

PAUL'S VICE LIST IN EPHESIANS 5:3–5*

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SIMILAR TO THE EVIDENCE PRESENTED in the study of 1 Corinthians 6:9–10¹ and Galatians 5:19–21,² four questions are considered in this article in an effort to understand Paul's purpose in citing a vice list and the phrase "inherit the kingdom of Christ and God" in Ephesians 5:3–5. Does the passage address Christians? What is the meaning of "inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God"? Why are there contrasts between believers and unbelievers? And did Paul warn his readers or exhort them?

DOES THE PASSAGE ADDRESS CHRISTIANS?

Paul addressed the recipients of Ephesians, "To the saints in Ephesus and the faithful in Christ Jesus"³ (τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Ἐφέσῳ καὶ πιστοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, Eph 1:1).⁴ The letter's recipi-

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¹ René A. López, "Does the Vice List in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 Refer to Believers or Unbelievers?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164 (January–March 2007): 59–73.

² René A. López, "Paul's Vice List in Galatians 5:19–21," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169 (January–March 2012): 48–67.

³ Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture quotations are the author's translations.

⁴ The words ἐν Ἐφέσῳ appear in brackets in the Greek text. This is because they do not appear in some early manuscripts, but they do appear in the majority and other well-attested manuscripts. The presence or omission of the words "in Ephesus" is not relevant, however, to determining whether the letter's recipients were Christians. For discussion see Ernest Best, "Recipients and Title of the Letter to the

ents, as in many of Paul's other letters, were called *ἀγίοι* (plural) and "faithful in Christ."⁵ These facts, coupled with the fact that Paul addressed the congregation as brothers (*τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς*, 6:23), show that he assumed his readers were believers.

Yet the Ephesian Christians, like those in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2), though called *ἀγίοις* ("saints," Eph. 1:1), were not living in accord with their positions as "saints." As Hoehner observed,

When it [*ἅγιος*] is used substantively, it is used of those called saints (1 Cor 1:2) who may have practiced unholy things (5:1). In fact, the saints of Ephesus were admonished to stop practicing the lifestyle of those who were not saints (Eph 4:25–32). The reason that saints are to abstain from sins of the ungodly is because their bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:15–20) and because of their position as saints (Eph 5:3), not because they were not inherently holy in themselves. The idea, then, is that they had the position of saints and thus were to act saintly. They obtained this position because they had appropriated Christ's work to their lives (1 Cor 6:11) rather than gained it by acting saintly. . . . The term is applied to all believers. The believer can approach God only because he or she has obtained a righteous standing or position on the basis of Christ's work by means of faith. Paul addresses his letter to these people.⁶

Hence Paul penned the contents of this letter to address Christian matters, and he considered his audience believers.⁷

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF "INHERITANCE IN THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST AND GOD?"

In Ephesians 5:5 the present tense *οὐκ ἔχει κληρονομίαν* ("has no inheritance") can be regarded as a "future-referring present,"⁸

Ephesians: Why and When the Designation 'Ephesians?' in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, ed. Wolfgang Haase and H. Temporini (New York: De Gruyter, 1987), 2:3247–79; and Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 2–61, 78–79, 144–52. On Pauline authorship of Ephesians see Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 136–50; and Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 4–7.

⁵ See, for example, Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Philemon 1; Colossians 1:2.

⁶ Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 139–40.

⁷ Besides the expression "brother" Paul used other terms that point to his readers' status as believers: "my children" (cf. 1 Cor. 4:14; 2 Cor. 6:13; Gal. 4:19; Philem. 10), "babes in Christ" (1 Cor. 3:1; 1 Thess. 2:7), and "beloved" (Rom. 12:19; 1 Cor. 10:14; 15:58; 2 Cor. 7:1; 12:19; Phil. 2:12; 4:1). See Victor Paul Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 90–91.

⁸ S. E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to*

which indicates that present wrongdoers will have no future part in the kingdom. However, the present tense can also be understood “as signifying a process, without reference to past, present or future: no immoral person has any part in the divine kingdom.”⁹ Either view excludes the group characterized by the vice list from partaking of God’s future kingdom, as Paul indicated in his other epistles (1 Cor. 6:9–10; Gal. 5:21). Paul could have been exhorting believers by using the present tense, since unbelievers are neither presently sharing anything in Christ’s present rule nor will they in God’s future kingdom. Hence believers should not presently share in their behavior, since they as Christians are presently already in Christ’s kingdom (Eph. 2:6; Col. 1:13).¹⁰ This view makes more sense in light of the contrast in 4:17–31 that exhorts believers to behave according to their new community rather than their former one (“no longer live as the [unsaved] Gentiles do”).

Unlike other places in the New Testament where the kingdom of God is mentioned,¹¹ Ephesians 5:5 is the only place that mentions both Christ and God together in one verse with respect to the kingdom. Some may argue that the names Christ and God refer to the same person.¹² Since the copulative καί links two singular nouns of the same case with an arthrous first noun and an anarthrous second noun (τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ), the second noun further describes the person first named. Thus both nouns may describe

Tense and Mood (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 230–32.

⁹ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 365.

