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Until We All Attain the Mature Man: Mapping the Metaphors for Maturity in Ephesians Within Paul's Greco-Roman Context

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Abstract: One of the central metaphorical themes of Ephesians is maturity, expressed most memorably in 4:13. In this verse, the goal of the church is portrayed as the attainment of the “mature man” (εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον), the state of completion to which Christ’s corporate body is growing until it reaches “the measure of the stature of the fullness” of its head. Despite the clear origin of Paul’s metaphor in the realm of human development, minimal discussion has centered on how Paul’s contemporaries employed the phrase “mature man” (τέλειος ἀνὴρ) in relation to other developmental milestones along the commonly conceived life course in Greco-Roman antiquity, and what implications this might have for understanding where in the maturation process Paul would have plotted his implied readers. This investigation explores these contextual matters and then uses the results to cast light on related developmental imagery in the surrounding passages of Ephesians, including not only the human growth terminology in 4:12–16 but also the pedagogical rhetoric in 4:20–21, the allusion to the Roman *toga virilis* ceremony in 4:22–24, and the military analogy in 6:10–18. Collectively, this metaphorical imagery helps to identify the church’s current stature as that befitting of a young man who has recently come of age and located within the liminal phase of early male adulthood. Explicating the fullness of the maturity metaphor in Ephesians helps to illuminate the thematic coherency of the letter as well as how Paul sought to make his realized eschatology intelligible to his ancient readers.

Keywords: Ephesians; maturity; the life course; human development; new creation



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1. Introduction

In his 2010 award-winning book, *Practice Resurrection*, the late pastor-theologian Eugene Peterson explores the text of Ephesians in search of guidance on how contemporary Christians might “grow up in Christ”, rather than contenting themselves with merely being “born from above” (Peterson 2010, pp. 1–3). Such growth in Christ is possible, as the title of Peterson’s volume indicates, through *the practice of resurrection*,¹ an activity Peterson defines as “an intentional, deliberate decision to believe and participate in resurrection life, life out of death, life that trumps death, life that is the last word, Jesus life.”² As Peterson rightly observes, “Ephesians is a resurrection document. . . . The message of resurrection predominates throughout the letter” (Peterson 2010, p. 272). And according to Peterson, this is so not simply because Jesus’ resurrection is frequently announced in Paul’s discourse, but because throughout Ephesians, the apostle offers a sustained reflection on what it means to share in and live out God’s recreative, resurrection work.

Peterson, moreover, observes that in Ephesians, the concept of *resurrection* is closely associated with and programmatically illuminated by the metaphor of *maturation*. As Peterson notes, Paul is the one who “coined the growing up metaphor”, and this process of maturation consumes the very “agenda” of Ephesians.³ The metaphorical maturation

process, Peterson maintains, begins with individual regeneration (new birth), which takes place at conversion, and it continues until the believer reaches “mature manhood”, “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13).⁴ As Peterson explains, “First birth and then growth. Neither metaphor stands alone. Birth presupposes growth, but growth proceeds from birth” (Peterson 2010, p. 3). Peterson pieces together this process of maturation by drawing on various New Testament texts (e.g., John 3:3), and he routinely suggests what it means to mature in Christ by appealing to the experiences of “growing up” in our contemporary world, assuming as he does that the process intimated by Paul is marked by those same developmental milestones familiar to Peterson’s own readers.⁵

But does the Christian maturation process as presented in Ephesians unfold as Peterson supposes? Are “birth” and “growth” the only, or even the main, developmental concepts surfacing in Paul’s letter?⁶ And does the contextual index for maturity in Ephesians need to be reconsidered? It is the goal of this essay to show that while part of what holds Ephesians together as a coherent literary and theological work is its repeated use of metaphors for maturation, these metaphors are more pervasive than most modern exegetes are aware. They also work differently from the way many interpreters, such as Peterson, suppose, since the source domain of these metaphors is the human developmental process as conceived in the Greco-Roman world, which is quite different from that assumed in many modern Western societies.

Indeed, Ephesians is flooded with a multiplicity of images involving human development and bodily enhancement. In this letter, the multi-ethnic church is portrayed as a “new human” (2:15) and a “body” (2:16; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23, 30), which is undergoing tremendous growth until it attains “mature manhood” and possesses “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (4:12–13). In the meantime, individual believers are called to advance beyond spiritual infancy (4:14) now that they have “learned Christ”, have taken off “the old human”, and have “put on the new human” (4:20–24), which “renews” their minds and adorns them with Spirit-wrought virtues (4:25–5:21) and protective divine weaponry (6:10–18). The soteriological, cosmological, and ecclesial significance of these individual terms and texts has long been appreciated. Lacking, however, is a robust scholarly attempt to assemble these discrete images into a coherent portrait of Christian maturation.⁷

A clearer picture begins to emerge, however, once it is realized that this constellation of metaphors draws upon ancient conceptions of human development. While Paul’s contemporaries used an array of terms to construct their varied and nuanced versions of the human lifecycle, there nonetheless existed within the Greco-Roman world a basic shared understanding of the continuum according to which the average male citizen advanced from one life stage to another. For example, all males began life as a child and ended life as an old man. Further, the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood occurred in the mid to late teens, as determined by the male’s father or guardian. In the Roman world, this moment of coming of age was symbolized by the removal of the child’s *toga praetexta* and its replacement with the *toga virilis*—representing the boy’s attainment of adult citizenship, his right to join the army, and his right to marry. Despite having officially reached adulthood, however, full maturity—that is, the “mature man” (τέλειος ἀνὴρ)—was not considered to have been attained until 25–30 years of age, when he had fully grown facial hair, when he had developed muscle tone, and when he had ridden himself of the vices inherent to young manhood (e.g., νεανίας). Only at this time was the man admitted to the senate and eligible for public office.

Importantly, nearly all these developmental milestones are represented in some fashion within Paul’s metaphor-laden discourse in Ephesians and can be arranged to form a coherent account of Christian maturation. This essay will begin by examining the significance of the “mature man” (τέλειος ἀνὴρ) as a developmental milestone in the human

lifespan and then proceed to survey relevant aspects of the human life course in the Greco-Roman world, with the goal of illuminating the status and stereotypes of young manhood, in contrast to childhood and mature manhood. With this contextual data at our disposal, we will then map these ancient beliefs about human maturation onto the text of Ephesians in order to reconstruct the letter's implicit spiritual lifecycle continuum. We will argue that Paul deployed key developmental terminology within the letter in order to show that new life in Christ comprises a lengthy process for both the individual believer and the corporate church wherein they are intended to advance from a phase of spiritual childhood to early manhood to mature manhood. Indeed, Paul's original readers began life in Christ as children but were taught early to exchange the attire of the old human (with its associated mindset and conduct) for that befitting an adult, the new human, which constitutes a liminal phase wherein one is afforded the right to engage in spiritual combat as well as the resources to continue advancing towards full maturity. Thus, the essay will demonstrate that the key maturation milestones highlighted in various extra-biblical sources map strikingly well onto the Christian maturation process presented by Paul in Ephesians. Understanding how these images work together, then, is critical for appreciating the theological coherency of the letter and how Paul sought to make intelligible the coexistence of realized and unrealized dimensions to his eschatology.⁸

2. The Young Man and Mature Man in Greco-Roman Antiquity

While many ancient authors reflected upon the process of growing up and growing old, there was no unanimous account of the human life course in Greco-Roman antiquity.⁹ Aristotle divides human life into three stages: youth (νεότητος/οἱ νέοι), old age (γῆρας/οἱ πρεσβύτεροι), and what he calls “the prime” or “apex” of life (ἄκμῃς/οἱ ἀκμάζοντες), which in typical Aristotelian fashion is “the mean [μεταξύ] between . . . the other two [stages]” (Rhet. 1389a3–1390b14). Cicero (*Sen.* 10.33; cf. 20.76) offers a more nuanced version, dividing the human lifespan into four stages, which he refers to as childhood (*pueritia*), youth (*adulescentia/iuventa*), middle age (*constans aetas*), and old age (*senectus*). Horace (*Ars* 153–178) similarly divides the life course into four stages, correlating the respective periods to that of the child (*puer*), the beardless youth (*imberbis iuuenis*), the man (*virilis*), and the old man (*senex*). Others divide the typical lifespan into evenly distributed numerals. For example, Varro (according to Censorinus' *De die natali* 14.2) separates the life course into five stages, each (except the last) consisting of fifteen-year increments, namely children (*pueri*), adolescents (*adulescentes*), young men (*iuvenes*), seniors (*seniores*), and old men (*senes*).¹⁰

Regardless of the precise divisions of the human lifecycle articulated variously in the surviving literature from ancient Greece and Rome, almost all ancient authors identify at least four stages for the male citizen, which we will call (1) childhood, (2) youth/young adulthood/early manhood, (3) mature manhood, and (4) old age. The second and third stages will be our primary focus in this study. Not only did almost all the major voices from antiquity recognize adulthood to consist of multiple stages, but as we shall now demonstrate, the few extra-biblical sources that employ the phrase τέλειος ἄνθρωπος to refer to a “mature man” in the human developmental sense do so in writings that distinguish this phase of *full/mature* manhood from at least one preliminary phase of *initial/young* manhood.¹¹

2.1. Xenophon (c. 430–354 BCE)

We begin our survey with Xenophon, the Athenian historian, philosopher, and military leader whose treatise on the education and political strategy of Cyrus the Great (*Cyropaedia*) outlines the divisions of Persian society by age group, and in the process, this treatise

provides as much of a window into ancient Greek thought as that of the Achaemenids.¹² According to Xenophon, the Persian Empire divided its population of males into four segments—the boys (οἱ παῖδες), youths/young men (οἱ ἔφηβοι), the mature men (οἱ τέλειοι ἄνδρες), and the elders (οἱ γεράνιοι)—each having allocated to them a disparate part of the “so-called ‘Free Square’” (ἐλευθέρα ἀγορὰ καλουμένη, *Cyr.* 1.2.3), the location within the capital city where “each age” (ἐκάστη ἡλικία, 1.2.5) of male citizen was educated and trained, and where they carried out their public service.¹³ As Sarah Brown Ferrario explains, “The training of Persian citizens (for whom Xenophon uses the word *politai*, the same employed of the members of Greek poleis) by age-classes begins in childhood, and expectations continue into adult life, through military service and into old age (*Cyr.* 1.2.6–16).”¹⁴ As we shall see, in Xenophon’s elaborate reconstruction of the Persian constitution (πολιτεία, 1.2.15) we find a systematic arrangement of civic duties assigned to specific age groups, whereby the children are tasked primarily with learning, the youths/young men are tasked with further developing skills and virtue, the mature men deploy their education and skills to serve the state, and the old men utilize their wisdom and discernment variously for the public good.

The primary responsibility of Persian boys, Xenophon explains, is to be educated. According to Xenophon, “The boys go to school and spend their time in learning justice [οἱ μὲν δὴ παῖδες εἰς τὰ διδασκαλεῖα φοιτῶντες διάγουσι μακθάνοντες δικαιοσύνην]” (1.2.6). This form of legal and judicial training is then put to practice in civil cases, wherein the boys prosecute (δικάζω) one another for petty and criminal charges they are alleged to have committed (1.2.6–7). Beyond their juridical education, the boys are also taught to shoot a bow and to throw a spear, while also being trained in virtue. Special attention is given to “self-control” (σωφροσύνη), which is acquired as the boys obey (πειθεσθαι) their officers and exercise “self-restraint” (ἐγκράτεια, 1.2.8) with respect to diet.

