

God defines the categories of “good,” “righteousness,” and “truth,” we must be diligent to seek out what He has and is revealing to us. The verb translated “trying to learn” is the Greek δοκιμάζω (*dokimazō*) which carries the sense of “to examine something in order to find out its true value” and/or “to determine genuineness.” The obvious sense that Paul intends by this phrase is that the believer will have a genuine desire and drive to know what does and does not please the Lord and always with the intention of doing that which pleases Him. We see this same word used in Rom 12:2.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove (δοκιμάζειν, *dokimazēin*) what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom 12:2)

How needful it is in our day, to “prove what the will of God is,” that is, not simply to follow what this one or that one teaches, but to constantly put what we hear or read to the “touchstone” of the Scriptures. Even as the assayer puts the stone to acid to discover if there is gold or not, so we must seek to align what we read and hear against the Scriptures to determine its accuracy and worth. Only when we know that what is being taught aligns with the Scriptures should we commit ourselves to receiving it and making it part of our lives.

Unfortunately, the availability of mass media in our day has given a platform to many false teachings. Therefore, John’s admonition in his first epistle is surely apropos for us today.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1Jn 4:1)

**11–12 Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret.**

Having given positive admonitions regarding how believers in Yeshua are to “walk as children of light” (v. 7-10), Paul now reminds us of that which must have no part in our life of faith, that is, participating in anything which is of the realm of “darkness.”

“Do not participate” translates a present tense imperative in the Greek (καὶ μὴ συγκοινωνεῖτε) which introduces a general precept, that is, something that ought never to characterize the life of one who confesses

Yeshua to be his or her Lord and Savior. The word itself, *συγκοινωνέω* (*sungoinōneō*), is made from the preposition *σύν* (*sun*, “with”) combined with the verb *κοινωνέω* (*koinōneō*, “to share together, to fellowship”), thus emphasizing the picture of people participating together in a common activity for a common purpose.

Paul once again uses the metaphor of “light” and “darkness” to contrast that which is pleasing to the Lord as opposed to that which He hates. As “children of light” (v. 8), believers in Yeshua have undergone a radical change, no longer marked by the deeds of darkness but rather having lives more and more marked by the light of God’s holiness, that which pleases Him and brings Him honor and glory.

In this regard, the “deeds of darkness” are the same as what Paul refers to as “evil deeds” in Colossians.

And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—(Col 1:21–22)

And the author of Hebrews uses “dead works” to describe the life of an unbeliever.

Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Messiah, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, (Heb 6:1)

In our text, Paul characterizes such “deeds” as being “unfruitful,” that is,

works which result in no gain, yield nothing pleasant or profitable, bring no blessing or reward with them....<sup>1</sup>

A tree that bears no fruit is a picture of a life which denies its Creator and robs God of the glory He deserves. John the baptizer, seeing unbelieving Pharisees and Sadducees coming to him for a *mikvah*, admonished them to “bear fruit in keeping with repentance” and using the metaphor of a fruit tree, proclaimed to them that fruitless trees are

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1 Salmond, “Ephesians” in Nicoll, ed., *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, 5 vols. (Eerdmans, 1970), 3.357.

destined for destruction:

The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (Matt 3:10)

This helps us understand what Paul means by “unfruitful deeds.” These are things which stand in opposition to God and His righteousness, and are that which mark the lives of unbelievers. Therefore, as those who have been born again to a new life, who are no longer children of darkness but rather children of the light, we are no longer to engage in the fruitless deeds of darkness, i.e., that which characterizes a life without saving faith in the Messiah Yeshua but we are to be known as “children of the light.” It seems likely that new believers in Yeshua, especially those Gentile believers who had grown up in the deeply decadent pagan society of the Roman Empire, may well have been on Paul’s mind as he wrote these admonitions. For immorality and abhorrent sexual practices were common in the pagan society of Rome and those saved out of this culture would need to have a clear understanding of what it means to “walk in the light” and to “forsake the darkness.”

...*but instead even expose them* – The first question we have in seeking to understand how we are to obey this command, is this: what is it that Paul expects believers to be exposed? Is it the “unfruitful deeds” or “the people who engage in unfruitful deeds”? The difficulty is that the word “them” in our English translation has been added by the translators but in the Greek text itself there is no object specified for the imperative “expose” or “rebuke.” Some commentators consider the “unfruitful deeds of darkness” to be the object of the imperative, i.e., that which believers are to expose.

