



Should we speak of a “letter” from Paul? The letter to the Romans was already for the most part, a theme on faith and salvation. Here it is even more so: no news, no personal message for a particular community, but once more a lengthy dwelling on world salvation. It was, doubtless, destined for the Churches of the Ephesus area.

Why the world, what is happening to humanity? Every day the same question confronts us with more insistence, in the measure that recent years have seen mass movements on the part of very diverse peoples. Even those eager to dominate know they can no longer do so unless they speak for the majority. Where is salvation for humanity? What is its future? Paul answers from his prison in Rome. As we know from Acts (28:16 and 30), Paul was prisoner in Rome during the sixties. In this capital of the only world known to the West, he had ample leisure to evaluate the doctrines then circulating throughout the Roman Empire. They came from the Middle East where they were of special concern for the Christians in the region of Ephesus. Just as other religions claimed to

offer a universal way of salvation, they offered Christ, as the only savior of the one humanity.

This letter to the Ephesians seems to have been written after the one to the Colossians. Paul again takes up and develops God’s plan that he must have understood through a revelation. The world was created for humankind to enable it to emerge as the New Human, one family in Christ. All will find themselves, each one in place, around a person capable of welcoming all, each in his own fullness.

Some people think the letter to the Ephesians is not Paul’s: how could he speak in an impersonal way to a community where he had worked for more than two years, approximately from 55 to 57 AD? As we have said, the letter must have been addressed, not only to the Christians of Ephesus, but more widely to the communities of the valley of Lycus: Hierapolis, Laodicea (Col 4:13 and 16) and Colossus which had been evangelized by Paul’s companions, in particular by Epaphras (Col 1:7).

Others think that the questions raised are more suited to a time later than Paul’s: like the letters of Titus and Timothy, this would be his only in a very broad sense. When one is aware of the very low level of Christian literature, immediately after the death of the apostles, it is difficult to accept that a letter of such theological certitude and of such doctrinal worth could have matured in someone other than Paul, even if he had left the writing of it to one of his disciples, Tychicus (Eph 6:21) or Timothy (Col 1:1).

- Rom 1:1
Acts 9:13
Gal 3:14
Jn 17:24
1P 1:20
Jn 1:12
Rom 8:29
1Jn 3:1
- 1** ¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
to the saints in Ephesus, to you who share Christian faith:
²receive grace and peace from God our Father and from Jesus the Lord.
- ³Blessed be God, the Father of Christ Jesus our Lord,
who in Christ has blessed us from heaven with every spiritual blessing.
- ⁴God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world
to be holy and without sin in his presence.
- ⁵From eternity he destined us in love
to be his adopted sons and daughters through Christ Jesus,
thus fulfilling his free and generous will.
This goal suited him:
⁶that his loving-kindness which he granted us in his Beloved
might finally receive all glory and praise.
- Rom 3:24
Col 1:13
⁷For in Christ we obtain freedom, sealed by his blood,
and have the forgiveness of sins.
In this appears the greatness of his grace,
⁸which he lavished on us.

In all wisdom and understanding,

• **1.3** This first page of the letter to the Ephesians is the best comprehensive expression of the Christian mystery in the Bible. It also serves to balance Paul's great presentation in his letter to the Romans, which could appear to center God's work in the tragedy of sinful humanity. The Letter to the Ephesians, like the Gospel of John, speaks of a re-creation of the world whereas the Letter to the Romans used more juridical terms: debt and reparation for sin.

Blessed be God! Usually Paul starts his letters with praise and thanksgiving. Here, however, the prayer is unusually lengthy: Paul gives thanks and at the same time proclaims God's *mysterious plan*, which he understood through a revelation (3:3).

His mysterious design (v. 9). Actually Paul says: *this mystery*; this term designated at the time a decision or a secret doctrine. Here Paul speaks of the plan of God the Creator: a plan rooted in the mystery of the three divine Persons. We know that from God the Father proceed the Son and the Spirit, and from him they receive his very divinity, the three being only one God. Besides this communication and this effusion of life in God, *before the creation of the world*, God the Father wished to communicate his riches, beyond himself, to created beings. It is there that we have the beginning of all human history. God willed that *sons and daughters* (v. 5) multiply around his only Son and in him, be capable of receiving his Spirit and returning it to him. They would return to him at the end of history, forming one body (v. 10).

God chose us in Christ (v. 4). Note the expression *in Christ* on which we have commented in 1 Cor 1:4. Every creature comes from God through his Son in whom God contemplates his own riches, and on whom he pours his

love. We are as God has loved us, and we are in him, in some way, from the beginning.

In creating us free, God knows that our freedom is fragile: it will be difficult for us to give him a filial response. How can we return to God, at the heart of his mystery, without dying to ourselves? All history must necessarily be a continual death and resurrection, for nations as for persons. So Divine Wisdom foresaw that the Son would be in our midst, with his cross and his resurrection, to show us the love of the Father who has called us (v. 5). And of course, wherever the Son is, the Spirit will be given (vv. 7 and 13).

