

Chapter Five

commentary

1–2 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Messiah also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

A question that we might first ask is whether these opening two verses of our chapter initiate a new paragraph or if they form a fitting conclusion to the previous paragraph which begins in 4:17. Apparently the chapter division as established by the Geneva Bible of 1560 CE, which became the standard for later English translations such as the KJV of 1611, considered these verses to introduce a new section of the epistle, and thus the beginning of a new chapter. It is most likely that this decision was based upon the fact that 5:1 begins with “Therefore” (οὕτως, *oum*) which in the previous chapter seems clearly to mark a new section or paragraph (e.g., 4:1, 17).

While it seems clear that these opening verses of chapter five offer Paul’s conclusion to 4:17–32, they also move us forward as Paul explains what it means to be “imitators of God” and he does so both by pointing out significant positive characteristics of a believer’s life as well as those negative things which are clearly antithetical to the life of one who is truly a child of God. In fact, the remainder of Ephesians (chapters 5 and 6) focus upon how we are to “walk” in our faith as those who are children in God’s family and who would therefore mimic their Father.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children... – At first we may wonder how Paul could admonish his readers and us to be “imitators of God,” for surely God is infinite in all of His attributes and we are surely finite and therefore greatly lacking to imitate Him. When we even seek to contemplate the greatness of God, we sympathize with the words of Zophar HaNa’amitee as recorded in Job 11:7–8.

Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty? They are high as the heavens, what can you do? Deeper than Sheol, what can you know? (Job 11:7–8)

Or we may remember the words of Isaiah when he was given a vision of ADONAI “sitting on a throne lofty and exalted, with the train of His

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robe filling the temple” (Is 6:1), and the Seraphim calling out, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.” (Is 6:3). Surely we resonate with the response of Isaiah when he cries out:

Woe is me, for I am ruined!
Because I am a man of unclean lips,
And I live among a people of unclean lips;
For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. (Is 6:5)

What then does Paul mean by admonishing us to be “imitators of God”? It is when we first come to recognize that in our own strength or by our own finite abilities we could never become “imitators of God” that we affirm that only by the power of the Ruach are we enabled to “put off the old man” and to continue to “put on the new man” as Paul instructed in the previous chapter (4:22–24). Note the picture given to us by John in Revelation.

When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. (Rev 1:17–18)

It is when we fully recognized our own weakness and inabilities, and then resolve to seek God’s strength and the empowering of the Ruach, that we gain both the resolve and the ability to become “imitators of God.”

The very idea of “imitating” (μιμέομαι, *mimēomai*) is that of “emulating” or “seeking to be like” someone. It means to have as a primary goal to become more and more like Yeshua in all aspects of life. And we know that we have been given the ability to increasingly become more like Him because

He predestined us to adoption as sons through Yeshua Messiah to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Eph 1:5–6)

Even as in the natural world children are born with certain characteristics of their father, so we who are “beloved children,” having been born again by God’s grace to be His own children, likewise are given both the ability and desire to become more and more like our heavenly

Father. This is a cooperative work in which the believer willfully submits to the Ruach and in the strength He provides, to “say no” to the flesh and to live in a way that pleases the Lord.

...if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Yeshua His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1John 1:7)

...and walk in love, just as Messiah also loved you – Paul uses the all encompassing aspect of “love” to gather together the various admonitions in the final verses of the previous chapter. These were speaking the truth (4:25), working in order to have something to give to those in need (4:28), being careful to let our words be that which edifies others in the grace of God (4:29), and to be kind, compassionate, and forgiving toward one another (4:32). Now Paul makes it clear that these actions are the fruit of genuine love, the kind of love demonstrated by Yeshua Himself, Who “gave Himself up for us.”

Paul uses the verb “to walk” (περιπατέω, *peripateō*) to describe “how a person lives,” answering to the Hebrew verb הָלַךְ (*hālak*, “to walk”) and its later associated noun, הַלָּכָה (*halākāh*, “the way one is to walk”).¹ He uses this verb “to walk” eight times in Ephesians, both to describe the life of sin by which the unbeliever is characterized (2:2; 4:17x2) as well as to describe the life of the believer who is characterized by good works as ordained by God (2:10; 4:1; 5:2, 8, 15).