In this context, however, where the object of the verb is not named in the Greek text but should be assumed to be the deeds mentioned in the previous clause, and where these deeds will be said to have been done in secret, to confront them in such a way as to show their wrongness is the same as to expose them. That the object of the verb is the fruitless deeds of darkness also makes it less likely that ἐλέγχειν (“expose/rebuke”) should be taken as a reference to verbal reproof or rebuke...<sup>1</sup>

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1 Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 329; note also Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 679.

Others, based upon the fact that in the next verse (v. 12) Paul refers to people, take the command in our verse to be that we are to “rebuke” those who are engaged the “fruitless deeds of darkness.”

The word ἐλέγχειν, which is translated “reprove,” answers to the metaphor of darkness; for it literally signifies to drag forth to the light what was formerly unknown. As ungodly men flatter themselves in their vices, (Psalm 36:2,) and wish their crimes to be concealed, or to be reckoned virtues, Paul enjoins that they shall be reprovved. He calls them unfruitful; because they not only do no good, but are absolutely hurtful.<sup>1</sup>

Since, however, in the following verses Paul references both the people who engage in the deeds of darkness (v. 12) as well as the deeds themselves in which they participate (v. 13), and since the verb ἐλέγχω (*elengō*) can carry both the sense of “rebuke” as well as “expose,” it is probably best to understand that Paul has both actions in mind. That is, he instructs us to expose those things which are of the darkness and against God, as well as to confront and even rebuke those who engage in such deeds of darkness, that is, those who claim to have placed their faith in Yeshua but who continue to engage in the “deeds of darkness.” In fact, since in v. 13 Paul uses the same verb (*elengō*) and clearly intends its meaning there to be “expose to the light,” it seems best to understand the word in our verse to carry the sense of “rebuke.” Indeed, one cannot “expose” something to be “of the darkness” without, at the same time, “rebuking” those who engage in such things that mark them as “darkness.”

When wrong is exposed, a conviction must follow that should result in reproof or rebuke. This in turn should lead to discipline. Hence, exposing includes both convicting and rebuking.<sup>2</sup>

...for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret.— Here Paul gives a further reason for the exhortations (both negative and positive) in v. 11. Obviously Paul is not teaching us here that we as believers should never even talk about the “disgraceful things

1 Calvin, *Ephesians*, p. 311.

2 Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 679. See also William J. Larkin, *Ephesians: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Baylor Univ., 2009), p. 117.

done in secret,” for if that were the case, we could not follow his admonition to “expose” them and “rebuke” those engaged in them. Rather, engaging in conversation about such disgraceful needs should not be something that marks our normal conversation within the community of believers or even with unbelievers. Rather, we must strive to have the words of our mouth governed by a growing desire to honor God in all of our conversations. As Paul has taught us in 4:29,

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. (Eph 4:29)

Note also what he writes in his epistle to the Colossians:

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. (Col 4:5–6)

The fact that such things “are done by them in secret” coincides with the metaphor of darkness, for apart from God’s revealed truth, those who live in the darkness may be blinded in part to what God judges to be right and wrong. Further, even if they recognize that the activity in which they are engaged is wrong, they think that no one knows their evil deed because it is hidden, that is, done in the dark. But the reality is, of course, that God is always watching. Therefore, shining forth the light of God’s truth brings into plain sight the deeds done in the darkness and shows them for what they truly are—the schemes of the devil in an attempt to mock God and rob Him of His rightful glory.

We do well to take these inspired words to heart and seek to know how to apply them to our own lives and to the culture in which we live. We must fight against the “spiritual anesthesia” of worldly culture which seeks to numb us, making us insensitive to the very things that are disgraceful and dishonor the God Whom we confess to be our Lord and Savior.

**13–14 But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. For this reason it says, “Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Messiah will shine on you.”**

We should be reminded that in this epistle Paul has designated

believers in Yeshua as “children of light” and exhorts them to “walk as children of light” (5:8). As such, the believer in Yeshua is a light in this world, and when gathered together within a community of believers, that light shines the brightest.

