

EPHESIANS

Ephesians 1

Adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Epistle to the Ephesians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2023), 60, 72–74, 106–107.

1:10. The last gathering. Paul’s words have been building to the action of gathering. Now we learn what God intends as a climatic ending to His work. The rare but rich verb *ἀνακεφαλαιῶ* (*anakephalaioō*) is related to the noun for “head” (*κεφαλή*, *kephalē*), found often in Ephesians.¹ The verb bears the meaning “to sum up.” In this instance, rich meanings run together in this verb, including “to summarize (a speech),” “to repeat (an original action),” and “to gather things together.” In the context, we are to think of the grand summation in Christ at the end-time, pulling together “all things . . . in heaven, and . . . on earth,” not the least part of which are Gentiles marching into the kingdom.²

1:1–23. From the beginning to Christ’s exaltation. Verses 3–14 present to our view the grand sweep of salvation history, opening vivid vistas onto the premortal council, the unspeakable gift of Christ’s Atonement, and finally the windup scene wherein all promised blessings will be realized. Two gateways lead into a valley bathed with a warm and bright sun that illumines these events in celestial colors. The first is revelation, plain and simple. Speaking of the Father’s gracious actions toward us, Paul wrote that He had “made known unto us the mystery of his will” (Ephesians 1:9). The Apostle has repeated this theme throughout the letter, effectively pausing to allow readers to take in the supernal view that presents itself through revelation. In his prayer for the Ephesian Saints, he intoned, “May [God] give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him,” effectively saying that God and His purposes are knowable (1:17). Paul did not stop here. Now that the “eyes of your understanding [are] opened,” never to be closed, believers can come to “know what is the hope of [God’s] calling, and what [are] the

riches of the glory of his inheritance” that He offers to the Saints (1:18). In a word, the view of what lies in store for the faithful is truly glorious, all made available to us through revelation (see 2:4–7).

The second gateway is framed by ordinances, those divinely authorized acts that carry force in both this life and the next. The first, of course, was foreordination. This action did not consist only of God’s premortal choosing or designation of certain “noble and great” spirits to be His rulers or leaders in mortality (Abraham 3:22–23). As Jesus was set apart for His role as Redeemer,³ so humans experienced a setting apart, a foreordination in the premortal world for roles in this life, exactly as the passage in the book of Abraham tells us. But this is not the only illustration. Jeremiah was ordained before he came out of the womb (Jeremiah 1:5); in one of the Servant Songs of Isaiah, the prophet wrote about the coming Servant, “The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name” (Isaiah 49:1); and Paul wrote that God “separated me from my mother’s womb” in what was evidently a premortal act.⁴

The complementing ordinance was baptism. To be sure, Paul mentions this ordinance only once in Ephesians (4:5). However, certain language points unmistakably to baptism. Such an act surely lies behind the words “holy and without blemish.” In a first instance, this pair of adjectives has to do with individuals; in another, they concern the Church itself, which of course is made up of individuals (see 1:4; 5:27). Moreover, the ordinances hinted at in this expression cover more ground than just baptism, nodding also in the direction of temple ceremonies. In this connection, the scrubbing of the Church “with the washing of water by the word” surely leads our thoughts to baptism as the purifying agent (5:26). More than this, verse 7’s “the forgiveness of sins,” or “remission of sins” as translated elsewhere, comes to a person for the first time in baptism, an observation at home elsewhere in the New Testament.⁵

At the heart of the long run-on sentence in verses 15–23, which forms a carefully compacted prayer of praise, rests the mighty power of God (1:19) that spends itself to lift believers into the Church, where they can receive incomparable blessings from Christ. For those who resided in and around Ephesus, the power of paganism was forcefully present at every turn: statues depicting Roman gods, temples celebrating emperors, tombs memorializing important officials, bimonthly processions through the city featuring priests from the nearby temple of Artemis, Hellenistic schools educating and training youth, coins bearing images of pagan deities and the emperor, a huge stadium hosting athletic contests and gladiatorial competitions, a massive theater showing performances based in part on the capricious activities of pagan gods and goddesses, shops selling magic books and silver images of the huge yet exquisite Artemisium temple, and the ever-present government officials presiding officiously in the upper city and at the sea docks. Paul’s words, rolling out in an impressively crafted cadence, encouraged his readers to understand that God’s mighty power had already begun to overgrow all other powers, whether in heaven or on earth, whether in this world or in the world to come” (1:10, 19, 21). Members should go forward in faith and love and hope, not looking back (1:15, 18).

