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LAURA BEALL

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EXPOSITORY ECCLESIOLOGY: THE HEAVENLY HOUSEHOLD OF EPHESIANS

Biblical scholarship and theological reflection on Ephesians have often noted the prominence of both the household code (5:21-6:9) and the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ (e.g., 4:15-16; 5:29-32) within the letter. By focusing so intently on these narrowly construed themes, however, interpreters of Ephesians have largely minimized or overlooked (one must hope accidentally!) the importance of the divine household theme in the entire letter, missing the overwhelming significance of that particular metaphor for the author’s intent and artistry throughout.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The kind of creative and purposeful interweaving of theological insights that we find in Ephesians is not surprising, especially from Paul.[[2]](#footnote-2) One commentator remarks that Ephesians “represents a development of Paul's thought and a summary of his message which are prepared by his undisputed letters and contribute to their proper understanding.”[[3]](#footnote-3) And although Paul’s letters were typically occasional letters, Ephesians is rather a circular letter to the churches of Asia Minor, including but not limited to Ephesus. The absence of a place name in the superscription of the original manuscripts[[4]](#footnote-4) and the impersonal tone of the letter[[5]](#footnote-5) both point to its circular character. So instead of being meant to address a specific context and issues within a particular church, Ephesians is an extended reflection on the nature and relationships of the church. It is, in the words of one writer, “the closest that the New Testament comes to a treatise on the church.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

The theme of the household echoes throughout this “treatise” of Ephesians as an organizing metaphor for the church. Paul indicates to his audience that though they were once aliens and strangers to God and one another, they are now members of a heavenly household. That assertion is, if you will, the thesis statement of his ecclesiologically oriented dissertation. Within this household, believers are viewed—with ever-increasing intimacy—as servants of one another, as children and heirs of God, and as the bride and body of Christ. Throughout Ephesians Paul compares and contrasts this household of God with the households of the world and the household of evil,[[7]](#footnote-7) calling on the church to live as a new humanity and a fully functional divine household.[[8]](#footnote-8)

When Ephesians is interpreted with this guiding metaphor of household at its center, it becomes clear that the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ is neither the only nor even the most prominent metaphor in Ephesians for the identity of the church. No, various metaphors abound, and the body metaphor is subsumed under the larger collection of figurative language that names Christians as members of God’s household. Furthermore, the household code of 5:21-6:9 is shown to be a sort of interpretive key to the entire letter.[[9]](#footnote-9) True, it still functions on one easily recognizable level as moral instruction to the audience about how to best live in relationship with one another and the world at large, but it also serves as an extended metaphor that leads to a deeper understanding of the relationship between believers and their God.

**A New Humanity and a Divine Domicile**

In addressing the largely Gentile audience of the churches of Asia Minor,[[10]](#footnote-10) one of Paul’s first goals is to convey the idea that Gentiles are no longer outsiders to covenant relationship with the God of the Jews. They must be assured of this basic shift in relationship—from outsiders to insiders—before they can ever conceive of the idea of more intimate interactions with either God or the Jewish Christians. So toward the beginning of this treatise on the church as the household of God, Paul makes it clear that the Gentiles can come before God on equal footing with the Jews.

Using the first imperative verb of the letter (μνημονεύετε), in 2:11-22 Paul asks his audience to rememberthat these “Gentiles by birth, called ‘the uncircumcision,’” who were “far off,” “without Christ,” “having no hope and without God,” and who were once considered “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenant of promise” have now “been brought near.” This signifies his hope for a major paradigm shift in the audience’s understanding of the Gentiles’ relationship to God.

In speaking of the “commonwealth” (πολιτεία) of Israel (2:12), Paul uses explicitly civil vocabulary to refer to things that the Gentiles, as “aliens” and “strangers” (ἀπαλλοτριόω and ξένος in 2:12), had not previously experienced in common with Israel because they did not have the prerequisite status as citizens.[[11]](#footnote-11) And in 2:19 he notes that the Gentiles had once been (but were no longer) “strangers” (again, ξένος) and “aliens,” here using the term πάροικος, “a stranger, a foreigner, one who lives in a place without the right of citizenship,” or, quite literally, one who is “dwelling near.”[[12]](#footnote-12) Up until this point, then, the Gentiles had been merely strangers or neighbors, dwelling near—but never with!—the people of Israel. All that has now changed because of Christ.

