

Church and Kingdom: Not Putting Asunder What Christ Brought Together

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Abstract

The fundamental question in ecclesiology is that of the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God. The answers—historical and theological—have wavered between those who want to keep the two isolated and those who want to make the two identical. This article proposes a christological connection between church and kingdom via two texts (Eph 1:20–23 and 1 Cor 15:22–25) that share similar phrasing and agendas.

Keywords

Ecclesiology, head, church, kingdom of God, redemption, power, authority, enemies of God

Introduction

The first and most fundamental question of ecclesiology is this: What is the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God?¹ The literature on this question is vast, and the positions that are taken run from one extreme to the other (from separation to identification). This study will not venture into that

¹ The other questions answer what the relationship is between the church and (in this order) the family, the state, and the world. The questions are outward-working concentric circles,

fray, except to examine the common elements found in two Pauline passages, Ephesians 1:20–23 and 1 Corinthians 15:22–25, which shed light on this key question. The former passage brings the perspective of Christ’s relationship to the church as the exalted head, while the latter brings the perspective of Christ’s relationship to the kingdom that he will deliver to the Father in “the end.” The goal here is to show how these pericopes display a significant common cause—one that impacts the question of how one relates the church to the kingdom of God.

I. *The Exalted Christ and His Church (Eph 1:20–23)*²

... and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward 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 1:19–23 ESV)

1. *Christ Is Exalted in Authority and Power as Head*

Few passages detail the relationship between the exalted Christ and his church more expressly than Ephesians 1:20–23. It offers insight into the church’s pride of place in the sweep of Christ’s all-encompassing agenda. The passage is nestled amid a flourish of heartening declarations of what Christ has secured for his church by his incomparable greatness. To wit, the context of Ephesians 1:15–23 provides an assortment of Greek synonyms for “power,” as Paul extols the supreme rule of Christ at the right hand of majesty.³ The prayer begins with thanksgiving and then quickly merges into petition, requesting that the Ephesians know three things: the hope of God’s calling, the riches of God’s inheritance, and the immeasurable greatness of God’s power. This last request permeates the following verses, as Paul

moving from identity toward mission. This order guards the theocentric nature of the kingdom and the christocentric nature of the church. See Edmund P. Clowney, *The Doctrine of the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 9; John Murray, “The Church and Mission,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 1, *The Claims of Truth* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 245.

² The first half of this article utilizes content from A. Craig Troxel, “The World Is Not Enough: The Priority of the Church in Christ’s Cosmic Headship,” in *Confident of Better Things: Essays Commemorating Seventy-Five Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. John R. Muether and Danny E. Olinger (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 2011), 337–65. It is used with the permission of The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

³ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 60.

wants his readers to know that this power, which is given to them for their benefit, is the very same power that raised Christ from the grave and exalted him to the right hand of God (vv. 19–20): “... and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward 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.” Their salvation is a display of the greatness of God’s grace and the greatness of God’s power—which is exhibited in the present exaltation of the risen Christ. This power is at work *in* them and at work *for* them because Christ is their “head” (*kephalē*, κεφαλή).

The title “head” appears in Ephesians 1:22 to underline the authority and power of Christ (consistent with the predominant theme and tone in which it is enveloped).⁴ He is not merely organically connected to his body; he is its master and Lord.⁵ Several factors support this. First, Paul’s choice of vocabulary loudly proclaims Christ’s exalted status and ruling might (v. 19: “power, great might”; v. 20: “raised, seated, right hand, heavenly places”; v. 21: “above all rule, authority, power, dominion, every name”; v. 22: “all things, under his feet, head, over all things, him who fills all in all”). In particular, the prepositions “over” and “under” graphically accent Christ’s relationship to “all things” and their relationship to him as defined by rank.⁶ The fundamental theological point of Christ’s being exalted to the “right hand” of God in majesty is, from beginning to end, about authority. This is true whether it pertains to his headship over all things or over the church.

Secondly, when Paul states, “And he put all things under his feet” (v. 22), he is quoting from Psalm 8:6 (“You have given him dominion over the

⁴ Gregory W. Dawes, *The Body in Question: Metaphor and Meaning in the Interpretation of Ephesians 5.21–33* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 146; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 368–69; Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard DeWitt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 378, 381; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 201), 166–67. This is consistent with one way that the Septuagint often renders the Hebrew word (*ro’sh*, רֹאשׁ) with (*kephalē*, κεφαλή), namely, to imply a superior (see Deut 28:13, 44; Judg 10:18; 11:8–9, 11; 2 Sam 22:44; 1 Kgs 8:1; Ps 17 [18]; Lam 1:5; Isa 7:8–9; 9:14–16; and Jer 31:7). Heinrich Schlier, “κεφαλή,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976), 3:674–76; “Head,” in Colin Brown, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 158; “κεφαλή,” in Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 430.

⁵ Geddes MacGregor, *Corpus Christi: The Nature of the Church According to the Reformed Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958), 154.

⁶ The preposition *hyper* (ὑπέρ) with the accusative, means that which “surpasses over and above,” or what “excels beyond.” “ὑπέρ,” in Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 839.

works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet”) and alluding to Psalm 110:1 (“The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool’”) because he sees their fulfillment in Christ’s session at the “right hand of God.”⁷ As is true in the Old Testament, the phrase “right hand” signifies the supreme position of favor, honor, victory, and power held by Christ and, thus, “his sovereignty.”⁸ This phraseology—“seated,” “under his feet,” and “footstool”—expresses both Christ’s session and his headship. Although “head” represents a title of Christ and “session” refers to a stage of Christ’s exaltation, they converge upon common territory. They refer to the same reality. Christ is not merely exalted to the right hand in his sessional glory. He is exalted to the right hand as “head.”⁹

Accordingly, the New Testament never uses the word “head” metaphorically to address Christ in his state of humiliation, only in his exaltation.¹⁰ Scripture says Christ *is*, not *was*, the head of the church. Christ has obtained something unique that he did not have before he ascended to his heavenly seat. To be sure, he possesses all authority as Creator of all things and fundamentally by right of his full divinity as the eternal Son (Col 1:15–19). But he has advanced to a new stage of exaltation, one in which he is praised as “inheriting” or being “given” the name that is above all names and “becoming a Son” (Phil 2:9; Heb 1:3–5).¹¹ Among every “name” and accolade that is given to the exalted Lord is that of “head.”