In his prayer, Paul openly begged God to furnish two things to his readers: first, that God would give to them “the spirit of wisdom and revelation” so that they would come to “the knowledge of [God],” and second,

that “the eyes of [their] understanding” would be enlightened (1:17–18). With such an unprecedented understanding, they could withstand the withering influence of any “principality, and power, and might, and dominion” that might beset them (1:21). God and His Christ had surmounted them all, including “every name that is named . . . in this world,” even admitting the names of emperors and heathen gods and overweening government officials. Besides controlling such individuals, as we have seen, God’s power also controls all powers and denizens of “that [world] which is to come” (1:21). This set of observations means that characteristics of “already” and “not yet” are at play. That is to say, Christ now stands victorious above all powers, terrestrial and celestial, meaning that believers can rely on His aid to negotiate the dispiriting difficulties of this life. It also means that because “at present we do not see everything subject to him,” as will be the case at the end-time, Christ has yet to suppress all evil powers in a final subjugation.⁶

That said, the chief beneficiaries of Christ’s new status, “far above all,” were to be Church members. Of these, Christ had now become the head. There is more. He is specifically “over all things for [the benefit of] the church” (1:22). As an added measure, in a seemingly complicating formula, the Church is His body as well. However, the obvious unity that is implicit in Christ being both head and body of the Church should have been reassuring to Paul’s audience (1:22–23). How so? Church members now glimpsed the clear pointer to the unity that they would share with Christ Himself because they too made up His body. In memorable words, “Ye [believers] are complete in him” (Colossians 2:10). In fact, “we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones” (Ephesians 5:30). It is in this sense that Paul wrote about “the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth [is united] . . . unto the edifying of itself in love” (4:15–16; see Doctrine and Covenants 84:109–110).

Ephesians 2

Adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Epistle to the Ephesians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2023), 140–141, 148–149, 191–193.

2:8. Grace saves through faith. Paul often employs a variant expression for “through faith” or “by faith.” Elsewhere we encounter *ἐκ πίστεως*, *ek pisteōs*, as frequently as we do *διὰ πίστεως*, *dia pisteōs*, like here.⁷ Depending on the contexts, the meanings of the phrases are essentially the same. In the case before us, “faith” directs us to the faith of the believer, not to either Christ’s faithfulness or His trust in us. Faith, of course, grants the believer access to God’s saving grace, activating it. Paul contrasts faith with works of the law of Moses but never with personal efforts or works that improve oneself or serve others.⁸ This faith, which has responded to the preaching of the gospel and has welcomed specifically the message of Christ’s death and Resurrection, leads a person to righteousness, a state of being justified before God.⁹ This faith, like that of Abraham which was “counted . . . to him for righteousness,” “is completely certain

of the full agreement between God's promise and his power, which can call into being things which are not," such as giving "Abraham a posterity."¹⁰

2:1–22. Salvation is available to all. For the spiritually conscious person, the old life, lived "in times past," was besotted "in the lusts of the flesh," specifically in "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (Ephesians 2:3). Such a person captured by spiritual depravity, Jesus said, was His to deliver and set at liberty.¹¹ In Paul's experience, that is exactly what was happening. Through Christ, believers had become God's spiritual workmanship and had been spiritually "created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Ephesians 2:10). But before those good works could visibly manifest God's blessings, shining out from believers to others, His grace arrived, free-flowing and generously bestowed.

Though the noun "grace" (*χάρις*, *charis*) appears twelve times in Ephesians,¹² the two that carry the most vital significance for us occur in the expression "by grace are ye saved" (2:5, 8). The latter passage adds the phrase "through faith" so that it reads, "By grace are ye saved through faith." One monumentally important point follows: "Not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (2:8). Nothing can be clearer—salvation that flows from Jesus's atoning act, accessed through faith, "is the greatest of all the gifts of God; for there is no gift greater than the gift of salvation."¹³

Were strings attached? Of course, and they took the form of the good works then expected from believers, framed like the patron-client arrangements of earlier eras (Ephesians 2:10). Such an agreement consisted of a reciprocal relationship formed between God and His children that was grounded in a covenant.¹⁴ For after converts had welcomed into their hearts the ineffable gift of Christ's Atonement, their subsequent baptisms meant that these new believers were "buried with [Christ] by baptism into death . . . so [they] should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4; also 6:11). Notably, these baptisms brought "redemption through [Christ's] blood, [and] the forgiveness of sins" (Ephesians 1:7). But the story does not end here. Paul pled with Church members to "walk honestly, . . . not in rioting and drunkenness, . . . not in strife and envying" (Romans 13:13). More briefly, "As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him" (Colossians 2:6; see 1 Corinthians 7:17). Hence, converts were expected to make earnest, permanent adjustments in their lives.

Ephesians 2:11–22 frames the high point of the letter and, as one might expect, shines a unified focus on Christ. In addition, these verses can be separated into three long paragraphs. The first concerns the gentile believers' former circumstance of "being aliens" and "being far off" from Christ (2:11–13). The second centers Christ's reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles by making the two of them into "one new man" (2:14–18). Within these lines some have detected a hymn, perhaps revised, about Christ's sweet peace which He has effected even in the face of a divisive, fracturing "middle wall" between Gentiles and Jews whose existence has led to serious enmity. The third element introduces a welcoming notice to gentile Christians that, along with fellow Jewish Christian believers, their spiritual lives rest on Christ as their foundation stone, each one enjoying a fellowship with all Saints, including the apostles and prophets (2:19–22).

