

# **Two New Testament 'Ships'**

*Fellowship and Headship*

*David Gooding*

A Myrtlefield House Transcript



**MYRTLEFIELD**

**HOUSE**

[www.myrtlefieldhouse.com](http://www.myrtlefieldhouse.com)

## Contents

1	<a href="#">Fellowship</a>	3
2	<a href="#">Headship</a>	13
	<a href="#">About the Author</a>	22

David Gooding has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work.

Copyright © The Myrtlefield Trust, 2019

All rights reserved. Permission is granted to reproduce this document in its entirety, or in unaltered excerpts, for personal and church use only as long as you do not charge a fee. You must not reproduce it on any Internet site. Permission must be obtained if you wish to reproduce it in any other context, translate it, or publish it in any format.

This text has been edited from a transcript of two talks given by David Gooding at European Fellowship Week, MET (N. Ireland) in 2008.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. May not copy or download more than 500 consecutive verses of the ESV Bible or more than one half of any book of the ESV Bible. Quotations marked KJV are from The Authorized (King James) Version. Rights in the Authorized Version in the United Kingdom are vested in the Crown. Reproduced by permission of the Crown's patentee, Cambridge University Press. Other quotations are Dr Gooding's own translations or paraphrases

Published by The Myrtlefield Trust

PO Box 2216

Belfast, N Ireland

BT1 9YR

w: [www.myrtlefieldhouse.com](http://www.myrtlefieldhouse.com)

e: [info@myrtlefieldhouse.com](mailto:info@myrtlefieldhouse.com)

Myrtlefield catalogue no: doc.0026/dw

## Fellowship

Let us begin with some readings from our Bible.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Cor 1:4–9)

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. (1 John 1:1–4)

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. (1 Cor 9:19–23)

Let's pause just a moment while I make a comment on the translation of that last phrase 'that I may share with them in its blessings' or 'that I might be partaker thereof with you' as the King James Version has it. Whichever you have, I personally do not think the Greek means that. It actually means, or appears to say, 'that I might be its [the gospel's] partner'. Just like Peter, when he caught a very large number of fish and signalled to his partners. They were joint partners with him in the work of fishing and he signalled to them to come and join him in the work. So the gospel is out and abroad in this vast world, doing its glorious job. It is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes. It's saving people still, mercifully. The opportunity is that we could become partners with the gospel and help it to save some people.

You say, 'Pardon? Your enthusiasm is running away with you.' No, it's not. Says Paul here, 'I do what I do so that "by all means I might save some".' He's talking as a partner of God's glorious gospel. That's true fellowship.

I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation\* in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation\* in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. (1 Cor 10:15-17) (\*Greek *koinonia* –fellowship)

May God give us good understanding of his word.

Now that we have read God's holy word, I give all of you who care so to do, permission to listen from now on with your eyes shut! I have been reliably informed that some of you have been travelling many hours and, in this warm room, I fear that if you try to keep your eyes open, there will worse happen to you than to the young man who sat in the window while Paul went on and on! So do feel free, you won't offend me or upset me if, from now on, I see you listening with your eyes shut. If you could manage not to snore that would be helpful!

### **Four features of 'fellowship'**

It has been suggested that we refresh our minds this evening, thinking about fellowship. We have read four Scriptures and from those four Scriptures, I take these captions. First of all, 1 Corinthians 1, the *indescribable majesty* of the fellowship into which God has called us. From the First Epistle of John, the *sheer wonder* of what it is we share in this fellowship, for the unexaggerated statement is that 'our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son' (v. 3). It is good to get into our heads a basic idea about fellowship. It is not just some mystical, rather thin nothings that somehow we enjoy with some other person. Normally fellowship means one person sharing with another person in something else. So it is in 1 John 1: this wonderful fellowship we share with God, we share with Christ, we share with our fellow believers. What is it that we have in common? I put on it the title, the 'sheer wonder' as we discover what it is we share.

The third little passage that tells us of Paul's motivation as he went about his work for the Lord will bring home to us the *eternal gain* that is open to us to get, if we are prepared on our part to have fellowship, to be a partner, with the gospel in its worldwide work of saving men and women for God. And finally, on the basis of 1 Corinthians 10, I call attention to the *supernatural unity* that is brought about in believers by this fellowship. This is not merely a human thing, not merely the enthusiasm of a club, not even a religious club, but a supernatural unity that is brought about in believers by this fellowship.

### **Indescribable majesty**

So let us think first of all, from 1 Corinthians 1, about the indescribable majesty of the fellowship into which God has called us. 'God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord' (v. 9). We have constantly to guard against the

temptation to let those wonderful titles of our blessed Lord become just ordinary terms to us, and God helps us to remember what they mean and who he is. He's the one in whom and through whom and for whom all things were made. Says Colossians, he is the firstborn of all creation in this sense that in him 'all things' — that is the universe — came into being (see 1:15–16). As Paul sailed the Mediterranean and looked up into the sky, if there were no clouds he could see about three thousand stars. Indeed, Isaiah the prophet is inspired of God to tell us that we should from time to time lift up our eyes and look at the stars (40:26). I hope you obey Scripture and do it!

