

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY - CHARLOTTE

EXPOSING THE DARKNESS:
THE EVANGELISTIC IMPERATIVE OF EPHESIANS 5:11

BY GARRETT BLACK

PRESENTED TO DR. ROBERT CARA IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF GREEK EXEGESIS
SPRING 2020

Introduction: An Evangelistic Mandate

The idea of moral exhortation and rebuke is a common theme in Pauline literature.¹ One passage dealing with this theme is Eph 5:7-14. In these verses, Paul² reminds the Ephesian church of their new identity as “children of light,” (Eph 5:8, ESV) and then issues a directive to expose darkness in 5:11. The nature of this “exposure” is debated, with some arguing that this is a command to internal accountability,³ while others believe this is an exhortation to proclaim and bring light to those still in darkness.⁴ Further still, there is no single consensus on the method of exposure; ought it to be verbal or brought about by moral example?⁵ When the grammatical and contextual considerations are accounted for, the most sensible interpretation of Paul’s words considers “exposure” to be external and verbal, a call to the Church to shine its light on a world lost in darkness through the verbal proclamation of God’s righteous standards.

Examining Eph 5:7-14

Paul begins this particular passage with a transitional statement in 5:7: “Therefore do not become partners with them...” The use of the consecutive coordinating conjunction οὖν serves

¹ C.G. Kruse, “Virtues and Vices,” *DPL*, 961.

² Pauline authorship is not universally accepted among scholars. The identity of the author of Ephesians is tangentially relevant but not critical to the present thesis, so there will be no discussion of authorship. The standard evangelical belief in Pauline authorship will be assumed. (See: Guy Prentiss Waters, “Ephesians,” in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized*, ed. Michael J. Kruger [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016], 269-270.)

³ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 332; Ernst Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, ICC (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1998), 493-4; Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 674.

⁴ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), 329; Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991 [1964, 1856]), 213; Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 344; John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians*, eds. David W. Torrance & Thomas F. Torrance, trans. T.H.L. Parker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965 [1539, 1550]), 200.

⁵ Moral example supporters: Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 330; Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4-6*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1974), 571-2. Verbal confrontation supporters: Arnold, *Ephesians*, 331; Best, *Ephesians*, 494; Calvin, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians*, 200-1; Hodge, *Ephesians*, 214; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 680; S. M. Baugh, *Ephesians*, EEC (Billingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 533.

as a bridge to the prior verses, signaling the “practical conclusion” of the preceding warnings.⁶

The extent of the partnership which Paul forbids is debated. The word Paul utilizes, *συμμέτοχοι*, denotes “a share with another in some possession or relationship.”⁷ Its only NT occurrences are found in Ephesians (3:6 being the other instance), and Paul offers no description of the kind of association banned.⁸ However, two contextual clues help to clarify Paul’s meaning. First, *συμμέτοχοι* is understood to have an intimate sense to it, transcending mere acquaintanceship. Baugh defines it as, “intimate communion and/or share in the same possession,” and concludes that this cannot mean casual or professional connections.⁹ Secondly, the term’s other NT appearance, Eph 3:6, emphasizes the positive union of Jews and Gentiles within the church,¹⁰ indicating that the connection enjoyed within the church is not be sought with those outside of it. Paul is not banning contact with non-believers, but, for the good of those within the body,¹¹ he is sparing them from the consequences of the “unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph 5:11).

A note must be made on the use of *αὐτῶν*. Found here in the genitive plural, all grammatical genders are theoretically possible. If taken as a masculine,¹² *αὐτῶν* is referring to the people who commit evil deeds; if taken as a neuter, the reference is to the acts themselves. The use of the prefix *συ-* in the preceding word, however, indicates a genitive of association.¹³ Additionally, the noun *συμμέτοχοι* is “lexically” inclined to complement the idea of “in

⁶ Baugh, *Ephesians*, 427. See also: BDF §451.

⁷ “*συμμέτοχος*,” *BDAG*, 958.

⁸ Best, *Ephesians*, 486-7.

⁹ Baugh, *Ephesians*, 428.

¹⁰ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 327; Best, *Ephesians*, 486.

¹¹ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 326.

¹² While the feminine is also a possibility, the masculine is the more sensible option of the two as the preceding noun is also masculine.

¹³ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 327.

association with,”¹⁴ so the masculine interpretation should be preferred. The object of $\alphaὐτῶν$ is therefore the individuals who commit the forbidden acts.