In Christ we obtain freedom, sealed by his blood (v. 7). This does not mean that Christ shed his blood to make amends to his Father offended by sin, as if God were resentful as we often are, and as if his dignity were offended. Paul is referring to a biblical law: the emancipation of slaves used to be signed in blood (Ex 21:6).

Sealed with the Spirit (v. 13). The Jews were branded, "sealed" in the flesh by the circumcision ritual that showed they belonged to God. Christians, on the other hand, had received the Holy Spirit who acted in them: from the Spirit come faith, hope and love, the many forms of service, the gift of knowledge, miracles and healings. These gifts are the most obvious proof that they have become children of God. These gifts are only a foretaste of all the marvels that God has in store for us.

Paul distinguishes something like two insights: God's plan in eternity (vv. 1-10) and its realization in time (vv. 11-14). The last two stanzas correspond to two stages in sacred history:

– *We have been chosen and called* (v. 11). Paul speaks for himself and in the name of the Jewish people chosen to be the people of God.

⁹ God has made known to us his mysterious design,
in accordance with his loving-kindness in Christ.

Rom
16:25

¹⁰ In him and under him God wanted to unite,
when the fullness of time had come,
everything in heaven and on earth.

Mk
1:15
Gal
4:4
Col
1:16

¹¹ By a decree of Him who disposes all things
according to his own plan and decision
we, the Jews, have been chosen and called

Dt
7:6

¹² and we were awaiting the Messiah,
for the praise of his glory.

Is
46:10

¹³ You, on hearing the word of truth,
the Gospel that saves you,
have believed in him.

1Thes
2:13
Acts
2:33
Rom
5:5
2Cor
1:22

And, as promised, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit,

¹⁴ the first pledge of what we shall receive,
on the way to our deliverance as a people of God,
for the praise of his glory.

Rom
5:5

God has put all things under the feet of Christ

Col 1:9 • ¹⁵ I have been told of your faith and
your affection towards all the believers,
¹⁶ so I always give thanks to God, re-
membering you in my prayers.

¹⁷ May the God of Christ Jesus our
Lord, the Father of Glory, reveal himself
to you and give you a spirit of wisdom
and revelation, that you may know
him.

Jn
17:3
1 Jn
5:20

¹⁸ May he enlighten your inner vision,

– *You now...* (v. 13). Here Paul means the pagan people like the Ephesians, whom he is addressing. And so, the fullness of time had come, that is to say the time of the Gospel proclaimed to the entire world so that everyone could receive the gifts of the Spirit.

This page clarifies some essential points of faith.

From eternity he destined us in love (v. 5). Here we recognize what Paul has affirmed in Romans 8:29-30. We cannot omit the word “predestination.” Many have used this word in the past in a different way from Paul’s. While Paul shows the Father’s decision to pour on created sons and daughters the infinite love which is lived within God, these preachers later spoke of a God who decides freely (and even capriciously) who will, and who will not, be saved. On this subject see “PREDESTINATION” in Romans 9.

It is impossible for us to understand how we can be free if we are known by God in eternity. It is not for that reason that we should share the doubts and anguish of those who believe they are subjected to a destiny or a fearsome “will of God.” In reality, we are “subject” to love and blessings (3) that await our response (see com. on Rom 9).

Paul does not speak of condemnation of anyone: he only affirms that God gives proof of a special love for those he calls to become members of Christ.

Many Christians are shocked when told they

have received more than others, that in no other place have people been gifted with truth as they have, and they think: would it not be more honest and more humble to accept that all religions have their own truth? Yes, in a way all have some truth, but to doubt this unique grace that is to know God in Christ, is to deny the entire revelation of the Bible. See on this subject the note “The three sayings of God” in Genesis 12.

God chose us in Christ (v. 4). Many Christian authors have spoken as if, in the beginning, God created man without considering his possible fall and that Christ only came to save the lost sinner. This is not what Paul says here: from the beginning the coming of Christ and the gift of the Spirit together with the laws of life and the course of history are mysteriously linked with the order existing in God himself.

The Beloved (v. 6) is always the first for God and for us the desire to be “saved” cannot be the basis of our faith. It would be just as egoistic as practicing one’s religion in order to enjoy good health. The Son has revealed to us the Glory of the Father and how he returned to the Father. He wished to draw us out of our egoism, even our religious egoism (Jn 17 and Phil 2:9).

• 15. *I have been told of your faith and your affection.* Paul delights in the faith of the Ephesians but, above all, he prays they may have hope that must be the source of their dynamism. He describes the stages of hope this way: *to know the Father; to appreciate the inheri-*

that you may appreciate the things we hope for, since we were called by God.

May you know how great is the inheritance, the glory, God sets apart for his saints;

¹⁹ may you understand with what extraordinary power he acts in favor of us who believe.

²⁰ He revealed his almighty power in Christ when he raised him from the

dead and had him sit at his right hand in heaven, ²¹ far above all rule, power, authority, dominion, or any other supernatural force that could be named, not only in this world but in the world to come as well.