To “walk in love” is a phrase that describes a foundational aspect of what it means to be “imitators of God,” for it describes a life characterized by love, the same kind of love which Yeshua had for the elect as He faced the cross, for it was the eternal joy of saving those given to Him by the Father that was His focus as He undertook to pay the price of our redemption. The words of Hebrews make this clear:

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Yeshua, the author and perfecter of faith, Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb 12:1-2)

The Greek of our text is very clear. The way we are to love is καθώς

1 The noun הַלָּכָה (*halākāh*) is not found in the Tanach.

καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς, “in the same way (καθώς, *kathōs*) the Messiah loved us.” Thus, our love for each other, and even for those who act as enemies toward us, is to be a love that is self-giving and done for God’s glory and honor, not motivated by self-gain or self-aggrandizement. For Yeshua, the Owner of everything, needed nothing yet gave Himself for those whom He would save. His love for all who would be saved was itself the fountain of joy which flowed from His love. Thus, if we are to love others as He loved us, we must do so in a way that pleases our Lord and finds favor in His eyes. And that must be the joy which strengthens us, even to love our enemies. For in loving as Yeshua has loved us, we show ourselves to be children in the family of God, honoring the Father and the Son through the power of the Ruach.

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (Matt 5:44-45)

... and gave Himself up for us – Here, as often in the Scriptures, the self-sacrifice of God’s Son, Yeshua, is spoken of as definite payment for the sins of those He would save. The Greek of this phrase is very clear on this matter: καὶ παρέδωκεν ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, “and offered Himself [as a sacrifice] for us.” In the days of the Tabernacle and Temples, a person who brought a sacrifice laid his hands upon the head of the animal to indicate that the animal was being sacrificed for him. If it was a guilt offering, then the sacrifice expunged the guilt of the one who had laid his hands upon the head of the sacrifice.

This is the language Paul is using here: a one-to-one correspondence between Yeshua and those for whom He died. He gave Himself up “for us,” where Paul clearly includes himself by switching to the first-person plural “us” when previously he used the second-person plural when stating that “Messiah also loved you.” The primary point to be made is this: Yeshua’s death on the cross actually paid for sin. It was not a “potential” payment or a payment to which something more needed to be added or to be accomplished. In this regard, note Paul’s words in the sister-epistle to Ephesians, i.e., Colossians.

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against

us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (Col 2:13-14)

The final phrase of Col 2:14, “having nailed it to the cross,” clearly indicates that the “certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us” was that which was “nailed to the cross.” The only meaning this text could have is that the decree that condemned the sinner, i.e., the penalty of sin being death, was completely nullified and destroyed for all the elect through the death of Yeshua. Yeshua’s death did not make salvation possible, it made salvation inevitable for all those whom He would save.

... *an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.* – The death of Yeshua for all those whom He would save is the reality of which the sacrificial system was the shadow. The sacrificial system always existed as a foreshadow of the ultimate and real sacrifice of Yeshua Himself. But not only was the death of our Messiah set forth by Paul here as fully efficacious, it also was completely voluntary on Yeshua’s behalf. For after stating that He “gave Himself up for us,” he adds the words “as an offering” (*προσφορά, prosphora*), the Greek word primarily having the sense of “gift” or that which is given “voluntarily.”¹ Thus, it was from His eternal and divine love that He willingly, voluntarily, gave Himself as the required sacrifice to redeem those whom the Father had given Him (cf. Jn 6:37-39).