In the first section (2:11–13), it appears that Paul’s words to his gentile readers derived entirely from his Jewish viewpoint. How so? Because he specifically called them “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel” before their conversion. Moreover, they had lived as “strangers from the [Old Testament] covenants of promise.” These circumstances had left them adrift in their lives. Borrowing the language of scripture, Paul continued to paint a dark picture of Gentiles’ lives before they found the gospel, writing that they had “no hope, and [were] without God in the world” (2:12). Even though they were now “in Christ Jesus,” they had been “far off” from true spiritual life which had its beginnings inside “the commonwealth of Israel” (2:12–13). What is more strikingly Jewish, probably offering readers a glimpse into how his fellow Jews and even Paul himself commonly characterized gentile neighbors, is his comment that they had been “called Uncircumcision” by the Jews, by those “called Circumcision” (2:11). It was almost as though the best way to view Gentiles was through a Jewish lens. But he pulled back, for that was only part of the story.

At the end of this first segment, Paul wrote that now the Gentiles “are made nigh by the blood of Christ,” completely repairing everything in their previous lives (2:13). At this moment, Paul plunged into his discussion of reconciliation through Christ that makes up his second part (2:14–18). Fundamentally, Jews and Gentiles stand on the same ground. For the law of commandments from Moses did the Jews no lasting service (2:15). To their aid, and to the aid of the Gentiles, came Christ, a tower of peace, who through His atoning actions “made both [peoples] one” by knocking “down the middle wall of partition between [them],” wholesomely reconciling “both [peoples] unto God” by slaying with “the cross . . . the enmity” that had divided Gentiles and Jews (Ephesians 2:14, 16; see Acts 10:36). The result? Stunningly, it is “through [Christ that] we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (2:18). Both groups needed Christ to perch them at a place where the Father is accessible.

In the third part (Ephesians 2:19–22), Paul addressed Gentiles directly. Rather than sitting “far off” (2:13), doing the bidding of “the prince of the power of the air” (2:2), they were now fellow citizens. But they were not citizens of the Jewish synagogue and certainly not under obligation to follow the Mosaic law. Instead, they were fellow members with the Saints, residing completely within “the household of God.” Their lives as “strangers and foreigners” to the gospel message lay in the past (2:19). They could rejoice that they were structural stones in “the building fitly framed together [as the] . . . habitation of God.” All this was made possible, of course, through the Spirit (2:19, 21–22). Almost beyond belief, within God’s dwelling place, they could savor fellowship with the apostles and prophets as well as Jesus Christ Himself (2:20).

Ephesians 3

Adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Epistle to the Ephesians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2023), 197–198, 242–243.

3:17–19. *Comprehending Christ’s love.* The middle form of the infinitive of *καταλαμβάνω*, *katalambanō*, which stands in parallel to the infinitive “to know” in 3:19, draws up the sense “to understand” or “to grasp,” often with the sense of surprise.¹⁵ The understanding that comes to a person does not consist of some vague divine mystery unless one wants to classify Jesus’s death on the cross, His visit to the spirits in prison, and His subsequent resurrection as such a mystery, as Paul does elsewhere (see 1 Corinthians 2:7). Rather, in an unlooked for, spiritually discerning way, a believer, with the aid of God’s Spirit, comes to grasp clearly the nature of Jesus’s Atonement. Prefacing his remarks in 1 Corinthians 2, Paul wrote that “I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). Then he plunged into what for him are “the deep things of God” that are not discerned by “the natural man [who] receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.” Why not? Because “they are foolishness unto him.” Worse, “neither can he know them” (1 Corinthians 2:10, 14). That is, a person’s natural ability and natural intelligence cannot grasp the grandeur, the infinite compass of Jesus’s death and Resurrection. These truths simply remain out of that person’s reach.

The comprehension which the Spirit activates in the inquiring, faithful believer is not simply the initial spiritual experience that that person undergoes when an investigator. This event, as a New World prophet reminded his readers, involved the power of the Holy Ghost. But God has promised much more through His Spirit. For “by the power of the Holy Ghost [we] may know the truth of all things”—a dazzling prospect (Moroni 10:4–5). So too Paul. For him, “the deep things of God,” which are also called “the things of God,” are available only through revelation by God’s Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10–11). Said another way, “the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God [are] . . . unsearchable . . . and his ways past finding out” (Romans 11:33; see 2 Corinthians 5:5). Only by the power of the Spirit are such divine delicacies made known.

3:1–21. “*He made known unto me the mystery.*” Turning to face his gentile readers in Asia Minor, the Apostle opened two vistas to them. First, he sketched why he and no one else had initially carried the gospel message to them (Romans 11:13). It was a revelation that not only set him on his current course but also uncovered for him the mystery of the divine plan to sweep Gentiles into God’s kingdom, where they were to receive celestial nourishment—“the unsearchable riches of Christ”—from God’s apostles and prophets (Ephesians 3:2–9). One is immediately taken back to Paul’s experience with the Resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus, where he was called as Christ’s representative, later to learn that he was to bear Christ’s word to the Gentiles.¹⁶ The Lord Jesus, on His part, besides seizing this man’s attention and healing him of his temporary blindness through the faithful Ananias, revealed to the Apostle one important fact during the following days and months, as He had to “his holy apostles and prophets.” Christ disclosed that the plan to bring Gentiles into the gospel fellowship was now activated and that this plan had not been revealed before that moment (also 3:5–6).

The Apostle enclosed the second vista inside the words of a prayer, framing a sight like no other. Within this panorama Paul pictured the inexpressible gifts that the believer will come to see and experience.