Once the boys reach age sixteen or seventeen, “they are promoted from the class of boys and enrolled among the young men [τοὺς ἐφήβους]” (1.2.8). Because “this time of life, it seems, demands the most watchful care”, the young men devote their time to guarding the city (1.2.9). For this task, they are clothed “in light armour” (σὺν τοῖς γυμνητικῶς ὅπλοις, 1.2.4; 1.2.9), which helps them to develop further “their powers of self-control” (1.2.9). During the day, the young men spend their time either around the public buildings or accompanying the king as he hunts. Those who attend to the king “take bow and arrows and, in addition to the quiver, a sabre or bill in its scabbard; they carry along also a light shield and two spears, one to throw, the other to use in case of necessity in a hand-to-hand encounter” (1.2.9). The cost of these trips is paid by the public treasury because ultimately, they are an investment for the public good, as “the training it gives seems to be the best preparation for war itself [τὸν πόλεμον]” (1.2.9–10). Even those young men who remain home continue to hone their combat skills—“shooting with the bow and hurling the spear and practising all the other arts that they learned when they were boys, and they continually engage in contests of this kind with one another”—that is, when they are not called on to assist the officers (αἱ ἄρχαί), “whether for garrison duty or for arresting criminals or for hunting down robbers, or for any other service that demands strength or dispatch” (1.2.12). Public contests and prizes are routinely used to recognize and reward progression in skill, as each division seeks to obtain “the greatest number of the most expert, the most manly [ἀνδρικότατοι], and the best disciplined young men” (1.2.12). This, the young men do for ten years, at which time they are promoted to the class of mature men (1.2.9, 12).

By virtue of their prior training and current stature, the mature men (τέλειοι ἄνδρες) serve for twenty-five years “in any service that requires men who have already attained discretion and are still strong in body [τε ἤδη ἔργα ἐστὶ καὶ ἔτι δυναμένων]” (1.2.13). This, of course, includes military activity. Thus, whenever a military expedition is required,

“those who have been thus educated [πεπαιδευμένοι] take the field, no longer with bow and arrows, nor yet with spears, but with what are termed ‘weapons for close conflict’ [τὰ δὲ ἀγχέμαχα ὄπλα καλούμενα]—a corselet about their breast [θώρακά τε περὶ τοῖς στέρνοις], a round shield upon their left arm [γέρρον ἐν τῇ ἀριστερᾷ] . . . , and in their right hands a sabre [μάχαιραν] or bill” (1.2.13). While at home, the mature men are also those from whom the various officers are selected (αἱ ἄρχαί δὲ πᾶσαι ἐκ τούτων καθίστανται, 1.2.13).

When twenty-five years of public service are completed, the mature men graduate to the class of elders (οἱ γεραίτεροι, 1.2.13). The elders, however, “no longer perform military service outside their own country, but they remain at home and try all sorts of cases, both public and private. They try people indicted for capital offences also, and they elect all the officers” (1.2.14).

These four divisions (boys, youths/young men, mature men, and elders), however, are not unique to Persian administration, as they reflect the divisions recognized in Xenophon’s own experience living in Athens and Sparta. Nearing the end of his life, Xenophon recounts his own life course, which appears remarkably similar to the four stages he attributes to the Persians.

[W]hen I was a boy [παῖς], I think I plucked all the fruits that among boys [ἐν παισὶ] count for the best; when I became a youth [ῥῆβησα], I enjoyed what is accounted best among young men [τὰ ἐν νεανίσκοις]; and when I became a mature man [τέλειός τε ἀνὴρ], I had the best that men can have [γενόμενος τὰ ἐν ἀνδράσι]. And as time went on, it seemed to me that I recognized that my own strength [τὴν ἐμὴν δύναμιν] was always increasing [ἀεὶ συναυξανομένην] with my years, so that I never found my old age [γῆρας] growing any more feeble [ἀσθενέστερον γιγνόμενον] than my youth had been [τῆς ἐμῆς νεότητος]; and, so far as I know, there is nothing that I ever attempted or desired and yet failed to secure. (*Cyr.* 8.7.6)

Since Xenophon’s own developmental milestones map perfectly onto the life course outlined in the Persian constitution, one can assume that Xenophon’s basic four-phase lifespan was shared by many of his contemporaries in the Greco-Roman world, and that is in fact what we find (see, e.g., Cicero and Horace above). Moreover, Xenophon was not alone in differentiating between youth/young manhood and mature manhood. In fact, Plato, Polybius, and Philo each used the phrase τέλειος ἀνὴρ in similar ways to distinguish between young men and mature men.

2.2. Plato (c. 428–347 BCE)

The term τέλειος ἀνὴρ is also found in the legal work of Xenophon’s contemporary, the preeminent philosopher, Plato. In *Laws*, book 11, Plato explains the legal process by which a father might disown and disinherit his son, who, at least in the scenario outlined, is presumed to be not a small child but a young man (ὁ νέος; cf. τῶν νέων, *Leg.* 11.929c) who has already been reared (ὃν ἔτεκε τε καὶ ἐξεθρέψατο, *Leg.* 11.929a). Plato describes how the court proceeding must take place, particularly how it must involve the entire extended family, including the son’s “own kinsfolk as far as cousins and likewise his son’s kinsfolk on the mother’s side” (*Leg.* 11.929b).¹⁵ The hearing is to include a public accusation by the father and rebuttal by the son, followed by a vote by the jury of extended family members, over half of whom must be convinced for the expulsion to be approved. However, neither the father, nor the mother, nor the defendant son is permitted to cast a vote. Rather, voting is restricted to “all the other adults of both sexes” (lit. “all the others whether they might be mature women or men [τῶν τε ἄλλων ὁπόσοι περ ἂν ὦσιν γυναικῶν εἴτε ἀνδρῶν τέλειοι]”, *Leg.* 11.929c). Admittedly, it is not entirely clear to which developmental stage(s)

these mature men and women must belong. We can assume that Plato is not ruling out the elderly from the voting process, since he normally attributes to them considerable discernment by virtue of their life experience (cf. Plato, *Resp.* 328d–e). Thus, it seems unlikely that Plato is using the phrase “mature men” here in precisely the same technical, restrictive sense as Xenophon. However, Plato does seem to be ruling out from the voting process both children and youths/young adults. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain why Plato would have included the adjective τέλειοι within a legal scenario in which multiple generations are present, including the defendant son, a young man (νέος). Thus, Plato’s discourse retains the basic distinction between young men and mature men we observed in Xenophon.

2.3. Polybius (c. 200–118 BCE)

The Greek historian Polybius likewise deployed τέλειος ἀνὴρ in a human developmental sense similar to his predecessors, Xenophon and Plato. The term occurs in Polybius’ reporting of what became known as the Social War (220–217 BCE)—fought between the Aetolian League, Sparta, and Elis, on one side, and the Hellenic League (comprising the Macedonians and Achaeans), on the other. Polybius uses τέλειος ἀνὴρ to portray the stature of the illustrious Macedonian King Philip V, who early in his rule, and despite his youth, surprised his political rivals by how well he led the Hellenic League. The relevant passage reads as follows:

The Aetolians were on the one hand anxious to make peace, since the war told heavily on them and things were turning out far otherwise than they had expected. For while they had hoped to find a helpless infant [ὥς παιδίῳ νηπίῳ] in Philip, owing to his tender years and inexperience [διὰ τε τὴν ἡλικίαν καὶ τὴν ἀπειρίαν], they really found him to be a grown-up man [τέλειον ἄνδρα], both in his projects and in his performances, while they had shown themselves contemptible and childish [παιδαριώδεις] both in their general policy and in their conduct of particular operations. (*Hist.* 5.29.2)¹⁶

The passage serves as a climax to Polybius’ developing narrative portrait of the young king. As Polybius mentions multiple times earlier, Philip ascended to the throne at the tender age of seventeen (*Hist.* 4.5.3; 4.24.1; cf. 4.2.5; 4.3.3). The king’s age was, unsurprisingly, considered a significant political liability in the eyes of many onlookers, including that of his opponents and even of Polybius himself.¹⁷ According to Brian McGing, Polybius employs the technique of *focalization* throughout his account, periodically attributing to Philip’s enemies a negative opinion of the king due to his youth and vulnerability (McGing 2010, pp. 98–99; 2013, p. 188). Philip, to be sure, required the assistance of courtiers during the earliest period of his rule, and thus few believed the child-king to be in control of his own monarchy. But as the narrative develops, so do Philip’s governing capabilities, thus demonstrating the miscalculation of those enemies who sought to exploit his inexperience. In particular, the Aetolian League, Sparta, and Elis came to regret having provoked the Social War, in which they were defeated by the Hellenic League, largely because of Philip’s surprisingly effective leadership.

These events are skillfully narrated in books 4–5 of Polybius’ *Histories*. Through a rich irony, the young king, who was presumed to be a “helpless infant” (ὥς παιδίῳ νηπίῳ), is actually perceived to be a “full-grown man” (τέλειον ἄνδρα)—one who had attained full strength and stature, if not in actual age, then in respect to his political and military prowess. In the passage cited above, the phrase ὥς παιδίῳ νηπίῳ uses two nouns to express the diminutive stature the Aetolians assumed Philip to possess; they expected to find not just a child, but an *infant* child.¹⁸ Instead, what they faced was an adult, and not just a man, but a “full-grown man”. The double-loaded descriptions in both phrases indicate that

Polybius uses the adjective τέλειος here to portray Philip as a *mature* man, as opposed to a mere infant, or a child, or even a *young* man. Philip's miscalculating enemies, on the other hand, are themselves shown to be "childish" (παιδαριώδεις), despite (we can assume) being of greater age than Philip, as they are eventually defeated in battle.¹⁹ As McGing explains, "The whole theme of Philip's young age was a sort of literary set-up, but one with an important historical interpretation contained in it: the perception that led the Aetolians and Spartans to think it was safe to antagonize Macedon was wrong. Philip was, in fact, never too young" (McGing 2010, p. 116). Indeed, "if Philip was ever 'a boy', his enemies watched him grow into a man with the same speed he demonstrated on the battlefield. Speed, combined with youthful helplessness misidentified, is the theme Polybius has developed to portray the beginnings of Philip's reign."²⁰ Thus, we find in Polybius' account another instructive use of τέλειος ἀνὴρ, one that signals the attainment of mature stature—that of a "full-grown" man.

2.4. Philo of Alexandria (c. 15 BCE–45 CE)

Our final comparative source is Philo of Alexandria, the Jewish philosopher and exegete, who provides us with an especially instructive portrait of the τέλειος ἀνὴρ within his presumed life course. Not only is Philo a Hellenistic Jew and contemporary of Paul, but he twice deploys the phrase τέλειος ἀνὴρ in discourses saturated with additional and relevant human developmental terminology. These two occurrences are found in his treatises *On the Cherubim* and *On Sobriety*, respectively.