¹⁰ The words “has no inheritance” may refer to the kingdom in mystery form *now* through Christ’s rule in the church, or it may refer to the believers’ present share in Christ’s rule and kingdom. In the latter sense the believers’ inheritance is *de jure*, not *de facto*. See Romans 14:17; 1 Corinthians 4:20; Ephesians 2:6; Colossians 1:13–14.

¹¹ “The kingdom of God” is mentioned in sixty-five verses, and the kingdom in relation to Christ appears in ten verses (Matt. 16:28; Luke 1:33; 22:29–30; 23:42; John 18:36; Col. 1:13; 2 Tim. 4:1, 18; 2 Pet. 1:11).

Ephesians 5:5 is the only place in the New Testament where this phrase appears. William E. Brown notes that though this verse differs from the traditional form expressed in other passages, “the essential meaning is the same” (“The New Testament Concept of the Believer’s Inheritance” [Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984], 127). See also D. R. Denton, “Inheritance in Paul and Ephesians,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 54 (July–September 1982): 157–58; and Paul L. Hammer, “A Comparison of *Klêronomia* in Paul and Ephesians,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 79 (September 1960): 268.

¹² This is particularly true of older commentators. See, for example, G. Chr. Adolph Harless, *Commentar über den Brief Pauli and die Ephesier*, 2nd rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Liesching, 1834), 184; and Samuel H. Turner, *The Epistle to the Ephesians in Greek and English: With an Analysis and Exegetical Commentary* (New York: Dana, 1856), 149.

the same person (the Granville Sharp rule), which some employ to defend Christ's deity.¹³ But two problems plague this view. Frequently θεός occurs without the article (e.g., 1 Cor. 6:9–10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21).¹⁴ The article with Χριστός can simply be “to denote his title, that is, his proper name, ‘the Christ’ or ‘the Messiah.’”¹⁵ Thus similar to 1 Corinthians 15:24, Paul seems to have stressed that this kingdom belongs to both God the Son and God the Father.¹⁶

Those who have no “inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God” (Eph. 5:5) are unbelievers in contrast to believers. They are not qualified to enter the kingdom nor do they qualify for rewards in the kingdom. As in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 and Galatians 5:19–21, kingdom-bound citizens (the saved) should not behave like the unsaved, “sons of disobedience” (Eph. 5:6), who practice “works of darkness” (v. 11).¹⁷

WHY ARE BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS CONTRASTED?

Believers are called “God’s possession” (Eph. 1:14), and as such they inherit numerous blessings from the Lord (v. 3). Believers, who compose the universal church, the body of Christ, were “made alive with Christ” (2:5) and were “raised up with Christ” (v. 6). This came at the point of salvation by faith in Christ apart from works for the purpose of manifesting good works for God (vv. 8–10). Ephesians 2:15 refers to Christ creating “in himself one new man”

¹³ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 276; and Max Zerwick, *Biblical Greek: Illustrated by Examples*, trans. Joseph Smith (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1963), 185.

¹⁴ Charles J. Ellicott, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians: with a Critical and Grammatical Commentary, and a Revised Translation*, 5th ed. (London: Longmans and Green, 1884), 118; A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 786; and S. D. F. Salmond, “The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians,” in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1903; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 3:354.

¹⁵ Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 662.

¹⁶ See, for example, Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 4–6*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960), 564; Joachim Gnilka, *Der Epheserbrief: Auslegung* (Freiburg: Herder, 1982), 249; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 325; and Turner, *The Epistle to the Ephesians in Greek and English*, 149.

¹⁷ “Works of darkness” could be a synonym of the phrase “works of the flesh,” used in Galatians 5:19. The vices (vv. 19–21), which are “the works of darkness,” typically describe pagan vices. Believers are encouraged to “no longer live like the Gentiles” (Eph. 4:17). Instead they should expose the “fruitless deeds of the works of darkness” (5:11).

out of two communities (cf. 4:22–24). That is, believing Jews and Gentiles compose one new community of believers called the church (2:11–22; cf. Col. 3:9–11). This community of believers is exhorted to stop participating in the sins of the vice lists of the community in which they were once a part.¹⁸

Paul summoned the believers to practice holiness to reflect their position as a new community in Christ, a corporate entity termed “the new man” (τὸν καινὸν ἄνθρωπον, Eph. 4:24).¹⁹ Paul contrasted two communities (one composed of believers and the other of unbelievers) and their behaviors for the purpose of influencing Christians to live in light of their new position.

