

A STUDY OF PAULINE PASSAGES WITH VICE LISTS*

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A STUDY OF PASSAGES (other than 1 Cor. 6:9–10; Gal. 5:19–21; Eph. 5:3–5) in which Paul used virtue-vice catalogs will help distinguish between his references to believers and unbelievers and show how he understood inheriting the kingdom of God. Examining these verses will also help readers know whether Paul deviated from or followed conventional usage of the terms in these many vice lists.

ROMANS 1:29–32; 2:8; 13:13

Romans 1:29–32 records vices of a group of people who manifest “ungodliness and unrighteousness . . . [and] who [in this way] suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (v. 18).

They have become filled with all kinds of unrighteousness, sexual depravity, greediness, evil, full of envy, murder, fighting, deceit, malicious, gossipers, slanderous, God haters, violent, arrogant, boastful, contrivers of evil schemes, disobedient to parents, senseless, covenant breakers, hardhearted (without affection), unmerciful; although they know the righteous requirement of God that those doing such things deserve death, not only do they do these things but also they approve of others practicing them.¹

Although these individuals know God in the sense of having an innate knowledge of Him (v. 21) as Creator,² they have refused to

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¹ Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture quotations are the author’s translations.

² “First, God made it crystal clear in [en] them before He visibly showed it to

acknowledge Him by their actions. Hence Paul summarized, in 3:9–12, 20, 23, that apart from faith in Jesus, Jews and Gentiles remain unrighteous sinners. “Paul’s first leveling argument in 1:18–32 will deal with all persons outside of Christ, but in particular Gentiles and their fallen condition and sin.”³ The people practicing the vices in 1:18–32 are Gentile unbelievers, as the evidence suggests.⁴

Romans 2:8 mentions three vices: “those who live from selfish ambition and disobey the truth, [and] obey unrighteousness” (cf. 1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5). Similar to those in 1:18–32 who are under God’s wrath, the people mentioned in 2:1–3:8 are ἀναπολόγητος (“without excuse,” 1:20; 2:1).⁵ Those who seek to approach God on the basis of their works, especially by claiming to keep the Law, are Jews.⁶

them. While the phrase *to them* captures the external evidence explained (with “For,” *gar*) in v 20 that God makes plain of Himself through natural revelation [i.e., creation], the phrase *in them* refers to the knowledge about God that all humans possess inherently. That is, humans are not intrinsically atheist, agnostic or devoid of moral knowledge (2:14–15). Discoveries of all civilizations show the opposite, for all of them give evidence to having a god-conscience [by their practice of some kind of] . . . cultic-worship-system (whether these systems are idolatrous or not) and rule of law” (René A. López, *Romans Unlocked: Power to Deliver*, rev. ed. [Springfield, MO: 21st Century, 2009], 44).

³ Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 59.

⁴ Ben Witherington III says, “We might add that Rom. 1:18–32 is a perfectly good example of a description of rebellion against God which could be called *apostasia*, and it is clear that there the subjects are not Christians” (*1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006], 216 n. 49). Douglas Moo notes that traditionally scholars have viewed the group in question as Gentiles. Yet he observes that since the term ἀνθρώπων (“people”) instead of ἔθνη (“Gentiles”) is used in 1:18–32, Paul’s accusations should include Jews (*The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], 96–97). For this view see C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: Clark, 1975), 1:105–6; and Jacob Jervell, *Imago Dei: Gen 1, 26 f. im Spätjudentum, in der Gnosis und in den paulinischen Briefen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), 316–19.

⁵ David E. Malick suggests, “Paul’s thesis is that all mankind is condemned and needs God’s righteousness, including the unrighteous who reject God (1:18–32), the moralists in their hypocrisy (2:1–16), and Jews who trust in the external aspects of their religion (2:17–3:8). Paul then validated this from Scripture by affirming that all are under sin (3:9–19)” (“The Condemnation of Homosexuality in Romans 1:26–27,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 [July–September 1993]: 333).

⁶ Many believe that in Romans 2:1–3:9 Paul made a twofold distinction. See Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 137–38; López, *Romans Unlocked: Power to Deliver*, 51; and James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), 76–77, 79.