But what would Isaiah say now, I wonder, if he could see the photographs brought to us by the Hubble Telescope — of not only billions of stars but billions of galaxies! This Lord Jesus Christ, being Son of God, into whose fellowship we are brought, is the author of it. In him was conceived the idea of a universe. Through him, as the agent, it was all made. If you should ask, 'What is it for?' the answer is that it was made for Jesus Christ, our Lord. And we have been called into his fellowship! Does it even seem realistic to you, or is this a little bit of Paul's enthusiasm run away with him? Indeed it is not. The call comes from God. It is God who has called you into the fellowship of his dear Son, and it is God who is going to provide the wherewithal all the way home, until we are with him and like him forever.

There is a lovely psalm in the Old Testament, Psalm 45. You will know it well. The scholars tell us it is written to celebrate the enthronement of the Judean king. It describes his military prowess, 'Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies' (v. 5). Then as he is enthroned, almighty God addresses him, and you notice that the Father calls him 'God'.

Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever. The sceptre of your kingdom is a sceptre of uprightness; you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions. (Ps 45:6–7)

We pause in the poetry to ask who these companions of the king might be. In those far-off days, at such an installation of a king, the king would be surrounded by the princes of the realm, and yet God has this one anointed with the oil of rejoicing above the princes of the realm, his companions. That psalm was translated into Greek and was eventually quoted by the writer to the Hebrews. Speaking of God, he says as follows:

But of the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever, the sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.' (Heb 1:8–9)

So here is the New Testament referring to our blessed Lord, enthroned by God, supreme among his companions. And who are the companions? The ancient Greek, in its translation of the Hebrew, used a Greek word *metochos*, which means someone who shares in something with somebody — a partaker or partner. It is used again in another connection in 3:14:

For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

'To share in Christ'. Well, it may be that that is the intended meaning, for all who love the Lord have part in Christ; but if you look at the dictionaries of the New Testament, they will suggest another possibility, for this is the very same word as was used in chapter 1. 'God . . . has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.' Let it not offend you if I express my belief. I believe the princes of the ruling house, who will surround our blessed Lord when he is enthroned in his kingdom, will be his redeemed people, such as you and me. Oh, my brothers and sisters, if it is true, God help us to grasp it. Companions of the Messiah, companions of the King.

You say, 'Sorry, Mr Preacher, but we don't agree with your translation.' Oh, too bad for you! But I have another one to aim at you, and this is our Lord getting tired of the disciples' discussion in the Upper Room, as to who should be the greatest among them. Our Lord turned the subject and he says to them,

I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom. (Luke 22:29-30)

What a magnificent metaphor! To be invited, my dear Christian friend, summoned into glory and bidden to sit down at the table of the King himself, as one of his companions, to share eating and drinking with him at his royal table, eternally. God is faithful, who has called you into the fellowship of his Son.

You say, 'They must have been an exceptional assembly there in Corinth to have things like that said about them.' Well they were exceptional, but not in your sense. They were exceptionally perverse. You could scarce think of a sin but what they didn't commit it. They were a boring crowd, I must say—God forgive me if I'm wrong, but they were really! In the very first chapter, Paul has to start rebuking them for the strife in their assembly and the way they were dividing themselves.

'I am of Paul.'

'I am of Apollos.'

'I am of Cephas.'

'My preacher's better than your preacher.'

'Your preacher is as dull as ditch water.'

'Mine is so elegant, his name is Apollos.'

'How can you expect Greeks to come and listen to that Paul? He can't speak proper Greek'—and so on.

They were pushing each other and prosecuting each other in the law courts. There was shocking immorality among them, such as would shock Greeks—and Greeks took some shocking when it came to immorality. And they had some queer doctrines. They flattered themselves, thinking they were great thinkers. And some of them had decided that there was no such thing as a resurrection, apparently oblivious to the fact that if the resurrection is not true, if Christ is not risen, you're yet in your sins and there is no salvation. It was an assembly full of troubles, so much so that by the time Paul comes to the end of his second letter to them, he says, 'You'd better start examining yourselves, whether you are in the faith or not. Test yourselves. Don't you realize that Christ is in you—unless you're not true believers at all and never have been' (see 2 Cor 13:5).

What a wonder, but as now Paul starts to write to this assembly with all its manifold troubles, arguments and boastful rebellions, he changes the subject and refocuses their vision. If only these dear Corinthians could look away a little bit and get their eyes on the indescribable majesty of the fellowship into which they have been called. Then their petty jealousies and superiorities, their careless living, their false teaching, so dishonouring to Christ—all that would disappear. We cannot run out of this world, but sometimes we are unduly engrossed with all the failures, not only of the world, but of the believers, that we lose the true focus of the majesty of the fellowship into which we're called. You say again, 'But is it realistic? It sounds exciting, but is it realistic? It's not really practical is it?'

'It is indeed practical,' says Paul, 'because it is God who called you into his fellowship; and when I came to you, God confirmed my testimony and you were brought to repentance and faith.'

And then something happened—the great miracle of the new birth and the entry of the Holy Spirit into their hearts, as they believed. And with his presence came the gifts of the Holy Spirit to provide for their further learning and their further spiritual education, so that the believers in Corinth had not only the firm word of the apostle, which was true anyway, but as they believed it, they had the confirmation of God in their hearts. And then Paul says, 'It is not merely that God has called you into the fellowship of his Son, but God is determined to sustain you right to the end, as you wait for the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ' (see 1 Cor 1:7–9). It would have been wonderful if he had introduced us into the fellowship of his Son while his Son walked our earth, dust stained and weary. That would have been wonderful indeed. But listen, there's more than that. One of these days, who knows when it will be, the very heavens will open and God will unveil his Son in all the splendour of his glory, and you and I must meet him.