²² Thus has God put all things under the feet of Christ and set him above all things, as head of the Church ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

By grace you have been saved!

2 ¹ You were dead through the faults and sins. ² Once you lived through them according to this world

and followed the Sovereign Ruler who reigns between heaven and earth and who goes on working in those who resist the faith. ³ All of us belonged to them at one time and we followed human greed; we obeyed the urges of our human nature and consented to its desires. By ourselves, we went straight to the judgment like the rest of humankind.

⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, revealed his immense love. ⁵ As we were dead through our sins, he gave us life with Christ. By grace you have been saved! ⁶ And he raised us to life with Christ, giving us a place with him in heaven.

⁷ In showing us such kindness in Christ Jesus, God willed to reveal and unfold in the coming ages the extraordinary riches of his grace. ⁸ By the grace of God you have been saved through faith. This has not come from you: it is God's gift. ⁹ This was not the result of your works, so you are not to feel proud. ¹⁰ What we are is God's

2Cor
4:4
Col
2:13

Ex
34:6

Rom
5:8
2Tim
2:12

2Cor
5:17

tance set apart for his saints; to understand the power of God to bring us to the realization of these hopes.

It is this hope that cracked open the immobility of ancient societies. Paul lived in a world where hope was considered an illness. Any project to transform humanity was taken as an illusion, and so the hopes of a nascent science were quickly smothered. Believers, on the contrary, lived the experience of a resurrection. In Christian countries appeared the certainty of a common destiny of humanity (the word "humanity" was non-existent at the time). People were beginning to be seen as persons in a truer way and it was this that set history in motion, never to return. How astonishing to see in our world so many Christians who believe, but who have very little hope: are they not the ones who carry the hope of the world?

Far above all power (v. 21). In Paul's days, neither Jews nor Christians doubted that the world was governed by supernatural powers, "angels." They called them: *Rulers, Powers, Authorities, Dominion*, and Paul was saying to them: all these Powers are inferior to Christ. In our days we express ourselves differently. Nevertheless, we see the universe subject to the laws of nature, to the forces of matter and of life. It is also subject to obscure forces: collective prejudices, vice and fanaticism. These ruled the world, preventing the emergence of humanity, until the coming of Christ: see Gal 3:23.

God has put all things under the feet of Christ (v. 22). This means the same as the words of our creed: "Jesus is seated at the right hand of God." It means that in rising, Christ, the God-Human became the First in the universe. *All things under his feet* except humankind.

Paul adds: "He made him *head of the Church*." Christ acts differently in two areas: in the world, where he is the invisible center in charge; in the Church, of which he is the head, where he can show the riches of his Spirit.

• **2.1** The path of humans without Christ leads to death.

We obeyed the urges of our human nature and consented to its desires (v. 3). There is no need to seek a clearer affirmation of what we call original sin. Paul does not speak of a fault committed before our personal sins, and in addition to the sins we are responsible for. It is a flaw easily seen in human condition and in all our acts; it is the liabilities of our life insofar as God has not taken us in hand.

The account of Genesis (chaps. 2–3) has placed in the past this "original" sin, as well as creation. It is a way of speaking proper to Hebrew culture. In fact both our creation by God (v. 10) and our revolt against him are a part of our daily reality.

He raised us to life with Christ (v. 6). Actually an authentic conversion is experienced as a resurrection. Paul is saying more: nothing can

work. He has created us in Christ Jesus for the good works he has prepared that we should devote ourselves to them.

Christ is our Peace

Col 2:11 • ¹¹ Remember that you were pagans even in your flesh and the Jews, who call themselves Circumcised (because of a surgical circumcision), called you Uncircumcised. ¹² At that time you were without Christ, you did not belong to the community of Israel; the covenants of God and his promises were not for you; you had no hope and were without God in this world. ¹³ But now, in Christ Jesus and by his blood, you who were once far off have come near.

Is 9:5 ¹⁴ For Christ is our peace, he who has made the two peoples one, ¹⁵ destroying in his own flesh the wall – the

hatred – which separated us. He abolished the Law with its commands and precepts. He made peace in uniting the two peoples in him, creating out of the two one New Man. ¹⁶ He destroyed hatred and reconciled us both to God through the cross, making the two one body.

¹⁷ He came to proclaim peace; peace to you who were far off, peace to the Jews who were near. ¹⁸ Through him we – the two peoples – approach the Father in one Spirit.

¹⁹ Now you are no longer strangers or guests, but fellow citizens of the holy people: you are of the household of God. You are the house ²⁰ whose foundations are the apostles and prophets, and whose cornerstone is Christ Jesus. ²¹ In him the whole structure is joined together and rises to be a holy temple

stop God's merciful plan. He sees beyond time and has already raised us with Christ. We are seated with him in heaven, that is to say, assured of victory.

