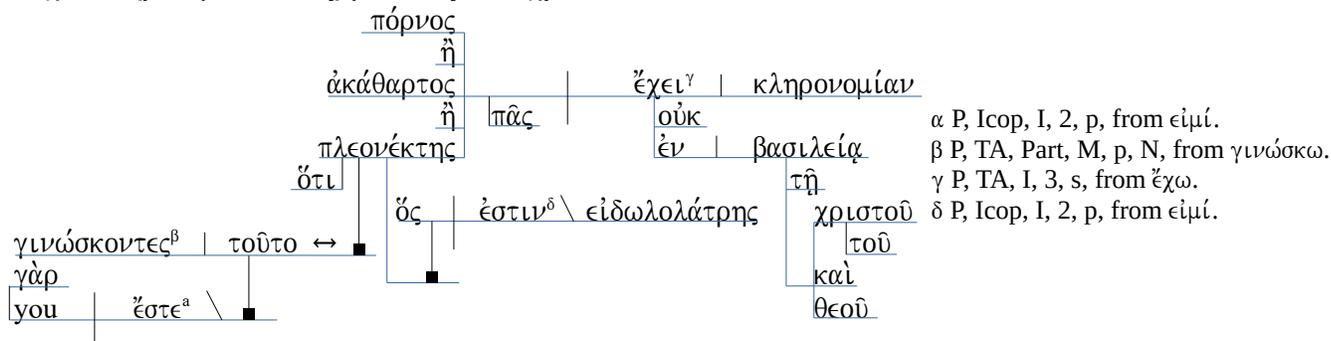


The Kingdom of God in Ephesians 5:5-6

by
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5:5 τούτο γὰρ ἔστε γινώσκοντες ὅτι πᾶς πόρνος ἢ ἀκάθαρτος ἢ πλεονέκτης ὅς ἐστιν εἰδωλόλατρης οὐκ ἔχει κληρονομίαν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ.



Translation: For you know this thing, that every fornicator or unclean or greedy person who is an idolater does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Exegetical Considerations

5a. τούτο γὰρ ἔστε γινώσκοντες ὅτι πᾶς πόρνος ἢ ἀκάθαρτος ἢ πλεονέκτης ὅς ἐστιν εἰδωλόλατρης (*touto gar este ginōskontes hoti pas pornos ē akathartos ē pleonektēs hos esten idōlōlatrēs – For you know this thing, that every fornicator or unclean or greedy person who is an idolater*)

The word “for” (*gar*) indicates that an inference can be drawn from Paul’s previous statements. Thus we have a repetition of the ungodly acts from vs. 3 above, but now stated in terms of the one who performs the acts, rather than the acts themselves.

Furthermore, the inference is already known by Paul’s readers. The immoral acts indicate immoral people whose character is consistent with the unbelieving Gentiles, for Paul still is viewing the problem of believers acting like unbelievers, the new man (the character of the believer) vs. the old man (the character of the unbeliever.) These three classes of people, fornicators, unclean people, or greedy people, are not simply people who indulge in such acts, but who do so as characteristic of their unbelief.

Concerning the fornicator and the unclean, Paul has nothing to add. But not so with regard to the greedy person, where he adds the description of such person as an idolater. In both Colossians 3:5 and Ephesians 5:5, Paul makes this association. In Colossians he uses the phrase τὴν πλεονεξίαν ἣτις ἐστὶν εἰδωλόλατρεία, “the greediness which is idolatry.” The KJV translates greediness as covetousness. The basic meaning has to do with seeking riches, and is not speaking about an attitude or state of mind as is often supposed. Rather it refers to *the expression* of a strong desire or lust, so that the individual so desiring *takes steps to gain what he desires*. In other words, it is not the “I want” but the “I am getting” that is this type of greed, which is supported by the statement, “which is idolatry.”

Idolatry is, of course, the worship of idols, that is, worship in the sense of sacrificing to a false good represented by a physical image. But there is more than one kind of idol and a believer can worship other material goods by attempting to gain through illegitimate sacrifice, as idolatry is often associated with errant sacrificing in Scripture. Greediness is a form of idolatry which makes sacrifices of those

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things that should not be sacrificed in order to gain more and more. A fleshly individual may sacrifice time, effort, and relationships with family by attempting to gain material goods that the person does not need. Some people will do anything to gain money, including various works of the flesh, such as the wrong use of their own sexuality, or even doing physical harm to their victims, up to and including murder. Such is idolatry.

5b. οὐκ ἔχει κληρονομίαν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ (*ouk echei klēronomian en tē basileai tou christon kai theou – does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God*)

Scripture, taken in its normal sense, clearly teaches a future physical kingdom of God on the earth, a kingdom that is not yet in existence, and is therefore yet to be inherited. This kingdom is predicted in the Hebrew Scriptures as a fulfillment of the promises made to David, and thus is sometimes called the Davidic kingdom. The gospels teach that Christ will return to earth to establish this kingdom at His second coming, which will end Gentile world ascendancy. See Romans 11:25-27.

This kingdom, however, is not for the church, nor for the Gentiles (even the believing ones), but is for Israel, when that nation will be delivered from the consequences of their national sins. The national boundaries of that kingdom as described in Ezekiel 47:13-48:35 will exist tribe by tribe in the Levant.