And then Paul adds “as a fragrant aroma.” This phrase, used in connection with the whole burnt offering, the meal offering, the peace offering, and the sin offering, described God’s willing acceptance of the sacrifices given. It is significant that only the guilt offering is not stated to be a “soothing aroma” (*ריח הנִיחֹחַ, reiyach hanichoach*) to the Lord (Lev 5). The guilt offering (*אָשָׁם, 'asham*) was required where a transgression had been committed knowingly, admission of guilt had been forthcoming, and where reparations had been made. While the guilt offering enabled the guilty party to be received back into the community in good standing, the Torah never refers to the *'asham* as a “soothing aroma” to God. It may well be that the guilt offering anticipated the full sacrifice of Yeshua for such guilt to be “wiped clean” from the heavenly ledger, for it is by His sacrifice that every sin of the believer is paid for and therefore the one who is “in Messiah” is accepted as completely holy in the eyes of God. While the animal sacrifice which constituted the “guilt offering” enabled the guilty party once again to be accepted in the Israelite community, only the infinite sacrifice of God’s Son,

1 BDAG, “προσφορά,” p. 887.

Yeshua, could make the necessary payment for the sin that marked the sinner as completely guilty before the three-times holy God. To those who, like Abraham, put their faith in the Coming One, His payment for sin by His death was reckoned to their account.

Thus, God the Father fully accepted the atoning sacrifice of His Son, Yeshua, on behalf of all the elect as full payment for their sins. The proof of such acceptance was the resurrection, for by death Yeshua conquered “him who had the power of death, that is, the devil (Heb 2:14).

Thus Yeshua, in willingly giving Himself to save us, stands as the supreme example of love, a love which we are to emulate as we seek to edify each other and to demonstrate to a watching world the power of God in redeeming His people to become more and more like His Son.

In committing ourselves to follow Paul’s inspired admonition and to “be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other,” we are to forgive as God forgave us, emulating the love of God with which we have been loved, a love which the Apostles define in their writings.

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1Cor 13:1-7)

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. (1Pet 4:8)

Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions. (Prov 10:12).

“Covering sin” does not mean to pretend it does not exist or to fail to deal with it, but rather to refuse to multiply it through gossip, hatred, or any kind of retaliation, and to follow biblical principles (Matt 5:21-26; 18:15-19).

3-4 But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

Paul now makes a specific application to the life of the believer of the theological truths he has emphasized in the previous contexts. In

the previous chapter he admonishes his readers to live out the new life they confess to have in Yeshua by no longer living in accordance with the flesh. He admonishes us to “no longer walk as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind,” to cease emulating those who have “given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness” (4:18–19). He likewise exhorts us to “lay aside the old self,” to “be renewed in the spirit of your mind,” and to “put on the new self...created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (4:22–24). This means “laying aside falsehood” and each one “speaking the truth with his neighbor” (4:25), no longer stealing but doing honest work so as to have something to help those in need (4:28), doing away with “unwholesome speech” and being intent upon speaking in a way that “is good for edification” (4:29).

Now Paul “zeros in” on three behaviors that should not even be “mentioned” within a community of believers. These are immorality, impurity, and greed. When he writes that these “must not even be named,” he teaches us not only that such things could never characterize a true believer in Yeshua, but also that such things should not be part of normal conversations among community members—they should not even be “named” (μηδὲ ὀνομαζέσθω, *mēde onomazesthō*).

“Immorality” (πορνεία, *porneia*) is a broad term in the Greek which includes all aspects of unlawful sexual relationships and practices and is often used to describe “prostitutes” or “homosexuality.”¹ Sexual deviancy also characterized the pagan religions of the Greco-Roman empire in which sexual activities were a significant element. Thus, in a society where sexual deviancy was common, it is easy to see how the divine standards given in the Scriptures were easily “stretched” to fit the culturally acceptable “norms.” But from the very beginning, God ordained marriage as between one man and one woman, and He Himself demonstrated His purpose by bringing Chavah to Adam as those created in His image and fashioned for each other. To allow immorality to remain within the believing community is to mix things that essentially differ. Therefore Paul warns us not to allow any form of immorality to remain within our communities.

“Impurity” (ἀκαθαρσία, *akatharsia*) has the basic sense of “filthy” or “dirty,” and even “refuse.” It takes on a metaphoric meaning to describe the baseness of sexual deviancy—as that which entirely undermines God’s purpose for marriage. We encountered this same Greek word in 4:19 in the phrase “have given themselves over to sensuality

1 Liddell, Scott, Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, “πορνεία,” p. 1450.

for the practice of every kind of impurity (*akatharsia*). This term thus broadens the concept to include all manner of worldly activities that would promote even thoughts of “immorality” and “fornication.”