Using figurative language in Ephesians 4:20–24, Paul exhorted believers to live with each other in light of their position as saints. His exhortation centered on the actions introduced in three infinitival statements “to put off the old man” (ἀποθέσθαι . . . τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον, v. 22), “to be made new in the attitude of your minds” (ἀνανεοῦσθαι δὲ τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ νοῦς ὑμῶν, v. 23), and “to put on the new self created to be like God” (ἐνδύσασθαι τὸν καινὸν ἄνθρωπον τὸν κατὰ θεὸν κτισθέντα, v. 24). The infinitives ἀποθέσθαι (“to put off”) and ἐνδύσασθαι (“to put on”) in verses 22 and 24 do not denote progress of action, since they are aorist forms, whose grammatical aspects are undefined. On the other hand ἀνανεοῦσθαι (“to be renewed”) appears in the present tense, which here denotes continuous action. The words “put off the old man” and “put on the new man” may be understood either as indicative statements (demonstrating facts that occurred in the past) or as imperatives (indicating something believers must do).²⁰ Colossians 3:9–10, a parallel passage that uses similar figures of speech and employs participles, favors the indicative mood (“you have taken off your old

¹⁸ 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), 159–61. Everett L. Worthington Jr. and Jack W. Berry see “the virtues arising from the new self and the vices arising from the old self” (“Virtues, Vices, and Character Education,” in *Judeo-Christian Perspectives on Psychology: Human Nature, Motivation, and Change*, ed. W. R. Miller and H. D. Delaney [Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2005], 158. See also R. C. Roberts, “Outline in Pauline Psychotherapy,” in *Care for the Soul: Exploring the Intersection of Psychology and Theology*, ed. M. R. McMinn and T. R. Phillips [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001], 143–63).

¹⁹ Bock, “The ‘New Man’ as Community in Colossians and Ephesians,” 162–64.

²⁰ The indicative mood implies that in the *past* believers have “put off the old man and put on the new man and should now be continually renewing their minds,” whereas the imperative calls for *present* action: “put off the old man and be continuously renewing your mind and put on the new man.”

self . . . and have put on the new self”). Paul often moved from the indicative to the imperative (e.g., Rom. 6:1–23).²¹ Bock’s argument for the imperative mood in Ephesians 4:22, 24 is compelling.

The imperative position can point to tighter logic. The logical flow of speaking of putting off the old man and putting on the new as positional truth interrupted by the call to renew the mind continually is awkward conceptually. . . . Certain activities of the old world (the old man) are not appropriate to that identity and to the association the individual now has in representing Christ and others who belong to him. So certain activities are to be shed; they are beneath the believer. Yet other virtues should be worn like new, fine clothes since they reflect the character of the new community, not to mention the character of God.²²

Contrastive exhortations that appeal to one’s position in order to influence behavior and that are associated with the new community are given in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11; Galatians 2:19–20; 5:19–26; Colossians 3:5–24; and Titus 3:3–7.

In Ephesians 5:1–2 Paul used the inferential conjunction οὖν to draw on the previous section (4:17–32), where he exhorted believers to live worthily of their new community status as saints.²³ Paul then continued to appeal to them to be “imitators of God as dear children” on the basis of Christ’s sacrifice (5:1).²⁴ According to 4:17–32 Christians could revert back to old behaviors that were

²¹ See René López, *Romans Unlocked: Power to Deliver*, rev. ed. (Springfield, MO: 21st Century, 2009), 123–24.

²² Bock, “The ‘New Man’ as Community in Colossians and Ephesians,” 162–64.

²³ Hoehner believes that οὖν is a “resumptive inferential conjunction that goes back to 4:1 and 17 and provides another application from the first three chapters” (*Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 643). Paul built his argument from positional truth (who the believer is) to practical truth (how the believer should live because of this).

²⁴ Imitation language was widely used by Hellenistic Jews (e.g., *Testament of Asher* 4:3; Philo, *De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini* 68; idem, *De Specialibus Legibus* 4.73, 187–88; idem, *De Virtibus* 168; cf. Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 4–6*, 556 n. 10, 588–92; Gnllka, *Der Epheserbrief: Auslegung*, 248–89; Robert A. Wild, “Be Imitators of God’: Discipleship in the Letter to the Ephesians,” in *Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. F. Segovia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 127–43.

Lincoln notes that Paul had to know about this tradition and that one’s position was foundational for this imitation to occur. “The likelihood that the writer is familiar with similar traditions to those used by Philo is increased when it is observed that in *De Specialibus/ Legibus*. 4:72–73, as here in Eph 4:32–5:1, imitating God is seen in terms of showing kindness and forgiving. The tradition of imitation of God has been made to serve the writer’s perspective, in which a new relationship with God is needed for this imitation to be accomplished, and that relationship is based on God’s saving activity in Christ” (*Ephesians*, 311).

inconsistent with their new position as believers (5:1–2).²⁵ In typical Pauline style he used a positional statement related to Christ's sacrifice (in v. 2) as a motivator to influence Christian behavior. Stoeckhardt states, "Καθὼς simply means that we are to practice love in accordance with the love which Christ has shown us. The unique, incomparable love of Christ in that He sacrificed Himself for us is the motive and power of our love."²⁶

In 5:3–5 Paul contrasted believers (by using the adversative conjunction δέ) with those characterized by the common vice list that portrays behavior reflective of those outside the community but which is not "proper or fitting for saints" (πρέπει ἀγίοις, v. 3). Then in verses 3–5 Paul mentioned ten vices (described either as people characterized by vices or the vices themselves) and commanded believers not to be characterized by these sins (present passive imperative, ὀνομαζέσθω): sexual immorality, impurity of any kind, greediness, obscenity, foolish talk, coarse joking, and idolatry. He concluded by stating that believers should not be identified with these sins because the person who practices such sins "has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God" (v. 5).