Initially, he prayed that each individual would “be strengthened with power in the inner person through [God’s] Spirit” (3:16 BYU New Rendition). Unbidden, this strengthening power would lift a Church member in ways that she or he had never experienced, whether in a spiritual, physical, or emotional manner. Next, Christ would arrive “to dwell in your hearts by faith” (3:17), keeping a pledge that He had made to the eleven the evening before He was crucified: “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.” More than this, the Father and the Son “will come unto [the believer], and make our abode with [that person]” (John 14:18, 23). At this point, Paul implored God that his readers would “be able to comprehend . . . what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height . . . [of] the love of Christ, which passeth [human] knowledge.” What is the end of all these indescribable blessings? It is “that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Ephesians 3:18–19). And how do these gifts come to believers? They flow, unasked for, from “him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask,” distantly recalling a line from modern scripture that our eternal rewards “without compulsory means . . . shall flow unto [us] forever and ever” (Ephesians 3:20 New International Version; Doctrine and Covenants 121:46).

Ephesians 4:1–21

Adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Epistle to the Ephesians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2023), 283–284, 326–328.

4:4–6. Unity in the Father. In the human sphere, especially that of the ancient Israelites, the appellation “father of all” applies to only two: Adam and Abraham. In the divine realm, it applies to one only, the Heavenly Father of all. To be sure, from the following phrases (“above all . . . through all”), a person might think that God’s fatherhood has to do with His involvement in Creation (see Ephesians 3:9: “who created all things”). But the thrust of the Old Testament—from the *shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4 (“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord”) to lines from its last prophet, Malachi (“Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us?” [Malachi 2:10])—has been one of a personalized relationship with God (Isaiah 63:16; 64:8). And Ephesians features this dimension of God’s interaction with this world. As we have noticed earlier, the Father “hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4). The “Father of glory” controls “all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named” (1:17, 21). The Father sent Christ to offer “redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins” (1:7). The Father “raised [Christ] from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places” (1:20). From the Father “every family in the heavenly realms and on earth derives its name” (3:15 BYU New Rendition). And through the Father, believers are “strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (3:16).

Within the embrace of the Father’s relationship with His children rest certain principles that a person must understand. The linking of the title *God* with *the Father*, as in this verse, conveys the status of lordship or sovereignty. The Father stands as the originator “of [Christ’s] glorious grace which [God]

showered upon us by his Beloved [Son]” (1:6 BYU New Rendition). This means that He directed Christ to give “himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world,” showing Himself to be sovereign in bringing about our salvation (Galatians 1:4). The believer’s act of “giving thanks always for all things” frames a reminder of the Father’s power to control and manage all life (Ephesians 5:20). Moreover, employing His generous might, He can invite us to “be partakers of his holiness” (Hebrews 12:10), a dimension of celestial reality which the Father controls and dispenses to the worthy. In an acknowledgment of His lordship, at “the end” Christ Himself will deliver up “the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power” (1 Corinthians 15:24). Besides all these and perhaps soaring above them all, through God’s unlimited love for us, He “will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:18). Happy day!

4:1–16. “For the perfecting of the Saints.” Paul has flipped a switch inside this section (Ephesians 4:1–16), pouring light onto the weighty matter of maintaining the oneness of the Church even as it grows by scooping up people of very different backgrounds and interests. And what gives him authority to undertake such an appeal? To briefly answer, it is his imprisonment for their sakes as ordered by his Master, Jesus Christ. For his non-Jewish readers, “I Paul, [am] the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles” (3:1). He then repeated for emphasis these words: “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord” (4:1). Earlier on he pled that readers “faint not at my tribulations for you” (3:13). The force of these pointers to his heaven-driven incarceration is monumental. Who will contradict him? Who will discount his afflictions on their behalf? No one. The table was now set for his plea for unity in love (4:2, 16).

In an acknowledgment of the diversity of his audience, the Apostle begged the Saints “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:3). It is that bond of peace, acting as an internal glue within congregations, that could seep and spread out to the Church as a whole, making it into one body (4:4). This kind of bonding did not arise because of some celestial arm twisting. Threats of force characterized the larger Roman world, not that of the Church. Instead, within the membership of the Church a person should come upon people who exhibit “all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love” (4:2).

The oneness of the Church rested on seven simple characteristics set out in a passage that some see growing out of a confessional statement of sorts (4:4–6). Even for an outsider, these distinctive Christian traits were readily visible. We have already run into the “one body” (4:4). This quality joined itself to others, including “one Spirit” of God and “one hope of your calling” (4:4). These three formed the undergirding attributes of the inner life and its Christian-shaped values, making the person into “the new man [or woman]” (4:24). How so? It was the individual’s inward choice to belong to the “one body” of the church, which invited the “one Spirit” into one’s spiritual life along with the “one hope of your calling.” For a Christian person with eternal possibilities in the offing, these all led incrementally to decisions that conferred righteousness and true holiness on that individual (4:24).

