

Taking to Heart  
the Inspired Message  
of  
Ephesians 5:6–10

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Pages from the  
Commentary on  
The Epistle to the Ephesians  
by  
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## 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*, *kenois 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 therefore 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.”<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

*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 king-

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.

dom. 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 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,”<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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*,

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1 BDAG, “*συμμέτοχος*,” p. 958.

2 Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 336.

*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.<sup>1</sup>

*...for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord* – “Darkness” (ἡσυχία, *choshek*; σκότος, *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” (ἡμέρα, *ōr*; 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,

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1 Ibid.

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*)<sup>1</sup> rather than “fruit of the light” (*καρπὸς τοῦ φωτός*)<sup>2</sup> 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

1 Ɔ<sup>46</sup> D<sup>2</sup> Ψ Ɔ<sup>h</sup> sy<sup>h</sup>

2 Ɔ<sup>49</sup> Ɔ A B D\* F G P 6. 33. 81. 629. 1175<sup>c</sup>. 1739. 1881. 2464 pc latt sy<sup>p</sup> co

codices, Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and Vaticanus.<sup>1</sup>

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, *dikaioṣunē*), 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.

...*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

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

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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)

## Notes & Thoughts

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