“Greed” (πλεονεξία, *pleoneksia*) describes “the state of desiring to have more than one’s due, i.e., greediness, insatiableness, avarice, covetousness.”¹ While *pleoneksia* was often used to describe the “very wealthy,” in our context it seems clear that Paul is describing an insatiable desire for things sexually related.

“Greed” (*pleonexia*), or covetousness in this context of sexual vices (cf. 1Co 5:10–11), may point to an insatiable desire for sexual indulgence. Paul here prohibits the entire range of immoral sexual behavior. In a culture where sexual perversions were rampant and where, for new believers, the lines between proper and sinful activities were difficult to draw, Paul wants to stress that greed for sex is not fitting for saints.²

...as is proper among saints. – That Paul states that such “immorality should not be even named among you” is simply an emphatic way of stating that those who confess Yeshua as their Lord and Savior should show their life of faith in Him through a life that exemplifies His holiness and thus to be utterly different than the society that is characterized as “the world.” The word “saint” (ἅγιος, *hagios*) simply means “holy,” and when applied to believers in Yeshua, it describes those who have been called into the family and kingdom of God through faith in Yeshua and thus are called to be separated from that which God hates.

The application of Paul’s words to our own times and culture is obvious. The biblical norms which give clear guidance regarding what God describes as “moral” and “immoral” continue to be eroded in our day to the point where some who call themselves believers are allowing that which, in previous generations, would have been universally described as immoral. In our global, digital world, the accessibility of immoral, sexually explicit media is available as never before, and sets a very real trap for those who allow themselves to be snared by it. We do well to heed the Apostle’s inspired words and to set the standard high, “that there not be even a hint of sexual immorality”³ in our communities which name Yeshua as Lord and King.

... and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, – “Filth-

1 BDAG, “πλεονεξία,” p. 824.

2 Klein, *Ephesians*, p. 134.

3 This is the NIV translation of the phrase in our verse.

iness” translates the Greek *αἰσχρός* (*aisxros*), used only here in the Apostolic Scriptures and in the Lxx of the canonical books, only to describe the “ugly appearance” of the cows who came up out of the Nile in Pharaoh’s dream (Gen 41:1-4). The word was used metaphorically to describe that which is “socially or morally unacceptable, shameful, or base.”¹ In our verse the word most likely carries the sense of “vulgar speech.”²

This is paired with “silly talk” (*μωρολογία, ἄσρολογία*), also found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures. In this context, the word may carry more meaning than just “uneducated talk” but more than likely also carries with it a sexual aspect. It seems possible that this word may encompass sexually explicit “jokes” or “jests” which might be found in various drink-fests, etc. Thielman makes this suggestion:

In its context here in Ephesians, where talk of sexual immorality and debauchery is in the air, *μωρολογία* [*mōrologia*] may also carry connotations of the kind of nonsensical talk that emerges from people in attendance at banquets where drunkenness and sexual immorality were common.³

The word translated “course jesting” (*εὐτραπέλια, eutrapelia*), once again, found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures, describes innuendos which often may carry veiled expressions that are recognized as sexually oriented.

...which are not fitting – All of these are the opposite (literally “out of place”) for what God intends to be the norm for His people, for the goal of our conversations together as believers in Yeshua ought to be for “edification,” i.e., for building each other up in the faith.

but rather giving of thanks. – We must make it our desire to give our Lord and Savior the glory and adoration He deserves by living and communicating in a way that honors Him. This does not mean that we avoid laughter and having a good time together. For surely we find in our mutual faith the very bedrock of what true community is which therefore results in true friendship as we bear each other’s burdens and love one another with the love we have experience from God Himself. This ought to be the norm to which we strive as we glory in the goodness of God and all that He has done and continues to do for us.

1 BDAG, “*αἰσχρός*,” p. 29.

2 As the NET Bible translates.

3 Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 330.

5 – For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Messiah and God.

