
The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis
LESSON CVIII : FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT (5:3-14)

From Darkness to Light (5:3-14) — Six Commands

As mentioned in the first lesson on this passage, we will be looking at this by focusing upon the six continued-action commands (present tense imperatives) within this passage:

- v. 3 *'be named' — 'let it not even be named among you'*
- v. 6 *'be deceived' — 'let no one deceive you with vain words'*
- v. 7 *'become' — 'do not become partakers with them'*
- v. 8 *'walk' — 'walk as children of light'*
- v. 11 *'have fellowship, participate' — 'have no fellowship with darkness'*
- v. 11 *'reprove' — 'but rather reprove them'*

Verse 7 appears to be a transitional verse, serving both what comes before and gliding into what follows. Here is a look at this passage, highlighting Paul's continued-action commands (using Young's Literal Translation as a basis):

³ ***LET IT NOT EVEN BE NAMED AMONG YOU,*** *as becometh saints;*

whoredom, and all uncleanness, or covetousness,

⁴ *also filthiness, and foolish talking, or jesting, — the things not fit —
but rather thanksgiving;*

[Why?] ⁵ *for this ye know, that every whoremonger, or unclean, or covetous person,
who is an idolater, hath no inheritance in the reign of the Christ and God.*

⁶ ***LET NO ONE DECEIVE YOU WITH VAIN WORDS,***

[Why?] *for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of the
disobedience,*

⁷ ***BECOME NOT, THEN, PARTAKERS WITH THEM,***

⁸ ***WALK YE AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT,***

for ye were once darkness, and now light in the Lord;

[Parenthetical comment on the light] ⁹ *for the fruit of the light [Spirit] is in
all goodness, and righteousness, and truth,*

¹⁰ *proving what is well-pleasing to the Lord,*

¹¹ ***HAVE NO FELLOWSHIP WITH THE UNFRUITFUL WORKS OF THE DARKNESS
BUT RATHER EVEN REPROVE THEM, EXPOSE THEM,***

[Why?] ¹² *for the things in secret done by them it is a shame even to speak of,*

¹³ and all the things reprov'd by the light are manifested, for everything that is manifested is light; ¹⁴ wherefore he saith,

*'Arouse thyself, thou who art sleeping,
and arise out of the dead,
and the Christ shall shine upon thee.'*

THE FIFTH COMMAND

v. 11 — And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, — καὶ μὴ συγκαινωνεῖτε τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς ἀκάργοις τοῦ σκοτούς [kai mē sugkoinōneite tois ergois tois akarpois tou skotous] — Paul had just commanded believers in v. 7, *'therefore do not become together-with partakers' with them, partners with them, fellow participants with them.* In vv. 8-10 Paul talks about the change the Lord has made in the lives of believers using the metaphor of darkness and light. We are then commanded to *'live our lives as children of light,'* with Paul giving practical explanations of what that entails (*our lives are to be filled with goodness, righteousness, truth, and the test of all things is to be what is pleasing to the Lord*). Paul then repeats his admonition to *'have no fellowship together with the works of darkness,'* this time following the command with another command about how we as believers are to deal with the works of darkness.

And have no fellowship, and do not take part, and do not participate — καὶ μὴ συγκαινωνεῖτε [kai mē sugkoinōneite] — **NOT 'JOINT-PARTAKERS' (v. 7) BUT 'JOINT-FELLOWSHIP' (v. 11)** — Paul underlines that living as children of light (v. 8) not only involves producing the fruit of light (v. 9,10) but also excludes participation in the works of darkness (v. 11). In v. 7 the word Paul used was συμμέτοχοι [summetochoi], literally, *'together-with partners, joint-partakers'*, the same word as 3:6, the only two times this word is used in the NT. That word signifies *'one who shares in a possession or a relationship, intimate involvement and participation with the other party;'* those who are *'together-with partners'* with the promises of Jesus Christ (3:6) cannot be *'together-with partners'* with the *'sons of disobedience'* in their lifestyles.

Paul uses a similar word here in v. 11 that also begins with the preposition *'sun-*' meaning *'together with.'* This word is συγκαινωνεῖτε [sugkoinōneite], a compound word built on one of Paul's favorite words for social relationships and partnerships (koinoneo / koinonia). The word means *'have fellowship with, share together in, to be associated with someone in activity'* and is used by Paul in only two other places: *'Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress.'* (Phil 4:14 NKJV; *'Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble,'* ESV). The sense being that the gift given by the Philippians (Phil 4:10) was tangible evidence that their care for him had *'blossomed afresh;'* since their gift met his material needs while imprisoned, the gift was also evidence of their being *'partners with him in his affliction.'* (Phil 1:14). The only other time this word is used in the NT is in Revelations, *'And I heard another voice from heaven saying, Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.'* (Rev 18:4) [Arnold, 331; Best, 492; Hoehner, 677; Lincoln, 329; O'Brien, 370]



NOT ESCAPISM BUT A COUNTER-CULTURAL LIFESTYLE

— *The warning given here is therefore not to avoid relationships with unbelievers but while developing relationships with unbelievers, we are not to participate in the behaviors that are not pleasing to the Lord.* Similar admonitions:

