Ephesians

Lesson 9

**Intro**

In the second half of Ephesians, Paul urges the Ephesians to walk worthy of the spiritual calling described in chapters 1-3. In Eph. 5:1-6, Paul contends that worthy living includes a lifestyle of sacrificial love in imitation of God. Sacrificial love requires believers to rid themselves of all forms of greed, including sexual immorality, any type of impurity, and all types of speech that encourage sin in others. Paul argues that assuming there are no consequences to a self-centered, greedy lifestyle is incorrect; people characterized by that attitude will experience God’s wrath and have no part in Christ’s kingdom.

**Eph. 5:7-14 Walking as children of the light**

In the next section, Paul exhorts the Ephesians to live as children of light. “Therefore do not become fellow participants with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord;” Because people characterized by disobedience to God will experience divine wrath, Paul urges the Ephesians not to become fellow participants or accomplices with disobedient people in their disobedient acts. In Corinthians, Paul clarifies that he is not saying believers should have no contact with unbelievers who engage in disobedience. (1 Cor. 5:9-12.) Paul is commanding something more difficult: despite being around disobedient people, the Ephesians must not partner in disobedient acts. Paul acknowledges that the Ephesians—like all humans—used to be “darkness,” meaning spiritually dead citizens of the realm/system opposed to God. Paul uses the imagery of darkness in a similar way in other epistles. (Col. 1:13; 1 Thess. 5:4-5.) Darkness was associated with evil deeds and, to the NT writers, with the absence of divine revelation or relationship. Paul contends that the Ephesians are now “light in the Lord.” Here, “Lord” refers to Jesus Christ and this phrase identifies Jesus as the source of the light, and the phrase implies the Ephesians both are light and are in the realm of the light.

“walk as children of light; for the fruit of light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth; approving what is pleasing to God” while Paul warns against possibilities that could reveal an individual lacks genuine faith, he takes the Ephesians’ profession of faith at face value and exhorts them to live consistent with their new identity in Christ/as children of light. If God is light and believers are children of God, it follows that believers are children of light, and should display the characteristics of light. (Rom. 13:12; 1 Tim. 6:16.) Those characteristics, described as “fruit,” are every or all types of goodness (that which is morally beneficial for the individual and others), righteousness (that which is consistent with God’s standards), and truth (consistent with reality, which, from a believer’s perspective, begins with consistency with God’s revelation). Here, “approve” means to examine something and certify it, as in the phrase “FDA certified,” so Paul wants the Ephesians to discern and certify what is pleasing to Christ. If they do so, the Ephesians will be sources of light to those around them.

“and do not participate in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them; for the things done in secret by them are shameful even to mention; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light;” Paul now expands on being sources of light. He contrasts participating in unfruitful works of darkness with exposing them, i.e., revealing their true nature. Most people rationalize even their dark deeds. In 2 Corinthians, Paul says even Satan masquerades as an angel of light. (2 Cor. 11:13-15.) If believers’ deeds are consistent with their identity as children of light, then their deeds and words can expose the true nature of dark deeds through contrast. Paul does not identify what people’s dark deeds need to be exposed. Some commentators think Paul is thinking first and foremost of dark deeds committed by believers. Others argue for unbelievers. I think the context favors the dark deeds of unbelievers, because Paul assumes in verse 8 that his audience is believers, but I am not convinced that one has to choose. Paul could be concerned with exposing the true nature of dark deeds committed by anyone. In addition to rationalizing dark deeds, people often try to hide their worst deeds. Paul says that deeds so dark people want them to be secret are shameful even to talk about. If it is shameful even to talk about such deeds, then believers should certainly not join in such deeds. The NIV translation of the last verse is not all that helpful. Paul’s point is that, when deeds are placed in/exposed to light, their true nature becomes visible. The last phrase is difficult. It literally says, “for everything that becomes visible is light.” The NIV removes the difficulty by interpreting “light” as the subject, but I don’t see a grammatical basis for the NIV approach. Perhaps Paul means that everything that “becomes enlightened” is light. In other words, if believers spread light by revealing the true nature of dark deeds, then perhaps some people will respond by accepting the light and everyone who accepts the light becomes light themselves.