Paul continues in verse 8 by introducing one of his most common metaphors,¹⁵ light and darkness: “for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light...” The light/dark comparison, a favorite of Paul’s, also appears in the prophecies of Isaiah and the teachings of Christ (among other places) comparing the holiness of God to the evil of sin.¹⁶ In this instance, light is applied not merely as a descriptor, but as a defining state of being.¹⁷ This verse offers the impetus for the imperative of verse 7 and adds to it by offering a positive challenge to walk “as befits the light”.¹⁸ Paul’s contrast of light and dark also strengthens his earlier points on the evils of sin by detailing the goodness of the new state. As Stenschke states: “the absolute negative portrayal of the readers’ past serves to paint the present indicative – from which the imperatives follow – all the brighter.”¹⁹ This light/dark dichotomy becomes the “controlling metaphor” for the remainder of the passage.²⁰

Verse 9 is a parenthetical statement further detailing the life walked in light.²¹ This is reflected in the NA28 through the use of hyphens. Additionally, the ESV, NASB, NIV, and KJV all enclose verse 9 within parentheses. Paul adds the concept of fruit to his teaching about light,

¹⁴ Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax: An Intermediate Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 62.

¹⁵ Paul frequently used light and dark to portray the difference between the opposing principles of good and evil. This contrast usually juxtaposed God’s light versus the world (2 Cor 4:6) or the church versus the unbelieving world (as is the case here). (See: G.L. Borchert, “Light and Darkness,” *DPL*, 556-8.)

¹⁶ Baugh, *Ephesians*, 428.

¹⁷ Barth, *Ephesians*, 567; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 338.

¹⁸ I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 378-9.

¹⁹ Christoph Stenschke, “‘Once You Were in Darkness’: The Past of the Readers of Ephesians.” *EJT* 23:2 (2014): 129.

²⁰ C. Mack Roark, “Interpreting Ephesians 4-6: God’s People in a Walk Worthy of His Calling.” *SJT* 39:1 (1996): 38.

²¹ Best, *Ephesians*, 489. Calvin, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians*, 199; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 672; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 326; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 339.

stating: “(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true) ...”²² In Pauline literature, fruit is used to, “describe virtues that manifest the realities of life in Christ.”²³ The descriptors found in this verse were commonly used to speak of God’s character in Judaic and early Christian literature,²⁴ and have OT parallels in 1 Chr 31:20 and Mic 6:8.²⁵

Verse 10 (“and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord”)²⁶ presents the interpreter with an exegetical choice. Paul opens with the participle δοκιμάζοντες, which the ESV translates as a conative, emphasizing the attempt to discern.²⁷ Many commentators disagree, arguing that this is not a standalone participle, but one that builds upon a previous verb (περιπατεῖτε from verse 8).²⁸ This argument seems to fit the context well, and δοκιμάζω, a verb of cognition, frequently appears in the NT as a supplementary participle.²⁹ Therefore, an accurate translation of the entire imperative would be: “Walk as children of light... discerning what is pleasing to the Lord.” The action of discerning is the practical application of the imperative to walk as children of light.³⁰

²² There is a possible textual issue with this verse, as the Textus Receptus labels these things the “καρπὸς τοῦ Πνεύματος,” not the “καρπὸς τοῦ φωτὸς,” as the UBS5 and NA28 do. The following manuscripts contain this variant reading: Ψ46, D2, K, L, Ψ, 104, 365, 630, 1175*, 1241s, 1505, Μ, syh. The UBS committee opted for the φωτὸς reading as it has considerable manuscript evidence among the Western and Alexandrian traditions, and it is probable that the memory of Gal 5:22 led to the πνεύματος variant. The φωτὸς option is to be preferred, as it better coordinates with the imagery used throughout this passage. (See: Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd, [New York: United Bible Societies, 1994], Accordance 12, 539-540.)

²³ D.S. Dockery, “Fruit of the Spirit,” *DPL*, 317.

²⁴ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 341.

²⁵ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 328.

²⁶ “Lord” (κυρίῳ) is replaced with the alternative reading θεῷ in: D*, F, G, 81*, lat, Ambst.

²⁷ Baugh, *Ephesians*, 431.

²⁸ Barth, *Ephesians* 4-6, 568; Baugh, *Ephesians*, 431; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 675; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 341.

²⁹ BDF §416.