Paul now continues to explain why it is so important to recognize that when a person is called by God to exercise true, saving faith in Yeshua, there comes about a change in that which characterizes the believer’s new life in Messiah. Thus, those things which characterize the world of the unbeliever, namely, “immorality, impurity, and greed” are “not even to be named” (cf. 5:3–4) within the believing community as though such things could ever be acceptable behavior among those who confess Yeshua to be their Lord and Savior. What is more, such sinful behavior should not be the topic of “silly talk or coarse jesting” (5:4), since the believer has been rescued from such sinful behavior through the very blood of Messiah shed on their behalf. So in verse five, Paul goes on to remind us that those whose lives are characterized by immorality and being self-centered are not part of God’s family and therefore currently await divine judgment in the world to come.

For this you know with certainty – The opening line of our verse utilizes an interesting doublet in the Greek (τοῦτο γὰρ ἵστε γινώσκοντες) which, if taken word-for-word reads: “For this you all must affirm knowing...” Paul utilizes two different Greek words (*οἶδα, oida* and *γινώσκω, ginōskō*, both plural) having the sense “to know,” in order to add emphasis. The first word, *oida*, is an imperative or command and the second word, *ginōskō*, is a participle. This combination may well emphasize that believers in Yeshua must “affirm to be true” that which one “always knows based upon the Scriptures,” i.e., the teachings of the Prophets and Apostles. Perhaps a translation like “Be sure you all know this” may capture Paul’s meaning, since it combines both the aspect of a command as well as that which is to be consistently upheld and acknowledged by the believing community.

...that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, – Once again, Paul is using these designations to describe the general character of a person. He is not teaching us here that one who has lived an immoral lifestyle, engaging in all manner of impurity, or one whose life was characterized by covetousness or even idolatry, are forever forsaken by God, for surely all who are sinners are cleansed and forgiven of their sin when they are granted repentance and saving faith in Yeshua and His work on their behalf. For Paul is not focusing in our text upon those who are outside of the body of Messiah, i.e., the *ekklesia* of which He is the head. Rather, Paul is teaching us here that those who have confessed Yeshua

as their Lord and Savior and who have therefore joined the community of believers and consider themselves part of the believing community, if they are truly born again, will never have a life characterized by immorality, impurity, covetousness, or idolatry.

In our verse, Paul simply repeats the terms he used in v. 3, namely, “immoral” (πόρνη, *pornē*), “impurity” (ἀκαθαρσία, *akatharsia*), and “greediness,” (πλεονεξία, *pleoneksia*). “Immoral” denotes all manner of unlawful sexual relationships and practices. “Impurity” denotes all manner of worldly activities that would promote even thoughts of “immorality” and “fornication.” And “greediness” denotes the driving desire to have more than one’s due, and perhaps in our context, a driven desire for sexual pleasures.

...*who is an idolater* – It is not certain if this added phrase refers only to “a covetous man” or if it also applies to the “immoral” and “impure” person previously named in the verse. The Greek would favor the view that the designation “who is an idolater” specifically describes the “covetous person,” for one whose life is primarily characterized by covetousness has made himself or herself the center of all their desires which is, in itself, idolatry. Note the parallel in Col 3:5.

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. (Col 3:5)

Paul makes the same claim in his epistle to the Romans where he describes idolatry as exchanging the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man.

Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures....For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (Rom 1:22-23, 25)

As Hoehner states:

To covet is idolatry. That which is coveted becomes the center of one’s life and is worshiped instead of the Creator (Rom 1:23). The greedy person is willing to exchange the glory of the incorruptible God for a corruptible idol (Rom 1:25).¹

¹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 661.

Paul teaches us that greed in the form of the “love of money” is a pathway to all kinds of evil.

For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (1Tim 6:10)

And this is paralleled by the words of Eliphaz in Job in which he seems to indicate that some had forsaken the Almighty and put their hope and trust in gold and silver as their “god.”