And while perhaps shocking enough itself, Paul’s message is not only that the Gentiles too can have access to God as fellow citizens of a heavenly household. No, he indicates, that is not sufficient. The grace and purpose of God run much deeper than that, spilling over even into broken relationships among disciples. For the purposes of God to be fulfilled, the followers of Christ must be unified. Christ, therefore, serves as the peacemaker between enemies. He has reconciled Gentiles and Jews not only to God but also to each other, tearing down the wall of hostility that had up until this point rigidly divided them.[[13]](#footnote-13) He has gone to the extreme lengths of abolishing the law so that the two might be made one—one new humanity.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Having thus set the stage, it is at this point in his letter (2:19) that Paul picks up the household metaphor in earnest. It is as the one new humanity that Christians—Jews and Gentiles alike—are the household of God, he writes. Though he has already hinted at and will continue to explore numerous other facets of the metaphor, Paul begins here somewhat slowly, likely not wanting to overwhelm his audience too quickly with the increasingly challenging ideas he will introduce.

He first names the household, then, as a structure: they are the “holy temple in the Lord…a dwelling place (κατοικητήριον) for God” (2:21).[[15]](#footnote-15) The household has a home and a place of worship, he writes to his audience, and it is them! But not only do they dwell in God’s household, God also dwells in all of them—quite a radical idea to those who had once been (or had once viewed the Gentiles as) merely “dwelling near”![[16]](#footnote-16)

**Paul’s οἰκονομία**

Before transitioning into further application of what the household metaphor means for the church as a whole, Paul makes known his own role in household affairs. Having named himself in the opening line of the letter with a version of his customary introduction, “an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God” (1:1), Paul now speaks of himself as a servant (διάκονος, 3:7) who has received a commission or stewardship (οἰκονομία, 3:2) of God’s grace for the church. Particularly in the use of οἰκονομία, Paul is naming himself as the administrator of the heavenly household he is expounding.[[17]](#footnote-17) His main task as administrator, he writes, is to elucidate the mystery of how “the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise” (3:6; *cf.*, 3:9),[[18]](#footnote-18) precisely the task he has already taken up and will continue to address in the remainder of Ephesians.

**Servants of One Another**

After having broadly called Gentiles and Jews into harmonious relationships as the household of God, Paul now begins to get more specific and detailed, moving into the metaphor of Christians as servants within the household. Beginning his lengthy (approximately 52-verse) and determined exhortation to his audience with “I beg (παρακαλῶ) you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (4:1), Paul expresses his hope that the church will recognize its summons to be a fully functional household of God and that it can begin living into the ideals of unity and of mutually beneficial, service-oriented relationships. Towards that end, he offers a great deal of helpfully practical advice, peppering it with theological rationale.

 Although the metaphor of Christians as servants of one another is not explicitly stated in this section (4:1-5:20), the purpose such a metaphor would convey is implicitly at work, as the ideas underlying such a concept continually arise. In 4:4-6, Paul reminds his audience of their oneness, the unity that is imparted to them because of their relationship to God. He goes on, continually contrasting how they once lived with how they are to live now and pointing to the ways in which their lives are to serve one another and build one another up. He writes of the gifts that they have been given for the betterment of the church (4:7-13). He compares the growth of the church to physical maturation and bodily functioning, emphasizing the interdependency of the church and its reliance as a whole on Christ (4:14-16).[[19]](#footnote-19)