However, both believers who make up the churchⁱ and believing Gentiles from past and future seasons will participate in the future kingdom program. We read in Daniel that the kingdom will start small, and will grow (Daniel 2:34-35 and 2:45).ⁱⁱ We read in Matthew 25:32-34 that Christ at the second coming will divide the nations (Gentiles) into two groups, characterized by sheep and goats, that is, by believers and unbelievers, and that the sheep will inherit the kingdom. Gentile believers, however, will not inherit the land promises given in other places, and described in Ezekiel 47-48. Rather, they will scatter throughout the world, and the kingdom will grow to fill the whole earth.

To this situation Paul speaks here. While speaking of Gentiles in Ephesians 4:17, he refers to unbelieving Gentiles, who are characteristically ungodly, who will not “*have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*”

Two distinct interpretations have been applied to the phrase “the kingdom of Christ and of God.” Some have postulated that the phrase is associated with Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 15:24, referring to the time of the final resurrection (the end one) when Christ gives over the kingdom “to God the Father.” This view has much to commend it, as the Revelation tells us that when the New Jerusalem descends to earth, the Father will sit on the throne of the earthly kingdom (Revelation 22:1).ⁱⁱⁱ

The second interpretation views “the kingdom of Christ and God” as an explanatory statement to the Ephesians. The basis for this view is the phrase “the kingdom of God,” as used in Luke’s Gospel specifically. Since Luke was associated with Paul in his service to the Gentiles and the Ephesian assembly would have been familiar with the phrase “the kingdom of God,” the recipients of Paul’s letter might have been confused if Paul had used the phrase “kingdom of Christ,” without clarifying his phrase by adding “and of God.” This view sees “and God” as actually referring to Jesus rather than the Father, and might be translated, “even of God.”

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Paul’s teaching to this point is clear. Christians are to style their life according to the new man, the person who lives a lifestyle honoring God, and can be seen to do so. Christians are to imitate God (Ephesians 5:1), as opposed to the previously mentioned unbelieving Gentiles (Ephesians 4:17), for such unbelieving Gentiles have no inheritance in the future earthly kingdom of God, whereas believing Gentiles clearly do, specifically those Gentile believers who survive the 70th week of Daniel, the so-called tribulation period. This future continues into verse 6, which seems to speak of that tribulation.

5:6 μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς ἀπατάτω κενοῖς λόγοις. διὰ ταῦτα γὰρ ἔρχεται ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας.

| | | | |
|--------|----------------------|-----------|------------------------------------|
| μηδεὶς | ἀπατάτω ^α | ὑμᾶς | α P, TA, Imp, 3, s, from ἀπατάω. |
| | λόγοις | | |
| γὰρ | κενοῖς | | α P, Icomp, I, 3, s, from ἔρχομαι. |
| ὀργῆ | ἔρχεται ^α | διὰ | |
| ἡ | ταῦτα | τὰ | |
| θεοῦ | ἐπὶ | υἱοὺς | |
| τοῦ | τοὺς | ἀπειθείας | |
| | | τῆς | |

Translation: Let no one deceive you with empty words. For because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Exegetical Considerations

6a. μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς ἀπατάτω κενοῖς λόγοις (*mēdeis humas apatatō kenois logois – Let no one deceive you with empty words*)

Paul addresses the danger of deception. The potential for such deceit is based on the pagan Gentile background of many of the believers in the Ephesian assembly.

The encouragement, “Let no one deceive you,” was directed to the maturing Ephesian believers as having put on the new man. Paul indicates the nature of the deception with the words “with empty words.” The original KJV translated the phrase “with vain words,” a phrase of difficult meaning today, but the New King James Version correctly modernized the translation to “empty words.” The danger is that “empty words” can deceive. What does Paul mean, then?

“Empty words” seems to be a description of communication of Gentile unbelievers that is empty of truth. The communication (words) is deceptive, and is used by the communicator to deceive the hearers. These evil doers have a wrathful future.

6b. διὰ ταῦτα γὰρ ἔρχεται ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας (*dia tauta gar erchetai hē orgē tou theou epi tous huious tēs apeitheias – For because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience*)

“For” here is inferential, and should be understood as meaning “therefore.” The phrase “these things” most likely refers to the evils mentioned in vs. 5, fornication, uncleanness, and greed, rather than to the empty words. It is the ungodly acts that ultimately brings about the wrath of God on unbelievers who practice such things and promote them through deception.

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The word “comes,” could also be translated “is coming,” which might be more meaningful in some ways. The present tense used here is a futuristic present, something that occurs commonly with verbs of movement. It is not uncommon for someone to say, “I’m coming,” while not yet moving. The verb in certain contexts has come to mean “I will come.” Today, we use the word *coming* and the word *going* in such a way regularly. “Are you going to the beach?” someone may ask. “Yes, I’m going tomorrow,” could be the reply. In both sentences the present tense going is used of a future act.

The wrath of God is coming, but has not yet arrived, for Paul is using the phrase in the future sense. He means that the evil activity of the Gentile world will bring the future wrath of God upon them. This wrath will not occur until the believers of the present age are resurrected or raptured.

- i Revelation 3:21-22. See my comments in *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 57.
- ii This truth is also taught by Christ in the kingdom parables. Note, for instance, Matthew 13:31-32, where the Lord likens the kingdom to a mustard seed which is smaller than all the seeds, but grows until it is larger than the garden vegetables, and becomes a tree. Also, the parable of the leaven in Matthew 13:33 speaks of the expansion of the leaven, that is, of the kingdom. Contrary to the non-distinctive interpretation that these parables speak of the church, they indeed are referring to the future kingdom of God, the Davidic kingdom.
- iii See my comments in *Bible Prophecy Concerning Israel and the Gentiles, An Outline Study*, page 87.