Others, however, see a threefold distinction consisting of Gentiles (1:18–32), Gentile moralizers (2:1–16), and Jews (2:17–3:8) (R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation*

Both groups, Jews and Gentiles, are under God's condemnation and are characterized by the vice list. Grammatically the inferential conjunction $\delta\iota\omicron$ ("therefore") connects the first group in 1:18–32 with the second group in 2:1–3:20, who also are under God's wrath.⁷ Thus the vices mentioned in 1:29–32 and 2:8 characterize all unbelievers, both Gentiles and Jews.⁸

However, in Romans 13:13 Paul exhorted believers not to practice vices characteristic of unbelievers (as shown earlier in 1:29–32; 2:8) known as "works of darkness" (13:12).⁹ He wrote, "Let us put on the armor of light. Let us live correctly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. Rather, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not make provision for the flesh in order to raise up its strong desire" (vv.

of St. Paul's Epistles to the Romans [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1936], 128–29; and Karl Barth, *A Shorter Commentary on Romans* [Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1959], 31–32). Others say 2:1–16 applies generally to both Gentiles and Jews (C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, rev. ed., Black's New Testament Commentary [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991], 41). As Cranfield explains, "The references to Jews and Greeks (that is, in the context, Gentiles) in 1:16; 2:9, 10; 3:9 suggest that in the construction of 1:18–3:20 Paul would be likely to keep to this twofold division of mankind: a brief reference in passing to the morally superior among the Gentiles might be understandable, but scarcely the lengthy treatment which 2:1ff would be" (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 138).

⁷ "For 1:18–19, which functions as a kind of heading for all of 1:18–3:20, includes reference to all humanity. On this reading, Paul would be saying in 2:1 that *because* God's wrath is revealed against *all* people, and *because all* people have been given knowledge of God, *therefore* even the person who judges is 'without excuse' before God. Although it might be objected that connecting 2:1 with 1:18–19 skips over too much intervening material, it can be said in response that 1:18–19 establishes what is Paul's main point in 1:18–32 so that the 'therefore' in 2:1 resumes the main sequence of Paul's argument" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 129–30, italics his).

⁸ According to 1 Thessalonians 4:5 Jews and Gentiles fell prey to these vices that originally arose from paganism. "Paul contrasts his audience with pagans, not with Jews, probably because the majority of them came to Christian faith as pagans, not as either Jews or God-fearers. He is thus dealing with temptations that Jews like Paul believed Gentiles often fell prey to, and no doubt they did. . . . After idolatry, sexual immorality and covetousness were seen as the major pagan vices (cf. Gal. 5:19–21; 1 Cor. 5:9–11; 6:9–10; 2 Cor. 12:20–21; Rom. 1:29–31; 2:21–22; 13:13)" (Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 116). Abraham J. Malherbe makes a similar observation (*The Letters to the Thessalonians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible [New York: Doubleday, 2000], 230–31). Moo sees this group as unbelievers (*The Epistle to the Romans*, 138).

⁹ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans: The English Text with Introduction Exposition and Notes*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 170. Eduard Schweizer says believers have the ability to practice the vices that the heathen commit ("Gottesgerechtigkeit und Lasterkataloge bei Paulus [inkl. Kol und Eph]," in *Rechtfertigung: Festschrift für Ernst Käsemann zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Johannes Friedrich, Wolfgang Pöhlmann, and Peter Stuhlmacher [Tübingen: Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1976], 468).

12–14). Murray summarizes Paul’s point about the need for believers to avoid the vices that characterized their former state of unbelief. “Sleep, night, darkness are all co-related in our ordinary experience. The same is true in the moral and religious realm. And what the apostle is pressing home is the incompatibility of moral and religious slumber with the position which believers now occupy in the great drama of redemption. . . . But the consideration Paul is now pleading is one that could apply only to the particular ‘season’ contemplated in the present passage and urged as the reason for godly living.”¹⁰

1 CORINTHIANS 5:10–11

These verses contain two vice lists. “And I did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or the greedy and thieves, or idolaters, since you would have to depart from the world. Yet, now I write to you not to associate with anyone named a brother who is sexually immoral, or greedy, or an idolater, or a slanderer, or a drunkard, or a thief, with such a person do not even eat.”¹¹

Paul addressed a sexually immoral believer in the church (vv. 1–2) who was to be judged by those in the church (vv. 3–4, 12) and excommunicated (v. 5). Open rebellion in the church destroys the testimony of the church before the world (vv. 6–8). However, Paul corrected a misunderstanding arising from a previous letter in which he commanded believers to withdraw from immoral people. He did not mean that believers were to have no contact with people outside the church (vv. 9–10). Instead believers were not to fellowship with immoral Christians (v. 11).

In verse 11 the New American Standard Bible refers to an immoral Christian as a “so-called brother.” This translation implies that he was not a genuine believer but only claimed to be.¹² While this is possible, since “brother” may refer to a fellow member of a

¹⁰ Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 169. See also Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 683.

¹¹ Paul’s words “Purge the evil men from you” repeat the fivefold admonition in Deuteronomy to separate covenant violators from the community (Deut. 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21; 24:7). See Mary Katherine Birge, *The Language of Belonging: A Rhetorical Analysis of Kingship Language in First Corinthians* (Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2002), 48–50.