Reminding readers of what they learned from Christ, Paul asks them to exchange their old way of life for a new one (4:17-24), elaborating on what that new life entails in terms that speak overwhelmingly of service-based relationships within the church (4:25*ff.*). Relationship-destroying activities like lying, stealing, evil talk, wrath, slander, malice, fornication, vulgar talk, greed, and debauchery are forbidden as “unfruitful works of darkness” (5:11). Instead, relationship-building pursuits like speaking the truth, controlling anger, honest work, encouraging talk, kindness, tenderheartedness, forgiveness, love and self-sacrifice, and communal worship and thanksgiving are the order of the day. And the motivation for such self-denying, service-oriented actions that are the “fruit of the light” (5:9) is simply that “we are members of one another” (4:25), “to share with the needy” (4:28), and “for building up” the church (4:29). In short, Paul reminds his audience that they are to model themselves on God (5:1) and act as servants of one another so that the heavenly household of which they are a part may run smoothly.

**Children and Heirs of God**

The people of God are not just servants of one another, however. Though that relationship is an important one for the health of the church, God’s people are much more than this in the overall scheme of the household of God. Throughout Ephesians, then, Paul reminds his audience of various aspects of their identity, including their status as the children of God.

 He begins his reflection on this metaphor of the church as the children of God early on the letter. Referring from the beginning to God as Father, Paul uses much of chapter 1 to tell his audience that they have been chosen for adoption as children (1:5) and that they are heirs to an inheritance beyond any other (1:11-14, 18).[[20]](#footnote-20) Again, he emphasizes the oneness of Jews and Gentiles as the children and heirs of God. As O’Brien notes, “In Christ Gentiles are not only fellow-citizens with Jewish believers under God’s rule; they are also children together in God’s own family.”[[21]](#footnote-21) And the metaphor is strengthened even more in 3:14-15, when Paul writes of bowing in prayer “before the Father, from whom every family (πᾶσα πατριὰ) in heaven and on earth takes its name.” This Father to whom Paul bows in reverence is the ultimate model of fatherhood,[[22]](#footnote-22) and all people in heaven and earth derive their name from him as they are adopted into his family.

 The “beloved children” (5:1) of God have a particular way of life to which they are called, a way of life that requires them to increase in maturity and responsibility. In 4:13-16, Paul reminds his audience that they are not to act like infants or little children (νήπιοι) but that they should rather “grow up” (αὐξήσωμεν) into full-grown adult maturity (εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον) in Christ.[[23]](#footnote-23) And Paul instructs them “as children of light” (5:8) to live a life that will assure they receive their promised inheritance as adopted children. Those who participate in the idolatry that characterizes children of darkness—all kinds of fornication, impurity, greed, and vulgar talk (5:3-5)—will not receive an inheritance in the new household of God, for their actions show indisputably that their allegiance is to their former household, not to the one into which they have been adopted.

**The Bride and Body of Christ**

Even in the midst of his use of the metaphor of children, however, Paul also hints that the readers’ relationship to God is not just that of growing children to a father. They are also part of the body of Christ, and what they are to grow up *into* is Christ himself, the head of that body (4:15-16). But his suggestion here is not the first such indication in Ephesians that the church is related to God in even closer ways that that of servants or children.

 Paul’s allusions to a more intimate relationship between God and God’s people begin as early as 1:4, where he claims that God “chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.” It is a simple enough claim at first glance. However, when lined up against 5:27, where Paul, comparing husband and wife to Christ and the church, speaks of the church as “holy and without blemish,” using the exact same words as in 1:4 (ἅγιος καὶ ἄμωμος), it seems that Paul’s meaning in 1:4 may be more complex than a first read would indicate. Perhaps there is another metaphor at work here, that of the church as the bride of Christ.

 Reading Ephesians with this possibility in mind, other indications of the church as the bride of Christ emerge. In 1:6, Paul writes of Christ as the “Beloved,” leaving it unclear whether Christ is God’s beloved or ours, or perhaps both. And in 1:11, we see that it is *in Christ* that we have obtained our inheritance as children. Might this not be an inheritance gained in the process of marriage?[[24]](#footnote-24) If so, then the members of the church are indeed children of God, adopted as heirs, as Paul has indicated throughout Ephesians, but this adoption was fulfilled most perfectly when they were brought into the household of God as the bride of Christ, God’s beloved son.