You'll recall that in the course of recounting the vision which was given to him in the book of the Revelation, the Apostle John relates how he came across an angel. I don't know whether you've ever seen an angel. I haven't, but I'm told they excel in strength and their presence can be overwhelming. When John saw this angel, his immediate reaction was to fall at his feet to worship him. And the angel said, 'John, get up, man. I'm merely a fellow servant like you are' (see Rev 19:10). Likewise, you and I are servants of the King and we shall see him in all his majesty. How shall we bear it? And this is added, 'And when we see him, we shall be like him' (see 1 John 3:2). Be careful how you treat a dear believer at your elbow, won't you? I know he and she can be a bit exasperating. Myself, I specialize in being exasperating: I have a habit of doing it! But if we could see her or him as they will be, away above angels and like the blessed Lord, it would temper our reactions to our fellow believers.

'Oh, I don't feel worthy,' you say. Well you're not: we can settle that right now! You never will be, but God is determined that he will present you. He will sustain you to the end that you may be guiltless—that is without charge, no case against you proved. Oh, wonder of wonders. This is no licence for us to sin, but think of it: who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect, when it is God who justifies? And supposing a charge were laid and the evidence allowed to be cited, who would condemn? All judgment is given to the Son and that same Son gave himself for us, died for us, is risen again, is at the right hand of God and makes

intercession for us. It's realistic. This is God's idea for our future, and already it is beginning to happen—we have been introduced into the fellowship of his Son.

### **Sheer wonder**

But what have we in common? It is difficult to have fellowship with people when you've nothing in common with them. I find that with the Queen. Well I don't find it actually, because I don't have anything in common with her. I am in a little club that pays for her racehorses, but as usual when she comes to Belfast, she doesn't bother to look me up and I'm glad of it! We don't have anything in common. How is it realistic to talk of our having fellowship with almighty God and with his Son, Jesus Christ? What on earth have we in common? John tells us in his First Epistle, for he says,

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. (1:1–3)

We have fellowship. Remember what we said about fellowship? Fellowship is when two people have something in common that they share. What is it that we share in this fellowship with the Father and with his Son, with the apostles and with our fellow believers? The answer is this—'the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us'. This is what we share. Now I must curb my enthusiasm and my statements, lest I go over the brink and say something I should not say! But first of all listen to John. He says, 'Do you know what we saw, we who witnessed the incarnation of our Lord? We saw it you know. We handled it. We touched it. It was real.'

'Yes, but what was it, John?'

'It was that eternal life which was with the Father, without beginning—the life that fed the love and heart of God from all eternity. That life which was with the Father and was manifested.'

You can almost sense the excitement coming out of the old quill that John was writing with, can't you? He's getting elderly of course and his hand shakes, but there's more than the hand shake here. He's thinking back to the moment it dawned on them that the man who travelled in their boat, the man they saw multiply the loaves and the fishes, and raise Lazarus from the dead, was none less than the only begotten Son who was in the bosom of the Father. 'Electrifying' is perhaps not the best word to use, but fancy waking up to it, as you rub shoulders with God incarnate. 'What we saw and heard and looked upon, we are now writing to you that you may have fellowship with us—with us apostles, that is—and surely our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son.'

Oh, thank God, God will never get tired of Christ, nor the infinity of his being. I'm not looking forward to dying, but I am looking forward to getting home. If I may talk a little bit vulgarly, I do fancy that Christ will yet have many things up his sleeve. What do you suppose



you're going to do for all eternity? Are you going to sit there on your heavenly armchair, supposing there are such things, and sing all day long? That's not bad, but for all eternity—non-stop? What's God going to do, do you think? The Bible talks about the ages of the ages yet to come.

If you say, 'Why did God invent this world?' Well, he invented it for his pleasure and for his glory. I say it without being crude: God doesn't have to work for a living so why does he do all he does? Now I have to be very careful—the little boy in me says he does it for fun, but that wouldn't be a word to use of almighty God, would it? What word would you think was better? He doesn't have to earn his living. He does it for the sheer joy of expressing himself through his dear Son, and so he will do for all eternity. He will never tire of Christ, and we shall not be tired either. We've been brought into the fellowship of his dear Son—to be enjoyed in heaven but also to be enjoyed now.

Then what are the conditions for enjoying, sharing this eternal life that was with the Father and was manifested? We share this life with God. What are the conditions for fellowship with him? Well, John reminds us that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. So if we say we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we're not telling the truth. The very opposite, for if we would have fellowship with this God, then we must walk in the light. What does that mean? Does that appear to you as saying that if you would have fellowship with God, you must behave yourself pretty well? Well I'm sure you ought to, but listen to the provision that is made:

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practise the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:6–9)

This is God's realism for making it possible for the likes of us, still imperfect, to have fellowship with him now, which means having and enjoying eternal life now.

The condition of course is this: not just that we come to the light—that's an important thing to do, but the condition goes further. We not merely come *to* the light, but we are to walk *in* the light. There were some recorded in the Gospel of John who came to the light and professed to believe in the Lord Jesus. Said the Lord Jesus, 'Now if you continue in my word, then you will really be my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.'