³⁰ This understanding fits theologically as well. Bavinck cites this verse as evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit within the believer – it is only by the act of the Holy Spirit that what is right, true, and good may be discerned. (See: Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Abridged in One Volume*, ed. John Bolt [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011], 373.) Schreiner brings up the reality of the nature of sanctification. What pleases the Lord is not “immediately evident to believers,” therefore the Holy Spirit must illuminate them. (See: Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001], 253.) If discerning what is pleasing to the Lord is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit, then a translation indicating the possibility of failure is not ideal.

If verse 10 dictates the positive aspects of this new walk, verse 11 gives the negative imperative: “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.” Paul juxtaposes what is pleasing to the Lord with these unfruitful works. A helpful connection can be made with 1 Cor 6:14, which forbids believers to be “unequally yoked” because “what fellowship has light with darkness?”³¹ Ridderbos expands on Paul’s words, saying:

In discussing the requirement of love we have already seen that this requirement extends to unbelievers at the same time that the line of demarcation between believers and unbelievers has not been hereby obliterated.... They may have no fellowship with their sinful works, however...³²

Total personal avoidance of the unbelieving world is not the Pauline mandate, but a conscious choice to not participate in evil. The nature of the exposure and the identities of those who ought to be exposed is a topic of considerable debate. This will be considered in detail later.

In verse 12, Paul states: “For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.” The exact deeds to which Paul is referring is unclear. Some commentators believe that this could be a reference to cultic sexual rites that even pagans considered scandalous.³³ Another possibility is the sexual sins listed in 5:3.³⁴ Either way, sexual perversion is mostly likely in focus. The word *αἰσχρός*³⁵ denotes social or moral unacceptability,³⁶ so it is quite likely that Paul is thinking of deeds that offend the moral sensibilities of the believer and non-believer alike.³⁷

³¹ Richard D. Phillips, *Ephesians*, MEC (Glasgow, UK: Bell and Bain, 2016), 386.

³² Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997 [1975, 1966]), 304.

³³ Baugh, *Ephesians*, 433. The cult of Demeter had a notable following in Ephesus. Baugh is careful not to come down too hard on this point, however. He notes that non-evangelical scholars may cite the greater prominence of cultic practice in Hierapolis to support the idea that this letter was not actually written to the Ephesian church. (See: Baugh, *Ephesians*, 433-4.)

³⁴ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 330.

³⁵ The ESV translates this as “shameful.” It is found here in the neuter singular form *αἰσχρόν*.

³⁶ “*αἰσχρός*,” *BDAG*, 29.

³⁷ This fits into the cultural language of the first century, as the ideas of shame and excellence were often used in the Greco-Roman world to discuss the morality of actions. The writers Epictetus and Quintilian occasionally used language similar to Paul’s. (See: Arnold, *Ephesians*, 332; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 445.)

However, one must also consider whether the shame is in committing the actions or speaking of them at all. While scholarly opinion is divided on the issue, the best explanation comes from viewing the shame as deriving from the acts themselves. Thielman argues that it is shameful to participate in these deeds, echoing the imperative of verses 7-8.³⁸ Best adds that the shame comes not from the act of speaking about these deeds (as Paul himself listed several such actions earlier), but from the need to speak about them.³⁹ The shame felt when speaking derives not from the words, but from the need to speak about them in the first place.

In verse 13, Paul details what light does when it encounters darkness: “But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible.” Most discussions of this verse center on the verb φανεροῦται.⁴⁰ Grammatically, both the middle and the passive are possibilities. If taken as a middle, then the idea is that believers, upon being illuminated themselves, are tasked with shedding light on others lost in darkness.⁴¹ However, the passive is the predominant scholarly view and is to be preferred. Of the forty-eight other uses of φανερόω in the NT, no others are considered to be middle, making this verse quite an anomaly if Paul intends the middle voice.⁴² The point here is that sinners, when encountering the light of God, are transformed into light themselves. This is something done not by themselves or others, but purely by God.

One of the greatest controversies in this passage comes from verse 14, in which Paul says: “for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, ‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise

³⁸ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 344.

³⁹ Best, *Ephesians*, 494.

⁴⁰ The ESV translates this as “becomes visible.”

⁴¹ The Geneva Bible renders it: “But all things when they are reproved of the light, are manifest: for it is light that maketh all things manifest.” The NLT says: “But their evil intentions will be exposed when the light shines on them.” Calvin took this to be a dictate for the church to act as lights in the world. (See: Calvin, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians*, 201.)