 As intimate as the imagery of the church as the bride of Christ is, one relationship of even greater closeness exists: being the body of Christ himself. We have already seen that the people of God are spoken of as children who are to grow up into Christ the head (4:15-16), and now we can examine how this body imagery interacts with the more intimate metaphor of the people of God as the bride of Christ.

In my own reading of Ephesians, it seems that the people of God are the *body* of Christ precisely because they are also his *bride*. In the section of the household code dealing with husbands and wives (5:22-33, which we will explore more fully shortly), Paul compares earthly marriages to the relationship between Christ and the church. Just as a husband and wife are united in marriage, so the church and Christ are united, and “the two will become one flesh” (5:31). The word for “flesh” here, σάρξ, which may denote “the sensuous nature of man” (as would be appropriate for a teaching regarding marriage), may also indicate a body into which the church is—pun intended!—incorporated.[[25]](#footnote-25) In either case, the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ is developed in this passage, for Christ is spoken of as the “head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior” (5:23),[[26]](#footnote-26) and the teaching regarding marriage calls on the audience to love their spouses “as they do their own bodies” (5:28) and even explicitly states that “we are members of [Christ’s] body” (5:30).

A MEDLEY OF METAPHORS

In this “treatise on the church,” then, Paul employs a wide variety of metaphors: a new humanity, a dwelling place for God, slaves and servants, children and heirs, bride, body. The refrain of household is fiercely evident. But why such a mélange? What is the purpose of these many mixed metaphors, illustrations that often overlap throughout the letter in ways that can even obscure their symbolic power?

Any one of these metaphors on its own, while expressing some particular aspect of life with God that the other images may not, is inherently limited. This is the case with all figurative language. In order to convey more fully the richness of relationship with God, Paul needed to employ more than one metaphor, for each of these illustrations speaks to some important aspect of the church’s relationship to God.

Yet rather than choosing random illustrations from a wide variety of life experiences, he chose to center his metaphors on a powerful theme, one that everyone can understand in some way or another: household. Every human being has a body, a physical expression of existence. All have a space in which to dwell, though some homes are admittedly more pleasant than others. Every person is a child, whether of good, bad, or absentee parents. Many are servants, slaves, husbands, and wives. So in choosing household metaphors, Paul chose to compare life with God to the familiar, even inescapable experiences of all human beings. There is something for all people here, no matter their station in life.

THE HEAVENLY HOUSEHOLD CODE

Even given Paul’s use of so many household metaphors, though, why do I believe the household code section of 5:21-6:9 is an interpretive key to the entirety of Ephesians? The substantial length of the household code alone lends it credibility as a pivotal element of Ephesians. The interpretive force of the section is further signified as the emphasis throughout the letter on household relationships culminates here, in the portion of the letter that specifically addresses earthly household relationships. Most significantly, however, in my reading of Ephesians, the household code serves two basic purposes, the first constructive and the second reflective.

First and most obviously, the faith commitments of the Christians Paul addresses here should help construct their everyday realities. Paul indicates throughout Ephesians that the household of God is not just one equal among many households; rather, it is the paradigmatic instance of household that interprets how other, worldly households should and do function. The household code, then, is a practical application of the theologically informed identities of the audience as members of God’s household.[[27]](#footnote-27) This pericope is undeniably an exhortation to align their earthly household relationships so that those ties reflect something positive about God and God’s people. Beginning with “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” (5:21), Paul frames household relationships under the command of mutual submission among Christians because of their respect for and relationship with Christ. He then proceeds to expound upon what those household connections should look like, addressing three sets of relationships—husband/wife, parent/child, master/slave—that were foundational in their society.