Many believe that a Christian who practices such sins cannot "remain a Christian."²⁷ However, this contradicts Paul's earlier point in Ephesians that to become a Christian depends solely on God's grace through faith in Christ excluding works (1:7, 11–15; 2:1–10). Also nowhere did Paul say that after initial salvation one can remain a Christian only through obedience. Any such view conflicts with many passages (e.g., Rom. 3:21–4:25; Gal. 2:16; 3:1–4:31; Titus 3:3–7). Furthermore, as noted above, Paul's Christian addressees were in contrast to those characterized by the vice list because the former were introduced by the adversative.

The phrase "the sons of disobedience" (τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας, Eph. 5:6)²⁸ clearly describes unbelievers (cf. 2:2–3). In

²⁵ See the excellent discussion on this point in *ibid.*, 319–21.

²⁶ G. Stockhardt, *Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*, trans. Martin S. Sommer, Concordia Heritage Series (St. Louis: Concordia, 1952), 226.

²⁷ "The Apostle has warned the Christians against vices which are apt to seep into the Christian's life and against which he must constantly fight and which he must never cease to put off more and more if he is to remain a Christian" (*ibid.*, 227).

²⁸ The term υἱός allows "the more vivid imagination of the oriental, who viewed any intimate relationship—whether of connection, origin or dependence—as a relationship of sonship, even in the spiritual sense" (Adolf Deissmann, *Bible Studies: Contributions from Papyri and Inscriptions to the History of the Language, the Literature, and the Religion of Hellenistic Judaism and Primitive Christianity*, trans. Alexander Grieve, 2nd ed. [Edinburgh: Clark, 1901], 161; see also 162–66 for the

Ephesians 2:1–10 Paul again contrasts these unbelievers with believers to show how their changed status should affect their behavior.²⁹ Ephesians 2:3 states that the unregenerate are “by nature children of wrath.” Their actions (i.e., “walked,” “conducted,” and “lust of our flesh,” vv. 2–3) reflected their “nature” (φύσις). As a result, their disobedient actions stemming from their nature incurred God’s wrath. The term “children of wrath” (v. 3) is thus a synonym of the phrase “sons of disobedience” (5:6).³⁰

Then in 5:7 Paul used the conjunction οὖν (“therefore”) to lead to his commands to believers, “Do not become partners with them” (μὴ οὖν γίνεσθε συμμέτοχοι αὐτῶν). By employing the present imperative γίνεσθε Paul seems to have had in mind a contrast for Christians between being partners with the unsaved and being imitators of God (v. 34).³¹ Rather than Christians seeking to become partakers with unbelievers (v. 7) they ought to become imitators of God (v. 1).

Similar to Romans 13:4–5 where Paul addressed believers who

use of υἱός as a Hebrew idiom and in the Septuagint). The Septuagint mentions ἀπειθεία (“disobedience”) four times (4 Macc. 8:9, 18; 12:3; Pss. Sol. 17:20) and ἀπειθής (“disobedience” or “rebellious”) eight times (Num. 20:10; Deut. 21:18; Isa. 7:16; 30:9; Jer. 5:23; Zech. 7:12; Sir. 16:6; 47:21). In the New Testament ἀπειθεία occurs seven times (Rom. 11:30, 32; Eph. 2:2; 5:6; Col. 3:6; Heb. 4:6, 11) and means “disobedience” or “unbelief.” Noting this, Hoehner concludes, “Disobedience comes from unbelief, for the person is not persuaded or convinced to trust what has been stated. . . . So, the unregenerate are characterized as disobedient because they do not believe in what God has provided. It shows that unbelief is more than the absence of trust—it is defiance against God. Thus, it is no wonder they are called the sons of disobedience for they follow their commander who is the prototype of disobedience. In conclusion, the unregenerate Ephesians walked according to the values of the present age” (*Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 316).

²⁹ Paul probably did not intend to contrast Jews and Gentiles in Ephesians 2:1–10 (Charles John Ellicott, *A Commentary, Critical and Grammatical, on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* [n.p.: Warren F. Draper, 1862], 35). Paul did not address the issue of Jews and Gentiles until in 2:11–13 (Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 318).

³⁰ The phrase “sons of disobedience” is a Hebrew figure of speech in which “sons of” points to the individual’s character (E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* [London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1898; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968], 504, 832–33). For further discussion see René A. López, “Do Believers Experience the Wrath of God?” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 15 (autumn 2002): 50.

³¹ Turner, *The Epistle to the Ephesians in Greek and English*, 149. R. V. G. Tasker, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God* (London: Tyndale, 1951), 38. For a discussion defending the view that disobedient believers can experience God’s wrath without forfeiting salvation see John Hart, “Why Confess Christ? The Use and Abuse of Romans 10:9–10,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 12 (autumn 1999): 3–35; Zane C. Hodges, “The Moralistic Wrath-Dodger,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 34 (spring 2005): 15–21; López, “Do Believers Experience the Wrath of God?” 45–66; and Stanley R. Weideman, “An Exegetical Study of the Wrath of God in the New Testament” (ThM thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978), 62.

incur God's wrath for resisting His authority,³² Ephesians 5:6–7 also shows that believers who behave like unbelievers incur temporal discipline like unbelievers.³³ When believers commit sin, they will always face serious consequences.