⁴² Thielman, *Ephesians*, 347. For a thorough examination of the options and defense of the passive use, see: Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 683-4.

from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”⁴³ The first phrase ties closely with verse 13, indicating the total transformation of the believer.⁴⁴ The controversy comes from the culminating quote. No OT text matches Paul’s words perfectly. This has led to two main interpretations: that Paul is quoting or paraphrasing an OT passage (usually Isa 60:1),⁴⁵ or that Paul is quoting an early Christian hymn.⁴⁶ The best answer is that Paul is interpreting and paraphrasing an OT passage in light of the redemptive-historical realities of the new covenant era.

The major arguments for the hymn alternative are that there is no obvious OT source⁴⁷ and that the quote utilizes parallelism, a common literary device in Hebrew poetry.⁴⁸ While the phrase has common vocabulary with several OT passages, it lacks any true one-to-one correspondence. However, the interpreter can gain an understanding of Paul’s source by comparing Eph 5:14 to an earlier OT quote in Eph 4:8.⁴⁹ The OT source of this earlier quote is typically recognized as Ps 68:18.⁵⁰ Paul alters this quote to fit his theological point, a normative Pauline practice.⁵¹ Paul introduces the quote with “διὸ λέγει,” a title only ascribed to quotes assumed to be authoritative.⁵² The Biblical interpreter must derive two principles here: Paul has

⁴³ The following manuscripts contain the alternative reading επιψανσεις του Χριστου (“Christ will touch you”): D*, b, MVict, Ambst, Chrms. Metzger believes these variants were inspired by the idea that Christ was crucified over Adam’s grave. He says: “Apparently the readings arose from the legend that the cross on which Jesus was crucified was erected over the burial place of Adam, who was raised from the dead by the touch of the Savior’s blood.” (See: Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 540.)

⁴⁴ Best, *Ephesians*, 496.

⁴⁵ Baugh, *Ephesians*, 438; Calvin, *Ephesians*, 201; Hodge, *Ephesians*, 215-7; Jonathan M. Lunde and John Anthony Dunne, “Paul’s Creative and Contextual Use of Isaiah in Ephesians 5:14,” *JETS* 55:1 (2012), 88-9; Phillips, *Ephesians*, 388.

⁴⁶ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 334; Barth, *Ephesians* 4-6, 575; Best, *Ephesians*, 497-8; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 331-2; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 686-7; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 349.

⁴⁷ Lunde and Dunne, “Paul’s Creative and Contextual Use of Isaiah”, 88.

⁴⁸ Best, *Ephesians*, 498; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 348.

⁴⁹ “Therefore it says, ‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.’”

⁵⁰ Elna Mouton, “Memory in Search of Dignity?: Construction of Early Christian Identity through Redescribed Traditional Material in the Letter to the Ephesians,” *ASE* 29:2 (2012), 139; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 264-5.

⁵¹ Best, *Ephesians*, 378.

⁵² Best, *Ephesians*, 497; Mouton, “Memory in Search of Dignity,” 139; Hodge, *Ephesians*, 215-6; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 686; Roark, “Interpreting Ephesians,” 39; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 248-9.

an established practice of paraphrasing Scripture, and he has an established formula for introducing it in this book.

In the Greek, 5:14b reads: “διὸ λέγει, Ἐγειραι ὁ καθεύδων καὶ ἀνάστα ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, καὶ ἐπιφανεῖ σοι ὁ Χριστός.” The inclusion of διὸ λέγει means that Paul considers what he is quoting to be authoritative, but what could possibly be the source? Isa 60:1, the typical passage those who think Paul is quoting the OT point too, reads: “Φωτίζου φωτίζου, Ιερουσαλημ, ἥκει γάρ σου τὸ φῶς, καὶ ἡ δόξα κυρίου ἐπὶ σὲ ἀνατέταλκεν” (LXX).⁵³ Clearly, this is not a direct quote. However, Lunde and Dunne make a compelling case that Paul is offering an apostolic interpretation of this text.⁵⁴ Isa 60:1 contains thematic similarity to Eph 5:14 through ethical “awakening,” darkness-dispelling “light,” and a resulting worldwide blessing (which Isaiah draws out further in verse 2).⁵⁵ Combined with his use of διὸ λέγει and penchant for altering language to make theological points, this is ample reason to assume that Paul is offering a “highly interpreted appropriation of the OT text.”⁵⁶ Through the benefit of experiencing the redemptive-historical event of Christ’s advent and the gift of apostleship, Paul is able to offer an authoritative interpretation of an OT text.⁵⁷

Throughout Eph 5:7-14, Paul is illustrating the proper walk of children of light. It is disconnected from the walk of unbelievers (verse 7), accompanied by a new mode of being and acting (verse 8-10), directly adversarial to the works of darkness (verse 11-14a), and enabled by

⁵³ NETS: “Shine, shine, O Ierousalem, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.”