• 11. Another aspect of the human condition without Christ: death goes hand in hand with divisions. Before Christ, humanity was divided and people did not know our common Father. Since they were not mature enough for a quick unification in the true faith, God took that into account when he began to prepare for Christ's coming. He chose a people and to avoid their being contaminated by the errors of the pagans, he separated them through a law that forbade their living together with other peoples (see Mk 7: 14 and Acts 10: 1). So there was in the Jerusalem Temple, *far* from the Sanctuary, a patio open to the pagans and another one, *near* the Sanctuary reserved for the Jews, and a *wall* between the two. There came a time when this dividing line became a sign of all the barriers that Christ was going to destroy.

He taught them to share life with non-Jews, forbidden until then. Christ, put on the cross by Jews and pagans, overcomes the hatred of all by a love that forgives and, once risen, gathers all people to himself.

Thus, just as the cross is made of two pieces, one vertical, towards heaven and the other, horizontal, towards the earth, so peace goes in two directions: towards God and towards others. *He has made the two peoples one... and reconciled us both to God.* These are the two sides of only one thing, because human violence is the other expression of our inability to meet God.

Christ *united them*, that is to say, whether we

like it or not, the Gospel will destroy all differences between people. No matter how much segregation emerges in our societies, our laws and our institutions will collapse perhaps through violence, but better by being discredited through the sacrifices of their victims.

In one Spirit. It is only through the Spirit that each one has communion with others. Often, unity among people means one party, one ideology, one religion. Imposed order destroys both the one who accepts it and the one capable of silencing his adversaries.

Unity in the Church is not uniformity: the believers are not of one mold. It is not a question of having the same options regarding human problems; we have the right to differ in our view of faith provided that we accept all that the Credo contains. The Spirit enables each person to be true to himself and to continue "in communion" with the community. This is how the "new creature" is born: not as the work of politics or of any ideology, but as the work of God, since we are dealing with a *new creation* as Paul says.

You are of the household of God. In biblical language this means: to belong to God's family. From there, Paul moves on to another image: *you are the household*, namely, the true temple of God. The community of believers form the temple, or better, is being transformed into the temple of God.

This imposing vision of the Church and our unity in the Church will perhaps astonish many Christians of today who are usually more aware of their responsibilities towards the world than towards our antiquated Church. Yet, of what Spirit shall we be bearers, and shall we do this work if we are not supported by a community?

Ezk
37:1
2Cor
5:17

Is
52:7
57:19

Phil
3:20
Heb
12:22

Mt
16:18
1Cor
3:9
Rev
21:14

Is
28:16
1 P
2:5

Jn
2:21
1Cor
3:16
2Cor
6:16
in the Lord. ²²In him you too are being built to become the spiritual sanctuary of God.

God's inheritance is for all

4:1
Col
1:24
Gal
1:12
3 • ¹For this reason I, Paul, came to be the prisoner of Christ for you, the non-Jews. ²You may have heard of the graces God bestowed on me for your sake. ³By a revelation he gave me the knowledge of his mysterious design, as I have explained in a few words. ⁴On reading them you will have some idea of how I understand the mystery of Christ.

Rom
16:25
Col
1:25
⁵This mystery was not made known to past generations but only now, through revelations given to holy apostles and prophets. ⁶Now the non-Jewish people share the Inheritance; in Christ Jesus the non-Jews are incorporated and are to enjoy the Promise.

This is the Good News ⁷of which I have become minister by a gift of God, a grace he gave me, when his power worked in me.

1Cor
15:9
1Tim
1:15
⁸This grace was given to me, the least among all the holy ones: to an-

nounce to the pagan nations the immeasurable riches of Christ ⁹and to make clear to all how the mystery, hidden from the beginning in God, the Creator of all things, is to be fulfilled.

¹⁰Even the heavenly forces and powers will now discover through the Church the wisdom of God in its manifold expression, as the plan is being fulfilled ¹¹which God designed from the beginning in Christ Jesus, our Lord. ¹²In him we receive boldness and confidence to approach God.

¹³So I ask you not to be discouraged at seeing the trials I endure for you, but rather to feel proud because of them.

• ¹⁴And now I kneel in the presence of the Father ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth has received its name.

¹⁶May he strengthen in you the inner self through his Spirit, according to the riches of his glory;

¹⁷may Christ dwell in your hearts through faith;

may you be rooted and founded in love.

Solidarity with those who share our options and our culture cannot replace participation in the Christian community. There are probably many things in the Christian community we are not happy with. However, it would be a bad sign if we were unable to recognize in it the truth that is missing in our non-Christian friends, and without which we would lose our reason for living.

• **3.1 Prisoner of Christ.** Paul writes this letter from his prison in Rome, but he does not say: prisoner "for the cause" of Christ. He is prisoner of Christ, for he cannot escape from Christ's continual hold on him, nor from the apostolate that God has destined for him (1 Cor 9:16).

Paul emphasizes what he has meditated on in jail, what seems most new in the work of Christ: this is the "mystery," or God's plan calling all people to become a single body, without any racial distinctions. Jesus proclaimed this equality (Mt 20), but the early Christians needed several divine interventions before they were convinced (Acts 10).