¹² G. G. Findlay, “St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians,” in *The Expositor’s Greek New Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1903; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 2:813.

community (not necessarily a believer), it is contextually indefensible. This person is contrasted with (a) Gentiles (v. 1), (b) those in the world (v. 12), and (c) those outside the church (vv. 9–10, 12–13). Nowhere else does the Greek verb ὀνομάζω (“named” or “called”) carry a sense of doubt.¹³ Hence Paul distinguished the immoral believer from unbelievers, though they were alike in their behavior.¹⁴ According to these verses, though Christians sometimes practice the sins in these two vice lists, believers should not be characterized by them, since verse 10 implies that these vices characterize those of “the world.” This explains why the church members were to excommunicate the immoral believer from their assembly.

2 CORINTHIANS 12:20–21

Eight vices are listed in verse 20 and three vices are noted in verse 21. “For I fear that somehow when I arrive I will not find you as I desire, and you will find me such as you do not want; since there may be strife, jealousy, anger, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, conceit, and confusion. Lest when I come again to you, God will humble me to you, and I will grieve for many of those who previously sinned and have not repented from impurity, sexual immorality, and the sensuality they have practiced.”

Paul defended his apostolic authority before the Corinthian church (2 Cor. 10–13) and desired to strengthen believers (12:19). But he reluctantly believed, perhaps based on reports from Timothy, Titus, and Silvanus (1 Cor. 16:10; 2 Cor. 1:1, 19; 7:13–14;

¹³ See Mark 3:14; Acts 19:13; Romans 15:20; Ephesians 3:15; 5:3; and 2 Timothy 2:19. “Does a person’s involvement in moral filth, however, necessarily indicate an unregenerate nature? Paul attacked the terrible sin of incest (1 Cor. 5) but he made no appeal for regeneration, nor did he imply that the lack of salvation might be the problem” (Duane A. Dunham, “An Exegetical Study of 2 Peter 2:18–22,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140 [January–March 1983]: 47). Witherington also says, “It [discipline] does not involve a human judgment about a person’s eternal salvation, which is for God to judge. Paul continues to call this errant brother a brother, and the disciplinary action is meant to be remedial” (*Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 160).

¹⁴ Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle, 1992), 321; and John H. Elliott, “No Kingdom of God for Softies? or, What Was Paul Really Saying? 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 in Context,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 34 (spring 2004): 21. John MacArthur Jr. sees the context as addressing discipleship, not distinguishing between a genuine or spurious believer (*1 Corinthians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary [Chicago: Moody, 1984], 131). D. A. Carson believes that 1 Corinthians 5:10–11 addresses a spurious believer (“Reflections on Christian Assurance,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 54 [spring 1992]: 16–20).

12:18), that he would find them practicing the vices described in 12:20–21. These vices characterized unbelievers. Therefore Georgi believed Paul used missionary terms (e.g., προαμαρτάνω and μετανοέω, v. 21) that show Paul questioned the Corinthians' original profession of faith, assuming that they had not become "Jesus-believers."¹⁵ However, Thrall observes problems with Georgi's view.

This interpretation is not impossible, but the linguistic argument is perhaps rather weak. Certainly, the verb μετανοέω is a mission term in Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; 26:20, but the present occurrence is the only instance of it within the Pauline corpus. We cannot, therefore deduce what connotations it carried for him. Moreover, when he uses the cognate noun μετάνοια in 2 Cor 7:9, 10 he is not talking of repentance of pre-Christian vices, although, admittedly, he does use it also in Rom 2:4, of God's intention for the unconverted. The verb προαμαρτάνω occurs only in this section of 2 Corinthians (12:21 and 13:2) in the whole NT, and whilst the simple verb ἀμαρτάνω does, in Romans, refer to human existence apart from Christ (Rom 2:12; 3:23; 5:12, 14, 16), this is in the context of theological argument rather than missionary appeal. Nevertheless, since the vices specifically named here are all related to sexual misconduct, and since, in Paul's view, such behaviour was a prominent characteristic of the pagan habits renounced at conversion (1 Cor 6:9–11), he could here be thinking in the way Georgi suggests.¹⁶

That the Corinthian believers practiced vices similar to those of pagans does not mean they were unbelievers. Otherwise no one in the Corinthian church was saved, since Paul discussed all sorts of sins (some not even practiced by unbelievers; 5:1). Yet though they were questioning Paul's authority and were sinning, Paul affirmed the fact of their justification in 13:4–6. In verses 5–6 he wrote, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless indeed, you are disqualified. Yet I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified." After carefully analyzing the context of these verses, Brown concludes the following.

To summarize, might the Corinthians have found themselves disqualified if they examined themselves too closely? Not at all! Paul knew they were Christians, and the Corinthians knew it too. Why then did Paul make such probing remarks? He made them because of the absurdity of questioning his motives and authority in the first place. The Corinthians were Christians; there can be no doubt about it from the way Paul structured his remarks. His ministry had intro-

¹⁵ Dieter Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians: A Study of Religious Propaganda in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 237.

