FULNESS’ IS ACTIVE, ‘FILLING’ IS MIDDLE VOICE WITH AN ACTIVE SENSE, AND ‘ALL IN ALL’ IS TAKEN AS AN ADJECTIVAL PHRASE — ‘THE CHURCH AS THE COMPLETION OF CHRIST WHO FILLS ALL THINGS IN ALL’ — (AV, RV, ASV, RSV, NASB, NIV, NRSV) B. H. Carroll: the church is the fullness of Christ; i.e., if we want a true conception of God the Father, we look to Jesus. If we want a true conception of Jesus Christ, we look at the church. “To see the fullness of Christ in the church, turn to the last chapter of Revelation, ‘And I saw the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God; and he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more: the first things are passed away.’ Again the angel asked John if he would like to see the Bride, the Lamb’s wife, and there is given a picture of the redeemed in the fullness of their redemption. *If when that time comes one should ask, ‘Where shall I look to see the fulness of the Father?’ Look at Christ. ‘Where shall I look to see the fulness of Christ?’ Look at that church in glory. Behold how many nations are represented in it! See the ends of the earth come together in it. Behold how many varieties of men, some very great men intellectually, and some very simple folk; some very wicked, others just as wicked by nature, who were not so wicked by practice, but now all are redeemed. We have the fulness of Christ presented in this, that all peoples, regardless of distinguishing nationalities and distinguishing castes, are there. As the Genesis creation was an expression of God, so that ‘the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork,’ so the re-creation, or redemption, will more manifest his glory. Not one of them but has arrived through regeneration and glorification. Not one of them but connects back with the eternal foreknowledge, election, and predestination of God. That is the fulness of Christ.*” [Carroll, 103f] Hoehner argues against this view first because no place in the NT is the church viewed at the completion of Christ. Secondly this considers ‘filling’ as a middle voice with active sense, when Paul uses the same word in 4:10 but in the active form; why use it here in the middle form with an active sense? Hoehner also states it is difficult to understand the meaning of ‘all in all’ in this case.

‘FULNESS’ IS ACTIVE, ‘FILLING’ IS PASSIVE, AND ‘ALL IN ALL’ IS TAKEN AS AN ADVERBIAL PHRASE — ‘THE CHURCH IS THE COMPLETION OF CHRIST IN ALL RESPECTS’ — This means Christ is somehow incomplete and is moving toward completeness when all the members are incorporated. This has the support of early versions (Peshitta, The Itala or the Old Latin Vulgate, Vulgate) and commentators Chrysostom, Jerome, Thomas Aquinas, Calvin, Abbott, Bruce, Hodge, Lenski, Simpson, Hendriksen, MacArthur. A. H. Strong quotes C. H. MacIntosh favorably: “*The church is the fulness of Christ; as it was not good for the first man, Adam, to be alone, no more was it good for the second man, Christ.*” [Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 796] “The argument with respect to the exact meaning of fulness in this particular case covers many pages in scores of commentaries. With due respect for the reasoning of those who defend other theories, and whose pleas in corroboration of their views have been examined in detail, I have, after lengthy study reached the conclusion that the following is the correct interpretation: *the church is Christ’s complement.* In other words: *‘This is the highest honor of the church, that, until he is united to us, the Son of God reckons himself in some measure imperfect. What consolation it is for us to learn that, not until we are in his presence, does he possess all his parts, or does he wish to be regarded as complete.’* (John Calvin, *Ephesians*) With variations as to detail, this view, namely, that the church is, indeed, represented here as filling or completing him who fills all in all, is also defended by Abbott, Barry, Bruce, Grosheide, Hodge, Lenski, Simpson, and many others. *This interpretation to which I, along with all of those just mentioned, cling does not in any degree or manner detract from the absolute majesty or self-sufficiency of Christ. As to his divine essence Christ is in no sense whatever dependent on or capable of being completed by the church. But as bridegroom he is incomplete without the bride; as vine he cannot be thought of without the branches; as shepherd he is not seen without his sheep; and so also as head he finds his full expression in his body, the church.... The idea stressed by Calvin, namely, that Christ refuses to regard himself as complete until he possesses all his parts, also harmonizes beautifully with the love-motif which dominates this entire epistle....* Commenting on the words ‘of him who fills all in all, Calvin continues as follows, *‘This is added to guard against the supposition that any real defect would exist in Christ if he were*

separated from us. His desire to be filled and, in some respects, to be made perfect in us, arises from no want or necessity; for all that is good in ourselves, or in any of the creatures, is the gift of his hand." [Hendriksen, 103ff] Hoehner argues against this view because nowhere in the NT is there any hint that the church completes Christ; rather, Christ completed the church (Eph 3:19; 4:10, 13; Col 2:9,10). Secondly, Eph 4:13 indicates the church that is growing into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Ernest Best argues against this as well, although he notes there is nothing grammatically which would oppose this interpretation; rather the objections come from lack of support elsewhere in the NT, and that the context argues it since the stress is on the greatness of Christ, therefore it would be surprising if it was now said that he needed completion. [Best, 187]