The nature of the newly found life embraced “one Lord, one faith, [and] one baptism” (4:5). Plainly, these dimensions rested outside of a person’s internal thoughts and beliefs. The “one Lord,” of course,

directed believers to Jesus Christ. Although “one faith” connects on one level to a person’s belief, on another it had more to do with an early title of the Church than might be suspected.¹⁷ And “one baptism” was the unifying ordinance for all Church members, no matter their background and habits. Naturally, a mental, physical, and emotional assent to these traits was required of all believers. But they resided outside one’s inner soul.

The last of the seven characteristics was the “one God and Father of all, who is . . . in you all” (4:6). In this line, Paul paid proper tribute to the Father, the lord and master of everything. As the seventh in the list, the expression “one God and Father of all” shared the importance of the number seven which carried special meaning and was sacred among the ancient Hebrews and others.¹⁸ And as the last in the series, a natural emphasis fell on it, bringing the reader to understand that it bore a significance beyond mere words. As Creator, the Father towers above all. As sustainer of creation, the Father’s powers are suffused through all. As guide for believers, the Father’s influence is “in you all” (4:6).

Immediately after this recitation of oneness, Paul rivets his readers’ attention on how this unity is to be achieved. It will not be by the unaided efforts of Church members. Rather, they will need divine help. And they will get it. But it will not come in a massive flow of divine grace that is uniformly distributed to believers. Rather, because “all members have not the same office,” some serving as Apostles and others as pastors and teachers, God needs to distribute His “grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ” (Romans 12:4; Ephesians 4:7, 11). Though “we, being many, are one body in Christ,” nevertheless God’s gifts come to Church members “differing according to the grace that is given to [each of] us” (Romans 12:5–6). That is to say, God’s grace comes in the divine strength and discernment that each person needs to receive in order to perform his or her task “for the perfecting of the saints, [and] for the work of the ministry” (Ephesians 4:12). In a word, gracious gifts come from God as He sees fit to distribute them for His purposes. Not all believers are the same nor do their Church assignments require the same celestial helps.

Ephesians 4:22–5:14

Adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Epistle to the Ephesians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2023), 355, 386–387, 393–395.

4:22–24. *The new man and new woman.* In Ephesians 4:23, the present infinitive of the verb “to renew” (*ἀνανεόω*, *ananeoō*), here in the passive, centers on a constantly active process that because of the present tense, does not shut off. It is governed by the verbal expression “ye . . . have been taught by [Christ]” (4:21), reminding readers about Christ who has taught them about the necessity to be constantly renewed (2 Corinthians 4:16). The question is, How does that renewal take place? As we have learned elsewhere, the biggest factors are the reception of the Holy Ghost and the regular renewal of one’s baptismal covenant by partaking of the sacrament, or Eucharist. It is in this renewal of the covenant wherein

we “present [our] bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God” that we are “transformed by the renewing of [our] mind” (Romans 12:1–2). The regular influence of the Holy Spirit, even if intermittent, brings believers to rely on the promise of the Resurrected Christ that “ye shall have my Spirit to be with you” (3 Nephi 18:7). By this means, Church members can experience the ongoing transformation of how they think, feel, and understand. Significantly, this change “is finally accomplished on them rather than through them,” one by one, person by person. The activator “of the renewal is obviously Christ Himself.”¹⁹

4:17–32; 5:1–14. *Becoming imitators of God.* Paul spins around from his treatment of Jesus’s descent and Ascension, followed by his handling of ecclesiastical matters (in Ephesians 4:1–16), and invites readers to walk behind him into the world of good and evil, which whether wanted or not, continues to touch Church members as chronicled in these verses (4:17–32). Since the days when they first heard the voice of Christ through the voices of His preaching servants, they have been taught to walk in the path blazed by the Savior. The Apostle will encourage believers to continue on that roadway, eventually stepping into the forgiving arms of the Father.

A number of Paul’s readers, notably Gentiles, stood close enough to their old lives of vanity and ignorance that they needed a stern reminder to stand farther away from old habits and to thoroughly “put off . . . the old man” who was plagued by “deceitful lusts” (4:17–18, 22). In these verses, the Apostle wrote in general terms, begging the Saints to “walk not as other Gentiles walk,” with their “understanding darkened” and suffering from “the blindness of their heart” (4:17–18). Such persons in the world were past feeling in the truly human sense and had permanently and cripplingly stooped to lasciviousness and greediness (4:19). For converts, “ye have not so learned Christ” (4:20).

A continued careful reading of Paul’s lines escorts a person into a room made dim by light-absorbing images. These images, in contrast to the general, unpleasant language that Paul employed in verses 4:17–19, show specific, objectionable actions by Church members in Ephesus and beyond, hinting at his familiarity with individual cases of transgression. He first turned attention to lying, the practice that undercuts all personal relationships. He begged that “every man [speak] truth with his neighbor” (4:25), an important standard that Jesus Himself had set decades earlier (Matthew 5:37). Following this appeal, in second place, arose one of the most puzzling sentences ever written by the Apostle. It concerned anger, a destabilizing outburst by someone that could pull apart a branch of the Church: “Be ye angry, and sin not” (Ephesians 4:26). To be sure, his next line made the point that any anger should be short-lived: “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.” But be angry anytime? This imperative is all the more puzzling because of the approaching directive to “let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger . . . be put away from you” (4:31). Modern scripture may present one solution, wherein a Church member reproves another but only “when moved upon by the Holy Ghost” and only with a “showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reprov’d” (Doctrine and Covenants 121:43). Anger is not allowed except under the most stringent limits.