The heavenly forces... (v. 10): see commentary on Gal 3:23 and Eph 1:21. We would not be distorting Paul's thinking by saying that multinational directors, presidents and the great of

this world are going to discover the true face of God, who manifests his glory in his poor and his saints (2 Thes 1:10), through the Church.

How fitting it would be to also express in poetry the wonderment of all nature, in discovering what God's power has achieved after billions of years. Paul believes he is approaching the end, and we as well in this century where events move faster and faster, and we discover every day new signs of human awareness at a world level.

• 14. *And now I kneel...* without further delay. Paul moves from his presentation to prayer. Such is the way of the interior person (v. 16) who is not satisfied with thinking about God or talking about him as if he were an object. The Spirit preserves in him the awareness of this Presence that gives him life. As St. Teresa said: "I carry the heart of my God and the God of my heart everywhere."

The Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth has received its name (v. 15). Our time has greatly devalued "the Father" with the obsession of an authority that would smother the personality of its children. This is not Paul's way: he marvels before the One who alone is from all eternity. The Father is the source of the divine being, from him comes the

Rom
11:33
1Cor
2:7
1P
1:12
Heb
4:16
10:19

1:17
Mt
11:25

Jn
14:23
Rom
8:11

Col 2:2
1Cor 13
13
1Cor 13
Col 2:9
18 All of this so that you may understand with all the holy ones the width, the length, the height and the depth – in a word, 19 that you may know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge, that you may be filled and reach the fullness of God.

20 Glory to God who shows his power in us and can do much more than we could ask or imagine; 21 glory to him in the Church and in Christ Jesus through all generations for ever and ever. Amen.

We shall become the perfect creation

Phil 1:27
4 • 1 Therefore I, the prisoner of Christ, invite you to live the vocation you have received. 2 Be humble, kind, patient, and bear with one another in love.

3 Make every effort to keep among you the unity of Spirit through bonds of peace. 4 Let there be one body and one spirit, for God, in calling you, gave the same Spirit to all. 5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism. 6 One God, the Father of

all, who is above all and works through all and is in all. 1Cor 12:4

7 But to each of us divine grace is given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it is said: *When he ascended to the heights, he brought captives and gave his gifts to people.* Ps 68:19

9 *He ascended*, what does it mean but that he had also descended to the lower parts of the world? 10 He himself who went down, then ascended far above all the heavens to fill all things. 11 As for his gifts, to some he gave to be apostles, to others prophets, or even evangelists, or pastors and teachers. Jn 3:13
Phil 2:7
1P 3:19

12 So he prepared those who belong to him for the ministry, in order to build up the Body of Christ, 13 until we are all united in the same faith and knowledge of the Son of God. Thus we shall become the perfect Man, upon reaching maturity and sharing the fullness of Christ. 1Cor 12:28
14:26
Col 1:28

14 Then no longer shall we be like children tossed about by any wave or wind of doctrine, and deceived by the 1Cor 3:1
14:20

order and the mystery of the divine persons. From him the universe draws its riches. Paul, speaking of the common destiny of all peoples, recalls that each one of them, *every family*, has received *its name* from the Father, which means its identity and its dignity.

Certainly we must recognize that the word *Father* no longer has the same meaning as in Paul's time, when father was given a greater authority and respect. Once woman found her rightful place in the family and in society we are inclined to speak of "parents" rather than of "father." Yet it is not by chance that God revealed himself in a culture – that of the Hebrews – where God was a masculine figure. Indeed they had already passed the primitive culture in which the woman was the center of family and the religion subsequently gave highest place to a female divinity. Among the neighboring peoples gods and goddesses went together. So God could have revealed to them with diverse faces, but this he did not do. Even if the Bible states that in God are all the riches of paternal and maternal love (Is 49:14), it keeps to the word *Father*. In so doing it insists on the liberty and initiative of God in all that he does: the universe and we ourselves have not come from God as a spontaneous "emanation", as naturally born from the bosom of the all-powerful divinity. Everything was a lucid and creative decision.

Therefore, the family, with parental authority,

is the basis of society, and *fatherhood* is also seen in the Church: the succession of bishops, with the authority of the hierarchy not dependent on people's votes, is part of the divine order in the Church. A society which does not acknowledge fathers and which scorns marriage, as well as "spontaneous" churches, are devious structures.

The love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge (v. 19). Paul is certainly thinking of the love Christ has shown and continues to show him personally even in proportion to his trials. The knowledge and experience of this love surpasses all that could ever be imagined. We shall not find it through books and study or transcendental meditation. It will be freely given to us, on God's initiative, on the way of love of which Christ made himself the model and the center.

• 4.1 Here, Paul returns to an important problem in communities where the style was still very free, we might say very charismatic, since the community counted on the unpredictable action of the Spirit through the charisms of different members. It is necessary that all in their own vocation work for the building up of the one body. Paul enthusiastically names all that we have in common through Christ and the action of the Spirit. It is not merely a temple that is constructed (see chapter 2:19-22); it is the *Body*

cunning of people who drag them along into error. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we shall grow in every way towards him who is the head, Christ. ¹⁶ From him comes the growth of the whole body to which a network of joints gives order and cohesion, taking into account and making use of the function of each one. So the body builds itself in love.