¹⁶ Margaret E. Thrall, *2 Corinthians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: Clark, 2000), 868–69.

duced them to Christ; there is no doubt about that either. So when the Corinthians looked at themselves and realized they were who they were because of God's power and authority working in Paul, then the apostle could close his argument by saying, "But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves [ἡμεῖς emphatic in Greek] do not fail the test" (v. 6).¹⁷

Then in 13:7 Paul exhorted them once more to stop practicing evil (perhaps thinking of the sins in 12:20–21) and practice what is good, regardless of what they thought of his apostleship. These Christian converts needed to disassociate themselves from their pagan vices of the past.¹⁸

EPHESIANS 4:31

The context of Ephesians 4:31 verifies that these vices refer to believers. "Put away [ἀρθῆτω, aorist passive imperative] bitterness, and anger, and wrath, and quarreling, and blasphemous talk from you, and evil speaking."¹⁹ Verse 22 attests that these were believers who were to leave behind former practices belonging to the "old

¹⁷ Perry C. Brown, "What Is the Meaning of 'Examine Yourselves' in 2 Corinthians 13:5?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154 (April–June 1997): 187. Murray J. Harris summarizes the two ways 2 Corinthians 12:6 is commonly understood. "If the Corinthian self-audit yielded a positive result—assurance that they were in Christ and Christ in them—they would also have come to a positive evaluation of Paul as an apostle of Christ (1:1), belonging to Christ (10:7), as a servant of Christ (11:23), and as Christ's spokesman (13:3). The Corinthians' genuine faith and Paul's genuine apostleship were inextricably related; they stood or fell together. If they were true believers, he was a true apostle, since they had come to faith through his preaching (1:19; 3:1–3; 11:2). On the other hand, if their faith was counterfeit, so too was his apostolicity. After v. 5 we might have expected Paul to say 'I hope you will discover that *you* pass the test,' but he says 'I hope you will know for certain that *we* [ἡμεῖς] also do not fail the test,' for he assumes that the Corinthians will give themselves a 'pass' on their self-audit and hopes that they will clearly perceive the indissoluble link between their 'pass' and his 'pass'." (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], 922–23).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 903–4. Schweizer sees a different structure of this vice list than others. He believes these were Christians who were in danger of "brüderliche Zusammenleben gefährden" ("jeopardizing the brotherly existence") by the triad of three vices ("Gottesgerechtigkeit und Lasterkataloge bei Paulus [inkl. Kol und Eph]," 466).

¹⁹ Henry Newland notes that "to put away" these vices does not merely mean "to be restrained for a time, but entirely to be removed" (*A Practical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians: In Which Are Exhibited the Results of the Most Learned Theological Criticisms, from the Age of the Early Fathers Down to the Present Time* [Oxford: J. H. and Jas. Parker, 1860], 290). On the question of whether the aorist infinitive ἀποθέσθαι is a command ("put off the old man") or an aorist indicative ("you have put off the old man") see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 606.

man.” Verse 30 also confirms their saved status, since Paul encouraged them not to grieve the Holy Spirit, who “sealed” them until “the day of redemption.” Also verse 32 validates that the referent in verse 31 is believers, since they were commanded to practice the virtues of “being kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.” Paul would not command unbelievers to do such things. Thus although these vices characterized believers before their conversion (vv. 17–22), they could still resort to old habits by not heeding Paul’s command to eliminate them (vv. 22–32).²⁰

PHILIPPIANS 3:2

The vice list in Philippians 3:2 is short. “Watch out for those dogs, watch out for those evil-doers, and watch out for those mutilators of the flesh.” Here Paul issued three warnings by using the imperative βλέπετε. Each warning has a noun in the accusative case that describes a vice (κύνας, κακοῦς, and κατατομήν) that the Philippian believers should avoid and guard against. According to O’Brien the three vices in this verse describe unbelievers, since Matthew and the Psalter employ similar terms for unbelievers or enemies of Israel (Matt. 7:6; 15:26–27; Pss. 5:5 [LXX, v. 6]; 6:8; 14 [LXX, 13]:4; 36 [LXX, 35]:12).²¹

Philippians 3:3 has an explanatory γὰρ and the emphatic ἡμεῖς . . . ἐσμεν (“we are”), which further strengthens the contrasts to the vices in the previous verse by describing the real people of God.²²

²⁰ G. G. Findlay also makes a similar observation (“The Epistle to the Ephesians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, 2nd ed. [New York: Armstrong and Son, 1898], 291). Harold W. Hoehner writes, “The last exhortation in this section lists vices for believers to put away followed by three positive injunctions, all of which encompass the conduct of the new person and include every area of life” (*Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002], 633).