In *On the Cherubim*, Philo offers an allegorical exegesis of two scriptural verses: Genesis 3:24 (wherein Adam is expelled from the Garden, and the cherubim and sword are appointed to prevent Adam's re-entrance; *Cher.* 1–39) and Genesis 4:1 (wherein Eve conceives Cain, and Adam credits Cain's conception to divine agency; *Cher.* 40–130). Much of Philo's treatment of Genesis 4:1 includes his insistence that God is sovereign over, and is indeed owner of, all things. As a consequence, humans only enjoy their own possessions as a loan from God (*Cher.* 106–113). Such borrowing applies even to the person's soul, body, mind, reason, and outward sense, for as Philo reasons, "I find that none of them is really mine" (*Cher.* 113–114). To prove the point, Philo proceeds to inquire about the origin, source, nature, and final destination of the body, soul, and mind, ultimately concluding "that what we use are the possessions of another, that nor glory, nor wealth, nor honours, nor offices, nor all that makes up body or soul are our own, not even life itself" (*Cher.* 117–118). Embedded with this complicated discourse about humanity's relation to God, Philo describes at least a part of the human life course as he understands it, presenting a series of eight distinct developmental stages ranging from childhood to adulthood. The text reads as follows:

For where was my body before my birth? and where will it go when I am departed? And what becomes of the differences of age of that being which at present appears to exist [ποῦ δὲ καὶ τοῦ δοκοῦντος ὑφ'εστάναι τῶν ἡλικιῶν αἱ διαφοραί]? Where is now the infant [ποῦ τὸ βρέφος]?—where the child [ποῦ ὁ παῖς]?—where the boy [ποῦ <ὁ> ἀντίπαις]?—where the youth just arriving at the age of puberty [ποῦ ὁ ἄρτι ἡβῶν]?—where the young man [ποῦ τὸ μενράκιον]?—where is he now whose beard is just budding, the vigorous and *perfect man* [ὁ πρωτογένειος, ὁ νεανίας, ὁ τέλειος ἀνὴρ]? (*Cher.* 114)²¹

The translation "the vigorous and perfect man", provided by Yonge, gives the impression that Philo intended these final two descriptive phrases to refer to a single developmental stage. However, Yonge has illegitimately added the conjunction "and" while not translating the definite article before τέλειος ἀνὴρ, thus failing to differentiate between ὁ νεανίας and ὁ τέλειος ἀνὴρ, even though the consistent use of the definite article

throughout the passage shows that Philo considers ὁ νεανίας and ὁ τέλειος ἀνὴρ to be two separate developmental phases. Thus, childhood appears to be represented here by three consecutive stages (“infant”, “child”, and “boy” [τὸ βρέφος . . . ὁ παῖς . . . ὁ ἀντίπαις]) and young adulthood by a set of four stages (“pubescent youth”, “young man”, “first beard”, and “the vigorous one”). That being the case, *mature* manhood ought to be understood here as the phase of adulthood one attains following these four aforementioned preliminary phases of *young* adulthood.

The second treatise in which Philo refers to the mature man as a developmental stage is *On Sobriety* (also known as *On the Prayers and Curses uttered by Noah when he became Sober*). This work is the finale within a series of allegorical-exegetical works on Genesis 9:20–27, wherein Noah begins to devote himself to horticulture, viticulture, and wine drinking, resulting in his intoxication and nakedness. In *On Sobriety*, Philo attends to Genesis 9:24–27 and focuses on Noah’s eventual sobriety, as well as on the blessing or cursing of Noah’s individual sons. Ham’s status as Noah’s “youngest son” (Gen 9:24) leads Philo into a lengthy discourse on the moral significance of childhood and maturity as applied to various characters within the Pentateuch (*Sob.* 6–30). Most relevant for our purpose is Philo’s treatment of Isaac and Ishmael.

[7] Often indeed does Moses in his laws give the name of the “younger” [νέους] to those who are advanced in years [ἡλικία], and the name of “elders” [πρεσβυτέρους] on the other hand to those who have not yet reached old age [μηδέπω γεγηρακότες], for he does not consider whether the years of men are many or few, or whether a period of time is short or long, but he looks to the faculties of the soul whether its movements are good or ill. [8] Accordingly when Ishmael had apparently lived about twenty years, Moses calls him a child [παιδίον] by comparison with Isaac, who is full grown in virtues [τὸν ἐν ἀρεταῖς τέλειον]. For we read that when Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael from his home, “he took loaves and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar and put also the ‘child’ [τὸ παιδίον] on her shoulder”, and again “she cast down the ‘child’ [τὸ παιδίον] under a single pine”, and “I will not see the death of the ‘child’ [τοῦ παιδίου]” (Gen. xxi. 14–16). And yet Ishmael was circumcised at the age of thirteen years, before the birth of Isaac, and when the latter at about the age of seven ceased to be fed with milk, we find Ishmael banished with his mother, because he, the bastard, claimed to play on equal terms with the true-born. [9] Still all the same, grown up [lit. young man, νεανίας] as he was, he [Ishmael] is called a child [παιδίον], thus marking the contrast between the sophist and the sage. For wisdom is Isaac’s inheritance and sophistry Ishmael’s. . . . For the mere infant [νήπιον παιδίον] bears the same relation to the full-grown man [ἄνδρα τέλειον] as the sophist does to the sage, or the school subjects to the sciences which deal with virtues. (*Sob.* 7–9, Trans. from [Colson and Whitaker 1930](#))

Philo’s allegorical application of such contrasting developmental stages as “mere infant” and “full-grown man” to the competing vocations of sophist and sage, respectively, is standard fare for this philosopher, whose disdain for sophistry is as intense as his appreciation for wisdom and virtue (See, e.g., [Winter 2002](#)). What is more relevant for our purpose, however, is Philo’s observation that the narrator of Genesis attributes childishness, on the one hand, to scriptural patriarchs whose age would seem to preclude such characterization, and maturity, on the other, to those who in fact were relatively young. In the case examined above, Ishmael was called a child (παιδίον) when forced to depart from Abraham’s household (cf. Gen 21:14–16), even though Philo assumes that, by this point in the narrative, Ishmael would have been a young man (νεανίας) of about twenty years of age. By contrast, Philo believes that within the same narrative Isaac had already

proven himself to be mature in respect to virtues (τὸν ἐν ἀρεταῖς τέλειον) despite being only about seven years of old, an age that Philo infers from the fact that Isaac had only recently been weaned (cf. Gen 21:8).

Thus, within this discourse, Philo reveals in part how he conceives the human life course, having identified at least four distinct developmental stages: “child/mere infant” (παιδίον/νήπιον παιδίον), “young man” (νεανίας), “full-grown/full-grown man” (τέλειος/τέλειος ἀνὴρ), and “elder/old age” (πρεσβυτέρους, γεγηρακότας).²² And while in this text Philo resists itemizing as many mediating developmental stages as those mentioned in *Cher.* 114 above, it is on the basis of the distinction Philo makes here between “young man” (νεανίας) and “full-grown/full-grown man” (τέλειος/ἄνδρα τέλειον)—a distinction he likewise makes in *Cher.* 114—that we can infer Philo separated manhood into at least two phases—young/early manhood, followed by mature manhood.²³

The life courses surveyed above are by no means identical. As previously acknowledged, there existed in antiquity a range of views on how many stages one had to pass through in the human developmental process. Even so, each of the authors examined above maintains that manhood consists of multiple phases, and mature manhood (expressed in each case by the phrase τέλειος ἀνὴρ) was attained only after reaching one or more prior developmental milestones of young manhood. In the next section, we will explore what the ancients (particularly the Romans) believed was involved in early manhood, including what entry into this life stage entailed.

3. Coming of Age in Ancient Rome

Youth, in basically all Greco-Roman accounts of the human life course, consisted of entry into manhood—*young* (or *early*) manhood, one could say—and was symbolically expressed in many antique Mediterranean societies by some kind of ceremonial rite of passage.²⁴ These ceremonies normally included an exchange of clothing. This is because clothing, as Kelly Olson explains regarding Rome, “had a strong legal and social dimension: it was an important way in which symbol-conscious Romans demonstrated rank and status” (Olson 2017, p. 7; Cf. Rothe 2020, p. 3). We know much more about the coming-of-age ceremony of the Romans than of the Greeks, and as shown below, it is the Roman rite of initiation that seems most relevant for the images introduced in Paul’s letter, so it is the Roman conception of young manhood that will be our focus.²⁵

3.1. The Clothing of Young Manhood

For the Romans, there was no fixed year at which a male child became a young man. Instead, at a date set by his father, usually between the ages of fourteen and sixteen by the time of the early empire, a free-born boy would remove the external markers of childhood, including the *bullā* (the protective charm he wore around his neck since birth to ward off the evil eye) and, more importantly, the *toga praetexta* (the purple-edged gown he wore to symbolize both his social status and vulnerability) (Rothe 2020, pp. 59–63). The *toga praetexta* was replaced by a special tunic (*tunica recta/regilla*), over which he put on the *toga virilis* (the toga of manhood), also known commonly as the *toga pura* (the toga of purity) (Rothe 2020, pp. 64–68). In the capital city, the ceremony usually occurred on March 17, during the festival known as *Liberalia*, and included, in addition to the private rituals already mentioned, a public march to the Forum where the young man was registered as a citizen and offered sacrifices (Eyben 1993, p. 6; Laes and Strubbe 2014, p. 30). Nicolaus of Damascus, a first-century BCE historian, Hellenistic Jew, and friend of Herod the Great, writes the following about the coming of age of Octavian, the eventual first emperor of Rome:

Then at about the age of fourteen he went down into the Forum to lay aside [ἀποθέσθαι] the purple-bordered toga [τὴν περιπόρυρον ἐσθῆτα] and take up the white toga [ἀναλαβεῖν δὲ τὴν καθάραν] as a sign of his enrolment among the men [σύμβολον οὔσαν τῆς εἰς ἄνδρας ἐγγραφῆς]. With the whole city admiring him because of his attractive appearance and brilliant lineage and since the people had enthusiastically elected him to the position, he was enrolled into a priesthood in place of Lucius Domitius, who had died. And, at the same time that he changed his toga and was adorned with the high honor of the priesthood, he performed a sacrifice. (Nicolaus Dam., *Vit. Caes.* 8–9).²⁶

As Rome's territory expanded, so did the reach of the toga ceremony, such that over time, the same rite came to be practiced well outside of Rome. Even by the late Republic, for instance, Cicero mentions that he had been instructed to present his nephew Quintus with the rite in Laodicea (*Att.* 5.20.9), while Pliny the Younger complains to Emperor Trajan about the large number of decurions invited to these same initiation events in Pontus and Bithynia (*Ep.* 10.116). Thus, in an important essay on the *toga virilis*, Fanny Dolansky explains, "By the second century AD, the ceremony seems to have become part of the fabric of Roman life in many provincial milieux where taking the toga—the quintessential symbol of the Roman people and of Roman masculinity in particular—served as a highly visible demonstration of *Romanitas* for those living far from Rome" (Dolansky 2008, p. 52).

The significance of this day can hardly be overstated. As Laes and Strubbe explain, by way of this rite of passage, a "new citizen was 'born' for the state. The young man received full citizen rights (political, juridical). . . . It marked the beginning of the young man's public life [even if in] the private sphere he still remained under the authority of his father (the *patria potestas*) until the latter's death" (Laes and Strubbe 2014, p. 57). The privileges of young manhood were especially apparent outside the home. The boy's coming of age meant he could marry, attend banquets (Nicolaus Dam., *Vit. Caes.* 18, 28; Apuleius, *Apol.* 98), and pursue a public career (Valerius Maximus, *Fac. et Dict.* 5.4.4).

To be sure, certain limitations still applied to Roman youths. Since according to Roman law, a male became a full, unrestricted adult (*maior*) at age twenty-five, he could not hold public offices with considerable responsibility until he passed that threshold. In the meantime, the youth, though in the early stages of manhood, was still considered a *minor*. If his family had significant resources, he might continue to pursue his education, and even if he were to devote himself to work (involving himself in business, for instance), as a minor, he was protected legally from economic exploitation. Accordingly, any transaction that was harmful to him was cancelable by law, which would have given his prospective lenders and clients great hesitation before entering with him into a contract (Plautus, *Pseud.* 303–4) (Laes and Strubbe 2014, pp. 32–33). Even so, by assuming the *toga virilis*, the boy had indeed become a man, albeit a young man. Hence, Plutarch refers to the *toga virilis* as τέλειον ἱμάτιον (the mature garment, *Anton.* 71.3) and elsewhere as the ἀνδρεῖον ἱμάτιον (the manly garment; *Brutus* 14.3).