Put on the new self

Rom 1:18-32 • ¹⁷ I say to you, then, and with insistence I advise you in the Lord: do not imitate the pagans who live an aimless kind of life. ¹⁸ Their understanding is in darkness and they remain in ignorance because of their blind conscience, very far from the life of God. ¹⁹ As a result of their corruption, they have abandoned themselves to sensuality and have eagerly given themselves to every kind of immorality.

Col 3:9 ²⁰ But it is not for this that you have followed Christ. ²¹ For I suppose that you heard of him and received his teaching which is seen in Jesus himself. Rom 12:2 ²² You must give up your former

way of living, the *old self*, whose deceitful desires bring self-destruction. ²³ Renew yourselves spiritually, from inside, ²⁴ and put on the *new self*, or *self* according to God, that is created in true righteousness and holiness.

²⁵ Therefore, give up lying; let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors for we are members of one another. ²⁶ *Be angry but do not sin*: do not let your anger last until the end of the day, ²⁷ lest you give the devil a foothold.

²⁸ Let the one who used to steal, steal no more, but busy himself working usefully with his hands so that he may have something to share with the needy. ²⁹ Do not let even one bad word come from your mouth, but only good words that will encourage when necessary and be helpful to those who hear.

³⁰ Do not sadden the Holy Spirit of God which you were marked with. It will be your distinctive mark on the day of salvation. ³¹ Do away with all quarreling, rage, anger, insults and every kind of malice: ³² be good and understanding, mutually forgiving one another as God forgave you in Christ.

Gen
1:26
Lk
1:75

Zec
8:16
Ps
4:5

Acts
20:34
1Thes
4:11

Jas
3:10

1Thes
5:19
Is
63:10

of Christ, of the *Perfect Man* the mature one, in which Christ expresses his fullness.

Jesus of Nazareth lived humbly until his death only once, but having been made the Head of humanity through his resurrection, he suffers everywhere; he works in every field of human activity; gives his life in every possible way; he gathers in himself every form of love, and lives the whole diversity of human existence in the person of his members.

Then, we will no longer be like children. Paul suggests that the Ephesians are still children, at least from time to time, when they allow themselves to be influenced by some trend of opinion. He invites them to become a mature community, capable of being led by the truth, and of building itself up through love. We too should ask ourselves if we have really gone beyond the time when the "faithful" constantly waited for others to think for them, guide them and push them.

• 17. *The old self and the new self.* This image of Paul opposes two kinds of life that co-exist in every society and in a certain sense, in each of us. Conversion has not installed us in a state of perfection; even if we are at peace with God in a very real sense (Rom 5:1) unity is not in us. We experience temptation and struggle; our decisions both small and great lead us in one of

two directions, either the old self hopelessly ruined and a slave of selfishness, or a person transfigured by love.

The self according to God. God created Man in his image, but the one who is truly this image is the risen Christ, conqueror of sin and of death. Here, as elsewhere in the Bible, Man is both Christ and humanity at the same time, and it is each one of us at our place in the "Body." All that we admire in Christ is also for our benefit.

The white garment that adults put on at baptism denotes the change of life that they are beginning. This renewal may also take place after a retreat or when God unexpectedly makes us abandon a routine Christian life devoid of ambition. Then we *put on Christ* with rediscovered faith.

Paul immediately points out some of the moral requirements of this daily renewal: frankness, sobriety, cleanliness of language and imagination. Christian faith does not allow us to live in a carefree way, as did the oriental religions in the time of Paul. There much was said about renaissance and knowledge of mysteries, but nothing about the slavery of sex and the evil of social life.

Old self, new self correspond with other expressions of Paul: "according to the flesh" or "according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:5); "children of darkness" or "children of light" (Eph 5:8);

Imitate God

5 • ¹As most beloved children of God, strive to imitate him. ²Follow the way of love, the example of Christ who loved you. He gave himself up for us and became the offering and sacrificial victim whose fragrance rises to God. ³And since you are holy, there must not be among you even a hint of sexual immorality or greed, or any kind of impurity: these should not be named among you. ⁴So too for scandalous words, nonsense and foolishness, which are not fitting; instead offer thanksgiving to God.

⁵Know this: no depraved, impure or covetous person who serves the god 'Money' shall have part in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for these are the sins which God is about to condemn in people who do not obey. ⁷Do not associate with such people.

⁸You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Behave as children of light; ⁹the fruits of light are kindness, justice and truth in every form.

¹⁰You yourselves search out what pleases the Lord, ¹¹and take no part in

Mt 5:48

5:25

Ps 40:7

1 Jn 3:16

1 Cor 6:9

Heb 13:4

Col 3:6

2 Cor 4:6

6:14

works of darkness that are of no benefit; expose them instead. ¹²Indeed it is a shame even to speak of what those people do in secret, ¹³but as soon as it is exposed to the light, everything becomes clear; and what is unmasked, becomes clear through light. ¹⁴Therefore it is said:

“Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead that the light of Christ may shine on you.”