However, it appears that in some of the communities to which Paul is addressing this epistle, there were some who professed to have placed their faith in Yeshua, yet they continued to be “fellow partakers” in those things which characterize unbelievers, i.e., “darkness.” Paul’s point in v. 13 is that when believers in Yeshua consistently live out their faith, they function as “light” in the darkness and expose the “fruitless deeds of darkness” in the lives of others. It is when the light of the word of God is lived out in the life of His people, that the “fruitless deeds of darkness” are made evident. When believers shine the light of the Spirit by living righteously and do so within a worldly society, unbelievers will be drawn to the light and thus to salvation. Within the believing community, when the light of transformed lives shines forth, those who are part of the believing community but who are allowing sinful ways to entangle their lives, will be convicted and, in repentance and seeking God’s forgiveness, will be helped to overcome such sinful behavior in order to become more and more like Yeshua, the One by Whom they have been redeemed.

Thus, we may understand Paul’s concluding clause, “for everything that becomes visible is light” to mean that the “light” of believers who are walking in the power of the Spirit will help to mark the difference between those who repent and grow in their sanctification, and those who do not and thus prove themselves to unbelievers. All who are true believers will progress in their sanctification and will therefore “be light” to others. Thus, “everything that becomes visible” is a reference to those who, through their becoming more and more separated unto God and from the world, prove themselves to be born from above and thus “to be light.”

Paul then gives a quote to substantiate what he has just asserted, but the source of his quote is not certain. He introduces his quote with the same phrase used in 4:8, i.e., *διὸ λέγει (dio legei)*, “Therefore He or It says.” While the commentaries are replete with suggestions on what source Paul is quoting here, it seems to me most possible that he is utilizing a known piece of liturgy or song which was based upon Scripture, i.e., Is 60:1. Given the fact that in the “Book of Comfort,” beginning with Is 40, the prophet is describing Israel’s pain and sorrow and promising God’s deliverance through the coming Messiah. It is possible, then, that Is 60:1 had been used as part of an early messianic hymn or part of a lit-

urgy that focused upon the fact that God's chosen nation would never be forsaken but would be blessed as the nation repented and returned to God. This general message would therefore fit the thrust of Paul's exhortation to the believing communities to which Ephesians was sent. This message was that those within the community who were still engaging in sinful practices, if in fact they were believers, would be convicted by "the light" and brought to repentance proving that they were truly "children of the light." Note the parallels with Paul's words and those of Is 60:1.

**Isaiah 60:1**

Arise, shine;  
For your light has come  
And the glory of ADONAI  
has risen upon you.

**Eph 5:13**

Awake, sleeper  
And arise from the dead  
and Messiah  
will shine on you.

It is interesting to note that in Is 53:11, the word "light" (רֹא, *ôr*), though not in the extant MT, is found in the Qumran Isaiah Scroll (1QIs<sup>a</sup> 44:19) and in 1QIsa<sup>b</sup> 23:22 (also numbered as 1Q8). This is likewise corroborated by the Lxx.

ἀπὸ τοῦ πόνου τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ, δείξαι αὐτῷ φῶς καὶ πλάσαι τῇ συνέσει, δικαιῶσαι δίκαιον εἰς δουλεύοντα πολλοῖς, καὶ τὰς ἁμαρτίας αὐτῶν αὐτὸς ἀνοίσει.

From the anguish of His soul, to show Him light and form understanding, to justify *My* righteous one who is subject to many, and He Himself will bear their sins.

Thus, Is 53:11 should include the word "light" as follows, which is a symbol of "life" and thus of "resurrection."

As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see light (of life) and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. (Is 53:11)

Thus, in the context of Is 60:1, "your light has come" may well be speaking of resurrection, i.e., "new life," and may well have been understood in this way by the early Messianic communities. This understanding directly parallels the opening line, "Arise, shine" and would explain the liturgical or hymnic line of Eph 5:13, "And arise from the dead." Further, that the Isaiah text has "the glory of יהוה [ADONAI]" and that

this is paralleled by “Messiah” (ὁ Χριστός, *ho Xristos*) in our Ephesians text, would emphasize the deity of Yeshua which is regularly affirmed in Paul’s epistles (cf. Phil 2:5–11). Paralleling the divine promise of Israel’s spiritual restoration with that of the ingathering of the Gentiles, seems very likely to be the purpose of Paul in quoting what may well have been a hymn or piece of liturgy based upon the prophecy of Isaiah. If this is the case, then his quote of these well-known lines would have resonated with his readers as the epistle circulated among the Messianic communities.