Moreover, when Scripture acclaim Christ as “head,” it does not mean to suggest he is merely promoted to a title or only to a place of honor. Christ has obtained a position of power from which he is actively exercising dominion over everything to its final conquest and all to the glory of God. Christ has been positioned at the right hand of God to execute his almighty rule. As the Scottish Presbyterian James Bannerman noted, with the title “head”

⁷ G. C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 233. Psalm 110 is similarly cited or alluded to for its messianic import elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g., Matt 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42; Acts 5:31; Rom 8:34; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; 1 Pet 3:22).

⁸ Peter T. O’Brien, “The Church as a Heavenly and Eschatological Entity,” in *The Church in the Bible and the World*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 109; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 62.

⁹ Other titles are used in association with Christ’s exaltation as head in his session: “Son of Man” (Acts 7:56), “Lord” (Matt 22:44), “prince and Savior” (Acts 5:31), “high priest” (Heb 8:1), the “author and perfecter” of our faith (Heb 12:2), and “Christ” (1 Pet 3:22).

¹⁰ The exceptions are: 1) literal references to Jesus’s physical head (e.g., Matt 27:29, 37) and 2) metaphorical references to Jesus as the “head of the corner” (Ps 118:22; Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet 2:7).

¹¹ Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978), 98–114, 117–19.

Christ is not simply seen as the *founding* head of the church; he is also designated as the *presiding* head of the church—her present “source of life and influence, of ordinance and blessing, of law and authority, of word and doctrine.”¹² Thus, the “first unambiguous” use of “head” in the book of Ephesians appears in 1:22 and refers to Christ’s status of supreme authority and power.¹³ As has been observed, understanding “head” here as “source” would be “inappropriate, indeed inexplicable.” There is only one kind of “mere and absolute power,” and it belongs to Christ the head, which he has reserved for himself, and he will not transfer it to any other (Second Helvetic Confession 18).

2. Scope: Christ, as Head, Is Exalted over “All Things”

Paul intensifies his thought by pointing to the utter expansiveness of Christ’s exalted status as it relates to all dimensions of space and time. First, Paul extols the unparalleled *height* of Christ’s exaltation in comparison to every conceivable province and entity. He is raised and seated at God’s right hand “in the heavenly places” (v. 20), “far above” all rule, authority, power, and dominion and every name that can be named (v. 21). With regard to “all things,” he is either “over” them or they are “under” him (v. 22). There is nothing that is not subject to Christ’s sovereign control, even if it is not yet apparent to the human eye (Heb 2:8; Ps 8:6). Paul also stresses the *extent* of Christ’s exaltation in time and space. He lauds Christ for his exaltation “not only in the present age” but also “in the one to come.” His reign has begun because the “fullness of time” is already underway (Eph 1:10; Gal 4:4), and that rule will continue for all time (1 Cor 15:24). Paul also acclaims the *realm* of Christ’s exaltation, namely, “all things.” He is above “all” rule, authority, power, dominion, and “every” title that can be given. God has placed “all things” under his feet, and he is head over “all things” for the church. He is the one who fills “all things.” Christ rises above every known reality, and his exaltation is without restriction as to time or sphere.¹⁴

Throughout Paul’s letters and preaching, the idea of authority has particular reference to cosmic spiritual powers.¹⁵ Since Christ is ensconced above

¹² James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, 2 vols. (1868; repr., New York: Westminster Publishing House, 2002), 1:194.

¹³ Dawes, *The Body in Question*, 138; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 146.

¹⁴ Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (1930; repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986), 12.

¹⁵ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 89.

every power, this implicitly subsumes both good and evil authorities (Heb 2:8–9; Eph 6:10). Christ’s reception of “every name that can be named” (v. 21) is akin to his receiving “the name that is above every name” (Phil 2:9). In Ephesians, Paul’s specific point is that Christ’s name is above the name of any (false) god that can be spoken and worshiped. All accolades, honors, or titles of praise have been attributed to the one who has ascended to a position of absolute supremacy—one that towers over all those who are in authority. His entitlement is due to the reality of his awesome power, which he is exerting over all things, including all false gods and real enemies.¹⁶

In Ephesians 6:12, Paul reminds the believer that the struggle is not against “flesh and blood” but rather against “the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” In Ephesians 3:10, Paul states that God has made known his wisdom through the church to the (presumably) hostile “rulers and authorities.” These repeated references to spiritual authorities illustrate the scope of Christ’s victory over the defeated cosmic powers.¹⁷ While Ephesians 6:12 affirms that these authorities are opposed to Christ, Ephesians 1:22 emphasizes that these authorities are in subjection to Christ.¹⁸ Paul puts Christ’s exalted headship into context—by placing it into relationship with all opposing parties and with the redeemed body of his church. There is no authority that is not presently in subjugation to Christ’s supremacy, including all spiritual authorities and powers. At the same time, these opposing parties subserve the higher and greater purposes that Christ has reserved for his church.