'FULNESS' IS PASSIVE, 'FILLING' IS PASSIVE, AND 'ALL IN ALL' IS TAKEN AS AN ADVERBIAL PHRASE — 'THE CHURCH IS FILLED BY CHRIST WHO IS BEING FILLED (BY GOD) ENTIRELY OR IN EVERY WAY' — JB, NEB, NJB and commentators Lightfoot, Westcott, Robinson, Best, O'Brien. One criticism against this view is because 'fulness' is taken as passive; but according to Hoehner, out of seventeen times this word 'fulness' is used in the NT, at least ten of those times it is passive (not including this verse). Lightfoot argues the form of the word demands it to be passive but Hoehner disagrees. *On the positive side, taking 'fulness' as passive signifies the church is being completed. This also fits with the rest of the NT where Christ is completing the church rather than vice-versa. This also places 'fulness' in apposition with 'body' which, as discussed above, makes the most sense of these verses. Since this also takes 'filling' as passive, it makes reference to Christ being filled by God's fullness as Paul taught in Col 1:19, 2:9. "That fullness with which Christ is being filled is that which fills the church or 'He who fills the church is Himself being filled.' (Ernest Best) In other words, God's fullness which is filling Christ is filling the church. This agrees with Eph 4:10 where Christ has descended to fill all things."* [Hoehner, 299] *This also makes sense of 'all in all' for as the church is receiving the fullness from Christ, He is being filled wholly, entirely, absolutely, or in every way by God.'*

Ernest Best agrees: "There is then no reason why we should not understand the participle as meaning Christ is being filled. In that case τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσι [ta panta en pasin] must be taken adverbially, 'totally', without any exception. God cannot be taken as the object of the filling for he fills and is not filled. *If then Christ is being filled, with what or whom is he being filled? This is not stated. In Col 1:19; 2:9 it is God who is said to dwell in him. Given this, it is not difficult to see AE conceiving of Christ as being totally filled with God, though it would also be possible to view him as filled with every grace and blessing.*" [Best, 185] *"As the divine fullness in its totality it has taken up residence in Christ, and believers have access to it in Christ... All of this presupposes, with Colossians, that Christ is the one filled by God and able to extend the divine life and power to others. In the OT God's glorious presence could be seen as permeating not only the creation but also the temple (cf. Isa 6:1; Ezek 43:5; Hag 2:7), so it should not be surprising that in an epistle which calls the Church 'a holy temple in the Lord ... a dwelling place of God in the Spirit' (2:21, 22) it should also be seen as the place of the dynamic fullness of God in Christ."* [Lincoln, 74f]

"[The plērōma] is that plenitude of Divine graces and virtues which is communicated through Christ to the Church as His body. The Church, as ideally regarded, the bride 'without spot or wrinkle or any such thing', becomes in a manner identified with Him. All the Divine graces which reside in Him are imparted to her; His 'fulness' is communicated to her: and thus she may be said to be His pleroma (i. 23). This is the ideal Church. The actual militant Church must be ever advancing, ever struggling towards the attainment of this ideal. Hence the Apostle describes the end of all offices and administrations in the Church to be that the collective body may attain its full and mature growth, or (in other words) may grow up to the complete stature of Christ's fullness. But Christ's fullness is God's fullness. Hence in another passage he prays that the brethren may by the indwelling of Christ be fulfilled till they attain to the pleroma of God (iii. 19). It is another way of expressing the continuous aspiration and effort after holiness which is enjoined in our Lord's precept, 'Ye shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.'" [Lightfoot, 263] Alford: It certainly cannot be said that Christ awaits His completion, by the completion of his Church. Rather if we take 'that filleth' in the active-reflexive sense, it would then mean "the fullness (the receptacle, filled and possessed; i.e., the churches) of Him who filleth all in all. This is supported by Eph 4:10 where Paul says Christ '*ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things*' and then proceeds to enumerate the various gifts bestowed by Christ for His churches:

'And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' (Eph 4:11-13 NKJV)

Alford then takes the 'all things' to refer to the entire universe, with the church being the special receptacle and abiding place, 'with all things' meaning 'who is the bestower of all, wherever found.' In 4:10 Alford notes 'that He might fill all things' is a reference to Christ filling all things (i.e., the universe) with His presence, His sovereignty, His working by the Spirit.