Verse 8 is introduced by the conjunction “for” (γάρ) and explains that the believers were once in “darkness” (σκότος, i.e., among the unregenerate “sons of disobedience,” v. 6), where they produced vices that came naturally to them. As Christians their behavior should now display the virtues that characterize their new nature as saints, those whom Paul called “light in the Lord” (φῶς ἐν κυρίῳ). In their unregenerate past they “were [imperfect tense] once darkness” (ἦτε . . . ποτε σκότος).³⁴

In the classical Greek period σκότος meant “darkness, gloom” and included “death” and pictured the “netherworld.”³⁵ Although the term in the Septuagint and in the New Testament period can refer to physical darkness (e.g., Gen. 1:2–5, 18; Matt. 27:45), more

³² López, “Do Believers Experience the Wrath of God?” 65. Hoehner notes that “in light of the coming judgment (v. 6), believers should not be deceived into thinking that it is harmless to become participants with unbelievers” (*Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 668).

³³ “The New Testament is very far, however, from asserting that the Christian is automatically, as it were, removed from any manifestation of divine anger. The burden of its message is that the justified sinner must become the sanctified sinner. He is called to abide in the divine love. The essential difference between the believer and the unbeliever is that, while the latter, whether he realizes it or not, is inevitably subject to God's wrath, the believer, by continual submission to the Holy Spirit, remains under grace, and so escapes that wrath. Paul was much concerned to warn the Christian of the danger of being deluded by a false sense of security” (Tasker, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God*, 38).

God's wrath should be distinguished from eternal punishment. Elsewhere this writer and others argue this point (López, “Do Believers Experience the Wrath of God?” 45–66). Gustav Stählin believes in an Old Testament eternal ὄργη, but argues that the wrath of God in the New Testament never “last[s] to eternity” (“ὄργη,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 5 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964], 433–34). As Zane C. Hodges affirms, “There is not a single NT example of this word [ὄργη] where it refers unambiguously to the experience of eternal punishment. Every NT instance of God's *orgē* can be understood as a reference to the temporal display of God's displeasure with human sin” (“The Message of Romans,” *The Kerugma Message* 6 [February 1997]: 1).

³⁴ “The verb [ἦτε] is emphatic both by its position and because the tense changes from the present to the imperfect. It emphasizes a past condition. This is further verified by the enclitic particle of time ποτε (cf. 2:2, 3, 11, 13), which stands in contrast to the following adverb of time νῦν (cf. 2:2, 13; 3:5, 10), which indicates the present time” (Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 669). See also Brown, “The New Testament Concept of the Believer's Inheritance,” 129–30.

³⁵ Homer, *Odyssey* 19.389; idem, *Iliad* 5.47; 4.461; 13.672; Euripides, *Phoenissae*, 1453; idem, *Helena* 62; and Sophocles, *Oedypus coloneus* 1701.

often it has theological connotations as the place where God's light is absent (Ps. 4:6; Job 12:22; Hab. 3:4; 1 John 1:5). It can also stand for death, the grave, and God's judgment (e.g., 2 Sam. 22:6, 10, 12, 29; Job 3:5–6; Ps. 49:19; Isa. 5:14, 20, 30; 9:2; 47:5; 59:9; 60:2). The wicked are in darkness (Ps. 107 [Heb., 106]:10). In the New Testament it can refer to people who live in the realm of sin (Matt. 4:16; Luke 1:79; John 3:19; Acts 26:18; Rom. 2:19; 13:12; 1 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 6:12; Col. 1:13; 1 Thess. 5:4–5; 1 Pet. 2:9; 1 John 1:6), and can also metaphorically designate where the unfaithful reside (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; 2 Pet. 2:17; 1 John 1:5–10; Jude 13).

In the classical Greek period $\phi\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ meant physical light³⁶ and was sometimes used metaphorically for “happiness, victory, and glory.”³⁷ The Hebrew $\אוֹר$ meant physical light (Gen. 1:3–5), but usually it was associated with God's character, revelation (Ps. 89:15 [Heb., v. 16; LXX, 88:16]; 104:2 [LXX, 103:2]; Isa. 60:19–20), and salvation (Pss. 27:1; 119:105 [LXX, 118:105]; 139:12 [LXX 138:12]; Prov. 6:23; Isa. 9:2; 10:17; 42:6, 16; 49:6; 51:4; 60:1). In the New Testament the term $\phi\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ refers to physical light (Luke 8:16; Acts 16:29; Rev. 22:5), to Jesus' garments that became white as light (Matt. 17:2), and to Jesus Himself as the light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5; 12:46). John also stated that in contrast to God, who is light, the natural (or unregenerate) person loves darkness rather than light (3:18). Because Jesus identified Himself as the light, all who believe in Him become “sons of the light” (John 12:35–36). Light and darkness cannot coexist and are presented as opposed to each other, both in Scripture (Isa. 5:20; 9:2; 50:10; Amos 5:18; Mic. 7:8; Matt. 6:23; John 3:19; 8:12) and in the Qumran literature (1QS 3:18–20, 24–25; 1QM 1:1, 11–16; 3:6, 9; 13:16). More than any other community, Qumran stressed that the opposite extremes of “darkness” and “light” characterize the unregenerate and regenerate.