3.2. The Abilities of Young Manhood

The period of early adulthood introduced various new abilities and opportunities. For example, this transition, often coinciding as it did with the start of puberty, was accompanied by a newfound ability to think intellectually. Thus, Seneca maintains, "A person, once a child [*infans*], becomes a youth [*pubes*]; his peculiar quality is transformed [*alia eius proprietates fit*]; for the child could not reason, but the youth possesses reason [*ille enim irrationalis est, hic rationalis*]" (*Ep.* 118.14, Trans. from Gummere 1925). The donning of the toga, therefore, implied the beginning of rational thought. However, even Seneca recognizes that many who enter adulthood fail to abandon their "boyish" thinking.

You remember, of course, what joy you felt when you laid aside the garments of boyhood [*cum praetexta posita*] and donned the man's toga [*sumpsisti virilem togam*] and were escorted to the forum; nevertheless, you may look for a still greater joy when you have laid aside the mind of boyhood [*cum puerilem animum deposueris*] and when wisdom has enrolled you among men [*et te in viros philosophia transscripserit*]. For it is not boyhood [*pueritia*] that still stays with us, but something worse, —boyishness [*puerilitas*]. And this condition is all the more serious because we possess the authority of old age [*auctoritatem habemus senum*], together with the follies of boyhood [*vitia puerorum*], yea, even the follies of infancy [*nec puerorum tantum sed infantum*]. (Ep. 4.2, Trans. from Gummere 1917)

It is striking how Seneca could deploy the exchange of togas to symbolize the transition into manhood while also acknowledging the dissonance that could remain between one's legal age and, as it were, one's rational age. So detached were the two that one could simultaneously possess the authority of an old man and the folly of an infant. Of course, for Seneca, what mattered most was neither the garment enveloping the man nor the rank he possessed, but the mindset (*animus*) that characterized him.

Young men, moreover, were noted for the many physical changes they experienced between childhood and full-grown adulthood, including growth in body and facial hair, as well as in body size (Harlow and Laurence 2002, p. 72). In one of his love letters, for example, Philostratus considers the growth of the first beard of a youth (μειράκιον) as a mark of increased maturity and masculinity: “now that you are showing your first down [χνοάζεις], you are more manly [ἀνδρικώτερος] than you were and more nearly perfect [or, mature; τελεώτερος]” (Ep. 15; cf. Ep. 13; Juvenil, Sat. 8.165–166, Trans. from Benner and Fobes 1942). Youths were also known to be quite strong and physically active. Horace remarks that the “beardless youth, freed at last from his tutor, finds joy in horses and hounds and the grass of the sunny Campus [Martius]”, where the republican army exercised (Ars 161–62). Pliny the Younger remarks how, in former days, youths delighted in and were trained to become leaders by means of hunting, “pit[ting] speed against an animal's swift-footedness, and strength and dexterity against its course and cunning” (Pan. 81.2). Cicero, writing in the voice of the Elder Cato at the ripe old age of eighty-four (Sen. 32), defends the dignity of the elderly, while reminiscing about the “strength” and “impetuosity of youth” (*viris adulescentis*, Sen. 27; *ferocitas iuvenum*, Sen. 33). So active were Roman youths that Cicero complains how “an intemperate and indulgent youth delivers to old age a body all worn out” (Sen. 29). Indeed, the physical strength of youth did not last forever. Cicero recounts how even the Greek wrestling champion Milo of Croton, “[a]fter he was an old man and was watching the athletes training in the race-course, . . . looked upon his shrunken muscles [lit. upper arms, *lacertos*]” and grieved his once youthful, brawny physique, saying: “Yes, but they now are dead” (Sen. 27). But youths did not normally enter young adulthood full grown. Dio Cassius records how Maecenas proposed that attaining the equestrian rank should be reserved for those who have reached eighteen years, “for at that age [ἐν γὰρ ταύτῃ τῇ ἡλικίᾳ] their physical soundness [τῶν σωμάτων αὐτῶν εὐεξία] and their mental fitness can be discerned [lit. excels, *διαφαίνεται*]” (Hist. rom. 52.20.1).²⁷

Newly established young men were also given the right to participate in combat (Eyben 1993, pp. 42–52). According to Harlow and Laurence, “In taking up the *toga virilis*, the boy had become an adult citizen and part of citizenship was to fight in wars for the *res publica*” (Harlow and Laurence 2002, p. 67). While military service was no longer mandated for young Roman men after the republic, it nonetheless remained an option for them during the early and later empires (Harlow and Laurence 2002, p. 75). Receipt of this public responsibility was due in part to the acquisition of the physical traits necessary to participate in battle, particularly speed and strength. Aulus Gallius reports how the early

Etruscan King Servius Tullius enrolled young men seventeen years of age as soldiers (*milites scripsisse*) because that is “when they were thought to be fit for service [*quo idoneos iam reipublicae arbitraretur*]” (*Noct. att.* 10.28; cf. Tacitus, *Germ.* 13; Isidore, *Etym.* 9.3.36–37).²⁸ Thus, Myles McDonnell suggests that “the ability to fight for the state was the criterion on which a Roman boy was judged ready to become a man.”²⁹

The toga, furthermore, symbolized the youth’s fertility. As Laes and Strubbe explain, “A young man wearing the adult toga was seen as capable of penetrative sex, unlike a child. The putting aside of the child’s *toga praetexta* led to the removal of protection in the public sphere. The *toga virilis* brought freedom” (Laes and Strubbe 2014, p. 59). Thus, the first-century BCE poet Sextus Propertius writes, “When the modesty of my boyhood’s garb was hidden away [*ut mihi praetexti pudor est velatus amictus*], . . . freedom was given me to know the paths of love [*data libertas noscere amoris iter*]” (*Eleg.* 3.15.3–4, Trans. from Butler 1916). Hence, the gown was also sometimes called the *toga libera* (the toga of liberty; Ovid, *Fasti* 3.771).

3.3. The Challenges of Young Manhood

The youth’s newfound freedom, however, often manifested in recklessness and overindulgence, being particularly “associated with violence, drinking, and sex” (Laes and Strubbe 2014, p. 59). Plutarch describes at length the immorality that often accompanied the young man’s freedom. At the beginning of a treatise (*On Listening to Lectures*) in which the exchange of attire represents the exchange of authority and values, he says:

The discourse which I gave on the subject of listening to lectures I have written out and sent to you, my dear Nicander, so that you may know how rightly to listen to the voice of persuasion, now that you are no longer subject to authority [ὅτε τῶν προσταττόντων ἀπὸ πᾶσιν ἀλλὰ ξαί], having assumed the garb of a man [τὸ ἀνδρεῖον ἀνειληφὸς ἰμάτιον]. Now the absence of control [ἀναρχία], which some of the young men [ἔνιοι τῶν νέων], for want of an education [ἀπαιδευσίς], think to be freedom [ἐλευθερία], establishes the sway of a set of masters, harsher than the teachers and attendants of childhood [χαλεπωτέρους ἐκείνων ἐν παισὶ διδασκάλων καὶ παιδαγωγῶν δεσπότης ἐφίστησι], in the form of desires [τὰς ἐπιθυμίας], which are now, as it were, unchained [ὥσπερ ἐκ δεσμῶν λυθείσας]. And just as Herodotus says that women put off their modesty along with their undergarments [ἅμα τῷ χιτῶνι συνεχδύεσθαι τὴν αἰδῶ τὰς γυναῖκας], so some of our young men, as soon as they lay aside the garb of childhood [οὕτως ἔνιοι τῶν νέων ἅμα τῷ τῷ παιδικῷ ἰμάτιον ἀποθέσθαι], lay aside also their sense of modesty and fear [συναποθέμενοι τὸ αἰδεῖσθαι καὶ φοβεῖσθαι], and, undoing the habit that invests them [λύσαντες τὴν κατασχηματίζουσαν αὐτοὺς περιβολήν], straightway become full of unruliness. But you have often heard that to follow God and to obey reason are the same thing, and so I ask you to believe that in persons of good sense the passing from childhood to manhood [τὴν εἰς ἄνδρα ἐκ παιδων ἀγωγὴν] is not a casting off [ἀποβολήν] of control [ἀρχῆς], but a recasting of the controlling agent [ἀλλὰ μεταβολὴν ἄρχοντος], since instead of some hired person or slave purchased with money they now take reason as the divine guide of their life [θεῖον ἡγεμόνα τοῦ βίου λαμβάνουσι τὸν λόγον], whose followers alone may deservedly be considered free. For they alone, having learned [μαθόντες] to wish for what they ought, live as they wish; but in untrained [ἀπαιδεύτοις] and irrational impulses and action there is something ignoble, and changing one’s mind many times [ἐν πολλῷ τῷ μετανοοῦντι] involves but little freedom of will. (Mor. 37C–E, Trans. from Babbitt 1927)

Plutarch's lengthy discourse provides us with significant insight into early Roman perceptions of young men (νέοι). According to Plutarch, not only does youth as a developmental stage mark "the passing from childhood to manhood" (τὴν εἰς ἄνδρας ἐκ παιδων ἄγωγὴν), including release from the oversight of "the teachers and attendants of childhood" (ἐν παισὶ διδασκάλων καὶ παιδαγωγοί; cf. τῶν προσταττόντων ἀπήλλαξις),³⁰ but the very act of "lay[ing] aside the garb of childhood" (τὸ παιδικὸν ἱμάτιον ἀποθέσθαι; cf. τῷ χιτῶνι συνεχδύεσθαι) and of "assum[ing] the garb of a man" (τὸ ἀνδρεῖον ἀνελιφῶς ἱμάτιον) represents an exchange of authority and its corresponding habitus. Despite the frequency with which some people associated young adulthood with the termination of learning (μαθόντες),³¹ the absence of authority (ἀναρχία, ἀρχῆς . . . ἀποβολήν), and the abandonment of modesty (τὸ αἰδεῖσθαι; cf. τὴν αἰδῶ), Plutarch, in standard Stoic fashion, insists that it is necessary for the noble person rather to be ruled by reason (θεῖον ἡγεμόνα τοῦ βίου λαμβάνουσι τὸν λόγον) and to remain (figuratively) enveloped in the garment that molded them (τὴν κατασχηματίζουσιν αὐτοὺς περιβολήν), namely, their education. What is clear from this work, moreover, is that, from Plutarch's perspective, it was commonplace for those who had reached the milestone of youth to jettison their childhood training. In fact, by virtue of their "irrational impulses", they show themselves to be quite uneducated and undisciplined (ἀπαιδευσία, ἀπαιδεύτοις). Instead of embracing the exercise of reason, too many youths exploited their newfound freedom, only to demonstrate that they remained enslaved to their passions (τὰς ἐπιθυμίας).