3. Purpose: Christ, as Head, Is Exalted over All Things for the Church

And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things for the church. (Eph 1:22)¹⁹

In this passage, “head” designates Christ’s rule over “all things” *and* his relationship to the church (Eph 1:10; 4:15; 5:23; Col 1:18; 2:10, 19).²⁰ There

¹⁶ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 65.

¹⁷ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 388; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 52, 64.

¹⁸ Ernest Best, *Ephesians: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 180.

¹⁹ Translation mine.

²⁰ Christ already rules over all things by virtue of his creating “all things” (Col 1:15–20). Ridderbos states, “Both in virtue of creation and in virtue of the restoration of the lost coherence of all things in him he forms the great point of integration for all that is in heaven and on

is a “strong disjunction” between these two spheres of rule, and Paul draws them into a relationship of priority in Ephesians 1:22.²¹ Paul overlaps the headship of Christ over all things and the church for the express purpose of showing the consequences of Christ’s cosmic rule on behalf of the church.²² His headship over the cosmos is subordinated to God’s purpose in Christ for the church.²³ However, does the grammar of Ephesians 1:22 lend itself to this interpretation?

The interpretive problem in this passage is in trying to unravel the knotted relationship between the different words in the phrase “and gave him as head over all things to the church.” The grammatical elements appear straightforward: God is the understood subject in verse 17 and in the Greek verb; “him,” that is, Christ, is the direct object; “the church” is the indirect object; and “head” is the predicate accusative.²⁴ Yet, how should the words “the church” be translated? With its dative construction, it would ordinarily be translated “to the church,” as it often is (ESV, KJV, ASV, NASB). Such a translation also best corresponds to the way Paul ordinarily uses *didōmi* (δίδωμι) in Ephesians, namely, “to give” (Eph 1:17, 22; 3:2, 7–8, 16; 4:7–8, 11, 27, 29; 6:19), rather than “to appoint,” “to install,” or “to make.”²⁵ In that case, the phrase would be rendered “God has given Christ, who is head over all things, to the church.”

However, there is much to be said for the translation “for the church,” as the NIV renders it.²⁶ First, grammarians recognize the legitimacy of translating *didōmi* as “make,” “appoint,” or “install” in this passage.²⁷ Second, a survey of Paul’s use of *didōmi* in his other letters reveals that occasionally Paul wishes to convey the idea that the gift is given for the advantage of the

earth.” Ridderbos, *Paul*, 89. “This superiority, which has been conferred on Christ by God in his exaltation (Eph 1:20), is closely bound up with the significance with respect to ‘all things’ that he had already at the creation of the world (Col 1:15ff), and which, in accordance with the divine good pleasure regarding the fullness of the times, has taken effect anew (Eph 1:9, 10).” *Ibid.*, 387–88.

²¹ Dawes, *The Body in Question*, 141.

²² Ridderbos, *Paul*, 387–88.

²³ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 70.

²⁴ A further challenge is discerning the syntactical relationship between “head” (*kephalē*, κεφαλῆ) and “over all things” (*hyper panta*, ὑπὲρ πάντα) which are grammatically parallel. The issue is whether “over all things” is in an appositional or attributive relationship to “head.” See the discussion in Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 287–89.

²⁵ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 289; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 66.

²⁶ Grammarians entitle this use the “dative of advantage” or “dative of interest.” Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 142.

²⁷ Bauer, “δίδωμι,” *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 193; Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 423.

recipient; he does this by employing prepositional phrases instead of using the dative, yet this sense is latent in his thought. For example, in 2 Corinthians 10:8, Paul says, “The Lord *gave* [authority] for building you up”; the same is seen in Galatians 1:4, where Paul writes, Christ “*gave* himself for our sins to deliver us.” The idea is quite pronounced in 1 Timothy 2:6: “... who gave himself as a ransom for all” and in Titus 2:14, “... who gave himself for us to redeem us.” The verb “to give” is used in these verses to convey the purpose or *telos* (τέλος) of the gift. This idea seems to be similarly present in Ephesians 1:22. Third, using *didōmi* in this way is consistent with Paul’s flow of thought in the passage, particularly in a striking parallel between verse 19 and verse 22. In verse 19, Paul states that the power of God revealed in Christ is given to and *for* us who believe; and in verse 22, Paul states that the cosmic headship revealed in Christ is given to and *for* us who believe. The overall flow of Paul’s contextual thought would encourage us to understand the phrase in question to mean God “made him head over all things *for* the church” because Paul is emphasizing the priority of the church in Christ’s headship.

All of Paul’s statements with respect to Christ’s headship in this passage come to their climactic and emphatic expression with the last words of the clause, “for the church,” which in turn function as a transition that leads us into the further descriptions to follow.²⁸ These ascriptions further accentuate Paul’s focus on the universal authority of Christ, which is exercised on behalf of his treasured possession, the church. Although Christ is head over all things, the church alone is his “body” and his “fullness.”²⁹ For example, Paul generally uses the metaphors “head” and “body” for distinctive purposes. While the title “head” conveys Christ’s authority over all things and the church (Eph 1:10; 4:15; 5:23; Col 1:18; 2:10, 19), “body” suggests the inseparable union and communion between Christ and his church and the union her members have with one another (Rom 12:4; 1 Cor 12:12–20, 22–25; Eph 4:12, 16). This metaphor of the church as the body of Christ is not simply one metaphor among many; rather, it is “a dominant concept,” perhaps even “the greatest metaphor” in the New Testament.³⁰ It is reserved to assure the church of the inseparable, eternal, and intimate bond that God

²⁸ O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 145.