Second, in addition to helping *construct* a God-honoring reality, the household relationships of these Christians *reflect* a reality that is already and unshakably in existence. Over and over again throughout Ephesians, Paul has reminded his audience that they are members of God’s household. In the constructive purposes of the household code, they are called to form their lives around that reality. But under the influence of the household code as Paul lays it out here, with continual references back to God’s household, a paradigm shift of sorts occurs, and the household metaphors are carried to their furthest extent. It is no longer simply that these Christians’ lives are *informed by* the metaphors of household, as important a contribution as that is. No, we now see that their very lives *are* the metaphors. *They* are the shadows that reflect ultimate reality, the reality of the heavenly household of God.[[28]](#footnote-28)

So as Paul sets forth the household code, both constructive and reflective purposes are at work. As he addresses husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves, Paul outlines what lives constructed around Christlike submission and service look like. But his very petition that they align their lives in this way is itself supported by his emphasis, both here and throughout the letter, that their earthly relationships reflect a more fundamental existence as members of God’s household.

The metaphors of the church as the bride and body of Christ permeate the first portion of the household code (5:22-33). The audience is exhorted to model their lives on these metaphors, but at the same time they are enjoined to be a living metaphor that reflects both to themselves and to the world what the household of God is like and how they can participate in it. Husbands and wives are called on to construct their marriages around the relationship they see exemplified by Christ and the church. The reverence a wife shows to her husband (φοβέω, 5:33) is the same kind of reverence for Christ they are to have for Christ (φόβος, 5:21). And husbands and wives are to be one flesh—just as and because Christ and the church are one flesh. As the bride and body metaphors show, the heavenly household is one of mutual submission, of love, of holiness and cleansing, of respect, of care, of beauty, of unity. Christ as the heavenly husband will care for the every need of the church, “the body of which he is the Savior” (5:23), the body he loved so much that “he gave himself up for her” (5:25).

Likewise, Paul’s instructions to children and parents (6:1-4) speak powerfully to the nature of God’s household. There is no extensive discourse here. A scant four verses are all that Paul offers, but perhaps this is the case because his reflections on the parent-child metaphor throughout the letter have already established a firm enough foundation. Children are instructed to obey their parents, an extension of the ancient command, “Honor your father and mother.” But, Paul is sure to note, this is the first command that is accompanied by a blessing, an inheritance of sorts, if you will. Both the command and the promise are reminiscent of our relationship as children of our heavenly Father. Additionally, fathers are encouraged to model themselves after that heavenly Father, not provoking their children but rather teaching them the ways of the Lord, just as God bears with us and trains us in the ways of the heavenly household.

Paul’s earlier emphasis on being servants of one another (beginning in 4:1) is revived and carried even further here in his dealings with masters and slaves (6:5-9), as he makes it clear that while some of his readers may be living under (or even perpetuating) the earthly structure of slavery, as members of a Christian household they are always only *servants* of *one another* and *slaves* only to one master—*God*. Slaves are enjoined to submit to and work for their earthly masters with “fear and trembling,” “as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart” (6:5-6). Paul asks them to serve “as to the Lord,” assuring them of God’s benevolence and impartiality (6:7-8). And to the masters he commands this same kind of godly benevolence and impartiality toward slaves, for both earthly slave and earthly master must answer to the one heavenly master under whom they are both slaves (6:9).

In every paradigmatic earthly relationship, the people of God are called to “be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” (5:21). In issuing the injunction to mutual submission—a revolutionary idea for each of these relationships—Paul does not completely overturn the existing social order. To do so would likely be unadvisable if even possible. He does, however, challenge how and why their relationships are practiced. He reminds them here, as he has throughout the letter, that in the heavenly household of God, they are the subordinate members. They are the slaves, the children, the wife. Yet he shows them the magnificent potential of these relationships (both their literal earthly relationships and their metaphorical heavenly ones) if they will but construct their lives so that they reflect the ultimate reality of God’s household. By employing household metaphors in the ways he has in Ephesians, Paul is essentially saying to his audience, “You are the house, you are the temple, you are the citizens, you are the new humanity, you are servants of one another and the slaves to Christ, you are the children and heirs, you are the bride, and you are the body. Now live like it!”