They said, 'Excuse us, free from what?'

'Well,' he said, 'free from sinning. Everyone who practices sin is a slave of sin.'

They said, 'Who asked you to come here, talking to us like this? You've forgotten who you're talking to. Get out' (see John 8:31–59).

What had happened? They'd come to the light. It shone on them and exposed them. That is the natural reaction, isn't it?

Listen to God's realistic provision that we might have fellowship with him—that is, share that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us. We must come and walk in the light and when it exposes us, as it will do, we must not run away, but confess our sins. Isn't that what we're required to do before the Lord's Supper every week—to judge ourselves?

‘These things I write to you that you do not sin. I’m not encouraging you to sin,’ says John, ‘but if any man does sin, then we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins. Not for ours only, but for the sins of the world’ (see 1 John 2:1–2). And he holds back the wrath of God until we are brought to repentance. If thus we have found God’s provision for walking in the light, sinners and failing and falling as we are, it’s where we walk that’s the all-important thing. We must walk in the light. But then of course we have a corresponding duty, for the one who says, ‘I abide in him,’ has a bounden duty to walk even as he walked. That’s how you walk. We start off with *where* we walk—in the light—and the blood of Christ is sufficient to keep us there. Then we have a duty to walk as he walked. That is *how* we walk. I leave it there. We have thought about the *indescribable majesty* of the fellowship into which we have been called; and I’ve tried with you, by God’s help and his word, to analyse the *sheer wonder* of what it is we have in common. Now very briefly, two other aspects of fellowship.

### **Eternal gain**

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul is explaining as best he can to the Corinthians what his motivation has been as he served the Lord and preached the gospel to them. It is notorious, and the Corinthians were somewhat upset, because Paul would not allow them to contribute to his expenses. He had a right to do it. If the Apostle Peter had come your way in those days, he not only would have expected you to maintain him, he’d have brought his wife with him, and I don’t know what she required! Paul apparently didn’t have a wife, but he wouldn’t take the expenses for himself and they drew all sorts of wrong conclusions from that. Some thought he wasn’t a real apostle and daren’t charge a fee because, in their estimation, the bigger preacher you were, the bigger the fee you charged. (There are some still who hold that view!)

So Paul explains what his motives were. He says, ‘Now when it comes to the preaching of the gospel, there is a sense in which I’m not free. You see, a stewardship has been committed to me. God has appointed me. I cannot say no to him. I’m answerable to him. I’m not free, and yet,’ he says, ‘I’ve found a way of being free.’ You say, ‘What are you talking about now, Paul?’ Well he says, ‘I’m free in this. As God’s appointed servant, I could demand of the Corinthians to pay my expenses. God would approve of it. The Lord has laid it down that they who preach the gospel should live off the gospel. I could demand it. I choose not to demand it and to serve without it and, in so doing, I’m free.’

I don’t know if I could illustrate it to you by a common or garden illustration. Here I am on the springboard down at Portrush, in what is meant to be summer, and I remember the first occasion I went there. It was summer, August, and we went into the sea to bathe with the sleet coming down and whirling around our ears! Imagine me standing on the springboard, not wanting to dive in and knowing it to be very cold. As I’m standing there ditheringly, I catch sight of a couple of Irishmen coming up behind me, as stealthily as they can, and if I’m not careful they’re going to push me in. Whether I want to go in or not, I will be forced to go in. I say, ‘I’m not an Englishman for nothing. I’ll beat these Irishmen.’ So I dive in of my own free will. No one made me do it. It was a free act.

Good old Paul. ‘I could demand that you pay my expenses,’ he says, ‘but I’ve freely chosen. I like to do something free for the gospel’s sake. And when it comes to all the cultural

differences, Greeks and Jews with all their cultural affairs, well so long as it doesn't contradict God's word, I submit myself willingly to fit in with their culture as best I can.'

You don't go to the Eskimos and when they set you down whale meat, say, 'No, I couldn't eat that horrible stuff.' They would be offering you the best they had.

'I'm an ambassador for Christ. I do all things.'

'What for, Paul?'

'That I may *gain the more*.' And then he says something even more bold. 'If by any chance I might save some.'

'Paul, aren't you exaggerating your part?'

'Not really. You see I want to become the gospel's partner, the gospel's associate, the gospel's companion, working alongside the gospel.'

There's the gospel out there, going and saving multitudes yet, if not in Northern Ireland. Says Paul, 'I love to get alongside the gospel and gain some and save some' (see 1 Cor 9).

The magnificent privilege given to sinners like us is to be associates with the gospel and share with the gospel in its work of saving people.

## Supernatural unity

My final point can be briefly stated. It comes in 1 Corinthians 10, where Paul says,

I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation\* in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation\* in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. (vv. 15–17) (\*Greek *koinonia* —fellowship)

The thing can easily be turned into a practical illustration. Suppose here we had a large loaf on a platter and it was circulated amongst us all who sit here tonight, and each one of us took a part from that loaf, such that when the last person had taken the last part, the loaf had disappeared altogether. In that moment, if I said to you, 'Where is the loaf now?' what would you say? Well, *we* are the loaf. There's a bit of the loaf in every one of us. Before we digest it, you could put it together and you've got the loaf.