²⁹ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 72, 80; Dawes, *The Body in Question*, 141. The idea of seeing the universe as an enormous “body” is present in Platonism, Stoicism, and Gnosticism, but such thinking is foreign to Paul’s thought in this passage. Heinrich Schlier and Ernst Käsemann’s belief that Paul has employed language from Gnosticism’s Redeemer myth has been widely criticized, if not discredited. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 70; Best, *Ephesians*, 191, n. 48.

³⁰ O’Brien, “Church,” 105; A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 1206.

has established between Christ and his church. Also, Paul affirms that Christ's headship reaches outward as he "fills all things" in heaven and earth with his mighty presence (Jer 23:24). But the church is his "fullness" (Eph 1:23; cf. Eph 3:19; 4:7–9; Col 2:10).³¹ What this means is that, though Christ fills all things, only the church is his fullness in the special sense. It is "the domain filled and ever increasingly to be filled by him."³² There are two types of "filling"—each reflecting the difference between Christ's headship over "all things" on the one hand and that of the church on the other. The first bespeaks power and containment; the second, benefits and gifts. The church should be far from being overawed by any other power, as though she did not possess in Christ everything necessary for her perfecting. On the other hand, Paul urges the church to seek her fullness in the fullness of her head.³³ The church must place her confidence in Christ because the universe is his and he alone "fills all things."³⁴ The church is the church of him who is the head over all things. This represents a twofold shift in redemptive history. Just as Christ enters into a new stage of his Messiahship upon his resurrection and ascension to God's right hand, so also the kingdom of God enters into a new form as the church, the body of Christ as a result of the exaltation of her head.³⁵

As far as her own existence and conduct are concerned, the church must see all that is in heaven and on earth from the vantage point of the "all-embracing and all-transcending power" of her head.³⁶ The center of gravity for the people of God is no longer on earth, nor is her potency to be measured in comparison to earthly powers. Instead, her epicenter and power are seated in heavenly glory at the right hand of majesty, with everything at his disposal.³⁷ This same rationale guides Paul's thought in Colossians 3:1–4, where he exhorts the believer to set his or her mind on "things that are above" because that is "where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." The core reality for every believer—who is raised and seated with Christ—is above. The church's head, center, charter, and security are all derived from the right hand of majesty in the world above, from the one whose reign "is not of this world" (John 18:36).

³¹ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 391.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 389; see Jeremiah 23:24.

³⁵ Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom and the Church* (1903; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 85–86.

³⁶ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 391.

³⁷ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 62.

Even if these considerations are not sufficiently weighty in the eyes of some to translate *didōmi* as “appointed,” “installed,” or “made,” they do demonstrate that Paul’s grammar should not be overstated to constrict Paul’s thought. Even scholars who would prefer to translate *didōmi* as “give” concede that Paul is placing emphasis on the priority of the church in relation to all things and interpret Ephesians 1:22 accordingly. They affirm that Christ’s supreme dominion over the cosmos is “for the benefit of his believers,” “for the benefit of his people,” “on behalf of the Church,” and for “the Church’s welfare.”³⁸ Christ’s lordship over all things is subordinated to Christ’s regard for his church, which is truly the focus of his presence and rule in the cosmos.³⁹

We may conclude, then, that Paul’s words were meant to encourage believers as they looked in faith to the head of the church, Jesus Christ. With confidence they could know that his transcendent authority over every power and authority was focused supremely on his glorious purposes in and for the church. Nothing else possesses a higher role and significance for the purposes of God.⁴⁰ Contemplated from eternity in the mind of God as the object of his all-wise plan, the church is uniquely “the *very means* by which her glorious Head accomplishes His purposes in the world.”⁴¹ His headship over all things subserves his sovereign and wise aim for the church. She is the medium of Christ’s presence and rule in the cosmos, and she is the community in which the consummation of Christ’s rule is anticipated. She need not fear that her power is insufficient to accomplish the vocation entrusted to her by her head. All things are his and at his disposal. Christ is head over all things, filling all things and directing all things in the supremacy of his headship, and he does so for his church, which is his body.⁴² She stands at the pinnacle and climax of redemptive history and as the guardian of the long-hidden mystery of the gospel, which she is to carry into all the world (Rom 16:25; 1 Cor 10:11; Eph 3:3, 6, 9).⁴³

³⁸ O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 145, 147, 152; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 67, 70.

³⁹ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 67, 77.

⁴⁰ O’Brien, “Church,” 110, 113.

⁴¹ James H. Thornwell, “The Argument for Church-Boards Answered,” *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, 4 vols. (1875; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 4:210.

⁴² O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 151.

⁴³ Christ’s headship, which is cosmic in scope, yet churchly in priority, merely recapitulates what the Old Testament teaches about God’s sovereign rule over all things. He rules all nations, the heavens and the earth, and all authorities and dominions for the sake of his treasured possession, Israel. God utilizes all creation and creatures to deliver, bless, exalt, enrich, and discipline Israel, and to glorify his name through her. Now these same purposes are operative in Christ’s headship over all things for the church (see Deut 7:6; Josh 10:12–13; Exod 15; Gen 19:24; Dan 6; Exod 10:12–13; 8:16–19, 21–23; Job 1:6; Dan 10:13).