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1. The theme of household is not unique to Ephesians. In fact, as Carter notes, it is a central theme in the Old Testament, where God is shown in a variety of household roles: father and creator of life, mother, husband, provider for the marginalized, redeemer from slavery, lawgiver and judge, owner of land. See Warren Carter “Household, Householder,” *NIDB* 2:904. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Scholars continue the debate, but the evidence that points to Pauline authorship is persuasive enough to me. For a helpful and brief summary of supporting evidence for Pauline authorship, see William J. Larkin, *Ephesians: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, (BHGNT; Waco, Tex.: Baylor UP, 2009), xix.Although a case can certainly be made for pseudepigraphy, the simplest explanation based upon the available textual and thematic evidence is that Paul wrote Ephesians. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Markus Barth, *Ephesians* (2 vols.; AB 34; New York: Doubleday, 1974), 1:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. F.F. Bruce maintains that it is difficult to establish the legitimacy of leaving an empty space for a place name in a circular letter, but others see evidence for such a practice in the circular letters of ancient courts. See F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 250, and, for example, Ralph P. Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon*, 4, where Martin refers to the writings of Günther Zuntz. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The letter contains no specific references to Ephesus and the members of the church there, even though Paul spent three years with them earlier in his missionary career. While typically used as an argument for non-Pauline authorship, this makes perfect sense if the letter was meant to travel between various congregations. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Daniel J. Harrington, “Church, Life and Organization of,” *NIDB* 1:663. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Unfortunately, due to page limitations I will not be able to explore in this paper the extensive contrasts to the household of evil. As I see it, the basic thrust of Paul’s argument is this: the household of evil exists and has power, but as members of the much more powerful household of God, we have left it behind for good.

 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Paul’s use of broad, universalizing language for the church makes sense in Ephesians, given his contrasting of the two households (one of God, one of evil) and his emphasis on one new humanity, one body, and onechurch who is the bride of Christ. Anything less than an emphasis on unity would be out of place. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. I am not by any means here claiming that it is the *only* interpretive key to Ephesians. Other important themes and metaphors emerge in a careful reading of the letter. However, due to the surrounding culture’s view that familial relationships were both the *basis* and a *reflection* of the cohesion of societal, religious, and governmental structures it is not surprising that Christians should view the household in a similar way in relationship to the Kingdom of God. See Janett E. Morgan, “Families and Religion in Classical Greece,” in *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, (ed. Beryl Rawson; West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 447-64. See also Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, (WBC 42; Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 357. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See George Gunn, “An Exegetical Study of Ephesians 2:11-22,” [cited 17 December 2011]. Online: http://www.shasta.edu/admin/userfiles/resourceDocuments/Ephesians%202v11-22\_article.pdf. Here, towards the bottom of page 9, Gunn describes the makeup of the Ephesian congregation in particular and the tensions this could potentially cause. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See the entry for πολιτεία in Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 845. Hereafter, BDAG. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Strong’s Greek Lexicon, “πάροικος,” [cited 17 December 2011], Online: http://studybible.info/strongs/