Just this sort of ἀναρχία is described in the work of Apuleius (c. 124–170 CE). In his *Apologia*, Apuleius writes about his stepson Sicinius Pudens who, after the death of both the boy's father and brother, began to reside with his uncle (Sicinius Aemilianus), to whom Apuleius charges the following:

You took him from us a mere boy [inuestem] and straightway gave him the garb of manhood [uesticipem]. While he was under our guardianship [regeretur], he used to go to school [magistros]: now he has bidden a long farewell to study and betaken himself to the delights of the tavern. He despises serious friends, and, boy [puer] as he is, spends his tender years in revelling with the most abandoned youths among harlots and wine-cups [scorta et pocula]. (*Apol.* 98)³²

Striking here is the admission that Pudens is, with respect to legal status, a man, though in terms of morality and vulnerability, he remains just a "boy". Thus, Cicero was not wrong when he remarked that "the young" have before them "many slippery paths [*multas vias adolescentiae lubricas*], on which they can scarcely keep their footing or even enter without falling or stumbling" (Cael. 17.41, Trans. from Gardner 1958). This image of slipperiness likely inspired a trope to be repeated many times over—that youth is a "slippery age."³³

Other tropes were also commonly deployed to capture the precariousness of youth. For example, Herodian used the storm metaphor when reporting about Marcus Aurelius' death-bed assessment of Commodus' unfitness to rule. Afraid as he was "that the young man [νεότης] would grow up in control of absolute, unchecked power without parental authority", and that "he might refuse the discipline of his moral studies and habits and devote his time to drunken debauchery" (*Hist.* 1.3.1), the emperor instructed his advisors and relatives on hand, "Here is my son, whom you yourselves brought up, who has just reached the age of adolescence [ἄρτι τῆς μεираκίῳν ἡλικίας ἐπιβαίνοντα] and stands in need of guides through the tempest and storm of life [ἐν χειμῶνι καὶ ζάλῃ τῶν κυβερνησόντων]. There is a danger that he will be carried away and dashed against the rocks of evil habits because he has an imperfect experience of what to do [μή ποι φερόμενος ὑπ' ἀτελοῦς τῆς τῶν δεόντων ἐμπειρίας ἐς φαῦλα ἐπιτηδεύματα προσαραχθῇ]" (*Hist.* 1.4.3, Trans. from Whittaker 1969). This trope would also be repeated in subsequent literature.³⁴

In sum, donning the *toga virilis* meant entry into manhood. On the one hand, the legal transformation was sudden: one day, he was a boy; on the next, he was a man.³⁵ But young adulthood itself was a transitional stage, one in which youths were defined “as not yet full grown and equally as no longer children. In fact, this group are defined as in a state of transition or liminality” (Harlow and Laurence 2002, p. 65). In practice, a man did not become full-grown overnight. First, he had to complete the maturation process that was already underway; he had to grow a beard, increase in height, develop muscle tone, form virtue, improve discernment, get married, begin a public career, and the like (Harlow and Laurence 2002, p. 73). Only then had he reached full-grown maturity. In the meantime, the process of maturation was replete with challenges. As Emiel Eyben explains, “It was the opinion of the ancients that youth primarily was *the* critical age of human life, a period of storm and stress, of tensions and conflicts” (Eyben 1993, p. 14 [original emphasis]).

4. Mapping Paul’s Metaphors for Manhood in Ephesians

Having examined the evidence for the “mature man” in Greco-Roman literature, as well as the process and significance of coming of age for Roman males, we now seek to illuminate Paul’s maturation discourse in Ephesians based on our previous findings. It is my contention that the Greco-Roman maturation process sketched above casts significant light onto the message and metaphorical coherency of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. In the remainder of this essay, we will show how the various developmental terms and bodily images in Ephesians cooperate to provide a compelling portrait of Christian maturity, as well as how they link together many of the letter’s separate units and theological themes, especially its Christology, soteriology, cosmology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. Beyond that, I will show that the maturation metaphor, drawn as it is from concepts familiar to those participating in Paul’s first-century environment, equipped the apostle with an intelligible and effective model for explicating the otherwise complicated tension inherent to his inaugurated (partially realized) eschatology.

4.1. The Church as a Growing Body

According to the beginning of Ephesians, God has begun his new creation work not only by sending Jesus Christ into this world to die in order to secure redemption and the forgiveness of trespasses (1:7), but also by raising him from the dead and seating him in the heavenly places to inaugurate his eschatological kingdom (1:20). It is from this exalted celestial location that Christ now reigns over all things, having proleptically subdued every rule, authority, power, and dominion, indeed every identifiable enemy within the cosmos (1:21), all of whom have been placed—in fulfillment of Psalm 8:6—beneath Christ’s feet (1:22). What is more, the Father has given Christ to the church, so that Christ might rule over her as a head governs a body (1:22–23).

But the reach of Christ’s reign is no less than cosmic in scope, for Christ is in fact “head over *all* things” (κεφαλὴν ὑπὲρ πάντα, 1:22), even as he serves as the cosmic agent in whom God is still in the process of summing up all things (ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, 1:10), both in heaven and on earth.³⁶ The end goal of Christ’s reign, Paul explains, is to reconcile and radically transform the cosmos. For just as the church, as Christ’s body, now is filled by him, so this body must continue to grow until Christ’s glory, presence, and power (1:6–8, 12–13, 18–19) fill everything everywhere (τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν πληρουμένου, 1:23; cf. 4:10).³⁷

By the end of Ephesians 1, Paul has already provided a robust narrative account of the good news about Jesus Christ. The apostle has done this not only by announcing Christ’s generosity in connection to his heavenly rule, but also by highlighting a full range of the Messiah’s cosmic anatomy, including his feet (1:22), head (1:22), and body (1:23).

And because Christ was given as head to the church, it is through the Messiah's special union (ἐν Χριστῷ) with the members of his terrestrial body that Christ-followers are able to participate in the Messiah's resurrection and reign, as well as to enjoy a multitude of the heavenly blessings now available to them in the proleptically realized new creation (1:3–14). This new creation work (κτισθέντες, 2:10; κτίση, 2:15), Paul writes, involves both raising and seating believers alongside Jesus in the heavenly places (2:1–6), as well as manufacturing a new political entity consisting of both Jews and Gentiles (2:11–16). In Christ, these two peoples now exist as co-citizens (ἐστὲ συμπολίται τῶν ἁγίων, 2:19) of a singular covenant community and thus experience peace and reconciliation with the Father and with one another as they form a unified family and are indwelt by God's Spirit (2:11–22).

Remarkably, this new entity Paul calls a “new man/human” (καὶνὸς ἄνθρωπος, 2:15; cf. *novum hominem*, Vulg.). In the Roman world, a new man (*homo novus*) was often a senator without noble ancestry.³⁸ In Ephesians, the apostle announces how disparate people groups from ignoble ancestry (καὶ ἡμεθα τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς, 2:3) are granted exclusive citizenship and reconciled to one another through the Christ event to form a singular, reconstituted human being (ἓνα καὶνὸν ἄνθρωπον, 2:15), a new Adam, who consists of a singular body (ἐν ἑνὶ σώματι, 2:16; cf. ἐν σώματι, 4:4; σῶσσωμα, 3:6).³⁹ This “one new human”, this “one body”, is none other than Christ's “body” (τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ, 1:23; τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 4:12; cf. 5:23, 30). And just as all the parts of an animate, developing human being share in the collective work of advancing towards the body's full stature—as the ancient physician Galen explains about the human body, “after it has been born, an effect in which all parts share [κοινὸν ἐφ' ἅπασιν ἔργον] is the progress of each to its full size [ἢ εἰς τὸ τέλειον ἐκάστω μέγεθος ἀγωγῇ]” (Nat. Fac. 1.5, Trans. from Brock 1916)—so Christ's entire body (πᾶν τὸ σῶμα, 4:16) is currently being built up through the work of cooperative ministry as each of the body's constituent parts contributes to its growth (4:16). And this growth will continue to occur until God's people attain perfect unity centered on a mutual faith and a shared knowledge of God's Son (εἰς τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, 4:13). Furthermore, this perfected unity coincides with the attainment of what Paul calls the “mature man” (εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον, 4:13), a metaphor that adds a degree of specification to the image of the “new human” (καὶνὸς ἄνθρωπος) introduced two chapters earlier (2:15).⁴⁰ But what does Paul mean by the “mature man”?

4.2. The Church and the Mature Man

According to Bradley Matthews, “Paul's use of a masculine metaphor to depict maturity is a product of antiquity”, and as such it “functions as a rhetorical collaboration with the prevailing and provocative symbols of antiquity” (Matthews 2007, p. 6). For Matthews, the origin of the metaphor is significant because it endows “maturity with corporate and cosmic categories not immediately intelligible to the modern reader” (Matthews 2007, p. 6). Even more basic to the origin of the metaphor is its derivation from ancient conceptions of human development. Just as the term is used in a developmental sense by other ancient Greek sources concerned with the physical and cognitive maturation of male citizens, the “mature man” in Ephesians 4:13 refers to a particular developmental stage in Paul's metaphorical portrayal of the corporate growth of Christ's body. Thus, it is illegitimate to de-sexualize the metaphor, as some scholars do, by treating ἀνὴρ as merely synonymous with ἄνθρωπος and rendering the phrase “mature/complete person.”⁴¹ Nor is it sufficient to conclude, as other scholars do, that “the word [τέλειος], in this context, has the meaning of adulthood.”⁴² Paul, of course, has adulthood in view,⁴³ but the contrast is not, as Harold Hoehner supposes, simply “between a boy and an adult man”, despite the

juxtaposition between the “mature man” (ἀνὴρ τέλειος) and “children/infants” (νήπιοι) in 4:13–14 (Hoehner 2002, p. 555).

Rather, the “mature man” represents Christ’s complete, sex-specific, multi-appendaged body once it reaches its intended and eventual full stature commensurate with its head, namely the person of Christ (εἰς μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 4:13; cf. 1:22–23).⁴⁴ It is not simply that the body must increase to its “maximum height”, as John Muddiman supposes (Muddiman 2001, p. 204). The growth the body requires is multi-dimensional; it must grow into Christ, its head, *in every respect* (ἀυξήσωμεν εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ, 4:15). Again, as Galen explains, “Growth is an increase and expansion in length, breath and thickness of the solid parts of the [living being]” (ἡ δ’ αὔξησις ἐπίδοσις ἐστι καὶ διάστασις κατὰ μῆκος καὶ πλάτος καὶ βάθος τῶν στερεῶν τοῦ ζώου, *Nat. Fac.* 1.5; cf. Eph 3:18). And as observed above, the Greco-Roman ideal of mature manhood surpasses early manhood in numerous developmental categories, including rational ability, virtue formation, but most obviously physical appearance (esp. height, hair, and build). Thus, when Paul explains that the body will grow “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”, he is likely envisioning the church’s growth as multi-dimensional, such that the process includes at least external expansion (i.e., numerical and geographical growth) and internal strengthening (i.e., unity, theological solidarity, and moral transformation).⁴⁵

Christ’s body, however, has yet to reach such stature. Everything in 4:11–16 points to the reality that the church remains en route (μέχρι καταντήσωμεν, 4:13) to the three coordinate goals presented in 4:13 (εἰς [3x]). It is true, as Ernest Best observes, that “[t]he church is one” and “the body of Christ exists”, but that in itself hardly warrants the inference that this body “cannot exist in any other than mature and perfect form” (Best 1998, p. 403). Paul seamlessly weaves realized and unrealized theological threads together throughout the letter, holding in unresolved tension both the *now* and the *not yet*. And if the body of Christ must continue to progress towards attainment of the “mature man”, then the body must currently remain, metaphorically speaking, in some prior developmental state, even if that state affords the church benefits fitting of mature spiritual adulthood. Christ’s head is already full-grown, yet he currently and metaphorically possesses a diminutive torso and undersized extremities whose complete “fullness” awaits future eschatological realization (1:23; 3:19; 5:18), which will take place at the culmination of “the fullness of times” (τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν, 1:11).