But now see what has happened. We have a part of that same loaf in all of us. What then does it mean to partake of the body and the blood of Christ—or, to use our Lord's own phraseology, to 'eat his flesh and drink his blood' (see John 6:54)? It is that we receive Christ within us; his very life given for us. But more than that: not merely laid down, but the Saviour coming to live in us. That's what it means to have fellowship in the blood and the body of Christ. I've not yet the evidence for most of you, whether you will accept me as a sensible member of the Body of Christ or not! I must warn you that I am one, because by God's infinite grace, I have received the Lord and the Lord is in me. That I don't show him more is a constant regret, but he is in me. You have received him and he is in you as well, my dear good brother and sister. 'We who are many are one body' (1 Cor 10:17). Oh, that Christians had always remembered it, so that we could sing truthfully the lovely words of J. G. Deck:

We would remember we are one

With every saint that loves Thy Name;  
United to Thee on the throne,  
Our life, our hope, our Lord the same.<sup>1</sup>

It's not a unity brought about by organization, though organization in its due place will help.  
It is a supernatural unity, brought about by the living Christ in each one of his people.

What a fellowship, what a joy divine,  
Leaning on in the everlasting arms.<sup>2</sup>

May God bless his word, for his name's sake.

---

<sup>1</sup> James G. Deck (1802-1884), 'Lord, we would ne'er forget Thy love' (1876).

<sup>2</sup> Elisha A. Hoffman (1839-1929), 'Leaning on the everlasting arms' (1887).

## Headship

I am delighted to be invited to address you once more this evening. May God bless our meditation on his word. The conveners of the conference have suggested that tonight our meditation should be on the topic of headship, and I therefore propose to read to you a few verses from the passages in the New Testament that particularly deal with this question of headship.

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. (Col 1:13–18)

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. (Col 2:8–10)

Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. (Col 2:18–19)

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, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 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. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Eph 1:18–23)

But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.' (In saying, 'He ascended', what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Eph 4:7-16)

Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. (1 Cor 11:2-3)

May God give us good understanding and enlarge our imaginations that we may take in, with our imagination, what we learn through our intellect.

### **Different emphases in the Epistles**

As we read the Epistles in the New Testament, I suspect all of us have noticed, or sooner or later will notice, that the emphasis changes a little bit as we move through them. Of course they all preach exactly the same gospel: how that our sins are forgiven us for Christ's sake; that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; that he was buried and that he rose the third day, according to the Scriptures. But when we read Romans, it soon becomes apparent that here the great work of Christ is geared to us individually, telling first why we personally need to repent and secondly, upon repentance, how God has a salvation for us; and it is by believing, and solely by faith, that we enter into the glory of the forgiveness of sins and acceptance with God, through the propitiation that Christ has made. Romans then, God's great work, as concerns the individual—and much more besides, of course.

When we enter the Corinthian Epistles, we see the great work of Christ geared to our experience as believers in the churches of God; and how so much of God's grace comes to us, not directly, but through our fellow members in the church. Ponder it, my brothers and my sisters. It is not enough to suppose one can get saved and then be neglectful of meeting together with the church. I repeat, much of the grace of God comes to us not directly, but is mediated through our brothers and sisters in the church.

But when we come to epistles like those to Ephesus and to Colossae, the emphasis changes once more. It's the same Christ, the same gospel, the same salvation, but now instead of that work being sketched out against the background of the individual or of the church, it takes on cosmic proportions. The work and the significance of the person of Christ, and what he has done and is doing for us, is described in the context of the vast universe of which we are a

part. We're given to understand that not only is it sketched against the background of this present heavens and earth, but also against the background of the eternal new heavens and earth that shall be. We certainly will need the help of the Holy Spirit because, if you are any way like me, I am so narrow-minded in my little heart that I'm always thinking about me! But as the children of God, we're called to bigger things. We have a salvation that is cosmic in its proportion and in the results it will yet have.

*Christ: First in salvation*

That is why Paul, in writing to the Colossians, first of all reminds them that by God's grace they have been delivered from the power of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of the Son of his love, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins. But then, so that we should take in the magnitude of this—whose blood it is by whom we have redemption, and what is this kingdom of the Son of his love, into which we have been translated—Paul is inspired to go on to tell us about our blessed Lord Jesus Christ in relation to the Father. He is the express image of his person, the full, absolute expression of God, and of course to be that, he has to be equal with the Father. There is nothing in God that Christ cannot express.

*Christ: First in the universe*

And what is his relation to the universe? Well it is said here that he is the firstborn of all creation. The Jehovah Witnesses used to have a translation that said he's the firstborn of all creation, because of him all the other things were created, implying that he himself also was created and the first created being. They've changed it now, whether out of wisdom or tactics I know not, but of course the very text defeats them. He is the firstborn, and in the Scripture the term *firstborn* conveys the idea of first in honour, first in position. He is the firstborn of all creation. Why is that? Because in him, not just all things but, to cite Paul's Greek, '*the all things*'—*ta panta*, that's simple Greek for the whole universe—were made and nothing was made without him. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. It was made in him and through him and for him (see John 1:1–4). And he will be the beneficiary of all the riches of history: he is the heir of all things.