‘Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?’ (2 Cor 6:14)

‘Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure.’ (1 Tim 5:22)

“Although Christians are not called to isolate themselves from the world, they are called to live differently than their non-Christian friends and acquaintances. Throughout this letter, Paul never advocates an escapism, but he repeatedly commends a counter-cultural lifestyle. Christians need to be with non-Christians (especially for the sake of the mission), but they simply cannot live like them, especially when it comes to matters such as sexual standards, attitudes toward money, and the way non-Christians joke, tell stories, and engage in verbal innuendo.” [Arnold, 338] “The child of light should not become involved in evil even by association. We cannot witness to the world if we do not go out into the world; and we cannot go far into the world before coming in contact with all sorts of wickedness. But we are never to identify with that wickedness or give it opportunity to take hold in our own life. To compromise God’s standards is to weaken our witness as well as our character. No act of unrighteousness is permissible.” [MacArthur, 211] “This paraenetic material functions primarily to give the readers a clearer sense of their own identity by drawing sharply defined boundaries, especially in regard to sexual purity, between their life and behavior and those of the surrounding society. [Paul] wants his readers to realize that the Church is to live by values as radically opposed to that society’s values as light is opposed to and incompatible with darkness. Yet it is interesting to note that this clear sense of being different from others is not meant to lead the Church into isolationism or defeatism in relation to the world. Rather than being corrupted by the surrounding darkness, believers are urged to exercise their influence on it. The readers are to be nothing less than a community whose conduct shines as a beacon to others, illuminating how life should be lived.” [Lincoln, 335]

with the unfruitful works of darkness, in the fruitless deeds of darkness — τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς ἀκαρποῖς τοῦ σκοτοῦς [tois ergois tois akarpois tou skotous] — **WITH THE UNFRUITFUL, USELESS, UNPRODUCTIVE DEEDS OF DARKNESS** — *The ‘unfruitful works of darkness’ provides a sharp contrast with ‘the fruit of light’ (v. 9). The metaphor of ‘darkness’ has already been used by Paul twice in this letter to characterize our pre-Christian identity (4:18; 5:8). Paul used the same metaphor in Romans:*

‘The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.’ (Rom 13:12)

These ‘unfruitful works of darkness’ are not identified here, perhaps because it would be shameful to do so (cp. v. 12) but would include any kind of behavior displeasing to God, especially as mentioned in the previous verses: sexual immorality, greed, filthy talk. The previous chapter listed lusts of deceit, falsehood, stealing, unwholesome speech, bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, malice and idolatry. It is interesting that Paul does not say that darkness produces bad or rotten fruit or that it fails to produce fruit, either of which would better accord with natural botany. But darkness does produce fruit, but fruit of which no one would desire. Darkness spreads only darkness. This fruit is ‘unfruitful,’ (ἀκάρποις [akarpois], ‘unfruitful, useless, unproductive’). Their works are dead and sterile. If believers have been formerly darkness but are now the light of the Lord, why should they participate in the sins that come from the place to which they had previously held in bondage? [Best, 491f; Lincoln, 329; Hoehner, 678; Bruce, 374f; MacArthur, 211; O’Brien, 370] “Because of the subsequent reference to shameful deeds done in secrecy (5:12), there may be an emphasis on sexual sins, which would have been carried out in privacy and darkness. There could also be a reference here to some of the readers’ ongoing participation in the dark and secret arts of magic. The first wave of believers in Ephesus demonstrated the difficulty of giving these up shortly after their conversion. It was only after great conviction came upon them after the extraordinary incident involving Sceva and his sons that they confessed their evil deeds and burned their magical books (see Acts 19:13-20).” [Arnold, 331]

THE SIXTH COMMAND

QUESTIONS REGARDING THE INTERPRETATION OF THIS PASSAGE AS A WHOLE

— I was caught quite unaware as I approached these next couple verses of the problems involved. Here are some of the difficulties:

- **To what is Paul referring when he instructs us to ‘expose, reprove’?** — Paul says in v. 11, *‘Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather _____’*. What is the object of the verb? If Paul was referring to *‘the unfruitful works of darkness’* then the verb would be better translated *“‘expose’ the unfruitful works of darkness”*. But if Paul was referring to the persons which commit these sins (cp v. 12, *“things done by them in secret”*) then the verb would be better translated *“‘rebuke, reprove’ them that do such things”*.
- **How does v. 12 connect to v. 11?**
- **In v. 13 is ‘made manifest’ passive or middle voice? What does ‘by the light’ modify?** — The commentators (and even the Bible versions) differ as to how to translate v. 13. There are two questions: is *‘made visible’* in the passive or middle voice (note: if the verb is in the ‘middle’ voice, it is used as an active verb)? And does *‘by the light’* refer to *‘expose, rebuke’* (a participle in v. 13) or does it refer to *‘make manifest’* (a finite verb in v. 13)?
- **What does it mean that ‘the things made visible are light’ (v. 13 / v. 14)?** — This is easy to translate but difficult to understand how it fits in the context.
- **Is v. 14 directed towards believers (corrective) or unbelievers (evangelistic)?**