The next verse may support that idea: “Therefore it says: ‘Wake up, O Sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’” Paul signals this is a quotation, but it is not clear what he is quoting. There is not an LXX Old Testament verse that seems close enough. Most commentators guess that the source was a NT era hymn. In 1 Thess. 5:6, Paul uses sleep as a metaphor for being spiritually dead, and says, in contrast, that believers should be spiritually alert. So, in this quotation, the sleeper appears to be someone spiritually dead who is commanded/exhorted to rouse himself from that spiritual condition. If he repents/awakens spiritually, then Christ will “shine” on him, i.e., shed light on him. This seems to pair the concepts of being spiritually enlightened with becoming light. Although some commentators argue that the person in this quote is a believer, I find it hard to believe Paul would use the phrase “rise from the dead” in conjunction with someone who is already a believer, so I agreed with the commentators who viewed the quote as an evangelistic/invitational hymn.

**Eph. 5:15-6:9 Walking in wisdom**

“Therefore, examine carefully how you are walking/living, not as unwise, but as wise; taking advantage of every opportunity, because the days are evil.” Paul’s final “walk/live” exhortation is to make an effort to live wisely or in wisdom. The first part of the phrase indicates living wisely is not easy; it requires careful examination of how one is living. Paul exhorts the Ephesians to urgently seize every opportunity to do so because the days are evil. Paul’s thought seems to be that the Ephesians physically live in an environment opposed to God’s desires (see Eph. 4:17-20), so when opportunities to advance the gospel appear, they should be seized. (See Col. 4:5.) This shows “living wisely” is not just a matter of personal holiness, it also includes the Ephesians’ part in building Christ’s kingdom.

“Therefore, do not become foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” The word “foolish” means making poor choices based on a lack of understanding. For example, Jesus applies the term to the rich man who had a good harvest and planned to keep the surplus all for himself, not recognizing that he was about to die and give an account to God. (Luke 12:16-21.) The Ephesians should strive to understand Christ’s will/desires, so that that they can avoid making foolish choices.

Paul then gives some exhortations related to living wisely and/or discerning God’s desires. “and do not get drunk on wine, in which there is dissipation, but be filled by the Spirit, speaking to one another by means of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs; sing songs and psalms with your hearts to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father; submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” Paul begins with the negative exhortation not to get drunk on wine, which causes “dissipation.” Dissipation refers to the squandering of resources. It is used to describe the prodigal son’s lifestyle that resulted in him quickly spending his entire inheritance and having no valuable assets to show for it. (Luke 15:13.) So Paul is arguing that habitual intoxication results in poor choices that squander spiritual resources/opportunities, i.e., the opposite of living wisely. There is no evidence that Ephesus was known for having more problems with habitual intoxication than any other community. But wine was widely available in the Roman empire. The Romans viewed wine as a staple dietary item, and in the first-century produced wine in Greece, Italy, Spain, France, and probably Palestine as well. Some historians believe wine consumption in the Roman empire peaked mid first-century. At that time, soldiers and even slaves were given a wine ration of as much as a gallon per week. Romans typically drank wine at every lunch and dinner. Estimates of typical wine consumption range from .5 liters to 1.0 liters per day per adult (a modern bottle is approximately .75 liters). In short, wine was the dominant intoxicating substance in the Roman empire, and virtually every person in the Roman empire would be exposed to it and at risk for alcoholism. There is abundant evidence available on the internet the Romans were aware of the problems caused by excessive wine consumption. For example, wine was mentioned in the list of things that Romans realized were ruining their bodies, but they did not want to give up.