Are you not glad for this vast universe? The more science goes on to show us the magnificent marvels of our universe, I say, thank God for science—carry on showing us all the wonders of the glorious universe! My Saviour made it all and, thank God, while your atheist has no ultimate purpose in life and can't answer a question a child could ask, 'What's it all for?', here we have the answer. It was made not only *in* Christ, as the designer and *through* him as the agent, but *for* him. Go on researching about your dark matter and your dark energy, though we don't know quite yet what it is. What holds it all together? We have the answer in front of us. In him, all things hold together and shall do until he releases that bond and the elements melt with fervent heat.

*Christ: First in the church*

He's first in creation, but then Paul can't resist and hurries on to tell us that he's first in another sphere. Not just in creation, for have you heard about it? About two thousand years ago there appeared a new phenomenon in the universe: a phenomenon that never had been known or

seen before. A brand new, extraordinary phenomenon which our Bible calls the *Body of Christ*. Perhaps we've got so used to talking about it that we fail to put it in its cosmic proportion. The universe itself had not known anything like it before, nor did they know about it when our blessed Lord walked this earth. It was something that had to await his death, his resurrection and then his ascension. Then at his ascension, he poured out the Holy Spirit with the result that there came into being the Body of Christ. Let me remind you how that glorifies the uniqueness of our Lord.

John the Baptist, the greatest of all the prophets, the voice in the wilderness, heralded our Lord Jesus as 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' But John said more: 'I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, and he it is that baptizes in the Holy Spirit' (see John 1:26, 29, 33). And when our Lord rose from the dead and for forty days associated with the apostles from time to time and taught them things about the kingdom of God, he told them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait after his ascension, because there was going to be fulfilled what John the Baptist had said, 'for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit' (Acts 1:5). They waited to the day of Pentecost and then this colossal thing happened: the Holy Spirit was poured forth. And the first deduction which the Apostle Peter made from that phenomenon was this, 'This is what was spoken of by Joel the prophet, and let me tell you how it has happened. It is Jesus of Nazareth who has poured out the Holy Spirit' (see Acts 2:16, 22–33).

Oh, ponder it, my brothers, my sisters. Jesus of Nazareth is his human name, is it not? The Holy Spirit is not some sort of current like electricity, but is the third person of the Trinity. Who then must Jesus be if he can pour out God's Holy Spirit? Says Peter, 'Because of this phenomenon—the pouring out of the Holy Spirit by our risen and ascended Lord—let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made him, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ' in the fullest sense of those terms (see Acts 2:36). And Paul in Philippians adds that God has decreed 'that at the name of him whom people call Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord' (see Phil 2:9–11). 'Lord' is the Greek for 'Jehovah'; and God who demands that every knee should bow to him, demands now that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow and confess Jesus is Jehovah.

### **The Body of Christ**

You say, 'What's so wonderful about this? Please go back a minute—what is so wonderful about the Body of Christ?' Well consider how it is made. It isn't a club in which members try their best to act as if they were a body. It's another thing altogether. It's a new entity, a living thing that acts because it is a body, and Paul explains to the Corinthians how this body has come to be. 'In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . . and all were made to drink of one Spirit' (1 Cor 12:13)—simple words but absolutely vital. Human beings saved, forgiven, born again and then the living Christ has caused them to be baptized in the Holy Spirit and of course, the baptizer is not the Holy Spirit himself. The one who does the baptizing is Christ. And, just as John the Baptist, if you came to him, would gently put you in the river, put you in the water, so the risen Christ—God help us to get the wonder of it—takes you, frail human being who has trusted him, and puts you in the Holy Spirit.



And not content with that, 'in one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body . . . and all were made to drink of one Spirit'. If you put me into the sea outside here, I go into the water; but if I have a glass of water and I drink it, the water goes into me. You need both things. To take a physical illustration, you're a body, many members sitting there in one piece, from the toes to the top of your hair, and do you know the secret of what keeps you together? It is this: that you are in the air and the air is in you. Just one thing won't do. It's no good if you're in the air, but the air isn't in you. If somebody put a stranglehold round your neck so you're still in the air, but the air isn't in you, you'd go black in the face! But suppose you've got a lot of air in you and somebody has put you on a rocket out into space. So you've got your lungs full of air and now you're in space, where there is none. What happens now? Well you'd go pop, that's all!

Here, to be a human being, all members of the body together and working together, you must have two things. You must be in the air and the air must be in you. And to be in the Body of Christ, two things are necessary: you must be placed by Christ in the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit must be in you. We are so used to everyday things that sometimes the wonder of it escapes us. You, my sister, my brother, you are in the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is in you. I tell you, it's a new phenomenon in the universe. You will not read of the Body of Christ in the whole of the Old Testament, nor in the Gospels that relate his earthly ministry. You won't find it until after our Lord ascended and poured forth the Holy Spirit. It's a new order, and I'm not quite sure the angels have got over it yet!

We are reliably told that at creation, when God's ingenuity of making all kinds of new things so got hold of the otherwise stately angels and archangels, they clapped their hands with sheer joy. And I wonder what they said among themselves when they saw the first human being made just out of matter, but with a spiritual dimension. Says Gabriel, 'It's less than us anyway—better than those animals maybe, but under us.' Man made a little lower than the angels; and then they saw with startled wonder, man's rebellion against their maker. The centuries rolled by and what a sight it was for Gabriel and Michael, when they saw the Son of the Almighty leave his exalted throne and come down to Bethlehem: 'Now he has become less than us angels—what on earth is God doing?' And what did that angel think who, according to Luke, came to the garden of Gethsemane and ministered to our Lord physically, when he had lost so much perspiration and blood (see Luke 22:43)?