Nor does Paul, in Ephesians, explicitly characterize Christ’s body or its individual members as presently childlike. It is true that Christ’s gifting of leaders and teachers to the church is for the purpose of equipping and ultimately building up the church so its members may no longer be children (ἵνα μηκέτι ὦμεν νήπιοι, 4:14), but Paul does not specify whether the childlike state he wishes his readers to outgrow is a vestige of their pre-conversion or early post-conversion status. And even if Christ’s gifts are intended to help believers grow beyond their initial post-conversion state of spiritual infancy, Paul appears to assume that his implied readers have already outgrown this state of vulnerability. After all, Paul includes himself among his referents (ὡμεν . . . αὐξήσωμεν, 4:14–15); despite his own perceived unworthiness of divine grace (3:8), Paul would hardly classify his own spiritual stature as infantile. Moreover, despite the insistence of Kingsley, while the adverb μηκέτι sometimes relates to the status quo, it need not signify as much.⁴⁶ For example, Paul’s use of μηκέτι in the injunction at 4:17 (only three verses later) serves not to identify the present behavioral patterns of his Gentile readers, but to rule out their return to an immoral lifestyle they are presumed to have already left behind (cf. 2:1–3).⁴⁷

Thus, in the same way that 4:13 (esp. εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον) identifies the point of culmination on the spectrum of spiritual growth, what Kingsley calls the “eschatological state

of prime development” (Kingsley 2024, p. 259), the ἵνα-clause in 4:14–16 introduces the opposing end on that spectrum (here, νήπιος represents what we might call the eschatological state of *initial* development) as well as the trajectory according to which maturation is to occur (ἀὐξήσωμεν εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα). In other words, the ἵνα-clause announces the purpose of Christ’s gifts (namely, to equip the body for a lifetime of growth that will take each part well beyond spiritual infancy) without providing an explicit assessment of the current stature of the implied readers.

Indeed, although Paul elsewhere characterizes redeemed life in relation to the parousia as a state of infancy (1 Cor 13:9–11) and concedes that there are in fact immature believers in the Corinthian church who can only be characterized as infants (1 Cor 3:1), he normally uses νήπιος in a highly pejorative manner and expects his churches to abandon their childish ways of thinking and to reason instead as adults who even now enjoy a foretaste of the new creation (1 Cor 2:6; 14:20; Gal 4:1–3; Phil 3:15; Col 1:28; 4:12). As Sigurd Grindheim observes concerning the church in Corinth, “The maturity that Paul wants the Corinthians to reach is characterized by nothing else than a realization of the implications of the state they had already reached as Christians” (Grindheim 2002, p. 708). Thus, in Ephesians, just because “the believers are not yet on the point of spiritual maturity as depicted in the metaphor of an adult man” does not necessitate Vrey’s conclusion that they “are still children in their faith.”⁴⁸

Paul introduces the child metaphor, then, not to identify the church’s actual location on the spectrum of spiritual development (i.e., he is not identifying them as infants in Christ), but to warn his readers about the dangers of habituating to a life characterized by immaturity. As we have seen above in Seneca, Apuleius, and Dio Cassius, moral integrity and intellectual ability were sometimes incongruent with one’s socio-legal position and physical stature. It was therefore not uncommon for Paul’s contemporaries to characterize the behavior of rationally stunted adults as something other than adultlike. We also showed that because of this rational and behavioral immaturity among Roman youths, it became something of a trope to characterize young adulthood as turbulent, akin to navigating a stormy sea. In a similar manner, Paul, having abruptly turned from speaking about the singular, corporate church (τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 4:12; ἄνδρα τέλειον, 4:13) to speaking about believers as a plurality (νήπιοι, 4:14),⁴⁹ deploys the infant metaphor and storm analogy in 4:14 to dissuade his readers from returning to harmful behaviors and erroneous ideologies that are incongruent with the reality of their developmental state, as well as to stress that through the corporate building effectuated by Christ’s gifts to the church (4:12), “immaturity and instability can increasingly be left behind” (Lincoln 1990, p. 257).

So, in which developmental stage does Christ’s body currently find itself? If the body and its disparate parts possess neither the stature of a child, on one extreme, nor that of the mature man, on the other, where on the continuum of maturation does Paul locate his implied readers? And where does he say as much? As Paul’s discourse continues into the parenetic section of the letter (4:17–6:20), we find that Paul has not left behind the notion of the growth of the body and its members at all. Rather, he continues to deploy imagery that resonates in the context of human development in the Greco-Roman world. Indeed, if the ultimate goal of Christ’s body is the attainment of the “mature man” (a developmental state that, as we have seen, is assumed to be preceded by a period of *early* manhood), then we should expect to find Paul employing terms and images that evoke precisely that prior phase of the life course as he exhorts the church about how to conduct itself. And that is precisely what we find.

4.3. The Believer's Coming of Age

Paul begins his parenesis by painting a negative portrait of stereotypical unregenerate Gentile life. Gentiles, Paul insists, have futile minds, darkened understanding, internalized ignorance, and hard hearts (4:17–18). They are taken captive by sensuality and practice greed and impurity (4:19). However, this behavior is out of step with the level of spiritual maturity to which Paul's audience has already progressed. If behaving like an infant in Christ is no longer appropriate for Paul's readers (μηκέτι ὤμεν νήπιοι, 4:14), then walking as the Gentiles do is even less suitable (μηκέτι ὑμᾶς περιπατεῖν καθὼς καὶ τὰ ἔθνη περιπατεῖ, 4:17).

We cannot fail to be struck by the “peculiar” manner in which Paul expresses his logic of exclusion⁵⁰: “But that is not how you learned Christ [Ὑμεῖς δὲ οὐχ οὕτως ἐμάθετε τὸν Χριστόν], if indeed you heard him [εἰ γὰρ αὐτὸν ἠκούσατε] and were taught in him [καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ ἐδιδάχθητε], as the truth is in Jesus [καθὼς ἐστὶν ἀλήθεια ἐν τῷ Ἰησοῦ]” (4:20–21). Paul's instructional rhetoric here is both explicit and unusual. In 4:20, ἐμάθετε τὸν Χριστόν identifies the person of Christ as the church's curriculum.⁵¹ Paul then unpacks what he means in 4:21, assuming as he does (εἰ γὰρ; cf. Eph 3:2⁵²) not only the church's prior exposure to the gospel about Christ (cf. Eph 1:13), whose (figurative) voice they heard *at* their conversion (αὐτὸν ἠκούσατε; cf. 2:17),⁵³ but also the further instruction they received *after* their conversion (ἐν αὐτῷ ἐδιδάχθητε).⁵⁴ Indeed, the Messiah Jesus was the very subject matter of their prior instruction, since truth is essentialized in the person and work of Jesus (καθὼς ἐστὶν ἀλήθεια ἐν τῷ Ἰησοῦ) (Best 1998, p. 429).

The focus in 4:20–21, then, is on the education Paul's readers have already received. Such theological and moral instruction, as Paul has already stressed, is required throughout the maturation process (4:11–16), but it is especially fundamental for those who wish to advance beyond spiritual infancy (4:14). In fact, while formal education in the ancient world could be suitable for privileged young adults, it was (as many of the texts discussed above intimate) most commonly provided to children in preparation for adulthood (cf. Gal 3:23–27). Thus, for Paul to acknowledge his readers' prior receipt of basic theological and moral instruction implies that they have already been equipped with the resources to move beyond spiritual childhood.

Given the link between education and maturation, it should not surprise us that when Paul identifies the content of the church's prior instruction in 4:22–24,⁵⁵ he conveys this teaching in imagery that, for Paul's original readers, would have evoked the coming-of-age ceremony for a Roman male. What Paul's audience has specifically been taught is “to put off the old human, which accords with your former way of life [ἀποθέσθαι ὑμᾶς κατὰ τὴν προτέραν ἀναστροφὴν τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον], the one being corrupted according to deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the Spirit of your minds, and to put on the new human [ἐνδύσασθαι τὸν καινὸν ἄνθρωπον], the one created according to God in true righteousness and holiness” (4:22–24). The old human is the Adamic nature (cf. Rom 6:6), characterized by one's former way of life (cf. 4:17–19). The new human, as we saw in 2:15, relates to Christ, the new Adam.⁵⁶ In 2:15, the new human was a communal entity, Christ's newly created corporate body which is undergoing maturation (cf. 4:12–16). In 4:24, the new human is individualized but has the same referent; it refers to Christ-existence, the new creation life one has in the Messiah. More importantly, the imagery of laying aside the old human as a piece of clothing and the donning of the new human is a salient allusion to the removal of the *toga praetexta* and the donning of the *toga virilis*, which marks one's entry into early manhood (cf. ἀποτίθημι, Nicolaus Dam., *Vit. Caes.* 8; Plutarch, *Mor.* 37D; *pono*, Seneca, *Ep.* 4.2).⁵⁷ Paul's use of the metaphor therefore suggests that his readers, taught as they were to wear the new creation apparel, are at least *prepared* to move into spiritual

young adulthood (to become ἔφηβοι, νεανίαι, or the like).⁵⁸ So, according to Paul, has this exchange of theological attire yet taken place?

According to Best, “there is no gradual creation of the new self. The believer is a new self; he or she is not on the way to becoming one. The pre-Christian and the Christian manner of life are thus both described in absolute terms” (Best 1997, p. 142). However, as Arnold warns, “It would also be wrong to overinterpret the aorist tense of these two infinitives and imply that this is a onetime event (and thereby refer this action to conversion or baptism). The action is simply viewed as a complete and undifferentiated process without comment on how it occurs. Since Paul is offering a snapshot of the entirety of the action, it could well involve a long process, that is, a daily activity” (Arnold 2010, p. 287). Almost certainly, both scholars are partly correct. Paul tends to theologize in absolute terms, and all other available Pauline evidence suggests that at conversion the old human has been crucified with Christ (Rom 6:6) and the change in garb has already occurred (Col 3:9–10). At the same time, Paul elsewhere stresses the need to continue to put on Christ (Rom 13:14) along with the virtues of the new human (Col 3:12). In other words, despite the immediacy of the creation of the new human, the challenge for Paul’s readers is that their lives do not always reflect the new existence they have received in Christ, characterized as it is by Spirit-empowered mind renewal, God-likeness, and true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24). They have taken off the old human, but in their conduct, the old human does not always remain off. They have put on the new human, but in their conduct the new human does not always stay on. Despite having received the new human at conversion, putting on Christ-existence does not result in immediate and impeccable moral transformation, since, as Paul explains elsewhere, that will only occur “when the perfect comes” (ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ τὸ τέλειον, 1 Cor 13:10).