⁵⁴ Additionally, Lunde and Dunne believe Paul draws upon Isa 26:19 (LXX): “ἀναστήσονται οἱ νεκροί, καὶ ἐγερθήσονται οἱ ἐν τοῖς μνημείοις, καὶ εὑφρανθήσονται οἱ ἐν τῇ γῇ· ἡ γὰρ δρόσος ἡ παρὰ σου ἴαμα αὐτοῖς ἔστιν, ἡ δὲ γῆ τῶν ἀσεβῶν πεσεῖται.” NETS: “The dead shall rise, and those who are in the tombs shall be raised, and those who are in the earth shall rejoice; for the dew from you is healing to them, but the land of the impious shall fall.”) for additional vocabulary with which to make his point. (See: Lunde and Dunne, “Paul’s Creative and Contextual Use of Isaiah,” 88-9.)

⁵⁵ Lunde and Dunne “Paul’s Creative and Contextual Use of Isaiah,” 97.

⁵⁶ Lunde and Dunne, “Paul’s Creative and Contextual Use of Isaiah,” 92.

⁵⁷ Lunde and Dunne, “Paul’s Creative and Contextual Use of Isaiah,” 109.

the light of Christ (verse 14b). Having given an imperative to imitate Christ in 5:1-2 and apophatically detailing how not to imitate him in 5:3-6, Paul offers a thoroughly practical and resoundingly theological definition and guide for the Christian life. Imitation of Christ is not mere fleshly striving and personal improvement, but a whole-being change. Where the light of Christ shines, darkness is expelled. The child of darkness is gone, and a child of light has taken their place.

Understanding ἐλέγχω

As stated before, one theologically contentious point, the nature of exposure in Eph 5:11, has been deferred for a later discussion. This will now be considered. In the Greek, the verse reads: “καὶ μὴ συγκοινωνεῖτε τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς ἀκάρποις τοῦ σκότους, μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ ἐλέγχετε.”⁵⁸ The Greek verb ἐλέγχω generally carried the sense of scrutiny, conviction, or reproof.⁵⁹ In Hellenistic Greco-Roman usage, it had a negative connotation expressing moral disapproval and correction.⁶⁰ ἐλέγχω appears in the Septuagint 65 times, usually carrying the sense of reproof.⁶¹ Prov 3:10 gives a typical usage: “νιέ μὴ ὀλιγώρει παιδείας κυρίου μηδὲ ἐκλύου ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ ἐλεγχόμενος.”⁶² While finding wide ranging use in Greek literature,⁶³ its NT usage (17 times in all) was more restricted, indicating a confrontation with sin and call to repentance.⁶⁴ It generally carried a “verbal nuance,” implying the necessity of spoken words.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ Author’s translation: “And do not take part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.”

⁵⁹ “ἐλέγχω,” *BDAG*, 315.

⁶⁰ Moisés Silva, “ἐλέγχω, ἐλέγχος, ἐλεγχίς, κτλ” *NIDNTTE* 2:164.

⁶¹ Silva, “ἐλέγχω, ἐλέγχος, ἐλεγχίς, κτλ” *NIDNTTE* 2:165; Hoenher, *Ephesians*, 678.

⁶² NETS: “My son, do not belittle the Lord’s discipline nor break down when you are reproved [ἐλεγχόμενος] by him.”

⁶³ Friedrich Büchsel, “ἐλέγχω, ἐλεγχίς, κτλ,” *TDNT* 2:474; Silva, “ἐλέγχω, ἐλέγχος, ἐλεγχίς, κτλ” *NIDNTTE* 2:164.

⁶⁴ Büchsel, “ἐλέγχω, ἐλεγχίς, κτλ,” *TDNT* 2:476.

⁶⁵ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 344.

The modern debate over the interpretation of this verse is over the correct group to reprove and the appropriate manner in which to do it. Some argue that this passage pertains to inter-church relationships and that the deeds to be exposed are therefore the backsliding acts of believers,⁶⁶ while others believe that this primarily concerns the Church's prophetic witness, a call to expose the dark deeds of the world in which believers live.⁶⁷ Bible scholars additionally debate the correct manner of exposure, with some arguing for reproof by example,⁶⁸ and others advocating for verbal reproof.⁶⁹ When the full, Biblical concept of ἐλέγχω is taken into account and the theology of Eph 5 is considered, it becomes apparent that the call is to verbally expose any work of darkness, with priority given to reproving the evil conduct of non-believers. The two aspects of the debate will now be considered individually.