If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored; If you remove unrighteousness far from your tent, and place your gold in the dust, and the gold of Ophir among the stones of the brooks, then the Almighty will be your gold and choice silver to you. (Job 22:23–25)

...*has an inheritance in the kingdom of Messiah and God.* – Here, once again, Paul affirms that eternal life with God is a matter of God’s grace in salvation and not something earned by righteous deeds, for an inheritance (κληρονομία, *klēronomia*) is not earned but is given by the family member who owns it and who designates it to another member of the family. For a believer in Yeshua to receive “an inheritance in the kingdom” is based upon the very foundation enunciated by Paul at the beginning of Ephesians, namely that believers are part of God’s family:

He predestined us to adoption as sons through Yeshua Messiah to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Eph 1:5–6)

Those who are predestined to be adopted as children into the family of God are those who, having exercised saving faith in Yeshua, have a sure inheritance in the “kingdom of Messiah and God,” and they show their rightful place as adopted sons and daughters in the family of God by their commitment and ability to live in a way that pleases their heavenly Father.

Conversely, those who join the local assembly of believers yet who secretly maintain their lust for immorality, impurity, and self-satisfying of the flesh, will stand before the Judge of all the earth and be revealed as impostors who will hear the resounding condemnation of the Judge, “I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawless-

ness" (Matt 7:23, cf. Ps 6:8). The fact that Matthew states in the previous verse,

Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?"

is a startling reminder that the visible "*ekklesia*" may contain many who make an outward profession of faith but whose hearts are untouched by the reality of God's saving and life changing grace.

The combined phrase "kingdom of Messiah and God" is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures. Some have sought to make a distinction between "the Kingdom of Messiah" and "the Kingdom of God," the former focusing attention upon the current reality of the Kingdom in that Messiah is now reigning on high, while the designation "kingdom of God" puts primary emphasis upon the future Kingdom in the world to come.

Surely both realities are true, that the kingdom of Messiah and God is established now within the body of Messiah, for the *ekklesia* Yeshua promised to build exists now and His rule and reign is manifested in the lives of those who are truly His. This Paul emphasizes in our text by using the present tense "has an inheritance in the kingdom of Messiah and God," indicating that those who are proven to have this inheritance are those whose lives are characterized by righteousness. Yet, there is the reality that we also await the fulness of the kingdom of Messiah and God when Yeshua returns, when the world to come is ushered in, and when sin and death will be no more. So the kingdom is both present and future. The present kingdom of Messiah and God is made known in our world when the gracious and loving rule of the King is seen in the lives of His people. Thus, the "kingdom of Messiah and God" are not two kingdoms or even two aspects of the same kingdom, but are simply that reality in which those who are truly born from above are given a new life and therefore show forth the rule of the King by the manner in which they live.

6 – Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

What are "empty words" (*κενοῖς λόγοις, kenoiis logois*)? They are words, thoughts, or conversations which produce nothing of value and even have no substance in meaning which would lead to the truth and there-

fore would aid in obeying God and receiving His blessings. From the beginning of this chapter Paul has given two general exhortations: "become who you are," and "avoid what you no longer are."¹ We are "to be imitators of God, as beloved children," "to walk in love, just as Messiah also loved us," "to give thanks" and to put away "immorality, impurity, greed, filthiness, useless talk, and coarse jesting."

It seems that in our text Paul is warning against those who, though inwardly not believers at all, were confessing themselves to be believers and joined the believing community while remaining in their immoral and wayward patterns of living. Perhaps they were still accepting the heretical tenants of Gnosticism, which utterly separated the physical world from that of the spiritual realm. As such, the law, which pertains only to the physical world and not to the "soul" or the "spirit" (*πνεῦμα, pneuma*), does not therefore govern one's physical activities. In fact, according to some Gnostic writers, since the "human spirit" is free from the power of fate, it is also free from the yoke of the moral law, and thus all things are permitted.²

for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Such philosophical inventions are "empty words" indeed, for though they promise pleasure and satisfaction, for those who accept their "empty promises" they suffer the wrath of God in eternal punishment. It is always the tactic of the evil one to appeal to the sensual pleasures of the fallen nature through disguising his lies by dressing them in "religious garb."