²¹ Peter T. O’Brien, *The First Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 354–55, 357.

²² O’Brien also notes this contrast (*ibid.*, 358). Several scholars see a contrast with the previous verse that emphasizes the true people of God (e.g., Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary [Waco, TX: Word, 1983], 126–28; and Marvin R. Vincent, *The Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon*, International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: Clark, 1897], 93). Although the issue involves the Philippians’ salvation, this was not the primary point Paul was addressing. As Gordon D. Fee says, “In saying that ‘we,’ both Jews and Gentiles together who have put our trust in Christ, ‘are the circumcision,’ Paul indicates that the primary issue is not the Philippians’ salvation, but rather the identification of the people of God under the new covenant” (*Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, New Interna-

Hence these three vices refer to unbelievers rather than to believing Jews who reverted to legalism,²³ since Paul, like these detractors, had attempted to attain righteousness through the Law.²⁴

COLOSSIANS 3:5–9

Colossians 3:5–9 mentions a list of twelve vices that believers are commanded to avoid: “fornication, uncleanness, lustful desire, evilness, greed, which is idolatry, wrath, anger, malice, blasphemy, dirty language, and lying.” These vices are contrasted with eight virtues in verses 12–14 that believers are to practice: “tender mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another, forgiving one another, and putting on love.”

The context clearly reveals two things. First, these vices originate from man’s fallen nature,²⁵ which Paul elsewhere ascribed to

tional Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 298).

²³ Apparently the Philippians’ opponents in 3:2 are also those mentioned explicitly in 1:15–17, 27–29. This was noted by Herbert W. Bateman IV (“Were the Opponents at Philippi Necessarily Jewish?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 [January–March 1998]: 54–55). He concludes, “The point is that these people were professing Christians on a mission to convert others. Their motivation for preaching Christ was self-oriented (1:15–17)” (*ibid.*, 56).

²⁴ Michael J. Vlach concludes, “Those who are circumcised in heart are the ‘true circumcision.’ They have believed in God by faith in contrast to the ‘false circumcision’ (3:2)—those who rely on physical circumcision to save them. When Paul called the Philippians the ‘true circumcision’ he was not calling them ‘Israel,’ he was identifying them as those who had trusted in Christ by faith alone” (“Has the Church Replaced Israel in God’s Plan? A Historical and Theological Survey of Replacement Theology,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 4 [April 2000]: 28).

²⁵ The phrase “on the sons of disobedience” (ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας) is omitted in some English versions (ESV, NASB, NIV, RSV, TNIV), and it is included in others (ASV, KJV, DBRY, NET, NKJV, YNG). This poses a difficult textual problem. First, without the phrase in verse 6 the verse is difficult to understand. The words in verse 7 ἐν οἷς seem to have no antecedent without the phrase ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας in verse 6. However, the neuter οἷς could perhaps refer to the vice list in verse 5. Second, the parallel account in Ephesians 5:6 has a similar phrase that could have influenced scribes to add it here. Noting this textual problem, the NET Bible concludes, “Further, although the witness of B is especially important, there are other places in which B and \mathfrak{P}^{46} share errant readings of omission. Nevertheless, the strength of the internal evidence against the longer reading is at least sufficient to cause doubt here. The decision to retain the words in the text is less than certain.” On the other hand it is probable that the phrase was in the original since there is solid evidence that Paul elsewhere characterized unbelievers by these vices (see above) as “sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:3; 5:6). Also the textual witness and geographical distribution of the texts is solid, which is why a number of English translations include the phrase. Whether the phrase is original is irrelevant to identifying whether those of the vice list are believers or unbelievers. Nevertheless the phrase strengthens the case that unbelievers are referred to in the vice list. For further discussion see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New*

unbelievers (cf. Eph. 2:2; 5:6). He reminded the Colossian Christians in Colossians 3:7 that they formerly belonged to that group and used to live like them. Thus these vices derive from the corrupt nature of unbelievers. Paul commanded Christians to “put off the old man with its practices” (v. 9) and to “put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (vv. 9–10).²⁶ Bock critiques numerous English renderings of the Greek phrases τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον (“the old man”) and τὸν νέον (“the new”). Many interpret these phrases to mean “old nature” or “old self” and “new nature” or “new self” (see NASB and NRSV). In these translations a believer’s spiritual life becomes the focal point, as two predispositions compete to control an individual’s will.²⁷ However, Bock suggests that “the rationale for the exhortation is not individualized.” Instead, in Colossians 3:9–10 (as in Eph. 4:22–24), Paul used the figures of speech “the old man” and “the new man” as a way of describing and distinguishing two communities (cf. Eph. 2:15). “The old man” refers to the practices of the unregenerate state of the old community that Paul’s readers once belonged to, unlike the new community (the “new man”) that should influence their behavior according to their regenerate state.²⁸

Second, though it is unnatural for believers as part of the new community to practice these vices, it is possible (and a reality in Colosse) for believers to practice them. Otherwise why did Paul write, “Put to death [νεκρώσατε] the members of the earth?”²⁹ Although believers can still behave like unbelievers, Paul classified these vices as belonging to unconverted persons, “sons of disobedi-

Testament, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Biblia-Druck, 1994), 557.