The Apostle was not finished. Evidently, he had become aware of a Church member, most likely a poor slave, who was augmenting his living by stealing. What to say? Paul was not at a loss for words: “Let him

that stole steal no more.” What was this poor person to do? Go to work, said the Apostle, “working with his hands” so that he could create enough extra, likely a tiny overage for a very poor person, “to give to him that needeth” (4:28). Charity is required of all, including those with the least. Then Paul addressed what he called corrupt communication, or harmful words, knowing by experience that Saints should speak “that which is good” and that leads to edifying one another (4:29). One major thing more, and this was the gravest of offenses: “do not offend the Holy Spirit of God” (4:30 BYU New Rendition). Besides an offending person standing in the middle of the highway where God’s wrath is bearing down at breakneck speed, that individual risked losing the day of redemption, the grandest of all God’s gifts (4:30).

The noun translated “followers” in 5:1 of the King James Version (plural of *μιμητής*, *mimētēs*, which means “imitator”), appears only here in the New Testament in the sense of imitating God. Its associated verb (*μιμέομαι*, *mímeomai*) occurs four times, usually rendered in the King James Version with the meaning “to follow.”²⁰ The noun *mimētēs* regularly has to do with imitating Paul or “the churches.”²¹ Wilhelm Michaelis engineered his best effort to say that in our passage, the term *mimētēs* points to an obedient disciple, or to a follower, even though the entire weight of the term’s history in the Greek language presses down onto the meaning “imitator.”²² He was not convincing. Hence, the consistent translation of the word as “follower” in the King James Version has to be discarded. His concern was that mentioning God in 5:1 construed “the reference to God as though God were set up as a model,” something that he could not imagine because the Father is so far beyond human reach.²³ But that is exactly the message.²⁴

The question arises, whom better to emulate than Heavenly Father? Can a person find something inherently wrong with imitating God? To be sure, we possess no direct window to look through so that we witness God’s life and activities. But His Son represents the Father in every important way, mirroring Him as we discover in 5:2. This is the substance of the exchange between Jesus and His disciples Thomas and Philip at the Last Supper. When answering Thomas’s question about how to find Him after death, Jesus responded, “If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.” If so, then “from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him” (John 14:7). Not grasping what Jesus had just said, Philip begged Jesus to “shew us the Father.” In reply, Jesus said to Philip, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:8–9). To be clear, imitating the Father involves a third party—namely, Jesus. How so? Because Jesus mediates or reveals God to believers, including the almost unfathomable “length, and depth, and height” of His love and because “through him we both [Jew and Gentile] have access . . . unto the Father” (Ephesians 2:18; 3:18). If the relationship were one of discipleship, only two persons are required: the leader and the follower. This is not the end of the matter.

The Apostle’s command to be “imitators of God” (5:1 BYU New Rendition) threads its way through succeeding verses, which are more than a patchwork of commands. One of the keys has to do with a person putting away old practices noted in 5:3–6 because at one time all believers, especially Gentiles, were caught in “being alienated from the life of God” (4:18). With the aid of Christ’s love, which came to readers as “an offering and a sacrifice to God” (5:2), Church members can avoid being partakers of enticing items

that “the children of disobedience” serve up (5:6–7). As imitators of God, the “dear children” not only reprove “the unfruitful works of darkness” but also hold onto “the light” (5:1, 11, 13). Embracing light does not recommend itself just because it scuttles darkness but because the light has vanquished the dark and revealed its soul-sagging works (5:11, 13).

Ephesians 5:15–33

Adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Epistle to the Ephesians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2023), 454–455, 485–487, 515.

5:17. Understanding the will of God. The noun for “will” (*θέλημα, thelēma*) has appeared five times already in Ephesians (1:1, 5, 9, 11; 2:3) and will occur one more time (6:6). Coming to grasp the divine will, with celestial aid, forms one of the most significant steps that a believer can undertake and achieve. The vista that opens in front of a devotee is truly breathtaking and inspiring, featuring salvation for all God’s children, living or dead.²⁵ In this case, we hasten to point out, God’s will is at work “in individual cases,” not in the universal sense.²⁶ Hence, in a manner bathed in quiet, eternal reassurances, we perceive that God’s will wraps itself around each believer, bringing purpose to each person’s life, not just to the Church as a whole or even to specific congregations.

But this act of revealing the divine will to individuals carries consequences for those who learn God’s intentions for themselves and thereafter do not fully pursue them. Jesus Himself drove home this principle in a parable that highlighted “that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and . . . neither did according to his will.” What was his fate? He was to “be beaten with many stripes.” In contrast, “he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes” (Luke 12:47–48). Clearly, the one who knows more bears more responsibility for proper action (Doctrine and Covenants 82:3). This concept lies behind the reach of Jesus’s atoning power to those who sin ignorantly: “His blood atoneth for the sins of those who . . . have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned” (Mosiah 3:11; also 2 Nephi 9:25–27).