Note the present tense "comes upon the sons of disobedience." Though the present tense verb *ἔρχεται (erxetai, "comes")* could portray an ongoing action in the future, it might also indicate that even in the present world those who are persuaded by "empty words" forfeit the ability to experience the current realities of God's kingdom. Rather than being adopted children in the family of God, they are "sons of disobedience," that is, children of the father of lies, i.e., Satan (cf. Jn 8:44). Yet though they fail to experience the joy of the kingdom in the current reign of Yeshua, their ultimate demise will be in the final judgment and we should note that the present tense "comes" is used of the coming, future judgment of God against unbelievers (1Thess 1:10; Col 3:6).

Here, in this verse, Paul once again makes a clear distinction between those who are born from above and thus more and more have

¹ Klein, *Ephesians*, p. 135.

² See Hans Jonas, "Gnosticism" in Paul Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 4 vols. (Macmillan Pub., 1967), 2.340.

lives characterized by conformity to God’s commands, and those who only claim to be saved but whose manner of life, whether hidden or revealed, continue to engage in the domain of darkness and sin.

7–8 Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light.

Paul now comes to a primary application of what he has taught in the previous verses. Since those who show themselves to be unbelievers are recipients of God’s wrath, believers ought not to be “partakers” with them in their unrighteous and godless manner of living. The word “partakers” translates the Greek *συμμέτοχος* (*summetoxos*), used only here and in 3:6. The word carries the sense of “having a share with another in some possession or relationship,”¹ being made up of the Greek word *μέτοχος* (*metoxos*), “sharing in, partner” and *σύν* (*sun*), “with.”

It is, then, an emphatic word and indicates the fullest possible participation in something.²

That the word *summetoxos* carries this sense of “fullest possible participation” is seen in that this same word is used in a positive sense of the believer’s participation or union with Messiah Yeshua and thus with the promise of eternal salvation given to all who are in Him.

to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers (*συμμέτοχος*, *summetoxos*) of the promise in Messiah Yeshua through the gospel, (Eph 3:6)

Therefore, Paul’s admonition in this verse is clear. He is not prohibiting contact with unbelievers, for if that were the case, how could the light which every true believer has be a witness to unbelievers? Rather, Paul’s point is that

fully participating in the worldview and conduct of unbelievers in matters of sex and money is incompatible with membership in the people of God.³

1 BDAG, “*συμμέτοχος*,” p. 958.

2 Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 336.

3 Ibid.

...for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord – “Darkness” (חֹשֶׁךְ, *choshek*; σκοτός, *skotos*) in the Scriptures is used metaphorically to depict “ignorance,” “lacking the truth,” “disregarding the truth,” as well depicting “death” and “the grave.” Conversely, “light” (אֵר, *’or*; φῶς, *phōs*) is used metaphorically to depict “knowledge,” “having truth,” “espousing truth,” as well as “life” and “resurrection.”

As unbelievers, we were “dead in trespasses and sin” (Eph 2:1) but we were “made alive together with Him” (Col 2:13) in order that we might “walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). It is therefore incongruous that we, having our life in Messiah, should participate in the immoral works and words of those who remain enslaved to their sinful nature. Note Paul’s similar admonition to the Corinthians.

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Messiah with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2Cor 6:14–15, 7:1)

When Paul states “but now you are light in the Lord,” he is emphasizing our union together with or in Messiah Yeshua as members of His body, and therefore it is the normal inclination of the redeemed heart to honor Him and to walk even as He walked, that is, to live in accordance with the truth as He has given it to us through the Scriptures, illuminated and made active by His indwelling Ruach.

...walk as children of light. – Here, once again, the reality is this: all who are truly born from above, who have died with the Messiah and risen with Him to a new life, will manifest who they are in Messiah through the manner in which they live. For it must be the heart desire of every true believer in Yeshua to honor Him and to become more and more conformed to His pattern of life, thought, speech, and actions.