G3941. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. * “Jesus did not amalgamate one group into the other. He created something completely new. To accomplish this new man the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, was destroyed. The ‘and’ that introduces the phrase ‘has destroyed the barrier’ is epexegetical, giving it the meaning ‘in that.’Thus the new man was made by destroying the barrier.” Bruce W. Fong, “Addressing the Issue of Racial Reconciliation According to the Principles of Eph 2:11-22,” *JETS* 38 (1995): 571. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Though for reasons not particularly recognizable at this point in the treatise, it is essential for more than just a sense of camaraderie that the two (Gentiles and Jews) become one. Paul will soon further engage the metaphors of the church as the bride and body of Christ, and for obvious reasons, neither the bride nor the body can be divided, either making Christ into a polygamist or, quite morbidly, his body into synecephalus conjoined twins. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The theme and root word of οἶκος are seen a number of times throughout Ephesians, continually drawing the mind back to the ideas of house and household. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See also 3:17, where Christ “dwells” (κατοικῆσαι) in their hearts. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. This conclusion is backed up by Clinton E. Arnold, *ZIBBC* 3:320. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. F.F. Bruce reminds us that this is the only New Testament usage of the word σύσσωμος, “members of the same body.” Regarding the use of an otherwise unknown term (aside from its subsequent employment by Christian writers only), Bruce points out that “it might be regarded as appropriate that a new word should be coined to express so revolutionary a concept as the inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God on the same footing as Jews.” See Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 316. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The metaphors in this section are admittedly mixed, with a variety of ideas interwoven, but that is actually the case throughout much of Ephesians. However, for reasons I will explore later, the intermingling of metaphors may actually serve an important purpose. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. As James C. Walters points out, adoption in the ancient world was primarily about filial rights (such as inheritance) rather than about caring for someone in need. Though the resulting implications for Paul’s meaning in this text are less than warm and fuzzy, the importance of inheritance is stressed. See. James C. Walters, “Paul, Adoption, and Inheritance,” in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook*, (ed. J. Paul Sampley; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2003), 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 221-22. See also Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, “One Family, Under God, Indivisible,” *JPT* 13/2 (2003): 51-65, where the author skillfully navigates some of the issues under consideration with the metaphor of adoption. Particularly of interest for our study of Ephesians (given the Jewish-Gentile reconciliation hoped for among Paul’s audience) is her remark on page 7 that “Functional adoptive families model for the church a hospitality born not only out of acceptance but also of inclusion of differences.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. A conclusion which, while natural enough to assume, can also be taken from an alternate translation of πᾶσα πατριὰ as “all fatherhood” rather than “every family.” [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. While these terms are not limited to the kind of physical growth that would allow the metaphor of the people of God as growing children to carry over well, they do encompass those meanings. See BDAG entries for νήπιος (671), αὐξάνω (151), and τέλειος (995-6). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. I realize that answering this question in the affirmative requires having far more support than I am able to provide here, especially given the dearth of information I have encountered about connections between adoption, marriage, and inheritance in the ancient world. Based upon the research I have done, the thought of a woman (in this metaphor, the bride of Christ) inheriting seems unlikely, even through adoption and/or marriage. Yet because of Paul’s tendency to mix metaphors (often changing the genders used) and explore possibilities that would sometimes run directly *counter to* his culture’s expectations, I pose the question anyway. Perhaps it is a worthwhile interpretation to inquire into further. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Strong’s Greek Lexicon, “σάρξ,” [cited 19 December 2011], Online: http://studybible.info/strongs/

G4561. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Here, similarly to 4:13-16, the term “head” (κεφαλή) often has a more figurative use rather than a literal one. Still, the figurative use, denoting power and high status, reflects the literal prominence and function of the head on the human body. See BDAG “κεφαλή,” 541-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Timothy Gombis says, “Paul, via the *Haustafel,* is laying out a manifesto for the New Humanity, painting in broad strokes a vision for how believers ought to conduct themselves in new creation communities, thus epitomizing the triumph of God in Christ.” Timothy Gombis, “A Radically New Humanity: The Function of the *Haustafel* in Ephesians,” *JETS* 48 (2005): 319. And Russ Dudrey puts it this way: “I am convinced that the primary purpose of the household passages of the NT is *not* to repress the socially downtrodden, but to transform spiritually all who are in Christ—husbands, fathers, and masters included. This in turn transforms all their relationships.” Russ Dudrey, “‘Submit Yourselves to One Another’: A Socio-Historical Look at the Household Code of Ephesians 5:15-6:9,” *RQ* 41/1 (1999), 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Gombis puts it this way: “Thus, each level of the hierarchy—the entire New Humanity—reflects the character of Christ himself. That is, it reflects the character of the New Humanity as created ‘according to God’ (Eph 4:24), and the cruciform example of Christ shapes the character of the entire new creation.” Gombis, “A Radically New Humanity,” 325. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)