Instead of being under the influence of wine, Paul exhorts the Ephesians to be “filled” by the Holy Spirit. The NT refers to multiple ministries involving the Holy Spirit. These include baptizing/identification with Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), indwelling (Rom. 8:9-11), and sealing (Eph. 1:13), which all occur in association with conversion and are constant, ongoing ministries. In contrast, believers are exhorted to be filled and to walk by the Spirit. In the NT, being “filled” means something is the controlling or dominant influence. Peter said Ananias and Saphira’s hearts were filled by Satan when they lied to the apostles about their gift. (Acts 5:3.) When crowds began to follow the apostles, the priests were filled with jealousy. (Acts 5:17.) Romans 1:29 says that rebellious humanity was filled with evil. Believers should strive for the Holy Spirit to be the controlling or dominant influence in their lives. One can think of filling as the opposite of grieving the Holy Spirit. Grieving occurs when we allow sinful desires to influence our decisions. Prof. Hoehner says, after indwelling, all of the Holy Spirit is available to a believer; when filling occurs, all of a believer is available to the Holy Spirit.

Paul describes some of the things that flow from being filled by the Holy Spirit. They include speaking to other believers in “psalms,” “hymns,” and “spiritual songs.” The NT uses the term “psalms” to refer to the OT book of Psalms. (Luke 20:42; Acts 1:20.) It is possible the NT church followed the Jewish practice of singing portions of Psalms accompanied by stringed instruments. “hymn” is used in the LXX to mean a song of praise, including some Psalm titles. In the NT, it is used to describe what Paul and Silas did in the Philippian jail, which seems consistent with the LXX. The last phrase is literally “spiritual odes” and usually refers to singing. It is not clear why Paul uses three terms that all basically mean spiritual singing. No one has found a persuasive way of viewing these terms as distinct categories, so the simplest explanation is that Paul is emphasizing the positive spiritual effect singing has on other believers. Paul also says to sing songs and Psalms with their hearts to the Lord, meaning Christ. Singing ministers to other people and is a form of worship. Context implies that this practice is an example of what being filled by Spirit looks like. Paul urges the Ephesians to give thanks constantly and in all circumstances (see also Col. 3:17). The object of thanksgiving is God the Father and the means is through the name or authority of Jesus Christ. This indicates that remembering and being grateful for our spiritual blessings and God’s sustenance through all types of circumstances is another example of being filled by the Spirit. (1 Thess. 5:16-18; Col. 3:16-17; Phil. 4:11-13.) The last example of being filled by the Spirit and living in wisdom is submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. The word translated as “submitting” literally meant to place oneself under another’s leadership. In this context, submitting likely means viewing others’ needs as more important than one’s own and seeking to serve others. (John 13:12-17; Luke 22:25-27.)

What walking worthy of one’s calling includes:

Eph. 4:1-16 Walk in unity with other believers/leave behind spiritual immaturity

Eph. 4:17-32 Walk in holiness/leave behind your past, short-sighted secular outlook

Eph. 5:1-6 Walk in sacrificial love for others/leave behind all types of greed

Eph. 5:7-14 Walk as light/expose darkness by contrast

Eph. 5:15-6:9 Walk in wisdom and seize spiritual opportunities/do not become foolish or

squander spiritual opportunities

**Conclusion**

The Bible never portrays God as seeking to convince humans of God’s love for them, or that God is lovable, by joining humans in their sinful endeavors. To the contrary, God never participates in sin. When God appeals to humans, God does so only through acts and words that are pure and holy such as Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross. (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:4-5.)

In this section, Paul calls believers to reflect God’s character by refusing to join in sinful disobedience even if it seems temporarily advantageous. Believers’ role in salvation is to reveal God by reflecting His character through holiness and self-sacrificing love and sharing the good news about Jesus, i.e. being salt and light. We cannot be salt and light if our deeds are as dark as those of unbelievers. (Matt. 5:13.)