Whom to Expose

Deciphering who is meant to be the recipient of this exposure is an important key to understanding the full passage. Best makes the argument that the imperative is to confront believers within the church, stating that the passage has, up to this point, been addressed to believers, the grammatical object of ἐλέγχετε is undefined, and that other passages that deal with confronting dark works outside the church (mainly 1 Cor 14:24) concern only specific situations.⁷⁰ He comments on the appropriateness of Christian-to-Christian confrontation, saying:

However, for the believer to convince other believers of their wrongdoing could be seen as a Christian duty, and this would [emphasize] the sense “rebuke, reprove.” Reproval would not be tactful if unbelievers were its recipients; nothing would be more likely to turn them against Christianity!⁷¹

⁶⁶ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 332; Best, *Ephesians*, 493-4.

⁶⁷ Calvin, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians*, 200; Hodge, *Ephesians*, 213; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 329; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 344.

⁶⁸ Barth, *Ephesians*, 572; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 329-30.

⁶⁹ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 331; Best, *Ephesians*, 494; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 344.

⁷⁰ Best, *Ephesians*, 492-3.

⁷¹ Best, *Ephesians*, 493.

According to Best, this passage is essentially an exhortation to continue the inter-community reproof encouraged and practiced in the OT.⁷²

Arnold reads this verse as a description of the duties of members of the covenant community. This duty is two-fold, to refrain from acts of darkness themselves and to confront one another when such acts are committed “so that they may ultimately be helped and restored by the risen Christ.”⁷³ Grammatically, Arnold sees the conjunction καὶ as a link to verse 7, connecting and paralleling the didactic imperatives to not be partakers with children of darkness and to expose darkness – both are directed at and intended for believers. Arnold directly states: “The overall flow of this context is moral exhortation to believers.”⁷⁴ Additionally, Arnold sights other Biblical and early Christian uses of ἐλέγχω that refer to confrontation between believers.⁷⁵ Taken together, Arnold and Best make a good case for a Church-centric interpretation of Eph 5:11.

Many scholars, however, have understood Paul’s words as a command to call the unbelieving world to repentance. Lincoln concedes that ἐλέγχω is used to mean inter-community accountability in many other uses in the NT, but that such a reading does not fit the context here. Contending that the “unfruitful works of darkness” are the implied subject of the verb, Lincoln argues that darkness has referred to non-believers so far in Paul’s extended metaphor.⁷⁶ Lincoln also points out that 1 Cor 14:24-25, which Best dismissed, clearly discusses the non-believer converting due to conviction of sin when confronted (ἐλέγχεται) by prophecy, and John 16:8 foretells the Holy Spirit convicting (ἐλέγξει) those outside of the covenant community of sin.⁷⁷

⁷² Best, *Ephesians*, 494. Best sites Lev 19:17, Prov 9:7, 10:10, and Eccl 19:13 to prove this point.

⁷³ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 330.

⁷⁴ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 331. See also: Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 677.

⁷⁵ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 332. Arnold cites Paul (1 Tim 5:20; 2 Tim 4:2; Titus 1:9, 13), Jesus (Mark 8:15), and the *Didache* (15:3).

⁷⁶ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 329-30. See also: Thielman, *Ephesians*, 343.

⁷⁷ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 330.

Both passages clearly denote the exposure of shameful acts committed by unbelievers, so Lincoln is correct in aligning his interpretation of Eph 5:11 with these uses of ἐλέγχω.

Additional support for this position is found in the works of Reformed theologians of the past. Charles Hodge argues for a strong, confrontational understanding of ἐλέγχω, exhorting the Church to: “Reprove them [non-believers] … for the truth is divinely efficacious.”⁷⁸ John Calvin took a similar stance, stating: “By their warnings the saints enlighten blind unbelievers, and drag forth from their concealment into the light of day those who were sunk in ignorance.”⁷⁹ Thielman adds an important and helpful nuance to this position. The Church’s opposition is to darkness in all its manifestations, not simply the darkness within one group or another. He states:

...the exposed deeds are simply activities that originate in and are cloaked by “darkness” and therefore are characteristic of the unbelieving Gentiles... That believers can fall into these deeds, perhaps as a result of deceptive teaching, is assumed by the admonition not to participate in them. It is the deeds, however, that are exposed as evil, not the people who practice them.⁸⁰

This warning is primarily about exposing darkness wherever it may be found. As the Church is not the domain of darkness (as Paul makes clear in earlier verses), the imperatival priority must be placed on witness to the unbelieving world. That does not mean the Church’s mission to expose darkness does not extend to darkness found within its own ranks. External mission is the primary focus here, but internal accountability is a practical and complementary implication.