¹⁵Pay attention to how you behave. Do not live as the unwise do, but as responsible persons. ¹⁶Try to make good use of the present time, because these days are evil. ¹⁷So do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is.

¹⁸Do not get drunk: wine leads to levity; but be filled with the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Gather together to pray with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and celebrate the Lord in your heart, ²⁰giving thanks to God the Father in the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord, always and for everything.

Husbands, love your wives

• ²¹Let all kinds of submission to one

“slaves of sin” or “persons free in Christ” (Gal 5:1).

Do not sadden the Holy Spirit. It is easy to understand this expression if we think of the sadness we feel each time we reject a good idea, a desire to do better: sadness of the “Holy Spirit” who suggested it in the first place, sadness of our own spirit, for it knows what we have lost.

• **5.1** Here are a few elements of a new way to live, as was already shown in the previous verses.

To imitate God (Rom 5:6-11) who loves everyone, the good and the bad (Mt 5:48). In a more tangible way we have a model in Christ, the Son of God, who gave himself out of love for us, as the way, the light and life.

Reject all that is shameful (v. 12) and that can only be done in the dark. It is true that much that was shameful has become normal today for many people: will it be so for a person who often seeks light and looks for it in the face in Christ? The witness of one Christian who lives in light (and still more of a community) is enough to condemn what has been taken as normal (v. 13).

To be more sensible and responsible in our lives. *Because these days are evil* (v. 16): that

means that if we are unable to judge, choose, make a personal decision, the very current of daily events will keep us in mediocrity or will lead us to evil. Everything changes when a believer, a couple, a group “awakens” and takes daily or weekly time out to discover what is God’s will for them, in the time and circumstances in which they live.

Do not get drunk (v. 18)! We need stimulants; there is nothing wrong in experiencing a sort of trance to the point of feeling happy and relaxed when ice is broken and tongues untied. The Bible has praise for wine. It is impossible, however, to experience at the same time the ecstasy that comes from the spirit and that which is the effect of alcohol, drugs and dangerous diversions. We must constantly make choices.

Sing and celebrate the Lord in your heart, giving thanks (v. 19)! Experience the comfort of the Spirit and find it in a community gathering.

• **21.** In the passage 5:21–6:9, Paul more or less repeats what he wrote in the letter to the Colossians (3:18–4:1). Here he has so much on his mind on the role of Christ as head of redeemed humanity that he will develop in an unexpected way the meaning of marriage.

Jn 3:20

Is 26:19

60:1

Col 3:3

1 Thes 5:18

1 P 5:5

another become obedience to Christ.
²²So wives to their husbands: as to the Lord.

^{1Cor 11:3} ²³The husband is the head of his wife, as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, of whom he is also the Savior. ²⁴And as the Church submits to Christ, so let a wife submit in everything to her husband.

²⁵As for you, husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her. ²⁶He washed her and made her holy by baptism in the Word. ²⁷As he wanted a radiant Church without stain or wrinkle or any blemish, but holy and blameless, he himself had to prepare and present her to himself.

²⁸In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they love their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹And no one has ever hated

his body; he feeds and takes care of it. That is just what Christ does for the Church, ³⁰because we are members of his body.

³¹Scripture says: *Because of this a man shall leave his father and mother to be united with his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.* ³²This is a very great mystery, and I refer to Christ and the Church. ³³As for you, let each one love his wife as himself, and let the wife respect her husband.

Children, parents, servants and masters

6 ¹Children, obey your parents for this is right: ²*Honor your father and your mother.* And this is the first commandment that has promise: ³*that you may be happy and enjoy long life in the land.* ⁴And you, fathers, do not make rebels of your children, but educate them by correction and instruction which the Lord may inspire.

So wives to their husbands (v. 22). It is not Paul who in the name of God demands that the wife be submissive: it is the society of the time that required it. And Paul says: "Let all kinds of submission become obedience to Christ."

So, even if Paul's way of speaking reflects the culture of his day with regard to marriage, there is no reason to scorn his teaching in support of feminism. There have been and there are different cultural models regarding the relationship between husband and wife. In our time the models differ in the economically developed countries from those of the Third World, for the middle and lower classes. What is still better, it is each couple that should find its own balance and the taking of initiatives according to the natural authority and the capacity of each one.

In any case, whether one partner makes a decision or follows it, neither will feel superior or inferior since the ideal for both is to "make oneself slave" (Mk 9:35). Paul says: *The husband is the head* but being the head is not the same as being the boss. Think of Christ: he has authority since he is the truth of God (which the husband is not to his wife); Paul however prefers to show him as the savior of his partner baptized humanity.