Ultimately, the quote is a strong urge to recognize that one cannot claim to have salvation in Yeshua if one is still walking in darkness. Those who are truly “in Messiah” are “children of light” and must therefore prove who they are by how they live out their new life in Him. As Hendriksen notes:

Paul’s aim is to show that he who has renounced the wicked ways of the world should live a life consistent with his new standing. Therefore, instead of any longer taking part in the unfruitful works of darkness, he should emerge completely from his sleep and arise and withdraw in every respect from the wicked ways of the company of the spiritually dead. The blessed result will be that Christ will shine upon him.<sup>1</sup>

**15–16 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.**

This is the fifth time since the opening of chapter 4 that Paul has introduced a specific admonition with the verb “to walk” (περιπατέω, *peripateō*), note 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8. In this text, Paul is exhorting us in regard to wisdom, that is, Godly wisdom which means having His priorities as ours and doing all that is necessary to be able to give ourselves to His priorities in our lives.

Our text begins with “Therefore” (οὖν, *oun*) which ties it back to the previous context. Since believers are known to be genuine followers of Yeshua by their manner of life, Paul gives the admonition to take inventory once again regarding how we go about making decisions, setting priorities, and so forth, so that we may indeed be seen as “walking in the light as He is in the light” (1Jn 1:7).

Thus he encourages us to “be careful” how we walk, that is, to be

<sup>1</sup> Hendriksen, *Ephesians*, p. 236.

alert, ready, and able to live in a manner that honors our Savior.

If we were to translate the Greek in a word-for-word manner, it would be: “Therefore, watch carefully how you walk...” The word translated “carefully” is ἀκριβής (*akribēs*) and carries the sense of “exact” or “strict” and its corresponding verb, ἀκριβόω (*akribōō*) carries the sense of “make detailed inquiry about something, ascertain precisely or exactly.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, Paul is exhorting us to take very seriously the fact that, as those who have been given new life through the saving work of Yeshua and who are therefore led by Ruach, we must constantly know who we are in Messiah and thus honor Him in all aspects of our lives.

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (1Cor 6:19–20)

Yet, though we are a “new creation in Messiah” (2Cor 5:17), we still have the sinful nature and must therefore continually put to death the deeds of the flesh and yield ourselves to the Ruach.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that [*the goal of the flesh is that*] you may not do the things that you please. (Gal 5:16–17)

...not as unwise men but as wise – Paul has used “wisdom” (σοφία, *sophia*) so far in this epistle to speak of God’s wisdom (Eph 1:8f), of Paul’s prayer for his readers that they would receive a “spirit of wisdom” (1:17), and that the wisdom of God would be made known through the *ekklesia* (3:10).

In our verse the adjective σοφός (*sophos*) describes the believer in Yeshua who has access to the wisdom of God through the leading of the Ruach as the word of God is applied to life’s decisions and direction. To “be wise” is to have a necessary “skill” for that which one is required to do. Thus, the Lxx uses this word in Ex 28:3 for those “skilled persons” who were commissioned to make the priestly garments.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, all who are believers in Yeshua must seek to increase their “skill” or “wisdom” in becoming more and more able to defeat

1 BDAG, “ἀκριβής,” p. 39.

2 Note also Ex 35:10, 25; 36:1; 1Chron 22:15, Prov 1:5.

the flesh and to live in obedience to the Lord through the guidance and power of the Ruach. Such skill comes from (1) meditating upon the word of God and knowing the Scriptures so as to apply them in all of life's circumstances; (2) recognizing the enemy's strategies to sideline the child of God from being a true "child of the light"; (3) a life characterized by prayer, thanksgiving, and praise; (4) ordering one's life in order to establish and maintain spiritual priorities; (5) recognizing the value and necessity of sharing life with other believers and thus establishing a commitment to a community of faith.