One last grammatical consideration must be raised. Best and Lincoln disagree on the object of ἐλέγχετε in 5:11. The idea that the object is undefined is defensible, as ἐλέγχετε is not accompanied by any obvious nouns. This leads Best to conclude that it references verse 12 and the people who do the works of darkness.⁸¹ However, Paul’s use of contrasting imperatives does

⁷⁸ Hodge, *Ephesians*, 214.

⁷⁹ Calvin, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians*, 200-1.

⁸⁰ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 344.

⁸¹ Best, *Ephesians*, 493.

not support Best's claim. Paul sets up a contrast between a prohibitive imperative ($\mu\nu$ συγκοινωνεῖτε) and a command imperative ($\dot{\varepsilon}\lambda\dot{\varepsilon}\gamma\chi\dot{\varepsilon}\tau\epsilon$).⁸² Both occur in the present tense, indicating the cessation of one ongoing activity and the beginning and continuance of another.⁸³ The relation of the Christian to the works of darkness must change; he or she is no longer a participant or accessory, but an antagonist to the works and those who do them. Therefore, Best's hypothesis should be rejected and $\tau\omega\zeta\dot{\varepsilon}\rho\gamma\omega\zeta\tau\zeta\tau\zeta\dot{\varepsilon}\alpha\kappa\alpha\rho\pi\zeta\tau\zeta\tau\zeta\dot{\varepsilon}\sigma\kappa\omega\tau\zeta\tau\zeta\tau\zeta$ (the object of $\mu\nu$ συγκοινωνεῖτε) should be understood as the implied object of $\dot{\varepsilon}\lambda\dot{\varepsilon}\gamma\chi\dot{\varepsilon}\tau\epsilon$. The thrust of Paul's message is a call to expose the darkness from which believers were delivered.

How to Expose

With the object of exposure now defined, the manner of exposure must also be understood. One option is that Paul is calling the church to act in such a way that their deeds will cause sinners to be internally convicted of their offenses.⁸⁴ The other common interpretation is that this exposure is brought about by verbal confrontation.⁸⁵ Defending the former option, Barth argues that verse 12 mentions shameful acts of which Christians must not speak, and that the summary statement in Eph 5:15 tells the reader to watch their conduct, meaning that verbal reproof is not a legitimate option.⁸⁶ He goes on to summarize:

...the example given by faithful Christians is trusted more than moralistic effusions, legalistic prescriptions, verbal punishments, acts of excommunication. For this reason, the paraphrasing translation was chosen: “disprove [by your conduct].”⁸⁷

⁸² As a specific action is prescribed (exposing darkness) $\dot{\varepsilon}\lambda\dot{\varepsilon}\gamma\chi\dot{\varepsilon}\tau\epsilon$ may justifiably be taken as an iterative imperative, commanding the reader to expose darkness “again and again.” (See: Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax*, 319.)

⁸³ Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax*, 210, 318, 320.

⁸⁴ Barth, *Ephesians* 4-6, 571-2; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 330.

⁸⁵ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 331; Baugh, *Ephesians*, 533; Best, *Ephesians*, 494; Calvin, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians*, 200-1; Hodge, *Ephesians*, 214.

⁸⁶ Barth, *Ephesians* 4-6, 571

⁸⁷ Barth, *Ephesians* 4-6, 572.

Barth makes a fair point that words by themselves are easily mistrusted and discounted. A Christian who reprobates a sinner merely by words offers no true reprobation at all.

Lincoln makes a similar case, arguing that 2 Cor 14:24-25 and John 16:8 depict non-believers converting due to the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the example of the actions of Christians.⁸⁸ He also cites Paul's sentiments about actions of which believers must not speak, and summarizes his position thusly: "As they refuse to join in evil actions and display a different quality of life, they cast their illuminating beam into the dark recesses of the surrounding society and will invariably show up its immoral practices for what they are."⁸⁹ Lincoln and Barth correctly point out that the actions of believers are a type of witness. However, other scholars offer compelling reasons to believe that conviction-by-example is not Paul's point here.