ARE WE TO 'EXPOSE AND CORRECT' BELIEVERS OR UNBELIEVERS IN SIN? —

What follows regarding the believers' response to the *'unfruitful works of darkness'* is understood differently by those teaching on these verses, dependent upon whether Paul is speaking about believers or the lost. While there are good men on both sides of this argument, I am in more agreement with those who believe Paul is talking to believers. ***“One of the difficult issues facing the interpreter in this passage (5:11b–14) is whether Christians are called to expose the evil deeds of fellow Christians or whether this kind of aggressive action should be directed to non-Christians in the surrounding community. Although a substantial number of interpreters have argued for the non-Christian interpretation, the evidence seems to point strongly in favor of this activity taking place within the Christian community.”*** [Arnold, 331] Some of the reason for understanding these verses as corrective towards other believers are as follows:

- **The context is one of helping believers grow to maturity and not evangelistic —**

The overall flow of the context is a moral exhortation given by Paul to believers. As having a new identity in Christ, believers are to live in a manner consistent with that calling, including repudiating a lifestyle of sexual immorality (5:3,5), greed and covetousness (5:3), filthy talk (5:4), and other shameful behaviors (5:4). ***“Christians have a twofold duty as responsible members of the community. They are not to participate in evil behaviors, but they are also to help their brothers and sisters who continue to engage in these behaviors by exposing their sin so that they may ultimately be helped and restored by the risen Christ.”*** [Arnold, 330; see also Hoehner, 677]

- **If this passage is directed towards exposing the sins of believers also makes better sense with what follows —**

‘See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.’ (5:15,16)

“Seeing the focus of the passage as directed to exposing sin in the community of believers also makes better sense of the various elements of the subsequent context (5:12-14). ***These statements and exhortations are not laying out an evangelistic goal, but the goal of helping fellow believers grow to maturity in Christ.***” [Arnold, 332]

- **Other NT texts shows believers do sin in the manners described in vv. 3-5 —** Paul states above that those who do such grievous sins mentioned *‘has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God’* (5:5) and that *‘the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience’* (5:6). But the sad reality of human existence is that after the Holy Spirit regenerates we who are sinners, we are not instantly perfect but must be sanctified, gradually growing more like Jesus and less like our old selves. ***“Paul exhorts believers (not the world) not to participate in the works of darkness but rather to do the works or fruit of light. Thus, it appears that some believers were participating in the works of darkness, making the enjoinder necessary.”*** [Hoehner, 679] “There is nothing in v. 11a which would enable us to distinguish between believers who had sinned as in vv. 3-5 (other parts of the NT show that believers did sin in the ways described there) and unbelievers, and therefore nothing to suggest that only the latter are intended here.” [Best, 492]

- **There is no reprimand of those in the world, rather Paul exposes, rebukes and disciplines those within the churches —** As we survey the demands upon believers, we do not find we are to confront unbelievers to demand they live as believers. Rather unbelievers are commanded to repent and believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Yet

within our churches Paul exposes, rebukes, and disciplines those who name the name of Christ. One of the most often quoted verses regarding this is as follows:

'Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that "by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.' (Matt 18:15-17)

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul specifically commands them to judge those within our churches but God will judge those outside our churches:

'I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner — not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore put away from yourselves the evil person.' (1 Cor 5:9-13)

Some OT general proverbs concerning this discussion:

'He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself,

And he who rebukes a wicked man only harms himself.'

'Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you;

Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you.'

'Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser;

Teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.' (Prov 9:7-9)

'A scoffer does not like to be reproved;

he will not go to the wise.' (Prov 15:12 ESV)

The commentators who believe Paul is addressing the unsaved often stress that our 'rebuke' of the unsaved is more by contrasting lifestyle rather than verbal exposure, but the word 'expose' includes both exposure and reproof. Thus the verbal aspect of the word must be included at least to some degree. Note that while this argues for these verses being directed towards believers, it also must be remembered that Paul does charge believers with the loving watch-care of other believers.

● Jewish literature at the time of the NT have similar statements referring to correcting those within the community — As professed Bible believers, we accept as our sole authority the Word of God, those sixty-six books collected and carried with us as we attend our churches (and hopefully read and studied throughout the week as well!). But while we do not recognize other writings as authoritative, we would recognize the historical importance of other writings. Some of the most important non-Biblical texts

would include the Qumran writings, often used as an example of how non-believing Jews of the NT era lived. These Qumran texts are quoted by many writing on these verses as the following example provides: “It is not necessary to go along with K. G. Kuhn and recognize here a ‘continuity’ of Essene tradition, but he does helpfully illustrate the duty of exposing the works of darkness from Qumran literature. *It is laid down as the duty of each member of the community ‘who sees another member breaking God’s commandment ... to rebuke the person concerned, i.e. to say to him, What you have done or are doing is not just in the eyes of God. He must not express this reprimand angrily or with pride or with hatred, but rather with real faithfulness, humility and merciful love. But he must make the other aware of his sin on the same day and may not postpone the matter until the next day, otherwise he is held responsible before God for any further sinning on the part of the other.’*” [Bruce, 375]