Darkness referred to the realm of the condemned, who were without God's light (Col. 1:13; 1 Pet. 2:9; Jude 13). Even unfaithful believers can interact with this realm (e.g., 1 John 1:6; 2:8, 9, 11). In Ephesians 4:17–18; 5:8, 11; 6:12 “darkness” refers to the position and practice of the unregenerate. As Lincoln observes, “Images of darkness and light occur frequently in connection with conversion (e.g., *Joseph and Asenath* 8.10; 15.13; Philo, *De Virt[ibus]* 179; Acts 26:18; Col 1:12, 13; 1 Pet 2:9; *Odes Sol.* 14.18; cf. also Heb 6:4;

³⁶ Plato, *Res Publica* 6:19 §508c; and Homer, *Odyssey* 21.429.

³⁷ Homer, *Iliad* 6.6; 17.615; Sophocles, *Ajax* 709; and idem, *Antigone* 600. Also Hoehner notes this (*Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 669–71).

10:32). . . . If the readers are light, then they are to walk or live (cf. 2:2, 10; 4:1, 17; 5:2) as children of light, a designation which contrasts with ‘the sons of disobedience’ in v 6. Their behavior is to conform to their identity.”³⁸

Paul immediately added a command in the present tense (here with a continual emphasis)³⁹ to let their practice reflect their position: “Live as children of light” (ὡς τέκνα φωτός περιπατεῖτε, v. 8).⁴⁰ Verse 9 then explains verse 8 by listing the “fruit” that should characterize children of the light.⁴¹ By contrast the “sons of disobedience” are still in “darkness” (v. 8). Similar to the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), Ephesians 5:9 again states what should characterize Christian behavior: “goodness, righteousness, and truth” in contrast to unbelievers who are characterized by “the fruitless deeds of darkness” (τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς ἀκαρποῖς τοῦ σκοτους, v. 11), which parallels “the works of the flesh” (Gal. 5:19).

In verse 7 Paul instructed them not to be fellow participants with evildoers, “the sons of disobedience,” and in the present verse Paul

³⁸ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 326–27. O’Brien also notes this contrast. “This whole paragraph, commencing with v. 8, plays on the rich symbolism of the light and darkness, and again Paul introduces the ‘once-now’ contrast schema (see on 2:1–10, 11–22) to focus attention on the transfer of dominions experienced by believers. Once they belonged to the rule of darkness (cf. Col. 1:13), but now because of their new relationship with their Lord they are identified with the realm of light. How contradictory it would be, then, for them to become involved with the immorality of the past. If they are *light*, then let them behave as *children of light*, and this will mean living by values that are diametrically opposed to those of their surrounding society” (*The Letter to the Ephesians*, 366). B. J. Oropeza notes this contrast as well. “Various examples of Paul’s use of ‘once . . . but now’ sets in contrast the believers’ former status with their new salvific status in Christ (Rom. 6:21–22; 11:30; Gal. 4:8–9; Col. 3:7–8; cf. Eph. 5:8)” (*Paul and Apostasy: Eschatology, Perseverance, and Falling Away in the Corinthian Congregation*, ed. Martin Hengel and Ortfried Hofius [Tübingen: Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 2000], 177). See also Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, 118–35; and Don N. Howell Jr., “Pauline Eschatological Dualism and Its Resulting Tension,” *Theology Journal* 14 (spring 1993): 16.

³⁹ Buist M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 358–60.

⁴⁰ Hoehner believes τέκνα φωτός involves a genitive of characteristic quality rather than a genitive of source, since the verse teaches believers to imitate God, the source of light. “Before conversion believers were darkness and hated the light (v. 8a; 2:1–3; cf. John 3:20). But light exposed them and they became children of light. Since they are light they should walk as children of light and hate the darkness” (*Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 672).

⁴¹ The words τοῦ φωτός in the phrase “the fruit of the light” can be interpreted as a “genitive of production” (Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 673; and Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 104–5). Ernest Best categorizes τοῦ φωτός as a “subjective genitive” that means “the light has produced fruit” (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: Clark, 1998], 489).

tells them not to participate in their unfruitful works of darkness. The “unfruitful” works is [*sic*] in contrast to the fruit of the light in verse 9. . . . Unfruitful works are useless and unproductive and their source in “darkness” (genitive of source) corresponds to the darkness in which they once lived (v. 8). If they have been formerly darkness but are now the light in the Lord, why should they participate in the sins that come from the place to which they had previously been in bondage?⁴²

Unbelievers are characterized by the vice list, the designations “sons of disobedience,” “darkness,” and “works of darkness” (vv. 3–6, 8, 11). Believers are characterized by love, light, walking as children of light, fruit of the light, and a list of virtues (vv. 2, 8–9).⁴³ Hence the vice list is tied to unbelievers, whose vices believers should not emulate.

DID PAUL WARN HIS READERS OR EXHORT THEM?