How could they make sense of it? And had they been told that, as evil men nailed him to a cross, he was doing it and bearing it for the likes of us sinners, do you suppose that would have made sense to Gabriel when, with one flick of the finger, he could have eliminated the whole of the human race from the planet? Then on the fortieth day after he rose, they saw this marvellous sight: not just the Son of God returning—he'd every right to do that—but the very gates of heaven were told to open and the serried ranks of the angels stood aside as the man, Jesus of Nazareth, ascended and sat at the very right hand of God.

### *Our position*

That's a phenomenon that was utterly new in this universe—a man seated at the right hand of God. And not content with that, listen to what this great God of wonders has in mind for us. Ephesians talks of the great power that God has exerted towards us, when he raised Christ

from the dead and seated him at his own right hand in glory. He is described there as ‘head over all things to the church, which is his body’ (1:22–23). And you redeemed human beings, who one day will have a spiritual body like the body of the Lord Jesus, are now part of that great Body of Christ—in the Holy Spirit every one, and the Holy Spirit in every one, and joined to the head. Heaven never knew such a thing before: it is the new great phenomenon.

### *Our purpose*

You say, ‘Well what are we up there for? You’ve told us we’re members of this body by this tremendous action of God and, in his plan, seated in the heavenly places in Christ, but whatever does the body exist for?’ Well of course, we know the operations of the Body of Christ, even now here on earth, and we’ve been hearing something of them in these last hours, and mightily encouraging they have been; but it’s more than that. For that reason I read from Colossians 1—its version of this same truth that he has seated Christ far above all thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, and every name that is named, not only in this world but in the ages to come.

And these thrones or dominions, who might they be? We’re not told, but we’re told what kinds of things and entities they are. They have to do with government: they are thrones, dominions, rulers and authorities—the great spirit hosts of God’s creation. Some of them loyal to him still—the archangel and the loyal angels—and some have rebelled. But the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us straight: ‘Now it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking’ (Heb 2:5). What’s the point of that statement? Well this world is to some extent being administered under God by angels. There have been angels at your side more often than you’ve realized, my brother, my sister—in your times of danger and peril maybe. For the angels are sent forth to be servants of those who are heirs of salvation, God’s executive. But it is not to the angels that the age to come will be subjected.

Well, to whom them? And you say, ‘Well to our Lord Jesus of course.’ Yes, you’ve got it right, but you didn’t quite quote the terms. It has been testified somewhere, ‘What is man that you are mindful of him?’ That’s an important question because the writer of the psalm has been looking at the stars, ‘When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers . . . what is man that you are mindful of him . . .?’ (Ps 8:3–4). And you would suppose the psalmist is going on to say that, compared with this vast universe, man is like a little centipede, or less, a little germ that you might need a magnifying glass to see. But instead of that, the psalmist goes off in the other direction, ‘You have . . . crowned him with glory and honour. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands’ (vv. 5–6). Hebrews tells us that those words are in the first instance fulfilled in our blessed Lord Jesus—the one that you say you’ve been saved through! God has set him over the works of his hand, truly human though he is.

And now this will take you some believing! It’s not just the Lord Jesus risen in glory now, seated at the right hand of the Father, but God is in process of bringing many sons and daughters to glory, and you along with them. You believe it, don’t you? Dare to believe it, for it makes sense of the universe and our experience of it, and brings a hope that your poor, poverty-stricken atheist doesn’t have, for they are without God and without hope in the world. As the Body of Christ, we are therefore to be Christ’s executives, not only now but for

all eternity, as Christ will govern and administer the world to come, and he will administer it through his Body. Marvellous, isn't it?

### **Spiritual growth and maturity**

There is at the moment a very big practical need, because this is not just wild imagination. This is God's solid truth and the need for us as believers, put simply, is this—we have a desperate need to grow, to grow up, to become adult. The standard of growth is 'to the measure of the stature of Christ, that we might grow up into him, who is the head of the body which is the church'. It would be grotesque to have a very large head and puny arms and legs: we desperately need to grow. And Paul warns us in Ephesians 4 that there are powers working against our growing. He says, 'That we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ' (Eph 4:14–15).

At this level there is a battle, as unseen forces will do everything to stop the growth of the children of God, and get them waylaid by all sorts of fancy, nonsensical and pernicious doctrines. I think of past experience and in this very island when, by the witness of some local believers, some ex-drunkards professed to be saved. One of them particularly went on so well and studied Scripture and began to preach. The last time I saw him, he and the girl he'd married from a lovely Christian family, had gone over to Jehovah Witnesses and denied the deity of Christ. There is a battle on, my dear brothers and sisters, and it's a battle not merely about experience. It's a battle about what we believe, so that we're no longer tossed to and fro like a feather in a storm, with every old wind of doctrine that comes along, but grow in adult discernment to see what is according to God and to Christ and what is dishonouring to him. And as we go into that battle, we need not lose heart. Because our blessed Lord Jesus himself has stepped into that battle.