Because believers live between the present evil age and the new creation, Paul holds in unresolved tension the indicative and the imperative, the indicative receiving primary emphasis in Ephesians 4:17–24 and the imperative in 4:25–6:20. To be sure, the paraenetic context may suggest that some imperatival force lies behind the infinitives in 4:22–24 (cf. 4:25).⁵⁹ Even so, what cannot be denied is that Paul’s implied readers have already been provided the necessary pedagogical and Christological resources to cross the threshold from spiritual infancy to spiritual adulthood, and *Paul assumes they at some point have already done so* (διὸ ἀποθέμενοι τὸ ψεῦδος, 4:25). Paul, in fact, seems to be plenty aware of the fact that initiation into adulthood was often accompanied by a period of significant moral struggle, since after having laid aside their old garment (4:25), which implies their already being clothed in the new garment (the new Adam), his readers must nonetheless be reminded to renounce the same vices that normally accompany Roman adolescence—anger, violence, obscenity, sexual immorality, coarse joking, and drunkenness (4:25–5:21). Instead, they are to “[l]ook carefully then how [they] walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time [τὸν καιρὸν, i.e., the time prior to the fullness of times (1:10) during which believers are transitioning from early manhood to mature manhood], because the days are evil [ὅτι αἱ ἡμέραι πονηραὶ εἰσιν]” (5:15–16).⁶⁰

Paul strategizes about how to withstand “in the evil day” (ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ πονηρᾷ, 6:13) in one final passage, bringing his maturity discourse to a fitting climax. In 6:10–18, the apostle explains that just as young men in the Greco-Roman world had attained the requisite age to participate in military combat, so his readers, having donned the new human, now also possess the right and responsibility to “put on the whole armor of God” (ἐνδύσασθε/ἀναλάβετε τὴν πανοπλίαν τοῦ θεοῦ) in order to stand against the combative schemes of the Devil (6:11, 13). Paul’s armor imagery no doubt originated from the divine warrior theme of the Hebrew Bible (esp. Isa 59:17), but here the apostle weds this scriptural motif to his maturity metaphor to inspire his readers to enter the cosmic conflict with

courage and confidence. While many interpreters treat the clothing imagery in 4:21–24 as conceptually different from the wearing of God’s armor (e.g., [Best 1998](#), pp. 590–91), it seems best to understand the latter as consisting of the same virtues and activating the same resources made available to all believers once they put on the new human ([Lincoln 1990](#), p. 442; [Muddiman 2001](#), p. 287; [Arnold 2010](#), pp. 443–44). In other words, Paul’s maturation metaphor persists even into this final military analogy as Paul calls upon his readers to participate in spiritual warfare in a way that is suitable only for those who have come of age. Indeed, it is only those who have metaphorically progressed beyond spiritual childhood to Christian young manhood who have been adequately equipped to be strong in the Lord and can withstand the attacks of their spiritual opposition.

5. Conclusions

This essay has sought to show that throughout multiple units in Ephesians, from 2:11–22 to 4:7–16 to 4:17–6:20, Paul conspicuously deploys terminology and images that would have evoked notions of human development and maturation in the Greco-Roman context of his earliest readers. Following a discussion of relevant Greek texts employing the phrase “mature man” and a sketch of the process and significance of attaining young manhood in the Roman world, we argued that, according to Paul, believers are expected to “come of age” to the extent that they have already received the rights and resources not only to enjoy God’s realized eschatological blessings (1:3–14) but also to experience moral transformation fitting of maturing Christ-followers who have put on the new human. Even so, the “storm and stress” of their yet-to-be perfected developmental state leaves believers vulnerable to agents of spiritual opposition, leading to moral failure (2:1–3; 4:14; 6:10–18). And yet, we are assured that when the corporate church—indeed *all* its disparate parts—works together to build up one another and continues to wear the garments of the new creation, believers will be able to deflect and withstand the phony teachings, dangerous ideologies, self-destructive vices, and cosmic powers that seek to derail and drive apart the body of Christ, which is on its way to attaining the stature of the fullness of its full-grown head. This elaborate metaphor brings together under a single coherent model numerous theological themes (including Christology, soteriology, cosmology, ecclesiology, and eschatology). Furthermore, it skillfully and intelligibly illuminates the tension inherent to Paul’s realized eschatological vision by drawing on an experience of liminality known throughout the ancient world.

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Notes

- ¹ Peterson gives credit for the phrase “practice resurrection” to ([Berry 1985](#), pp. 151–52) (cf. [Peterson 2010](#), p. 8).
- ² ([Peterson 2010](#), p. 12 [original emphasis]). According to Peterson, “When we practice resurrection, we keep company with Jesus, alive and present” (2010, p. 8); “The practice of resurrection encourages improvisation on the basic resurrection story as given in our Scriptures and revealed in Jesus. Thousands of derivative unanticipated resurrection details proliferate across the landscape. The company of people who practice resurrection replicates the way of Jesus on the highways and byways named and numbered on all the maps of the world” (2010, p. 13). Thus, “The practice of resurrection is not an attack on the world of death; it is a nonviolent embrace of life in the country of death. It is an open invitation to live eternity in time” (2010, p. 13).

- (Peterson 2010, pp. 2, 8, respectively). Thus, for Peterson “the practice of resurrection” is interchangeable with “growing to maturity” (2010, p. 66); “this practice-resurrection life” is the same thing as “this growing-up-in-Christ life” (2010, p. 85).
- All translations of biblical texts are my own unless otherwise stated.
- Thus, Peterson remarks, “Infants are totally dependent on parents, but as children we gradually learn to dress and feed ourselves, make independent decisions, take initiative. Adolescence is the critical transition between childhood and adulthood. It is an awkward and often turbulent time as we learn to incorporate the gifts that we have been given into adult responsibilities” (Peterson 2010, p. 46).
- Although the identification of the author of Ephesians remains disputed, in this essay I refer to the author as Paul out of convenience. For a robust defense of Pauline authorship, see (Hoehner 2002, pp. 2–61).
- For the study of maturity in Ephesians, see especially (Matthews 2007, 2009; Mbennah 2013; Kingsley 2024).
- By “realized eschatology” I mean the present arrival and fulfillment of events or realities commonly believed to be reserved for the age to come. For the concurrent existence of realized and unrealized aspects of Paul’s eschatology in Ephesians, see (Lincoln 1990, p. lxxxix–xc). In this sense, it is appropriate to consider Ephesians to be projecting an *inaugurated eschatology*, whereby the new creation has dawned but has not yet fully arrived.
- According to Laes and Strubbe, “In total, one can find about fifty Greek texts and 120 Latin passages that contain more or less elaborate divisions of the human life cycle” (Laes and Strubbe 2014, p. 28).
- Overstreet (2009) believes there existed widespread agreement in Greco-Roman antiquity about the division of life into seven discrete stages.
- It is noteworthy that the phrase τέλειος ἀνὴρ/*perfectus vir* refers more often to the wise or virtuous man (cf. James 3:2; Isocrates, *Panath.* 32; Plato, *Leg.* 643D; 730D; 950C; *Hipp. maj.* 281b; Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 1176a; Polybius, *Hist.* 4.8.1; 6.2.5; 38.21.2; Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl. Hist.* 9.11.2; Seneca, *Ep.* 2.6.8; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 8.16; Plutarch, *Mor.* 1046[27F]; Pseudo-Plutarch, *Mor.* 874F [*Plac. Philos.*]; Galen, *Aff. Pecc. Dig.* 5.14.9–10K; Apuleius, *De deo Socr.* 17; Aelian, *Nat. an.* 10.48; *Elegy and Iambus*, 2.22.2; Emperor Julian, *Misop.* 354a).
- According to Gera, “The narration of the life and deeds of Cyrus the Great is, in essence, a convenient framework, a peg upon which Xenophon hangs reflections and ideas of his own. Cyrus is not the real impetus for the *Cyropaedia* but is more akin to a tailor’s dummy, a useful figure to be clothed as his author likes” (Gera 1993, p. 2). Thus, the treatise, which Gera dates to the 360s BCE (Gera 1993, p. 25), more accurately attests to the rhetoric and ideas of ancient Greece rather than of Persia.
- All translations of Xenophon are from (Miller 1914).
- (Ferrario 2017, p. 63). Lu coins this form of training as “social education”, because “it is a lifelong task and touches almost every branch of public life” (Lu 2015, p. 89). Xenophon’s “social education” extends beyond political theory into matters of morality and socialization, all of which, according to Lu, was prioritized in Cyrus’ governance and was foundational to his political success (Lu 2015, pp. 87–92).
- All translations of Plato are from (Bury 1926).
- All translations of Polybius are from (Paton 1923).
- See, e.g., Polybius’ own commentary: “Finally the king spoke, if indeed we are to suppose that the opinion he delivered was his own; for it is scarcely probable that a boy of seventeen should be able to decide about such grave matters” (*Hist.* 4.24.1).
- Polybius’ coupling of παιδίον and νήπιον elsewhere in his writings suggests extreme youth (cf. *Hist.* 4.20.8; 15.7.1; 15.20.2). Thus, Polybius’ use of ὡς παιδίῳ νηπίῳ here attributes to the Aetolians an exaggerated view of Philip’s immaturity, which serves as a foil for their newfound perception of the king as a τέλειος ἀνὴρ.
- (McGing 2013, p. 184): “the word ‘childish’ can function as a term of abuse for people acting in a particularly stupid way”.
- (McGing 2010, p. 116). McGing, to be sure, argues that “[f]rom the very beginning of the *Histories* Polybius displays an interest in age” (McGing 2013, p. 182). However, “It is overwhelmingly youthfulness that attracts Polybius’ attention, in particular young leaders. He conveys a widespread belief among the actors of his story that young men are gullible, rash, and not able to manage public affairs” (McGing 2013, p. 183).
- Trans. from (Yonge 1991). The LCL translation (Colson and Whitaker 1929), regrettably, conflates five of the intermediate developmental stages: “Where is the babe [τὸ βρέφος] that once I was, the boy [ὁ παῖς] and the other gradations between boy and full-grown man [ὁ τέλειος ἀνὴρ]?” In the volume’s appendix, the LCL translators explain, “Of the five gradations left untranslated ἡβῶν perhaps = age of puberty, while πρωτογένειος speaks for itself, and the other three fall of course between the limits thus indicated” (Colson and Whitaker 1929, p. 485). Thus, Colson and Whitaker recognize that within the passage Philo identifies eight developmental stages, ranging from “babe” to “full-grown man.” Importantly, this means that (Colson and Whitaker 1929), unlike (Yonge 1991), read Philo as having differentiated between ὁ νεανίας and ὁ τέλειος ἀνὴρ as separate stages.
- It is possible that for Philo νήπιον παιδίον and παιδίον are not strictly interchangeable. They may represent two separate, perhaps even successive, developmental stages, or perhaps νήπιον παιδίον represents an early stage within the broader, parent stage of the παιδίον. Settling this matter, however, is not essential for the argument of this essay.