"In Col 1:19 and 2:9 it indicates God's deity and in Eph 4:10 it refers to God's gifts to the church. In Eph 3:19 Paul prays that all believers might be filled with God's fullness. In these contexts, *fullness seems to point to God's moral excellence, perfection, and power.* Particularly in 3:19 being filled with God's fullness is to know the love of Christ. On the other hand, *in the present context power is the center of the discussion, for God was demonstrating his power in that he gave Christ to the church as head over everything. The church, his body, is being filled with the moral excellence and power of God by Christ who in turn is being filled with the moral excellence and power of God.*" [Hoehner, 300]

APPENDIX A — “FULNESS” (PLĒRŌMA) DEFINED

THE VERB ROOT OF OUR WORD ‘PLĒRŌMA’ — “The verb πληροῦν [plērōun, ‘fulfill’] has two senses. It signifies either (1) ‘to fill’, e.g., Acts ii. 2 [filled the whole house]; or (2) ‘to fulfill, complete, perfect, accomplish’, e.g. Matt xxvi. 56 [that the Scriptures ... might be fulfilled], Rom xiii. 8 [has fulfilled the law], Acts xii. 25 [they had fulfilled their ministry]. The latter sense indeed is derived from the former, but practically it has become separate from it. The word occurs altogether about a hundred times in the New Testament, and for every one instance of the former sense there are at least four of the latter.” [J. B. Lightfoot, *Lightfoot’s Commentary on the Epistles of St Paul: St Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*; Hendriksen Publishers, 1995; p 257]

“TO FILL SOMETHING COMPLETELY, TO FULFILL WITH A STRONG ELEMENT OF EXCLUSIVENESS OR TOTALITY” — The following is loosely taken from Kittel’s Theological Dictionary of the NT, volume 6, pages 290–292; some of the following are direct quotes but it is also interlaced with quotes from others, the verses and such to clarify what the dictionary is saying:

Kittel’s states **the root verb** has a very basic meaning of ‘to fill’ but the particular content of this word in the NT is ‘to fulfill a norm, a measure, a promise,’ ‘to complete or achieve’ something. Literally the term means ‘to fill something completely,’ e.g.:

*‘and there came suddenly out of the heaven a sound as of a bearing violent breath, and it **filled** all the house where they were sitting’ (Acts 2:2 YLT)*

*‘Mary, therefore, having taken a pound of ointment of spikenard, of great price, anointed the feet of Jesus and did wipe with her hair his feet, and the house **was filled** from the fragrance of the ointment.’ (John 12:3 YLT)*

*‘which, when [the net cast into the sea] **was filled**, having drawn up again upon the beach, and having sat down, they gathered the good into vessels, and the bad they did cast out’ (Matt 13:48 YLT)*

*‘every valley **shall be filled**, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straightness, and the rough become smooth ways’ (Luke 3:5 YLT)*

It is used for our lack of material items:

*‘and my God **shall supply** all your need, according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus’ (Phil 4:19 YLT)*

Non-literally it means ‘to fill with a content,’ in the passive sense: ‘to be filled with’ something; the content may not be specified, the subject itself is the content. In the passive sayings God is in part to be inferred as the One who fulfils richly, especially in the prayers at Phil 1:11 and Col 1:9:

*‘**being filled** with the fruit of righteousness, that is through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.’ (Phil 1:11 YLT)*

*‘Because of this, we also, from the day in which we heard, do not cease praying for you, and asking that **ye may be filled** with the full knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding’ (Col 1:9 YLT)*

He it is who gives spiritual gifts, and He gives them with fulness. Paul prays for those to whom he writes that the full knowledge of God’s will may be in them and that they may stand before the coming Christ with the fulness of the fruit of righteousness brought forth in them, Col 1:9 and Phil 1:9ff.

There is in the term a strong element of exclusiveness or totality. The joy, knowledge, etc. which fill the Christian shape his whole existence and **imperiously claim his whole being.**

im·pe·ri·ous – adjective: domineering in a haughty manner; dictatorial; overbearing

It is used for the fulness of insight into the will of God makes mutual correction possible for the community:

*‘And I am persuaded, my brethren – I myself also – concerning you, that ye yourselves also are full of goodness, **having been filled** with all knowledge, able also one another to admonish’ (Rom 15:14 YLT)*

In Eph 5:18 there is perhaps a play on ‘to be drunk with’; the licentious life of the drunkard is contrasted with the disciplined lift of the man who, wholly filled by the Holy Spirit and His gifts, worships and praises God:

*‘and be not drunk with wine, in which is dissoluteness, but **be filled** in the Spirit’ (Eph 5:18 YLT)*

The human race, given up by God to self-will, is full of all the conceivable effects of unrighteousness:

*‘**having been filled** with all unrighteousness, whoredom, wickedness, covetousness, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil dispositions; whisperers’ (Rom 1:29 YLT)*

In Eph 4:7-11 Christ is described as the One who dispenses in fulness the gifts of grace. He is this because He has achieved dominion over all powers, both the lowest and the highest (v. 8f). Verse 10 shows wherein the unlimited power of Christ has its basis in His all-comprehensive descent and ascent, which took place ‘*He may fill all things*’:

*‘he who went down is the same also who went up far above all the heavens, that **He may fill** all things – and He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as proclaimers of good news, and some as shepherds and teachers,*

*unto the perfecting of the saints, for a work of ministration, for a building up of the body of the Christ, till we may all come to the unity of the faith and of the recognition of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to a measure of stature of the **fulness** [πληρώματος , plērōmatos] of the Christ' (Eph 4:10-13 YLT)*

Christ can give rich gifts to His community because He is absolute Lord, because He 'fulfills' or reaches all things with His powerful presence.