II. Application

1. *The Church as the Object of Christ's Redemption*

One way to illustrate the priority of the church for Christ in relation to that of the world is to consider the biblical doctrine of redemption. The eternal Son took on human nature so that he might “give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45).⁴⁴ Christ has secured this redemption for his people by receiving the curse of their sin, giving himself up unto death (Eph 1:7; Heb 9:12, 15; Gal 3:13). With only a few exceptions, the language of “ransom” and “redemption” is reserved in Scripture for God’s elect, those whose salvation has been purchased by the riches of God’s grace in Christ, so that they might become a people for “his own possession” (Titus 2:14).⁴⁵ The idea of payment is the reason for the existence of the entire *lytron* (λύτρον) word group, and the concept is soteric to the core.⁴⁶ Christ has thus delivered them from their bondage under the law and their former sinful ways and has won their justification and their adoption as sons (1 Pet 1:18; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; Gal 4:5; Rom 3:24). The New Testament authors purposely employed the “ransom” and “redemption” vocabulary to express the personal effectiveness of Christ’s death and not to express some form of abstract deliverance. Furthermore, the consummation of this salvation for believers is their anticipated “day of redemption,” on which they will experience a final deliverance from this world and receive an inheritance in the world to come (Luke 21:28; Eph 1:14; 4:30). On that day, all who trust in Christ will receive the fullness of their adoption with the final redemption of their bodies (Rom 8:23).

There is only one redemptive institution or community that Christ has established, and it is the church (Matt 16:18).⁴⁷ Christ builds his church by growing her intensively and extensively.⁴⁸ The former speaks to her

⁴⁴ The teaching of Jesus assumes that the kingdom of God is fundamentally about salvation, e.g., when he stipulated that a person will not enter the kingdom unless they repent and believe (Mark 1:14–15; Matt 4:17). David F. Wells, *The Person of Christ* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1984), 24–25; Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 385.

⁴⁵ The exceptions for the nonsoteric use of “ransom” and “redemption” are Ephesians 5:16 and Colossians 4:5, both of which teach we should “make the best use” of our time. In the Old Testament, the Mosaic Covenant provided for the redemption of property, such as land and animals (Exod 34:20; Lev 25:19).

⁴⁶ Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 12; as cited in Carolyn J. Lex, “The Meaning of the New Testament Ransom Language: Evidence for the Limited Atonement” (unpublished paper, 1988), 2.

⁴⁷ David VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 102.

⁴⁸ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 431, 435.

maturity and the latter to her immensity. To maintain her mission to the world, the church must resist being conformed to the world. One such temptation is to bring forward into “this age” what belongs to the one to come, particularly its “shalom.”⁴⁹ The emphasis of Scripture is that we *enter, seek, announce, receive, come into, inherit, are given, brought into, testify about, pray for, and by faith belong* to the kingdom. But nowhere does Scripture say that we are to create it or usher it in.⁵⁰ But is it true that the language of “redemption” should not be applied to all things? One way to answer this question is by examining the vocabulary of the word “world.”

2. The World (“All Things”) Is Not the Object of Christ’s Redemption (in This Age)

When the words for “world,” *kosmos* (κόσμος) and *aiōn* (αἰών), are used in Scripture, they can refer to either the created suborder or the sinful moral order.⁵¹ With regard to the first, the “world” may designate all creatures and all of creation. In relation to this, some would say that God does have “redeeming purposes toward creation” or that the gospel conveys a “saving, reconciling grace” to creation or that the kingdom of God is the “renewal of the whole world.”⁵²

It is true that the kingdom of God “is not only oriented to the redemption of God’s people, but to the self-assertion of God in *all* his works,” including all of creation.⁵³

All creation longs for redemption from its bondage, and God’s rule comprehends the “regeneration of this cosmos,” the “consummation of all things,” and the “renewal of the world.”⁵⁴ In fact, the goal of all history is

⁴⁹ William D. Dennison, “Dutch Neo-Calvinism and the Roots for Transformation: An Introductory Essay,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42.2 (June 1999): 271–91; C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), 7–8; see also, C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 156.

⁵⁰ Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We Love the Church: In Praise of Institutions and Organized Religion* (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 49.

⁵¹ For example, for Paul’s use, see Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 4:9; Eph 1:4; Col 1:6; 1 Tim 6:7; for John, see John 3:19; 8:26; 13:1; 1 John 4:1; Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 14.

⁵² Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1997), 52–53; Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor ... and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 31–48; Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Engaging God’s World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); see the “Introduction” in VanDrunen’s *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 11–32.

⁵³ Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, trans. H. de Jongste, ed. Raymond Zorn (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), 23.

⁵⁴ Wells, *Person of Christ*, 24–25, 27; Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 23, 56; John Bright, *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1953), 231; Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 6; Vos, *Kingdom and Church*, 102.

the universal acknowledgment of God's sovereignty, the triumph of his righteousness, and the establishment of his peace so that the glory of God will be fully vindicated.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, there are several problems with applying the soteric vocabulary of "redemption" to the world—understood as the created suborder—in this age.

The Bible does not speak of the created world as something in the *process* of being redeemed. For example, Romans 8:23 states, "The creation itself will be set free from its bondage." Even so, the context of Romans 8 teaches that the liberation of the created order will take place along with the revealing (*apokalypsis*, ἀποκάλυψις) of the sons of God at their glorification (vv. 19, 23). This renewal of creation will happen when it undergoes a purging by fire and when the new heavens and the new earth are ushered in at the close of this age (2 Pet 3:12–13). This takes place not as a process but on the "day of the Lord" (2 Pet 3:10). Second, this will take place not through human efforts to "save the planet" but by the mighty hand of God, who alone will accomplish the rebirth of the heavens and the earth with fire, just as he once deluged the creation with water (2 Pet 3:6–7). Also, it is biblically untenable to consider a form of redemption that bypasses the cross and is brought about by the good works of humanity.⁵⁶ We typically associate the vocabulary of atonement, repentance, faith, and forgiveness with redemption, but how do we construe the church as a "co-redeemer" in the world?⁵⁷ It was B. B. Warfield who warned of "rhetorical excess" and who asked in wonder whether we really think that we can understand "redemption" and "Redeemer" to refer to whatever benefit we happen to think it means—no matter how loose or superfluous that meaning is?⁵⁸ It is premature to apply redemption to the creation before the dawn of the new heavens and the new earth.