When Paul wrote in 5:5, “of this you can be sure” (τοῦτο γὰρ ἴστε γινώσκουτες), was he warning the Ephesians or exhorting them? If Paul was warning Christians, he could have been referring to their forfeiting an entrance into the kingdom by behaving like unbelievers. Or if he was exhorting believers to have their practice reflect their position, he could mean that they should continue to be aware (ἴστε, perfect active imperative or indicative) that unbelievers do not inherit the kingdom. Hence they should not practice sins that characterize those who will be excluded from the kingdom.⁴⁴ Perhaps Paul both warned and exhorted believers not to practice the sins of those who will not enter the kingdom, because not only are they positionally different from them but also like them they will incur temporal discipline.⁴⁵

⁴² Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 678.

⁴³ Lewis Sperry Chafer wrote, “The Epistle to the Ephesians is characterized by its contrasts between the estate of the lost and the estate of the saved” (*The Epistle to the Ephesians* [New York: Loizeaux, 1935; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1991], 125). Also O’Brien noted the “contrast between the Christian community and the outsiders” (*The Letter to the Ephesians*, 358–59).

⁴⁴ Hoehner seems to reflect this view. “The conjunction γὰρ serves a double function: (1) confirmation of what they already know and (2) reason for the negative injunction in verses 3–4. The reason they should not act like unbelievers is because unbelievers are not going to inherit the kingdom of Christ and God. The demonstrative pronoun τοῦτο refers to the content which follows” (*Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 659).

⁴⁵ See López, “Do Believers Experience the Wrath of God?” 45–66; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 325–26; and Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Der Brief an die Epheser*, Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neu-

Some believe that the warning pertains to Christians who habitually sin and thus will forfeit their salvation. Others believe (a) the warning proves they were never saved, or (b) focuses on broken Christian fellowship, or (c) focuses on believers who will miss the kingdom (while remaining saved), or (d) refers to believers who will lose rewards. However, various exegetical issues invalidate these views. Many passages show that Christians cannot lose their salvation (e.g., John 10:28–29; Rom. 8:31–39).⁴⁶

As stated earlier, Paul contrasted believers with unbelievers in order to encourage the former to behave in light of their new community, and thus not be deceived (cf. ἀπάτη, “deceive,” in Eph. 4:22) into living licentiously (4:17–5:11). O’Brien sees the phrase ἵσπε γινώσκοντες in 5:5 as a warning that continues in verses 6–7.

The identity of those who might try to lead them astray is not specifically indicated. They may be members of the Christian community (perhaps with libertine or Gnosticizing tendencies) who do not take sin seriously. But the context, with its references to “the sons of disobedience,” “partakers with them” (v. 7), and “you were once darkness” (v. 8), may point to unbelieving Gentiles who tried to justify their vices as matters of indifference. This suggestion has the merit of maintaining the “insider/outsider” contrast that runs through the passage. Whatever the source of the temptation, the readers are not to be led astray.⁴⁷

Barth and Best believe those addressed in the vice list are erring church members in danger of losing their salvation.⁴⁸ Lincoln’s conclusion, however, fits the grammar and context best.

By means of the οὖν [in v. 7], “therefore,” the prohibition also builds on vv 5, 6. Since the consequences for the immoral are so severe, the readers are not to become partners with them. αὐτοῖν, “with them,” is to be taken as a reference to people rather than vices . . . and “the dis-

kirchen, 1982), 224–27.

⁴⁶ See Joseph Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Miami Springs, FL: Shoettle, 1992); Michael S. Horton et al., *Four Views on Eternal Security* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002); and Charles F. Stanley, *Eternal Security* (Nashville: Nelson, 1990). As Lincoln says, “Those in bondage to their sexual appetites are not those over whom Christ and God rule. The writer assumes that his readers are not among such people. To describe this verse, therefore, as a warning to believers that they can lose their salvation . . . does not do justice to its function in the context. It provides a further motivation for readers not even to mention these vices, namely, that those who actually perpetrate them are in a realm totally antithetical to the kingdom of Christ and God” (*Ephesians*, 325).

⁴⁷ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 364–65.

⁴⁸ Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 4–6*, 564, 566; and Ernest Best, *Ephesians: A Shorter Commentary* (London: Clark, 2003), 249–51.

obedient” is the most immediate antecedent. . . . The context here in Ephesians makes clear that what is involved is not a general distancing from all aspects of life in the Gentile world but in particular a separation from its immoral aspects. The readers are not to become partners with the disobedient Gentiles in their sins and thereby also in the judgment that will come on them.⁴⁹

The judgment/discipline that will come on believers, initially meant for unbelievers, appears as a present possibility. The verb ἔρχεται describes a present reality with future aspects, as most commentators suggest.⁵⁰ Although Lincoln believes Ephesians does not develop the present aspect of God’s wrath in the sense of Romans 1:18–32, O’Brien’s conclusion seems to be on firmer ground contextually, grammatically, and logically.

The present tense (*comes*) has been understood to indicate that even now such sinners experience something of the divine wrath. Others suggest that the present tense of this verb often has a future nuance, thereby indicating that the divine wrath will be manifest on the last day, or else it occurs in both present and future. However, the present tense probably depicts the action taking place as a process: *those who are disobedient* experience the divine wrath (cf. Rom. 1:18–32), whether in this age or its full manifestation at the end.