When we turn to Paul, we understand that in his case he was positioned to know God’s will after his vision of the Christ, something that was completely fresh and new to him even though as a Jew he had previously thought he knew (Acts 22:14; see Romans 2:18). This novel comprehension lifted the Apostle to a new height, a height that required him “not [to] be conformed to this age,” not to fall under the pervasive influences of his era. Rather, after experiencing Christ, he became “transformed by the renewing of [his] mind, so that [he could] determine what the will of God is.”²⁷ Obviously, the stakes had suddenly become higher than they had been a few minutes before the Resurrected Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus.

5:15–33. Christ’s love in marriages. In Paul’s directive to “love your wives” (5:25), we begin an elucidation of the last line of 5:23. It may seem odd that the verb “to love” is *ἀγαπάω, agapaō*, the verb

that undergirds all descriptions of Christian service and aid. Of course, its noun is *agape*, which is consistently translated “love” or “charity.” It is this love that arrives with the reception of the Spirit, as Paul wrote in another place: “The fruit of the Spirit is love [*agapē*]” (Galatians 5:22). It is this love that is the companion of God’s mercy, for “God, who is rich in mercy” pours out “his great love [*agapē*] wherewith he loved [*agapaō*] us” (Ephesians 2:4). It is this love that bends the believer toward those who need assistance: “By love [*agapē*] serve one another” (Galatians 5:13). It is this love that stands beneath the timeless commandment, “Thou shalt love [*agapaō*] thy neighbor as thyself” (Galatians 5:14, quoting Leviticus 19:18). The question is, why apply this verb to marital love? The answer? For all of the characteristics just cited and more. For such love is drenched in the divine care for others.

During the far reaches of time, God made the Israelites His daughter or wife. Therefore, it made a difference how she responded to Him and to her neighbors. Even when she behaved like Gomer, the wife of the prophet Hosea, and left the prophet for another man (that is, symbolically for another god or pantheon of gods), God said in a forgiving voice, “I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her” (Hosea 2:14). To those who had drawn themselves far from God, He would say, “Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God” (Hosea 2:23). When faced with thrashing ancient Israel for her sins, God turned away in graciousness and forgiveness, and asked, “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? . . . mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.” Then He answered His own questions: “I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee” (Hosea 11:8–9; see Psalm 89:30–34). More than a hundred years later, God pledged Himself to bear the pain and disappointment that the kingdom of Judah had caused Him (see Jeremiah 10:19). These scenes, which portray God’s lenient love for His daughter or wife, became the benchmarks for the love that God’s people should expect from Him and that they should expect from one another. All of this is directly relevant to marriage.

We shall learn in Ephesians 5:27 what the Messiah intends His church to become—His bride. We read the Apostle’s words, “That he [Christ] might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Revised Standard Version). Paul’s language harks back to God’s presentation of the newly created Eve to Adam. There we encounter the words, “[The Lord God] brought her unto the man” (Genesis 2:22). In this case, the man Adam had a helper, a matchmaker of sorts, in the person of the Lord God who introduced Eve to her soon-to-be husband. In the case of Christ and the Church, which was now His bride, no matchmaker assisted like at Jewish weddings. Christ took on the full responsibility of bringing the bride (the Church) into existence. For this is the sense of the verb translated “to present” (*παρίστημι, paristēmi*): “to cause to exist” or “to raise up.”²⁸ Therefore, as Christ has lovingly brought His betrothed to a perfected state, one “without spot or wrinkle . . . that she might be holy and without blemish,” so the husband is to lovingly open the door to his wife to become “holy and without blemish” before him and before her Maker (Ephesians 5:27 Revised Standard Version).

This set of verses directs all readers to the view that Christ has placed His sanction upon marriage, equating it to the sacred act of creating and nourishing His Church. By this means, both the Church and marriage have become holy paths to God. They each, as spiritual companions of one another, grant “access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Ephesians 2:18). Together they allow believers to know God, “who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” (3:20 New International Version). In sum, marriage has continued to be a holy relationship with God at its head, as it was in the beginning as we see in Genesis 3:12: “The woman whom *thou [God] gavest me*” (emphasis added).

Ephesians 6

Adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Epistle to the Ephesians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2023), 559, 562–563.

6:12. Wrestling against the darkness. Concerning the appearance of the term “darkness” (σκότος, *skotos*), the Greek text pairs the demonstrative pronoun “this” with “darkness,” not with “world” as in the King James Version, leading to a reading, “The cosmic lords of this darkness” (BYU New Rendition). The Apostle was pointing directly to “this darkness,” the gloom that can and does arise in the lives of believers. Whether this lurking darkness connects to outer darkness, a locale for the wicked that Jesus warned about, remains unknown.²⁹ Perhaps unsurprisingly, spiritual darkness possesses its own reservoir of power. Elsewhere Paul wrote that “the Father . . . hath delivered us from the power of darkness [*skotos*]” (Colossians 1:13). This viewpoint helps to explain the Messiah’s need for power when “bringing . . . [His people] out of darkness unto light—yea, out of hidden darkness and out of captivity unto freedom” (2 Nephi 3:5).