²⁶ Peter T. O’Brien writes, “Obedience to the apostolic injunctions to reject sin and be clothed with the graces of Christ is necessary for men and women who are in a new relationship with God through Christ and have become part of God’s new creation” (*Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary [Waco, TX: Word, 1982], 180–81). See also Siegfried Wibbing, *Die Tugend- und Lasterkataloge im Neuen Testament und ihre Traditionsgeschichte unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Qumran-Texte* (Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1959), 123–27.

²⁷ Darrell L. Bock, “The New Man’ as Community in Colossians and Ephesians,” in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, ed. Charles H. Dyer and Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 157.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 159–60.

²⁹ Similarly Romans 8:13 is addressed to believers. “For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” Here Paul referred to a life that only obedient believers can and will experience. For more on this see López, *Romans Unlocked*, 168–70.

ence.”

As MacDonald notes, “The pattern of moving from doctrinal assertions to ethical exhortations is frequent in Pauline correspondence (e.g., Rom 6:1–14). The reference to death [in Col 3:5] echoes [Col.] 3:3. . . . The problem with those who are tempted by the false teaching (see 2:8–23) is that their ‘dying’ has not led to this required ethical comportment; they live as though they still belong to the world (2:20). The idea of transformation of the self underlies this verse (cf. 3:10).”³⁰ The addressees are obviously believers who need to look anew to Christ and their new position in Him (v. 11).

1 TIMOTHY 1:9–10; 6:4–5

Paul wrote to Timothy that some had “strayed” (1:6) from following “sound doctrine” (v. 10) termed “the faith” (4:1). Paul urged Timothy to “teach” the believers at Ephesus “not to spread false doctrine” (1:3). Some had strayed from teaching apostolic truths to teach what they wrongly interpreted as the Law (v. 7).³¹ Hence Paul wrote in verses 8–10, “However, we know that the law is good if one uses it correctly, by knowing that the law was not intended for the righteous person but for the lawless, and rebels, ungodly, and sinners, unholy, and profane like those who kill their fathers and mothers, and murderers, fornicators, homosexuals, kidnapers, liars, perjurers, and if anything else opposes sound teaching.”

Although some had strayed from sound teaching, nothing in the context implies that they were unbelievers.³² They had strayed

³⁰ Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2000), 134.

³¹ Anton Vögtle believes the author probably had the Decalogue in mind (*Die Tugend- und Lasterkataloge im Neuen Testament: Exegetisch, Religions- und Formgeschichtlich Untersucht* [Münster: Aschendorffsche, 1936], 16). Wibbing holds the same view (*Die Tugend- und Lasterkataloge im Neuen Testament und ihre Traditionsgeschichte*, 83).

³² Robert J. Karris states, “In 1 Tim 1:9–10 and 2 Tim 3:2–4 a catalogue of vices is used to describe the opponents. . . . The use of these vices is not parenetic, i.e., the author is not telling his audience what to avoid. Rather the author employs these catalogues of vices to deride the sophists and cause aversion for them in the minds of his readers” (“Background and Significance of the Polemic of the Pastoral Epistles,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 [December 1973]: 553–54). For more on the catalogs of vices used this way see Philo, *Quod Deterius Patiori Insidiari Soleat* 73; Lucian *Pseudologista* 25; *Rhetorum praeceptor* 15.22; *Dialogi mortuorum* 369–70; *Fugitivi* 16; *Timon* 55; and *Piscator* 29.34. Others have also noticed Lucian’s use of the catalog of vices (Hans Dieter Betz, *Lukian von Samosata und das Neue Testament; Religionsgeschichtliche und Paränetische Parallelen: Ein Beitrag zum Corpus*

from teaching the correct use of the Law to teach “myths and endless genealogies” (v. 4; cf. 6:3–5), and Paul listed a set of vices in order to show these teachers how to use the Law properly in instructing people what to shun. Those who were teaching error were not those of the vice list, though they might end up practicing those vices if they continued (cf. 6:3–5).