Since the consequences of living an immoral life are so serious, the readers are strongly urged not to become partners with the disobedient Gentiles in their sinful behavior. . . . The term *partners* [in v. 7], which appears in the New Testament only here and at 3:6 [i.e., the Greek compound term συμμέτοχοι], is used to signify “one who shares in a possession or a relationship.” Accordingly, the readers are to make sure that they do not share with the disobedient Gentiles in their immorality and thus escape the judgment that rightly falls with it (cf. 2 Cor 6:14–7:1). Those who participate with Jewish believers in the promise of Christ Jesus through the gospel (3:6) cannot be partners with pagans in their sins. The two forms of participation are mutually exclusive.⁵¹

Those in danger of incurring God’s temporal wrath by partaking of the sins in the vice list will likewise partake of the temporal judg-

⁴⁹ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 326. It is not clear if Lincoln believes Christians can incur temporal punishment or if they, like their pagan counterparts, will incur eternal judgment (ibid., 325–26).

⁵⁰ T. K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: Clark, 1897), 152; Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 4–6*, 566; Best, *Ephesians: A Shorter Commentary*, 251; Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 664; Franz Mußner, *Der Brief an die Epheser*, Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar zum Neuen Testament (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 182), 114; and Schnackenburg, *Der Brief an die Epheser*, 226.

⁵¹ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 365–66.

ment of the pagans. Believers are sealed to the day of redemption (1:13–14, 18; 2:2–3; 4:22–24, 30; 5:7–8). Therefore Christians are secure, since this and other New Testament passages also guarantee their future entrance into the kingdom on the basis of their position in Christ (John 3:1–16; 4:10–12; 5:24; 6:40, 47; 10:28–29; 11:25–27; 20:31; Rom. 3:21–4:25; 8:31–39; Eph. 1:13–14, 18; 2:8–10; 4:30; Titus 3:3–8).⁵²

Hence the danger of believers being deceived (Eph. 5:6) does not suggest they will forfeit entrance into the kingdom (v. 5). That will be true of unbelievers, but disobedient believers will experience God's discipline now.

Thus Paul's statement *τοῦτο γὰρ ἴστε γινώσκοντες* ("for this you know" or "for your knowing this") functions as a reminder to believers (similar to phrases "do you not know" and "do not be deceived" in 1 Cor. 6:9 and "I told you beforehand as I told you before" in Gal. 5:21) not to participate in the sins of those characterized by the vice list. Since unbelievers have no present inheritance in the kingdom, it is inappropriate for believers to behave like outsiders (4:17–5:5, 8–11). And if Christians behave like unbelievers, the former will incur temporal discipline aimed at outsiders (5:6–7).⁵³

SUMMARY

Vice lists in Paul's writings highlight behavior inappropriate for Christians, and often these lists were designed to exhort believers to change their course of action (Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 5:10–11; 2 Cor. 12:20–21). The vice lists motivate believers to behave in keeping with their status as a new community of believers (Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:5–9; 1 Tim. 1:9–10; 6:4–5; 2 Tim. 3:2–4; Titus 1:6–7; 3:3).

The term "inherit" or "inheritance" carries one of two nuances: nonmeritorious or meritorious. By faith alone in Christ alone anyone can receive the right to enter and share in the coming kingdom (also known as possessing "eternal life or salvation"). This is a nonmeritorious inheritance (Rom. 4:13–14; 8:17a; Gal. 3:18, 29; 4:1, 7, 30; Titus 3:7) that God guarantees (Eph. 1:11, 14, 18). Kingdom-bound believers, however, can prepare for their future status (and be rewarded) by being faithful in suffering and by being obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is "meritorious inheritance" in the

⁵² For extensive discussions on the security of the believer see Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*; Horton et al., *Four Views on Eternal Security*; and Stanley, *Eternal Security*.

⁵³ O'Brien comes to a similar conclusion (*The Letter to the Ephesians*, 365–66).

kingdom (Rom. 8:17b; Col. 3:24; cf. 2 Tim. 2:11–13).

Although most of the references to inheriting the kingdom relate to God's nonmeritorious work, one should not think this condones disobedience or encourages one to be negligent.

Some passages referencing the kingdom are more ambiguous regarding an entirely future realm; hence some argue for a now-and-not-yet inaugurated kingdom (Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; Col. 1:13). Yet these passages can be viewed as *de jure* not *de facto*, that is, as something already established "judicially" without the "actual event" having taken place (e.g., Eph. 2:6). In many passages the kingdom refers to a yet-future realm (1 Cor. 15:24, 50; 4:11; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5; 4:1, 8).

This series revealed that Paul combined a vice list and the phrase "inherit the kingdom of God" in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10; Galatians 5:19–21; and Ephesians 5:3–5 and elsewhere as a rhetorical device to motivate and exhort believers not to behave like those excluded from the kingdom, but rather like kingdom-bound saints. That is, Paul used the lists with vices that characterize unbelievers to show that when believers behave that way, such conduct is inappropriate for their position as Christians. Thus the combination of the vice list and the words "inheriting the kingdom" is used with future-realm language to highlight the exclusion of unbelievers from the kingdom and to motivate believers not to behave like sinners.