

**PREFACE**

Please turn to Galatians 5.

A critical part of understanding our passage in 1 Corinthians (vv9-11) is determining who the apostle Paul refers to when he states that “the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

- In v1 he used this same word (plural noun, *adikoi*) to refer to those outside the church—i.e., nonbelievers (“...not before the saints”).
- In vv7-8 he used the verb form of the same word, “wronged” (*adikeo*), to refer to what one brother was doing to another. That is, one brother in the church is behaving like the “unrighteous” in his actions toward another brother.

So we need to ask ourselves, Just who in this scenario is not going to be inheriting the kingdom of God?

In Galatians 5 we have a setting with similarities to the one in 1 Corinthians 6. Paul offers this counsel for different reasons—different problems within the Galatian church—but here he makes the same statement about the kingdom of God. However here he includes an additional verb that is extremely helpful in understanding who he speaks of.

**Sidebar:** In both passages it is clear his reference is to the *future* kingdom of God, since he includes the word “inherit.” In other words, he speaks of the promise of heaven for believers, and their participation in Christ’s eschatological kingdom.

**Read Galatians 5:16-17.**

Here is the classic and ongoing battle between the flesh—i.e., the fleshly nature with which we are born—and the Holy Spirit, indwelling everyone who has placed their trust in Christ Jesus. When we combine this with other passages, such as Paul’s heart-rending treatise on this internal battle in Romans 7—not to mention our own experience—we can conclude that during our time on earth all Christians will suffer this conflict—some more than others, but all in one way or another. Depending on our progress in sanctification, depending on our level of spiritual maturity, there will be times when the Spirit wins, and times when the flesh wins.

Some today have been taught that when one becomes a Christian the flesh no longer holds any power over them. And it is easy to see how one could lift out verses such as v24 to make that case.

## Read Galatians 5:24.

But then, if v24 means that, that from the moment we obtain the Holy Spirit at conversion the battle against the flesh is forever won, then why v25?

## Read v25.

Why must Paul encourage us to “walk by the Spirit,” and warn against becoming “boastful, challenging one another, envying one another” if the battle is over? Because it is *not* over—and will not be this side of heaven.

### Sidebar: Read v18.

*Vincent:* We might have expected, from what precedes, “under the flesh.” But the law and the flesh are in the same category. Circumcision was a requirement of the law, and was a work of the flesh. The ordinances of the law were ordinances of the flesh; the law was weak through the flesh.

After laying out the nature of the conflict, Paul offers a list of unrighteous behaviors that exemplify the “desires of the flesh” (vv19-21a), followed by a contrasting list of righteous behaviors that exemplify the fruit of “walk[ing] by the Spirit” (vv22-23).

Tucked in between, at the end of v21 after the long list of sinful behaviors, we have essentially the same statement Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 6:

...of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Notice that to the Galatians instead of just saying “the unrighteous,” as he does to the Corinthians, he writes, “...those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” “Such things” clearly refers back to the “deeds of the flesh” just listed, but what does “practice” mean?

**practice** <sup>nasb,nkjv</sup>, **do** <sup>kjv,esv</sup>, **live** (like this) <sup>niv</sup> = *prasso* = a primary verb; to “practice”, i.e. **perform repeatedly or habitually (thus differing from <G4160> ( *poieo* ), which properly refers to a single act);** by implication to execute, accomplish, etc.; specially to collect (dues), fare (personally) :- commit, deeds, do, exact, keep, require, use arts.

I would next like to read an account, written by someone who was there, that is a perfect, contemporary illustration of the situation described in 1 Corinthians 6, and also illustrates the difference between sinning, and *practicing* a life of sin.

*a pastor:* I vividly remember a case where a brother in the church was suing another brother over a piece of equipment he had borrowed and broken. The one brother was wealthy, the other poor (thus why he had to borrow the equipment). When the borrower could not fully pay for the damages, he asked for time to make it right. The first brother wanted the whole amount right away or he was going to sue him for it. The head of the church board and I spent hours going between these two men but the wealthy brother would not relent. Finally, I and my fellow church leader offered to pay the amount on behalf of the poorer brother. We emptied our pockets before him, down to the last penny we had on us, thinking that might shame him. His response was, "If you can't come up with the full amount tonight, I am suing tomorrow." The church leader guaranteed the rest on the spot and wrote a check for it (a considerable amount).

Because every follower of Christ will do battle with his or her fleshly nature, and some times lose the skirmish, every follower of Christ will, at times, sin. But our gracious God has set up a system for dealing with such a situation: confession.

### **Read 1 John 1:8-9.**

Let's select just one from Paul's long list of "deeds of the flesh": outbursts of anger. Is there among us anyone who has *not* committed this sin? Then what keeps any of us from being included with those "who practice such things [and] will not inherit the kingdom of God"? Answer: Confession—and the concomitant forgiveness of God.