The second use of the word "world" in Scripture refers to the sinful moral order of "this age." As a rule, the Greek idioms for "this age" and "this world" are "apt to call up evil associations."⁵⁹ These phrases refer to all that exists "as an evil-complexioned ... system opposed to God, and therefore

⁵⁵ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1986), 20; Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 46–47.

⁵⁶ Calvin P. Van Reken, "Christians in This World: Pilgrims or Settlers?," *Calvin Theological Journal* 43.2 (November 2008): 242.

⁵⁷ DeYoung and Kluck, *Why We Love the Church*, 49; Van Reken, "Pilgrims or Settlers?," 242.

⁵⁸ B. B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1950), 346.

⁵⁹ Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 12–13. Notable exceptions are passages like 1 Timothy 6:17 and Titus 2:12, which "are more neutral from an ethical point of view."

doomed to pass away.”⁶⁰ For example, the “god of this world [age]” or the “ruler of this world” is Satan, as it lies presently under his power (2 Cor 4:4; John 12:31; 1 John 5:19). Consequently, the church’s relationship to this world is to be marked by a sober watchfulness, lest she fall to its temptations, desires, deceit, corruption, and conform to its pattern—all of which are “passing away along with its desires.”⁶¹ It is from this present evil age that Jesus has delivered the church (Gal 1:4). The church and the world are in direct conflict with one another—with competing allegiances and being wed to separate ages.⁶² The church wages war against principalities and powers in heavenly places and this world, which are “already vanquished” but have “not yet become harmless.”⁶³

The reason the world hates the church is because the world first hated Christ (John 15:18–20). This principle is a matter of fundamental identity. Christians are of the seed of the woman, not of the serpent, and citizens of the city of God, not just the city of man. Christians are *in* the world but not *of* the world (John 17:11, 14; 15:19). The church does not belong to this world any more than Christ did (John 8:23; 17:14). She is a people in exile, pilgrims and sojourners who are passing through (1 Pet 1:17; 2:11; Heb 11:13). The church understands that she has become an “inhabitant and participator” of the world above and the world to come.⁶⁴ The “fatherland is not here and now.”⁶⁵ It is essential to appreciate the vital temporal element in this second conception of the “world” as it is expressed in Scripture.⁶⁶ Inherent in the phrase “this age” (Rom 12:2) is the “belief in a fixed nature and a temporal duration of the present order of things.”⁶⁷ The “things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Cor 4:18). The contemporary reader of Scripture must resist imputing too much spatial, and not enough temporal, thought into the terminology of the “world.” Nowhere else in all of Paul’s thought is this explicitly expressed with greater clarity than it is in Ephesians 1:21, where he says, “... not only in this age but also in the one to come.”⁶⁸

⁶⁰ Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 17.

⁶¹ First John 2:15–17; Romans 12:1; Ephesians 2:2; Colossians 2:8; James 1:27; 2 Peter 1:4.

⁶² Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967).

⁶³ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 392.

⁶⁴ Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 47.

⁶⁵ Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” 8.

⁶⁶ As to this meaning, the terms “world” and “age” are virtually interchangeable in the New Testament, and translations have treated them accordingly.

⁶⁷ Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 17.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 12. As Vos notes, this contrast is also implicit elsewhere (e.g., Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 1:20; 2 Cor 4:4; 1 Tim 6:17).

Thus, “this world,” in its moral complexion—that is, fallen and in opposition to God—ought to be viewed as something that will pass away and simply cannot be redeemed. It is evil and therefore transitory.⁶⁹ It is not the world but the people enslaved to it that need to be redeemed. When the New Testament speaks of redemption, this is what it speaks to most often—lost sinners who have been ransomed by what Christ accomplished on the cross and in his resurrection.

It is true that God kindly cares for all things in his creation. In his general providence, he feeds humankind and all creatures, and they “live and move and have [their] being” in his generous care (Acts 14:15; 17:28). He extends his kindness to those who neither love him nor thank him (Matt 5:43–47; Luke 6:35). God’s goodness is showered upon the world, both as a created suborder and as a fallen moral order. God loves the world and proves it by freely offering to it the gospel of his Son (John 3:16; Matt 22:14; Ezek 33:11). So also, Christians are to love their neighbors as did the “good Samaritan” and even love their enemies as does their heavenly Father (Luke 10:29–37; Matt 5:44, 48). But God’s general love and common grace for the world do not compare to his saving love and special grace, which he shows to his church. When it comes to the church, God’s love is special, not ordinary; his calling is effectual, not general; and his providence is particularly gracious, not common. On the eve of his passion, when Christ prayed, “I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me” (John 17:9), he was praying for the “people of his own possession” (1 Pet 2:9), those for whom he would soon intercede on the cross and for whom he presently intercedes at the right hand of majesty (Heb 7:25), those who are a “holy nation” gathered by his Spirit out of all the nations of the world, those for whom he would give his flesh and blood (John 6:51; 1 Pet 1:19), his saving love (Eph 5:25), his cleansing (Eph 5:26), his Spirit (Acts 2:38), his promises (2 Pet 1:4; Gal 3:16), and eternal life (John 6:54). These gifts do not belong to the world at large. They are for Christ’s body. Jesus was not praying for the world but for those chosen ones in the world, upon whom his eternal love was fixed. In the expansiveness of “all things,” and in the “fullness of time,” God blesses the church in a way that transcends his ordinary benevolence in the world.

Thus, Christ being exalted over all things for the church expresses Christ’s twofold relationship—to both the redeemed party and the hostile party.