Arnold notes that ἐλέγχω was commonly used to mean "rebuke," an action that requires premeditated action and an intended purpose.⁹⁰ Silva points out that the term's use in the Pastoral Epistles gives the minister the task of rebuking the members of his church, which ties into Jesus' use in Matt 18:15, an instruction to verbally confront a brother about their sin.⁹¹ Considering Paul's list of sins in Eph 5:3 and this exhortation to expose the works of darkness, Phillips makes the corresponding point: "What [Paul] condemns is dwelling upon it and filling our minds with evil even as we condemn it."⁹² As it would be hypocritical of Paul to forbid discussion of these deeds directly after discussing them himself, the instruction must be that the believer must speak of these sins without committing them his or herself.

⁸⁸ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 330.

⁸⁹ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 330.

⁹⁰ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 331.

⁹¹ Silva, "ἐλέγχω, ἐλέγχος, ἐλεγχίς, κτλ" *NIDNTTE* 2:166.

⁹² Phillips, *Ephesians*, 387.

Best takes a similar approach, arguing that, since Paul names shameful sins in 5:3, this cannot possibly be a ban on verbal reproof. He helpfully brings up other NT uses of ἐλέγχω which speak of rebuking sins.⁹³ Of special importance to this debate, he notes that the author of Ephesians “continually reproves and rebukes his readers verbally, as does Paul in his letters.”⁹⁴ Therefore, the ἐλέγχω of which Paul speaks must be a verbal, confrontational encounter in which the object of rebuke is compelled to face the nature and consequences of their “unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph 5:11).

Conclusion: Go Forth and Expose

The idea of rebuke is found throughout the Pauline corpus. The Apostle had a special determination to call out sin and frequently exhorted others to do the same.⁹⁵ Based on the textual and theological evidence, the exhortation in Eph 5:11 ought to be interpreted as a call to confrontational Christian witness to the unbelieving world through the spoken word. This does not mean that believers are not called to hold each other accountable for the dark acts they may commit, nor does it deny the evangelistic potential of modelling a Biblically acceptable lifestyle. However, in this instance Paul is stating that believers, who were once darkness themselves, now have a duty to shine the light that defines them on the world around them, thus fulfilling the promise of 5:14, that “Christ will shine” on those who were formerly asleep and dead. Eph 5:11 is a strong exhortation to a strong witness, and the Church, whether in the first or twenty-first century, must heed it in its fullest force.

⁹³ Best, *Ephesians*, 494.

⁹⁴ Best, *Ephesians*, 494. Best denies Pauline authorship of Ephesians but sees the style of writing within the Epistle as emulative of Paul’s writing.

⁹⁵ Krause, “Virtues and Vices,” *DPL*, 961.

Appendix – Translation and Logical Progression

ἢ οὖν γίνεσθε συμμέτοχοι αὐτῶν·

Therefore, never become partners with them.

ἢ τε γάρ ποτε σκότος,
For formerly you were darkness,

νῦν δὲ φῶς ἐν κυρίῳ·
but now [you are] light in the Lord.

ώς τέκνα φωτὸς περιπατεῖτε
Walk as children of light,

οὐ γάρ καρπὸς τοῦ φωτὸς ἐν πάσῃ ἀγαθωσύνῃ καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ καὶ ἀληθείᾳ
(for the fruit of light is all goodness and righteousness and truth)

δοκιμάζοντες τί ἔστιν εὐάρεστον τῷ κυρίῳ
discerning what is pleasing to the Lord.

καὶ μὴ συγκοινωνεῖτε τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς ἀκάρποις τοῦ σκότους,
And do not take part in the unfruitful works of darkness,

μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ ἐλέγχετε.
but rather expose them.

τὰ γὰρ κρυφῆ γινόμενα ὑπὸ αὐτῶν αἰσχρόν ἔστιν καὶ λέγειν,
For what is done by them in secret is shameful to speak.

τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐλεγχόμενα ὑπὸ τοῦ φωτὸς φανεροῦται,
but all is exposed and made known by the light

πᾶν γὰρ τὸ φανερούμενον φῶς ἔστιν.
For all that is made known is light,

διὸ λέγει·
therefore, it is written:

ἔγειρε, οὐ καθεύδων,
“Get up, sleeper!

καὶ ἀνάστα ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν,
And rise from the dead,

καὶ ἐπιφαύσει σοι ὁ Χριστός.
and Christ will shine on you.”