- This reading also finds confirmation in Philo's *Hypothetica* 11.3, where it is reported that “no Essene is a mere child [νήπιος] nor even a stripling [πρωτογένειος] or newly bearded [μειράκιον], since the characters of such are unstable with a waywardness corresponding to the immaturity of their age [τῷ τῆς ἡλικίας ἀτελεῖ συννεωτερίζοντα]. Rather, “they are all full-grown men [τέλειοι δ’ ἄνδρες] and already verging on old age [γῆρας], no longer carried under by the tide of the body [μηκέθ’ ὑπὸ τῆς τοῦ σώματος ἐπιρροῆς κατακλυζόμενοι] nor led by the passions, but enjoying the veritable, the only real freedom” (trans. from Colson 1941). In this passage, Philo recognizes multiple intermediate stages between the νήπιος and τέλειος ἄνθρωπος, including the young man (μειράκιον). See further (Kingsley 2024, pp. 156–57).
- In classical Athens, the transition of a youth to adulthood took place gradually from age sixteen to twenty. Around the age of sixteen, a boy participated in a ceremony in which he was re-introduced to his family; he also received a ceremonial haircut in which the extraneous hair was offered sacrificially to Artemis. At eighteen, his age and descent were examined by the council, and those who passed were then officially registered as a member of the local district and were removed from the authority of their father. Then, after completing two years of military training in the *ephebeia*, the boy was registered as a citizen and became a *neoi* (Laes and Strubbe 2014, pp. 49–50). While it is unclear whether all these rituals persisted into the Hellenistic and Roman periods, the *ephebeia* continued to be utilized in the Greek East, though its function likely transformed from an institution primarily concerned with combat preparation to one focused on athletic and intellectual training (Laes and Strubbe 2014, pp. 104–35).
- For “coming of age” and “early adulthood” in ancient Greece, see (Garland 1990, pp. 163–241).
- Trans. from (Toher 2016, p. 182). According to Toher, “[Nicolaus’] description is generally in accord with the standard development of a young Roman aristocrat destined for a prominent role in public life” (2016, p. 182).
- For διαφαίνεται as “excel”, see LSJ s.v. “διαφαίνω”, II.3.
- Trans. from (Rolfe 1927). The rite and even requirement to serve in the army also accompanied entrance into young adulthood in ancient Greek society. The Greek historian Diodorus of Sicily reports how, during the Hellenistic period, the Rhodians voted that “their sons on reaching manhood [ἐν ἡλικίᾳ γενομένους] should be crowned in the theatre at the Dionysia and given a full suit of armour [πανοπλίᾳ]” (Bib. Hist. 20.84.3 [trans. from Geer 1954]). See also the elaborate Cretan ceremony in Strabo, *Geogr.* 10.4.21, about which Garland explains, “The imagery seems to suggest that manhood was most importantly indicated by eligibility for military service and the right to attend the symposium or drinking-party” (Garland 1990, p. 176).
- (McDonnell 2006, p. 180). McDonnell immediately adds, “It was because such a high proportion of Roman citizens served in the army, and because Rome was at war so frequently, that the primary meaning of *virtus* [from *vir*, man] in republican Latin is martial courage” (2006, p. 180).
- On the roles of teacher (*ludimagister*) and attendant (*paedagogus*), see (Laes 2011, pp. 107–31).
- Laes indicates that Roman children were in school from approximately ages seven to fifteen (Laes 2011, p. 107).
- Trans. from (Butler 1914). There is likely a euphemism in this passage—the boy (unclothed, inuestem) is returned a man (clothed, uesticipem), which probably suggests something about his having been adorned with both the *toga virilis* as well as with sexual partners (harlots).
- See, e.g., Tacitus, *Ann.* 6.49 (*lubricum iuventae*); 13.2 (*lubricam aetatem*); 14.56 (*lubricum adulescentiae*); Jerome, *Ep.* 79.7 (*lubricam aetatem*); *Digest* 4.4.11.5 (*aetatis lubrico*); *Code of Justinian* 2.22.1 (*lubricum aetatis*); 2.34.2 (*aetatis lubrico*); Latin Panegyrics, *Pacatus* 12.7.11 (*adulescentiae lubrico*)
- See, e.g., John Chrysostom, *Hom. Matt.*, 81.5 (PG 58.737); Florus, *Epit.* 1.17.9 (*fretum illud adulescentiae*); Latin Panegyrics, *Eumenius* 5.5 (*in mediis adulescentiae fluctibus*); *Pacatus* 12.7.10–18; Ambrose, *On Cain*, 1.3.11 (PL 14.321).
- (Rothe 2020, p. 64): “The existence of the ceremony and what it symbolized reveals a Roman concept of the transition from childhood to adulthood as a sudden step, rather than a gradual process”.
- For the conceptual and metaphorical relatedness of ἀνακεφαλαιόω to Christ’s role as cosmic head (κεφαλή, 1:22), see, e.g., (Schlier 1957, p. 65; Barth 1974a, pp. 89–92; MacDonald 2000, pp. 202–3; Hoehner 2002, pp. 219–21; van Kooten 2003, pp. 151, 157; Witherington 2007, p. 236; Arnold 2010, pp. 88–89; deSilva 2022, p. 72).
- The precise meaning of 1:23 is notoriously difficult. Most compelling is the reading that understands τὸ πλήρωμα to refer to the church as that which is filled by Christ. The participle τοῦ πληρουμένου is middle in form but active in force, and thus, τὰ πάντα is the direct object and ἐν παντί is spatial (“in every place”). See esp. (Schnackenburg 1991, pp. 83–84; cf. Barth 1974b, pp. 205–10; Matthews 2009, pp. 116–17; Arnold 2010, pp. 116–20; Cohick 2020, pp. 137–38).
- Wiseman defines *homo novus* as “a senator with no senatorial antecedents in his family” (Wiseman 1971, p. 1). See the more decent discussion and survey of competing proposals in (van der Blom 2010, pp. 35–59). See also (Becker and Mortensen 2018).
- For καὶνὸς ἄνθρωπος as an allusion to Genesis 1–2, see (Owens 2015, pp. 151–52).
- (Muddiman 2001, p. 204): “the author . . . has substituted ‘Man’ for ‘human person’ under the influence of the preceding reference to the Son of God [4:13b]”.
- Some do this seemingly because of Paul’s inclusion of both men and women in Christ’s body, e.g., (Hoehner 2002, pp. 554–56), while others do this because of Paul’s later feminization of the church in Ephesians 5:22–33, e.g., (Schnackenburg 1991, p. 185; Dawes 1998, p. 163).

- (Nortjé 1995, p. 61). See also (Schnackenburg 1991, p. 185; Nortjé-Meyer 2003; Nortjé-Meyer 2005). More accurate is Nortjé-Meyer's observation that, in Ephesians 4:13, "The body is a male body still maturing, but not a child anymore", because it rightly implies that the body/church finds itself somewhere between childhood and full maturity (2005, p. 735).
- Mbennah argues that both *ἀνὴρ* and *τέλειον* independently imply a full-grown, adult male (Mbennah 2013, p. 87). But if that were the case, then the combined phrase *εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον* would be redundant. It is better to recall that in Greco-Roman antiquity, there existed a spectrum of adulthood, and that the *τέλειος ἀνὴρ* referred to a fully developed man in contrast to a young man.
- On the syntax of *μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ* (4:13), see (Hoehner 2002, p. 557): "It is probably best to take *ἡλικίας* as a genitive of apposition, *τοῦ πληρώματος* as an exegetical genitive and *τοῦ Χριστοῦ* as either a subjective genitive or, better, a possessive genitive." Note that Wallace collapses the appositive and exegetical genitives into a single category (Wallace 1996, pp. 95–100).
- (Matthews 2009, p. 122): "when Paul presents the Church as the *ἀνὴρ τέλειος* in 4.13b, he is now depicting the one new person as having developed to its full maturity. This is fitting given that both the initial clause about unity and the final clause about fullness are equally concerned with the realisation of the *ἀνακεφαλαίωσις*. Thus, the fulfilment of the divine plan is presented by a series of images of the Church: internal unity, corporate maturity and cosmic fullness. What this argument suggests is that Christian maturity is fundamentally corporate, cosmic and eschatological".
- (Kingsley 2024, p. 123): "The adverb *μηκέτι* seems to imply that at least some of the Ephesians were in the state of *νήπιοι* at the time of the letter".
- See also Romans 6:6, where Paul insists that the "old human" was co-crucified with Christ "in order that the body of sin might be nullified, so that we might no longer serve sin [*τοῦ μηκέτι δουλεύειν ἡμᾶς τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ*]" . Paul's use of *μηκέτι* in the verse's final clause does not imply that Paul and his readers currently remain in a state of servitude to sin; in fact, Paul insists just the opposite is true (cf. 6:7, 17–18; 7:6).
- (Vrey 2019, p. 390). Likewise, Kingsley asserts, "It seems relatively safe to assume that the implied state of existence for the church would be one of prolonged childhood (or what Barth calls spiritual 'adolescence') if the state of *ἀνὴρ τέλειος* is indeed tied directly to the Parousia in Eph 4:13" (Kingsley 2024, p. 253). Kingsley, however, seems not to account for Paul's coming-of-age imagery in 4:22–24 (on which, see below). Moreover, it is difficult to comprehend why Kingsley equates childhood and adolescence, as he seems to do in the above quote. In Greece and Rome, "adolescence" (*ἐφηβεία/adolescēntia*) was a transitional stage *between* childhood and full-grown adulthood (cf. Laes and Strubbe 2014, pp. 28–29), as acknowledged both by Barth (1974b, p. 491) and by Kingsley himself (Kingsley 2024, pp. 25, 201).
- On Paul's oscillation between individual and community, see (Gupta 2010, p. 535): "Paul is fond of a dialectic interplay that transfers christological import to the individual and the community".
- (Muddiman 2001, p. 216): "'to learn' with 'Christ' as its direct object is a peculiar idiom". Cf. (Witherington 2007, p. 297).
- (Best 1998, p. 426): *ἐμάθετε τὸν Χριστόν* is an unusual phrase ... because a person is said to be learnt; normally subjects are learnt ('You have not learnt the Torah'). Indeed, through the expression *ἐμάθετε τὸν Χριστόν*, Paul is implying that Christ is the subject being learned.
- Cf. BDAG s.v. "γέ", b.α. According to Thrall, "The sense of *εἰ γέ* is probably, 'At any rate if you have heard ... as I know you have'" (Thrall 1962, p. 88).
- The accusative object of *ἀκούω* normally refers to what (not who) was heard (BDAG s.v. "ἀκούω", 1.b.α). Because the object here is personal (*αὐτόν*), the pronoun could refer to the teaching about Christ or, as Best proposes, "that Christ himself is heard in those who proclaim him" (Best 1998, p. 427). Indeed, in 2:17, Christ himself is figuratively portrayed as he who proclaimed the gospel of peace to Paul's readers.
- The familiar locative sense of *ἐν αὐτῷ* ("in him/Christ") suggests that the teaching received by the reader occurred after their conversion. Thus, Meyer rightly calls our attention to "the progress of the discourse, which passes over from the first proclamation of the gospel (*αὐτόν ἠκούσατε*) to the further instruction which they have thereupon received *as already converted to Christ* (*ἐν αὐτῷ ἐδιδάχθη*). [*sic*])—two elements, which were previously *comprehended* in *ἐμάθετε τὸν Χριστόν*" (Meyer 1880, p. 243 [original emphasis]). Cf. (Muddiman 2001, p. 217; Best 1998, p. 428).
- Arnold rightly classifies the infinitives in 4:22–24 as exegetical/explanatory (Arnold 2010, p. 286).
- Dahl identifies the old and new humans as Adam and Christ, respectively, though he asserts that they are "nicht zwei Individuen, sondern zwei Typen, den mit Adam und den mit Christus konformen Menschen" (Dahl 2000, p. 397).
- Kim suggests that "the metaphor of clothing-with-the-new-man ... seems to correspond to the transition from boyhood to manhood which was experienced by a Roman male and which was accompanied by the laying aside of the *toga praetexta* and the wearing of the *toga virilis*. The putting off/on metaphor also echoes traditions similar to those found in the concept of the change from a pagan to a Jewish personality. ... However, above all, the metaphor seems to correspond to the ritual of the OT priest's putting off his previous garment, bathing, and putting on the priestly garment" (Kim 2004, pp. 191–92). Despite the possible resonances between Paul's language in Ephesians 4:22–24 and the Hebrew/Jewish clothing images advanced by Kim, the *toga*

virilis metaphor remains the strongest given the pervasiveness of the human development terminology (and the absence of the other proposed metaphorical concepts) throughout the letter.

- 58 For a convincing case for the *toga virilis* as the source domain of Paul's clothing imagery in Galatians 3:27, see (Harrill 2002).
 59 (Best 1998, pp. 430–31). Arnold helpfully situates Ephesians 4:22–24 in relation Colossians 3:9–10 to explain the tension between
 indicative and imperative (Arnold 2010, pp. 286–87).
 60 Cf. Juvenal, *Sat.* 8.165–166: “Let your evil days be short [*breve sit quod turpiter audes*]; let some of your misdoings be cut off with
 your first beard [*quaedam cum prima resecentur crimina barba*]” (trans. G. G. Ramsay 1979).

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