⁶⁹ Geerhardus Vos, “Eschatology in the New Testament,” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 28.

All rule, authority, power, and dominion answer to Christ's higher purposes for this church. This is the great *telos* of his headship, both sovereignly and redemptively.

III. *The Exalted Christ and His Kingdom (1 Cor 15:22–28)*

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15:22–28 ESV)

1. *Scope: Christ Conquers All Things (Comparing 1 Cor 15:22–28 with Eph 1:20–23)*

When Christ ascended to God's right hand, his spiritual adversaries became subject to him, but when Christ delivers the kingdom into the Father's hands, they are vanquished by him. The two events function as bookends of the final epoch in redemptive history. Christ's session announced the inauguration of his heavenly reign over all authorities, and Christ's coming appearance will transpose his present reign into consummate glory—seen in the devastation of all that opposes him. Ephesians 1:20–23 and 1 Corinthians 15:23–28 are twin reflections upon the inception and conclusion of the same era. The common phrasing that links these passages indicates their shared agenda, even if from different perspectives.

Ephesians 1:21–22	1 Corinthians 15:24, 27
21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion ...	24 ... after destroying every rule and every authority and power.
22 And he put all things under his feet ...	27 For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.”

Ephesians 1:20–23 casts Christ's headship into a relationship of superiority over “all rule and authority and power and dominion.” First Corinthians 15:23–28 does the same. Here Paul uses the same language and quotes the same verse from Psalm 8, then he asserts that nothing of Christ's reign over these powers will ever diminish. There is no spiritual principality that

escapes Christ's dominion during his session, and there is none that will escape his devastation at his appearing. What was his to subdue will be his to destroy. The Corinthian passage substantiates that when Paul refers to these spiritual authorities, he has adversarial powers in view (e.g., Eph 6:12).⁷⁰ Both passages focus on "all things" in Psalm 8:6 to make their case.⁷¹ But Paul demonstrates in 1 Corinthians 15:27 how "all things" provides the source of "destroying *all* rule and *all* authority and power." Paul uses the same Greek adjective *panta* (πάντα) throughout 1 Corinthians 15:24–25, 27 and Ephesians 1:21–23, just as the Septuagint does in Psalm 8:6. For Paul, the "all things" includes (and draws attention to) every adversarial form of spiritual rule, authority, and power. The Messiah has fulfilled what the psalmist had prophesied, which is more than his simply being exalted. It means that Christ will catastrophically tread all of God's enemies, including death, under his feet. He led captivity captive when he ascended (Eph 4:8). When he appears in glory, he will condemn it, just as the psalmist said he would.

2. Purpose: The Kingdom of Those That Christ Has Redeemed

In 1 Corinthians 15:22–28, Paul looks at the summit of redemption through the doctrinal lens of the resurrection of Christ, who is the "firstfruits" of all who will rise with him on that day. Or, as Paul puts it, the Son will deliver the kingdom to the Father. What Romans 8:23 explains as the believer's anticipated glorification (the redemption of body and soul at the final resurrection), 1 Corinthians 15:22–28 extols as the aim of the messianic work given by the Father to his Son (John 4:34; 5:36; 17:4). It is the "end" (*telos*) that Christ had in view, all along, in the covenant of redemption (John 17:4–5). God's ultimate goal in saving believers and Christ's ultimate messianic task are the same. At the second coming of Christ, the redemptive and the regal will converge. These events do not merely compose the final scene. They represent the intended climax of all that preceded. Paul gives center stage to the culminating transaction between God the Son and God the Father (1 Cor 15:24). In this deliverance of the kingdom, Christ exhibits the final proof (and fruit) of his triumphant victory over his enemies (death in particular), but he does so on behalf of "those who belong to Christ." In other words, Christ's appearance at the end-time proceedings entails two parties, his subdued enemies and his redeemed people. When he finally conquers all kingdoms (*katargēsē pasan archēn*, καταργήσῃ πᾶσαν ἀρχήν), all kingdoms will be involved, but this whole conquest favors his kingdom (cf.

⁷⁰ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 89.

⁷¹ Taken from *kol* (כֹּל): the whole, all, any, every.

Ps 2:8; Dan 7:14; Rev 11:15). The “when,” “then,” and “after” do not mark time; rather, they signal an inseparable relationship between what Christ destroys and what Christ delivers (1 Cor 15:23–24, 27–28).⁷² This was true in Christ’s session, and it will be true at his glorious appearance.

As was the case in Ephesians 1:20–23, so it is in 1 Corinthians 15:23–28. Paul places Christ’s headship into not only a relationship of duality but also one of priority. Just as Christ’s headship over all things is subordinated to his purposes for his church, so also Christ’s final destruction of all his adversaries is to deliver to the Father the kingdom—that is, all “those who belong to Christ.” Given the contextual theme of the resurrection, Christ is understandably introduced as the “firstfruits.” He is the first among all those who will receive their glorification, the redemption of the body (Rom 8:23). Christ will present himself to God as the representative pledge of the full harvest to come.⁷³ The image assumes an organic and inseparable unity between Christ and those who belong to him.⁷⁴ What is striking is that the same organic union, which is communicated by the head-body metaphor in Ephesians 1:23, is similarly suggested by the firstfruits metaphor in 1 Corinthians 15:23.⁷⁵ Both passages highlight the inseparable bond between Christ and those who receive the benefits of his work.