The application of Paul’s admonitions to our own lives as believers in Yeshua here, in the 21st Century, are so needed. How vigilant we must be to guard against the schemes of the devil. In our modern world where digital media is so readily available, we must doubly guard our eyes, our hearts, and our minds from being snared by that which the world finds exciting, stimulating, and part of the acceptable *Zeitgeist*, “spirit of the times.” We are experiencing in our modern world what was most likely the issue to which Paul addresses himself in this epistle, namely, that the pagan cultures of the Gentile world had become so

“common place” that even those who were coming to faith in Messiah needed to be instructed about what was truly “righteous” in God’s eyes and what was not. In our own times, things that would have been entirely rejected as inappropriate 50 years ago are now not only commonplace but are the acceptable norm in much of the culture. Let us therefore resolve to “not be partakers with them” but rather to “walk as children of the light,” i.e., the true life we have “in the Lord,” in our Messiah Yeshua.

9–10 for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth—trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

Some manuscripts have “fruit of the Spirit” (καρπὸς τοῦ πνεύματος)¹ rather than “fruit of the light” (καρπὸς τοῦ φωτός)² but this variant no doubt found its way into the text of Ephesians from Gal 5:22, for “fruit of the light” fits Paul’s use of “light” throughout the immediate context of our Ephesians text and has the weight of the major codices, Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and Vaticanus.³

The “fruit of righteousness” is, in fact, the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22) and the close association is undoubtedly how the variant originally came into some of the manuscripts. Here Paul specifically points to three aspects: “goodness” (ἀγαθωσύνη, *agathōsunē*), “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη, *dikaïosunē*), and “truth” (ἀληθεία, *alētheia*).

“Goodness” carries a broad spectrum of meaning, of that which is approved by God, for “God is good” (cf. Ps 73:1). Though not found in early non-biblical Greek literature, the word is used in the Lxx, primarily carrying the sense of “kindness” to others, as in Gal 5:22, where “goodness” is listed in connection with “kindness” and “faithfulness.” Thus, in our Ephesians text, “goodness” is the opposite of “greed” which proceeds from being self-centered.

“Righteousness,” being coupled with “goodness” and “truth,” emphasizes “upright behavior,” that is, seeking to order one’s life in accordance with God’s revealed will and the leading of His Ruach. Thus “truth” here is clearly God’s truth, that is, His will as revealed in the creation, the written word, and the Word incarnate. This helps us to understand the import of v. 10.

1 P⁴⁶ D² Ψ M sy^h

2 P⁴⁹ A B D* F G P 6. 33. 81. 629. 1175^c. 1739. 1881. 2464 pc latt sy^p co

3 See Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, p. 568; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 672, ft. nt. 3.

...trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. – In order to know how God defines the categories of “good,” “righteousness,” and “truth,” we must be diligent to seek out what He has and is revealing to us. The verb translated “trying to learn” is the Greek δοκιμάζω (*dokimazō*) which carries the sense of “to examine something in order to find out its true value” and/or “to determine genuineness.” The obvious sense that Paul intends by this phrase is that the believer will have a genuine desire and drive to know what does and does not please the Lord and always with the intention of doing that which pleases Him. We see this same word used in Rom 12:2.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove (δοκιμάζειν, *dokimazō*) what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom 12:2)

How needful it is in our day, to “prove what the will of God is,” that is, not simply to follow what this one or that one teaches, but to constantly put what we hear or read to the “touchstone” of the Scriptures. Even as the assayer puts the stone to acid to discover if there is gold or not, so we must seek to align what we read and hear against the Scriptures to determine its accuracy and worth. Only when we know that what is being taught aligns with the Scriptures should we commit ourselves to receiving it and making it part of our lives.

Unfortunately, the availability of mass media in our day has given a platform to many false teachings. Therefore, John’s admonition in his first epistle is surely apropos for us today.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1Jn 4:1)

11–12 Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret.

Having given positive admonitions regarding how believers in Yeshua are to “walk as children of light” (v. 7–10), Paul now reminds us of that which must have no part in our life of faith, that is, participating in anything which is of the realm of “darkness.”

“Do not participate” translates a present tense imperative in the Greek (καὶ μὴ συγκαινωνεῖτε) which introduces a general precept, that is,