The people criticized in this passage, however, seem to be members of the believing community. . . . The reference to those who wanted to be teachers of the law allows a digression to explain what the value of the law really is. . . . This law is understood to teach *the lawless and unruly* what to avoid. Bad behaviour is characterized in a list which is made memorable in the Greek by assonance and alliteration. . . . There is no suggestion that believers at Ephesus, not even those teaching differently, were guilty of any of these particular deeds. Extreme cases are used for rhetorical effect, to cause repugnance in the reader. They represent the end to which lawlessness tends, in contrast to the *goal of the instruction* which is *love* (verse 5).³³

Δίκαιος in verse 9 does not refer necessarily to a justified believer (although a believer may be the referent in Paul’s mind) but to an ethical person who obeys the principle of the Law.³⁴ An obedience is expected of all believers according to their new position (cf. Titus 2:12).³⁵ However, those who partake of the sins in this list seem to be the unbelievers who behave “contrary to sound doctrine,” termed the “glorious gospel of the blessed God” (v. 11) that Paul himself once opposed.³⁶ Paul also mentioned three vices that

Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti [Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1961], 194; and Wibbing, *Die Tugend- und Lasterkataloge im Neuen Testament und ihre Traditionsgeschichte*, 89). See also Neil J. McEleney, “Vice Lists of the Pastoral Epistles,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36 (April 1974): 205.

³³ Margaret Davies, *The Pastoral Epistles: 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, ed. Ivor H. Jones (London: Epworth, 1996), 5–6 (italics hers).

³⁴ Possibly all these vices refer to the Ten Commandments (I. Howard Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: Clark, 1999], 378–79).

³⁵ Marshall states something similar. “For the righteous person (δίκαιος, 2 Tim 4:8; Tit 1:8 and note) is a person who keeps the law and does not need to be told what to do; the concept of being justified by faith is not in view. The principle here expressed could be true generally of any law-abiding citizen, but it may also be used to describe true believers as they ideally are (see especially the theological orientation given the concept in Tit 2:12)” (ibid., 377).

³⁶ In mentioning the list Paul possibly thought of himself in his preconversion days when he opposed the truth. Noticing this point William Hendriksen wrote, “Paul would certainly place himself among them. . . . Paul very definitely and explicitly tells us that he includes himself, note verse 15 (which must already have been in the mind of the writer when he wrote verse 9)” (*Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles*,

characterized him when he was an unbeliever. The term ὑβριστήν (“insolent man”), which Paul used of himself (v. 13), appears in a catalog of vices in Romans 1:30 that describes unbelievers. These vices describe unbelievers, including Paul before he became a believer. Those in error were not those of the vice list; they were the erring believers of the community who were not teaching sound doctrine.

However, it seems that those who may fall prey to the vices mentioned in 1 Timothy 6:3–5, which are not as grave as those mentioned in 1:9–10, were believers. “If any one teaches differently than the latter and does not agree with sound doctrine as those of our Lord Jesus Christ that are according to godliness, he is conceited and knows nothing, but has an unhealthy interest in controversies about words that result in envy, strife, malicious, evil suspicions, and constant arguing by people of corrupt mind and deprived³⁷ of truth who suppose that godliness is a means to financial gain.” They seem to have been believers, since they were part of the community and were teaching those who belong to it. Otherwise why warn them to avoid teaching from those outside? On the other hand some writers believe these were people “outside the community” who denied some teachings by Jesus or His entire message.³⁸ Whether these were believers or not is difficult to decide since there are no clear indicators, nor was the text written apparently with this question in mind. These teachers may be the same as the teachers mentioned in 1:6–8, who were not teaching sound doctrine (vv. 9–10). Ironically these teachers also fell prey to vices similar to those of unbelievers.³⁹

New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957], 66–67). McEleney believes the vice list describes pagans but that the “false teachers” were Jewish Christians who did not view the Law as having passed away (“Vice Lists of the Pastoral Epistles,” 207–10).

³⁷ The word ἀποστρέω, “to defraud or deprive,” in 1 Timothy 6:5 signifies “being deprived of the truth.” In 1 Corinthians 6:8 and James 5:4 this verb refers to believers cheating other believers.

³⁸ J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Black, 1960; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1960), 133–34. Kelly does not directly say these may be unbelievers, but one gets that impression since the “errorists” rejected Christ, seeing that they denied “the wholesome words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ.” However, since the context refers to submission, godliness, and correct teaching about godliness, it seems that these are believers. And nothing in the context points unambiguously to the “errorists” being unsaved.

³⁹ If believers fall prey to teaching heretical doctrines, this does not mean that they are unbelievers (Davies, *The Pastoral Epistles: 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, 48).

2 TIMOTHY 3:2–4

In 2 Timothy 3:1–4 Paul predicted, “Yet know this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will love themselves, love money, be boastful, arrogant, blasphemers, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful and ungodly, unloving, unforgiving, slanderous, lacking self-control, brutal, despisers of goodness, traitors, reckless, proud, lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God.”⁴⁰ Paul then commanded Timothy to ἀποτρέπου (“avoid” or “turn away from”) people who behave this way (v. 5).