6:1–24. The Apostasy looms. In Ephesians 6:13, the noun “day” and its adjective “evil” (τῆ ἡμέρα τῆς πονηρίας, *tē hēmera tē ponēra*), here in the singular, touch on a specific era. In the context, that day, that age, turns readers to a bleak moment in the future. Two possibilities come to mind. The first bears on a threatening apostasy, the event that Paul wrote about in his second letter to his Thessalonian converts. There, while discussing the timing of Jesus’s Second Coming, he pled, “Let no one deceive you by any means, because that day [of Christ’s return] will not come until the apostasy comes first” (2 Thessalonians 2:3 Wayment). On another occasion, when speaking to his friends from Ephesus about the future of their branch, Luke recorded Paul saying, “I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29). Hence, Paul did not expect the Church to survive.³⁰ Similarly, Jesus’s parable of the tares envisioned the tares mixed in with the wheat and not separated out until the end, the harvest—a bleak prospect for the future of the wheat field, or the Church.³¹

The other possibility has to do with the last great struggle with the devil and his minions. Chapter 12 of the book of Revelation paints a picture of a great red dragon whose “tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth.” There, they awaited the birth of a child to “a woman clothed

with the sun” (Revelation 12:1, 3–4). After the “man child . . . was caught up unto God, and to his throne . . . the woman fled into . . . a place prepared of God,” where she waited out a war in heaven (Revelation 12:5–7). In that war, “Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels.” At the end of the struggle, “the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world” (Revelation 12:7, 9). Modern scripture adds a bit more color for the future. We learn that “Michael, . . . even the archangel, shall gather together his armies, even the hosts of heaven.” On the other side, “the devil shall gather together his armies; even the hosts of hell, and shall come up to battle against Michael and his armies.” In the end, “the devil and his armies shall be cast away into their own place, that they shall not have power over the saints any more at all” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:112–114). Hallelujah!

Notes

- 1 See Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; 5:23.
- 2 Heinrich Schlier, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 9 vols., ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–1974), 3:682. See 2:11–18; 1 Corinthians 15:24.
- 3 Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22; Doctrine and Covenants 93:4.
- 4 Galatians 1:15; also Isaiah 49:5; 1 Corinthians 2:7; 1 Peter 1:1–2; 2:8.
- 5 See Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 2:38.
- 6 Hebrews 2:8 New International Version; see 1 Corinthians 15:24; Revelation 20:10; 2 Nephi 9:16; Doctrine and Covenants 88:112–114.
- 7 For *ek pisteōs*, see Romans 1:17; 3:30; 5:1; 10:6; Galatians 3:8, 11, 12, 22. For *dia pisteōs*, see Romans 3:22, 25, 31; 2 Corinthians 5:7.
- 8 Romans 3:28; 4:2; Galatians 2:16.
- 9 Romans 3:20–22; 4:5–6, 24; 9:30–32; 10:3–9; 1 Corinthians 15:11; Galatians 3:6–12.
- 10 Genesis 15:6; see Romans 4:3; Gerhard Delling, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 6:310.
- 11 Luke 4:18; see Isaiah 61:1; Doctrine and Covenants 138:18, 30–31.
- 12 Ephesians 1:2, 6, 7; 2:5, 7, 8; 3:2, 7, 8; 4:7, 29; 6:24.
- 13 Doctrine and Covenants 6:13; see Romans 5:14–17; 6:23; Doctrine and Covenants 14:7.
- 14 Walther Zimmerli, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 9:373, 374, 376, 378; Brent J. Schmidt, *Relational Grace: The Reciprocal and Binding Covenant of Charis* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 87–114.
- 15 See Acts 4:13, “perceived”; 10:34, “perceive”; 25:25, “found.” Gerhard Delling, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 4:10.
- 16 Acts 9:1–17; 22:3–15; 26:11–20.

- 17 See, for example, Acts 6:7; 13:8; 14:22; Romans 1:5; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Galatians 1:23.
- 18 See, for example, Genesis 2:3; Exodus 31:12–17; Hebrews 4:4.
- 19 Johannes Behm, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 4:901.
- 20 See 2 Thessalonians 3:7, 9; Hebrews 13:7; 3 John 1:11.
- 21 For references to imitating Paul, see 1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; for imitating the churches, see 1 Thessalonians 2:14; compare Hebrews 6:12; 1 Peter 3:13.
- 22 Wilhelm Michaelis, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 4:671–673.
- 23 Michaelis, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 4:671.
- 24 See Philippians 3:21, “Like unto his glorious body;” 1 John 3:2, “We shall be like him;” 3 Nephi 27:27, “Even as I am;” Moroni 7:48, “We shall be like him.”
- 25 Eduard Schweizer, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 7:1078–1079.
- 26 Gottlob Schrenk, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3:58.
- 27 Romans 12:2 Wayment; Schrenk, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3:57; see Colossians 1:9.
- 28 Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1989), §13.83.
- 29 Matthew 8:12; 22:13; Alma 40:13; Doctrine and Covenants 101:90–91; 133:73.
- 30 See 2 Corinthians 1:8; 2 Timothy 1:15; 1 John 2:18–19; 4:1–3.
- 31 Matthew 13:24–30; John W. Welch, “Modern Revelation and the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares: A Guide to Research about the Apostasy,” in *Early Christians in Disarray: Contemporary LDS Perspectives on the Christian Apostasy*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2005), 101–132.

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