It seems plausible to conclude that if Paul is describing the final redemption of all “those who belong to Christ” (who will accompany him at his appearing), then the “kingdom” that the Son delivers to the Father in “the end” is his church. This context does not consider the kingdom in abstraction. This is about its constituency. The *telos* of the kingdom is the *telos* of the church, the glorified body of Christ. What the Son delivers to the Father is nothing less than the consummation of the covenant of redemption, which is what comes to the fore in 1 Corinthians 15. It is “the conclusion of the economy of redemption carried out by Christ”—it is his attaining the purpose for which he was sent by God.⁷⁶ The Son will give back to the Father *those whom* the Father had given to him beforehand (John 17:2, 9, 11–12, 22, 24). In Christ’s high priestly prayer, he stated the goal of his work: “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the

⁷² Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 753–54.

⁷³ Gaffin, *Resurrection*, 34

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 39.

⁷⁶ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 560–61.

foundation of the world” (John 17:4). His desire was to deliver to the Father all those who belong to him. As Herman Ridderbos suggests, the ideas of kingdom, Messiah, and the church (*ekklēsia*) form an “integrated unity,” and they are “never separable in the preaching of the Kingdom.”⁷⁷ It was always the expectation that the prophesied Messiah would shoulder a kingdom that would never be destroyed (Isa 9:6–7; Dan 2:34, 44–45).⁷⁸ Yet, equally linked to the Messiah, and his kingdom, is its corporate dimension.⁷⁹ The one evokes thoughts of the other. Christ was never pictured “as a lone figure ruling in solitary majesty, but always with corporate qualities. He rules over people; he calls people to his rule.”⁸⁰ It is not possible to have Christ without a people.⁸¹

Conclusion

Alfred Loisy’s well-known statement, “Jesus foretold the kingdom, and it was the Church that came,” could be easily dismissed as too extreme.⁸² However, its candor captures the reticence to identify the kingdom of God with the church, even when it is expressed more moderately by others. For example, George Ladd writes,

In biblical idiom, the Kingdom is not identified with its subjects. ... The church is the community of the Kingdom but never the Kingdom itself. Jesus’ disciples belong to the Kingdom as the Kingdom belongs to them; but they are not the Kingdom. The Kingdom is the rule of God; the church is the society of men.⁸³

The church is the people of the Kingdom, never the Kingdom itself. Therefore it is not helpful even to say that the church is a “part of the Kingdom,” or that in the eschatological consummation the church and Kingdom become synonymous.⁸⁴

On the other hand, some would rejoin that Augustine, the Reformers (like Martin Luther and John Calvin), and the Reformed tradition represent

⁷⁷ Herman N. Ridderbos, *When the Time Had Fully Come: Studies in New Testament Theology* (Jordan Station, ON: Paideia, 1982), 22–23.

⁷⁸ Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 28; cf. Geerhardus Vos, *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus: The Modern Debate About the Messianic Consciousness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 73; Bright, *Kingdom of God*, 215.

⁷⁹ Bright, *Kingdom of God*, 227.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁸¹ Vos, *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus*, 60.

⁸² Alfred Loisy, *The Gospel and the Church*, ed. Bernard B. Scott, trans. Christopher Home (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 166.

⁸³ Georg Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 110.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

the other extreme by identifying the kingdom of God and the church too closely.⁸⁵

It is beyond the scope of this study to negotiate the continuum of viewpoints on the issue of relating the church to the kingdom of God. Moreover, it is beyond such a narrowly focused study to articulate a position with sufficient nuance. Instead, the intent has been to shed light on the question in the light of a comparison between Ephesians 1:20–23 and 1 Corinthians 15:22–28 and their common cause. These passages seem reminiscent of Matthew 16:18–19, which leads us to believe that as far as membership is concerned, we may identify the kingdom and the church.

To put it more plainly, the two pericopes underline the inseparable relationship between the church and the kingdom and encourage us to bring them into a strong association with one another.⁸⁶ It is difficult to conceive of being in the one without being in the other,⁸⁷ and it is even more difficult to put distance between them. It seems incredible to think of the church as a mere “society of men” in light of Christ’s promise, “I will build my church” (Matt 16:18).

The two passages are nuanced, and they do see redemptive history from distinct vantage points. However, they are looking at the same thing. The kingdom that belongs distinctively to Christ in this age, his body, will be delivered over to Father in the end. Ephesians 1:20–23 asserts that Christ is given as head over every opposing principality on behalf of his church. First Corinthians 15:22–28 teaches that those same spiritual authorities will be destroyed at Christ’s appearing on behalf of his kingdom, the same kingdom that he will deliver to the Father. Both moments encompass one triumphant reign, which is accomplished on behalf of all “those who belong to Christ.” Until then, that kingdom could be called “the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ,” and it could be reasonably identified with the church (Westminster Confession of Faith 25:2). This is to admit that “our Lord looked upon the visible church as a veritable embodiment of his kingdom.”⁸⁸ In the end, the kingdom of Christ will become the kingdom of the Father. When Christ proclaims, “It is done!” the kingdom of glory will exhibit the co-reign of the Father and the Son, along with all who will reign with Christ

⁸⁵ Bright, *Kingdom of God*, 105; Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 104; Raymond O. Zorn, *Christ Triumphant: Biblical Perspectives on His Church and Kingdom* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 66. Calvin saw the Reformation church as the visible image of Christ’s kingdom. Tadataka Maruyama, *Calvin’s Ecclesiology: A Study in the History of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022), 436.

⁸⁶ Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 355.

⁸⁷ Vos, *Kingdom and Church*, 86.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 87

(Rom 8:17; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 2:12; 2 Pet 1:11; Rev 11:15; 12:10; 20:4; 21:6). Then, what Christ promised his disciples will become true: “I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matt 26:29). Christ makes that same promise to all who belong to him—whether we regard them as his church or his kingdom. Until this author stakes out a sufficiently refined position on the exact relationship between the church and the kingdom of God, he is content not to put asunder what Christ has brought together.