Some details suggest that these vices refer to unbelievers. First, in verse 2 Paul used οἱ ἄνθρωποι (“people”) rather than οἱ ἀδελφοὶ (“brothers”). Second, Paul told Timothy to avoid such people (v. 5) for they were without knowledge of the truth (v. 7).

Four times Paul used the phrase ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας (“know the truth”), all in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25; 3:7; Titus 1:1). The phrase ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας refers solely to eternal salvation (1 Tim 2:3–4; 2:23–26; 3:7), which should result in godly living.⁴¹ By contrast, in 2 Timothy 3:8 Paul wrote that people like Jannes and Jambres (Pharaoh’s magicians who opposed Moses), who follow the practices listed in verses 2–4 “also resist the truth” and have a “depraved mind” (v. 8). Therefore the vice list in verses 2–4 describes unbelievers whom Timothy was to “avoid” (v. 5), since they rejected the truth and had not “come to the knowledge of the truth” (v. 7).⁴²

⁴⁰ “There are many similarities between this catalogue and the vices mentioned in Rom. 1, the main difference being that in the latter Paul is describing the contemporary Gentile world, whereas here a future condition is being envisaged” (Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957], 156). See also Karris, “Background and Significance of the Polemic of the Pastoral Epistles,” 559 n. 42, 560, 662.

⁴¹ “The concluding part of this verse, *to come unto the knowledge of the truth*, accords better with spiritual salvation than natural preservation, unless it means that peaceful conditions assist the propagation of the gospel. The phrase *knowledge of the truth* is reminiscent of John and is not found in Paul outside the Pastorals. It should be understood as the whole revelation of God in Christ, to know which must be the ultimate aim of Christian salvation” (Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, 71–2, italics his).

⁴² McEleney notes that Paul employed “a list of standard vices associated with the wicked” to show that they are unbelievers (“Vice Lists of the Pastoral Epistles,” 212).

TITUS 1:6–7, 10; 3:3

The short vice list in Titus 1:6–7, 10—contrasted with a short virtue list in 1:6, 8–9—supports Paul’s instruction to Timothy on how to choose an ἐπίσκοπος, “elder” (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2–5).⁴³ “An elder must be blameless, a one-woman man, and must have faithful children not insubordinate. For an overseer must be blameless, as one trusted with God’s stewardship, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not a drunkard, not violent, [and] not greedy for money. . . . For there are many rebellious people, idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision.”

If anyone aspired to the office of elder in the Christian community, Timothy was instructed to pick a person characterized by the virtues mentioned in Titus 1:6, 8–9, and to reject those characterized by the vices in verses 6–7, 10.

Titus 3:3 states, “For at one time we were also foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to numerous passions and desires, living in evil and envy, being hated and hating one another.” Paul also exhorted believers to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, godly in the present era, and to look forward to the coming of Christ, who saved them, in order to serve Him in good works (2:12–15). Paul continued in 3:1–2 with a virtue list that describes how believers should behave. They ought “to submit to rulers and authorities, obey, be ready to do every good work, slander no one, not be a fighter, be gentle, showing humility to all men.”

However, in verse 3 Paul transitioned (by using an explanatory γάρ) to a description of the state of events before Paul’s recipients were saved.⁴⁴ Dibelius and Conzelmann wrote that verses 3–7 “speak of the state of the reader with regard to salvation, before and after becoming a Christian. Note that the author includes himself in the characterization. In the comparison of Tit 3:3–7 with Rom 6:17f; 1 Cor 6:9–11; Col 3:7, 8; Eph 2:2ff; 2 Clem. 1.6–8, a significant similarity in the train of thought is apparent. Such a presentation of a person’s past before becoming a Christian, followed by a description of his condition as a Christian, played a

⁴³ Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, trans. Philip Buttolph and Adela Yarbro, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 132.

⁴⁴ McEleney observes, “The list of Tit 3:3 describes the pagan’s moral degeneracy as the former state of the Christian” (“Vice Lists of the Pastoral Epistles,” 217).

common role in early Christian preaching.”⁴⁵ Clearly this vice list describes what used to characterize believers before they became Christians, as the positional statement in verses 4–6 indicates, and it serves to motivate believers to avoid sin.⁴⁶

In short, some vice lists describe unbelievers and are addressed to believers, who are admonished to avoid these sins. The next article in this series discusses Paul’s references to inheriting the kingdom in relation to his vice lists.

⁴⁵ Dibelius and Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 147.

⁴⁶ Paul often included statements about the believers’ position in Christ after he gave a vice list (as seen in Titus 3:3 and then verses 4–6). In this way he was pointing up a change in actual status in order to influence behavior. Paul used this pattern elsewhere (1 Cor. 5:10–6:10 and then verse 11; Col. 3:5–8 and then verses 9–12; Gal. 5:19–21 and then verses 22–25; Eph. 5:3–7 and then verses 5:8–12).