*Well, you say, a flash of anger isn't so bad. There are much worse sins.* True—but beside the point. King David committed adultery and murder, among other unrighteous acts, in the episode with Bathsheba. Yet a gracious God forgave him those sins—because David confessed them and sought the mercy of God. We might say today, he "owned" the transgressions; he admitted that he did them, and stood before a holy God without excuse.

We see this in the behavior of the poor brother in the story above; he admitted that he was guilty of breaking the borrowed equipment and sought a way to repay the damages. Even though the offense has been committed, this is how the indwelling Holy Spirit gives us ultimate victory over sin: When we sin against a holy God, His Spirit (if we are His child) convicts us and encourages us to confess the sin. If we don't, we are miserable; if we do, our gracious God forgives us, and the sin is expunged from the record ([Micah 7:18-20](#), [Psalm 103:10-12](#)).

None of this means, of course, that there may not be consequences to our sin, or that the Lord will not discipline us as a loving Father. But it does mean that our transgression will not be accounted to us.

*But then, you ask, what if we do it again—and again? Isn't that "practicing" sin? It should always be cause for concern when there is a persistent temptation that finds us easy prey repeatedly. But this is still different from what Paul means by "practice such things." Look at how Christ instructed Peter.*

### **Read Matthew 18:21-22.**

Confession of the sinner is not stated, but is implied in this passage. Peter's question to the Lord keys off the procedure Jesus has just outlined for church discipline in vv15-20. We can infer from v15 that the sinner confesses his wrong when it states, "if he listens to you."

"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother."

If Jesus says that brothers are to not set a limit on forgiveness, would Father God forgive less?

Returning to our example of "outbursts of anger," if that is my predilection, and the offense with which I most often struggle, it will probably occur more than once. The critical measure of my relationship to Christ is found in *what happens next*.

Every one of us has some point of weakness, some temptation that Satan knows is his best bet for disrupting our fellowship with God. So long as we are on this earth the struggle between Spirit and flesh will persist in one form or another. What we do about it will reveal whether we will or will not "inherit the kingdom of God." And the difference is played out in the story of the two parishioners.

- The poor man admitted his offense against his church brother—damage to the borrowed equipment—and expressed his determination to make right the cost of the damage; he was just unable to do it in full immediately.
- The wealthy man, by contrast, was insisting on full compensation immediately. Absent that, he would immediately file suit in civil court for the damages.

Both men were guilty of an offense against a supposed brother; both men were guilty of sin. But only one was at risk of not inheriting the kingdom of God—not because of his sin, nor even his immediate response to it, but because his response revealed a dramatic—and persistent—absence of "the fruit of the Spirit" (vv22-23). He refused to forgive the offense and exhibited a decided lack of "patience, kindness...gentleness."

**Sidebar:** Let's be clear: No one can say with certainty what is in someone else's heart; no one can declare with certainty whether someone else is a child of God in Christ. Neither do our actions *determine* whether we will inherit the kingdom of God; only our relationship with Christ determines that. But our actions, especially when observed over time, *can* reveal whether we are walking by the Spirit or walking by the flesh. In our example it is clear that the wealthy man was *not* walking by the Spirit. We can only make an educated guess about his relationship with Christ.

What happens next after someone sins is the critical piece of evidence. When Nathan called King David on his sin with Bathsheba, when he pointed a bony finger at the king and declared, "You are the man!" (2 Samuel 12:7), David offered no excuse, no rationale, no denial. His first response was, "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Samuel 12:13). And the Lord forgave his sin—but there was a price to be paid: God took the life of the child from Bathsheba.

So let's get down to it: what is the difference? What constitutes "practic[ing]" unrighteousness in this context? When we sin against God, what do we do next?

Charles Haddon Spurgeon is reported to have said, "The grace that does not change my life will not save my soul." The flesh would have us shrug off sin as nothing to worry about—in fact, the flesh would have us not call it sin at all! But the indwelling Spirit in a believer will convict him to repent and confess *each time he sins*. When that Spirit is absent, it is far easier—indeed, it is perfectly natural to continue sinning.

Regarding the Greek behind the word "practice":

- "The tense of the verb (present) indicates a habitual continuation in fleshly sins rather than an isolated lapse, and the point is that those who continually practice such sins give evidence of having never received God's Spirit." (Boice)
- Practice "represents a present participle, 'people doing such things', and it carries the implication that they do them constantly." (Morris)
- "The verb *prassontes* [practice] referring to habitual practice rather than an isolated lapse." (Stott)

That is, the word "practice" refers to a *sinful way of life*—a way of life that gives evidence to "the deeds of the flesh" itemized (as a subset) in vv19-21. It is a self-serving, unrepentant life that, probably, does not know Christ or His Spirit.

This prepares us for our passage in 1 Corinthians in our next session.