...*making the most of your time, because the days are evil.* – Many of the modern English translations (including the NASB as quoted here), translate the Greek term ἐξαιγοράζω (*eksagarazō*) as "making the most of" or "making the best of" (ESV), or something similar. But the Greek word itself is based upon ἀγοράζω (*agarakō*) which means "to acquire things or services in exchange for money, buy, purchase," or "to secure the rights to someone by paying a price, buy, acquire as property." Likewise, *eksagarazō*, the word in our text, never fully loses the sense "to buy" or "to buy back" in the sense of "redeeming" something or someone. Note the parallel to our text in Colossians:

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. (Col 4:5)

We find this same word, *eksagarazō*, two other times in Paul's epistles where it clearly carries the sense of "to buy or purchase; to redeem."

Messiah redeemed us from the curse of the Torah by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—(Gal 3:13)

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Torah, so that He might redeem those who were under the Torah, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (Gal 4:4–5)

It seems most likely that Paul uses this term in our text to envisage "buying back" or "redeeming" time in a most interesting sense, for since the verb *eksagarazō* has the preposition ἐκ (*ek*) attached, which means "out from" or "away from," the sense must be that believers are to "buy time back from that which is holding it." This follows the pattern of redemption, i.e., purchasing a slave "out from" or "away from" his or her slavery.

But how does this fit Paul's point here in Ephesians? He is instructing his readers to "buy time" away from something. When we consider what Paul wrote in 2:2, the answer seems obvious. The "course of this world" is being controlled by "the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." Thus, when in our verse Paul reminds us "that the days are evil," he is likewise emphasizing that the enemy seeks to rob us of using our time wisely by luring us away from that which ought to be our priority. This means that the believer, the child of God, is to recognize that the godless society of this world will do all in its power to monopolize time by enticing people to engage in the temporal so as to leave no thought with regard to the eternal. But for the child of God, every aspect of daily life, whether in work, in service, in times of relaxation, or entertainment—every event can be and should be used with the intent to honor and glorify the One Who has saved us for eternity. As Thielman notes:

The business of buying time out of its slavery to evil takes place day by day, moment by moment, in the practical decisions of everyday life.<sup>1</sup>

### **17 – Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.**

In v. 15 Paul admonishes us to be wise rather than unwise. There, the term unwise (*ἄσοφος*, *asophos*) has the sense of "lacking wisdom" which results from not seeking to gain wisdom. Here, in v. 17, the term "foolish" (*ἄφρων*, *aphrōn*) describes "a lack of prudence or good judgment, foolish, ignorant."<sup>2</sup> In the context of our verse, Paul is describing the aspect of being "foolish," that is, neglecting to do what one knows is necessary in order to succeed. If one knows that "the days are evil" and that the enemy is always desirous to waylay the child of God from the path of righteous living, then one must engage in due diligence to acquire and utilize the spiritual safeguards, weapons, and knowledge so as not to be entrapped by the schemes of the devil. As Paul writes in the next chapter of our epistle:

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this

<sup>1</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 357.

<sup>2</sup> BDAG, "ἄφρων," p. 159.

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darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Eph 6:12)

A foolish person neglects to prepare for what he or she knows is an inevitability. Even as a soldier prepares for the battle realizing that if he goes into the battle unprepared, he will be defeated, so the believer in Yeshua must recognize that we are in a spiritual battle, and that we have been given the victory if we but utilize all that God has given us in order to overcome the enemy and to be victorious for our Lord.

Paul instructs us to “understand what the will of the Lord is.” His words here make it clear that the will of the Lord is not “hidden” but is available to those who are His. This is because He has given us His word by which we may know His divine principles and by the power of His Spirit, we may apply these to every situation we face in life. This does not mean that we instantly are taken out of the battle! But what it does mean is that we may be assured that we will be victorious in the battle as we make the Lord’s will our delight.

He whose “delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates in it day and night,” (Psalm 1:2,) will triumph over every obstacle which Satan can oppose to his progress. Whence comes it that some wander, others fall, others strike against a rock, others go away, — but because we allow ourselves to be gradually blinded by Satan, and lose sight of the will of God, which we ought constantly to remember? And observe, that Paul defines wisdom to be, understanding what the will of the Lord is. “How shall a young man,” says David, “direct his way? By attending to thy word, O Lord.” (Psalm 119:9) He speaks of youths, but it is the same wisdom which belongs to old men.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Calvin, *Ephesians*, p. 314-15.