#### *Christ's captives!*

For Paul on one occasion was reading the psalms apparently and he came to Psalm 68, and he read the verse that said 'You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train' (v. 18); and as he read that, he scratched his apostolic head, wondering what this could mean. Who is this that has ascended up on high? It can't be God the Father, because he is at the height and couldn't possibly ascend any higher. And then he saw it. The one who has ascended had first descended into the lower regions, the earth. And now he has ascended, taking a multitude of captives and, like a victorious general, is distributing the spoils of war with his people to enrich them (see Eph 4:8–10). You say, 'What are you talking about—spoils of war, what are they?' Well let me quote you the man who wrote Ephesians. He was one of the biggest enemies that ever faced Christ. He was determined to eliminate the very name of Christ from the earth, and persecuted his believers and stood over them while they were tortured to get them to blaspheme the name of Jesus. God defeated him, brought the man to his very knees. How did God do it? Well, listen to Paul himself:

The grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. (1 Tim 1:14–15)

‘If he’d save me, he’ll save anybody,’ says Paul, ‘and this went to my heart.’

And Christ not only saved and forgave him, but he counted him faithful and put him into his service. Would you have done that with Saul of Tarsus? I wouldn’t. When he got converted I would have said, ‘All right, old chap, you sit on the back row a while and you prove yourself for the next ten years.’ Did Christ take a big risk? Christ counted him faithful and said to Ananias, ‘Go and tell him, he’s a chosen instrument of mine and tell him what things he must suffer for my sake’ (see Acts 9:15–16). And Saul was faithful to the deposit given him—the arch-enemy converted through Christ and given to the church, as one of the gifts in the church.

And you, madam, and you, sir, I don’t suppose you were outrageous sinners like Saul of Tarsus. But the Bible holds that we were all at enmity against God, and Christ has saved us out of his infinite compassion. Why does he bother with us, and save us, give us to the church? For you see the point of these gifts in the church, the noticeable ones like prophets and apostles and teachers and pastors, are only there to help the believers in general to serve. John Stott says in one of his books that we need to get rid of the idea of the parson perched on his pulpit. The noticeboard outside the church should not read ‘Minister: Mr So and So’, but should say ‘Ministers: every member of the church’.

We are each given by the risen Lord to the church so that ‘the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love’ (Eph 4:16)—until that glorious day when the body will be complete and we will be in glory, the Body of Christ, his executives in all those magnificent schemes that the God of endless ingenuity will have throughout the coming ages. My brothers and sisters, whatever life’s trials may be, whatever the pains through which the Lord allows us to go for the sake of our spiritual education, if this is the purpose in view, it will be worth it all when we see Jesus.

### *Obstacles to progress*

We must make progress but there are dangers associated with making progress and Paul in Colossians reminds them of those positive dangers. We do not have time to consider them tonight. They are what you might call ‘false recipes for the advancement of spiritual life’. They are theosophy, a perverted kind of philosophy. They are an excessive observation of holy days, as though they were the means of salvation. They are ecstatic experiences in which people claim that they go up into the heavenly realms and join in the worship of angels. And they are also asceticism, rough treatment of the body. All of them are perversions of something good.

But the key for our purposes this evening is this: that if we would be saved from these false recipes for spiritual advancement, we must not do what some of the Colossians were doing—they were not holding fast to the Head. Vainly puffed up in their own sensuous minds and going on in detail about visions of angels, as they would have told you, and all sorts of other wonderful ‘experiences’. But Paul says that was puffed up by their fleshly minds and it didn’t come from the Head—as you would eventually see if you examined the doctrinal basis

of these so-called experiences. We're only safe as we make progress, holding fast to our glorious Head and to his word, given to us by his inspired apostles.

### **Symbols given to the church**

We read one last thing. It is a practical matter. In the few seconds I have before I close, I mention it now. 'When we meet in church,' says Paul, 'we have sundry symbols,' like the symbol of the bread and wine at the Lord's Supper. Valuable symbols, and in the Christian church from the early days, the men wore no head covering, as distinct from Jews to this present day where, in the synagogue, the men wear a covering of the head (even if it's only a trilby, which looks odd!).

#### *Uncovered heads*

Why don't the Christian men wear a covering out of reverence to God, as the Jew does? The man praying with an uncovered head is a symbol that Christ is his head. Christian gentlemen, this is not an antiquated custom that passes with fashion. For if a Greek had come into a Christian church in those far-off days and saw the men praying without any covering on their head, they might have said, 'How odd.' But unless they asked the Christians, they would never have known what it signified, unless the Christians had told them. And what they said was the significance of it would have startled the Jew; for the Christians believed that Christ is the Son of the living God, creator of the universe, head of the church. It is in his honour that the men symbolically don't wear a head covering in church.

#### *Covered heads*

You say, 'What about the ladies?' Well I'm not only a man, but I'm a bachelor. My job tonight is to exhort the men not to wear hats in church. I leave the ladies to work out the corollary of that, as is given us in 1 Corinthians chapter 11!

And so may God bless our evening meditation and grant it may be fruitful for eternity.

## About the Author

**DAVID W. GOODING** is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. He has taught the Bible internationally and lectured on both its authenticity and its relevance to philosophy, world religions and daily life. He has published scholarly articles on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews, the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, and several books addressing arguments against the Bible and the Christian faith. His analysis of the Bible and our world continues to shape the thinking of scholars, teachers and students alike.