Paul points out what is essential in conjugal love when he recalls the word of Scripture: *a man shall leave...* (v. 31). He applies this word to the union of God with humanity in Christ, the Beloved (Mk 2:19). For marriage contains a mystery, that is a divine treasure which cannot be understood before the coming of Christ. When it is said that marriage is a "sacrament," that does not mean primarily that there is a Church cer-

emony: it signifies that through marriage and the couples who live a life of love "according to Christ," the mystery of the love of God is manifested among humankind. That is, in our midst, the sign of a covenant that God made with humanity, as the husband with his wife: a covenant of love, fidelity, fruitfulness.

He gave himself up for her. Christ finds us in our sins and he takes charge of us, even to the ultimate consequences: he gives his life to purify us. This is the way to show the main quality of Christian love, which is faithfulness. The self-gift of the spouse is permanent and from that moment on, each will do his best to save the other, that is, to help the other grow and be better. The perfect couple is not the one that lives without problems and accepts mediocrity, but the two who compel each other to give their best.

He washed her by the baptism in the Word (see James 1:18-21 and Jn 15:3). If the ritual of baptism is important, what is even more important is for us to welcome the Word of God that gives us life.

Many young people flee marriage, partly because they fear a risk (total fidelity is indeed a way of losing one's life: Mk 8:35), partly because they consider that their love is their own business. Paul shows that Christ's love for us, however personal it may be, never forgets his love for all those who make up his body. It is an example: married Christians are invited to have their place in the transformation of the world through the radiation of their love and their service to others.

- **6.1** Paul reminds children that God asks for obedience, and parents that they must not

1:4
 1Cor
 6:11
 2Cor
 11:2
 Tit
 3:5
 Rev
 19:27
 21:2

1Cor
 12:12
 Gen
 2:24
 Mt
 19:5

Ex
 20:12
 Col
 3:20

Pro
 13:24

Col 3:22
Tit 2:9
1P 1:18
Rom 6:15

⁵ Servants, obey your masters of this world with fear and respect, with simplicity of heart, as if obeying Christ. ⁶ Do not serve only when you are watched or in order to please others, but become servants of Christ who do God's will with all your heart. ⁷ Work willingly, for the Lord and not for humans, mindful that the good each one has done, ⁸ whether servant or free, will be rewarded by the Lord.

⁹ And you, masters, deal with your servants in the same way, and do not threaten them, since you know that they and you have the same Lord who is in heaven, and he treats all fairly.

Be strong in the Lord

Col 4:7
2Cor 6:7
10:4

• ¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord with his energy and strength. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God to be able to resist the cunning of the devil. ¹² Our battle is not against human forces but against the rulers and authorities and their dark powers that govern this world. We are struggling against the spirits and supernatural forces of evil.

¹³ Therefore put on the whole armor of God, that in the evil day, you may resist and stand your ground, making

use of all your weapons. ¹⁴ Take truth as your belt, justice as your breastplate, ¹⁵ and zeal as your shoes to propagate the Gospel of peace. ¹⁶ Always hold in your hand the shield of faith to repel the flaming arrows of the devil. ¹⁷ Finally, use the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, that is, the Word of God.

¹⁸ Pray at all times as the Spirit inspires you. Keep watch, together with sustained prayer and supplication for all the holy ones. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, so that when I speak, I may be given words to proclaim bravely the mystery of the Gospel. ²⁰ Even when in chains I am an ambassador of God; may he give me the strength to speak as I should.

²¹ I also want you to know how I am and what I am doing. Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will tell you everything. ²² I am sending him precisely to give you news of us and comfort you all.

²³ May peace and love with faith from God the Father and from Christ Jesus the Lord, be with the brothers and sisters. ²⁴ And may his blessing be with all who love Christ Jesus, our Lord, with undying love.

Is 59:17
1Thes 5:8
Heb 4:12
Rev 1:16

Rom 15:30
Phil 1:14
2Cor 5:20

neglect their duty as educators (see commentary on Sirac 30:1-2). Parents have the difficult task of leading their children to true freedom, teaching them first to obey a law, to serve rather than be served, to share rather than demand. Later, they will show them how to follow the calls of the Spirit, well beyond what is considered good or bad all around them.

Paul reminds the slave of his nobility. Let him live without servility: this is the first step toward genuine liberation.

• 10. Paul has said what he had to say. What does his invitation to be strong mean, when he takes his examples from military life? Is it because he feels the Christians of Ephesus are not sufficiently strong? See verses 18-20: Paul invites them, without saying it, to compare their situation with his. Free or slaves, most of them were people of modest means of the cities near

Ephesus. Subjected for a long time to the Roman Empire that imposed peace on them, they were free of serious problems. They were not rich but they were able to content themselves with little. Under a Mediterranean sky they had abundant light and a friendly, natural environment. They found the faith at a time when it cost them little; what would they do the day the Empire became an obstacle and when suddenly they would be classed a bad lot, responsible for all that was wrong?

This is why Paul warns them: peace is only provisional, for the demon is waiting for his hour (11 and 16). Paul asks them to persevere in prayer: the only effective arms against evil are those that Christ has left us: truth, faith, the word of God... and if they believe they have found salvation, let them exert themselves to evangelize others.