

PREFACE

In our last session we examined Galatians 5:21, where Paul writes that “those who practice [the deeds of the flesh] will not inherit the kingdom of God.” We used this passage to gain insight into what he writes to the Corinthians in Chapter Six—specifically, what are the parameters that define those who “will not inherit the kingdom of God”?

Since Paul is addressing members of the church in Corinth, and has referred to them as brothers in Christ, is he saying that there are *Christians* who will not inherit the kingdom of God? When he offers a list of unrighteous behaviors that includes such things as thievery, greed and drunkenness, does this mean that if at any time in our life we were guilty of such behavior, we will not be included in Christ’s eternal kingdom?

We concluded in our last session that because he included the word “practice” in Galatians 5, Paul defined the unrighteous as those who *repeatedly, habitually* demonstrate such behavior. More to the point, the word “practice” refers to a *sinful way of life*—a way of life that gives evidence to “the deeds of the flesh” rather than a life walking by the Spirit, giving evidence to the work of God in a life. It is a self-serving, unrepentant life that, probably, does not know Christ or His Spirit.

Now we are ready to consider our passage in First Corinthians.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.**v9A**

...the unrighteous...

It is also a great help to understanding Paul’s meaning that he employs the same word, translated “unrighteous” in v9 that he did in v1 when he was referring to those outside the church (“...and not before the saints”).

unrighteous = *adikos* = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and <G1349> (dike); **unjust**; by extension wicked; by implication **treacherous**; **specially heathen** ∴ unjust, unrighteous.

Even so, placing this verse in context, v8, leading into v9 seamlessly, at least *seems* to bring “the unrighteous” back into the church.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:8-9a.

So how do we reconcile this—if, indeed, it requires reconciling? I do not believe it does; I believe this passage (vv9-11) is Paul's way of "putting the fear of God," as it were, in the Corinthian church. This is how he means to slap up-side the head certain individuals in that church—not just the litigious brethren. Let's put together the evidence.

We know that the apostle Paul subscribes to the security (or perseverance) of believers, as he wrote to the Romans regarding Israel.

Read Romans 11:28-29.

If God has called you, and has placed the Holy Spirit within you, that's it. That security will not be revoked. The writer to the Hebrews concurred.

Read Hebrews 7:23-25. (*forever = completely = uttermost = eis*)

All of this is a work of God, a work of His grace. It has nothing to do with us.

Read Philippians 2:12-13.

That is, Christ Himself is the one who guarantees the inheritance of every believer. If you belong to Him, no matter what travails you pass through, He will see you through to the end.

So we know that Paul cannot mean in this passage that the Corinthians should beware lest their behavior will cause them to lose their salvation. Nevertheless, the package of vv8-9 comprises a stern warning.

will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The word "inherit" tells us that the context is eschatological; that is, Paul speaks of the kingdom that will be inaugurated when Christ returns to rule over the entire earth, culminating in "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1). Thus it is the apostle's favorite way of referring to the eternal salvation Christians have in Christ. The "unrighteous" will be found guilty when they die, or at the final judgment of Christ, and they will have no part in His kingdom.

vv9B-10

The apostle helpfully defines for us what he means by the unrighteous. He offers a subset of behaviors that, when unrepentantly "practiced," reveal an unrighteous state.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:9b-10.

I want to spend just a few moments defining these—especially since they vary in the multitude of translations we use. And I will try to walk a fine line that is both clear and not overly graphic. Nonetheless, we need to understand what is being said here. In this list Paul repeats some he listed in Chapter Five, but adds some more. The first set of five (four in some translations that group together the last two) explicitly or tangentially concern sexual sin.

fornicators, sexually immoral = *pornoi* = any kind of extra-marital sexual intercourse, including incest. This is the standard catch-all word for any sexual sin.

idolaters = *eidololatres* = In Romans 1:22-25 Paul associates idolatry and immorality—the first a sin of the mind against God, the second a sin of the flesh. W. E. Vine adds that “an idolater is a slave to the depraved ideas his idols represent, and thereby, to divers lusts.”

adulterers = *moichos* = Lange: “...that inordinate indulgence of the sexual passion which violated alike the Divine ordinance of marriage, and the rights of the married parties.”

effeminate, male prostitutes = *malakoi*

homosexuals, sodomites = *arsenokoites*

Out of all the descriptions I read for these words, Dr. Peter Lange offers what I believe to be the description best suited to mixed company: “The former denotes those who allowed themselves to be used as women (*qui muliebria patiuntur*); the latter, such as used the former in this unnatural way” (i.e., *passive and active*).

[The difference between ancient and modern perceptions of societal homosexuality is fascinating. In the ancient world this practice had less to do with sexual proclivities than with status and power. Because of the nature of the topic I have chosen not to include that discussion in the class or notes proper. I have prepared a separate handout—with text taken from an end note in David Garland’s commentary—that illuminates this. The information is not profane or prurient, but it is *detailed*. If you find this topic sufficiently unpleasant, please disregard the handout (last page in the PDF).]

The next five behaviors are not necessarily related to sexual sin (although they could be), and are sufficiently general in nature—which might just make a few of us a little uncomfortable.

thieves = *kleptes* = from <G2813> (klepto); a stealer (literal or figurative) :- thief. Compare <G3027> (leistes).

covetous, greedy = *pleonektes* = This word, along with at least one more in this list plays right into the situation in the Corinthian church: from <G4119> (pleion) and <G2192> (echo); **holding (desiring) more, i.e. eager for gain (avaricious, hence a defrauder)** :- covetous. Look at v8: "...you yourselves wrong and defraud."

drunkards = *methysos* = a sot.

revilers, slanderers = *loidoros* = from *lidos* (mischief); **abusive, i.e. a blackguard :- railer**, reviler.

swindlers, extortioners = *harpax* = This word, too, has ties to the situation in Corinth: from <G726> (**harpazo**); rapacious :- extortion, ravening.

harpazo = from a derivative of <G138> (*haireomai*); **to seize** (in various applications) :- catch (away, up), **pluck, pull, take (by force)**.

A. T. Robertson makes a good point, that the foregoing list represents "a solemn roll call of the damned, even if some of their names are on the church roll in Corinth whether officers or ordinary members."

Every church of even moderate size includes individuals that are "Christians" in name only. They may not be guilty of gross duplicity; they may be even fooling themselves—they may truly believe they are Christians. This ignorance may be exacerbated by their societal environment (as it was in the Corinth church); by listening to the lies of the unsaved community, and by those lies seeping into the church itself, they believe themselves to be "spiritual"—hence, a Christian. But since they are not in possession of the Spirit of God, they are not *truly s*/Spiritual.

So our effort to determine those of whom Paul speaks—those who are included in the "unrighteous"—cannot include the factor of church membership. The criteria must exclude only those who are truly followers of Christ and in possession of His Spirit. And we simply cannot say with certainty that everyone in the pews on a Sunday morning is righteous in Christ.

That being said, as Garland writes, "The ten sins in this list reflect the behavior of those outside the church, the *adikoi* (unrighteous) who are guilty of open rebellion against God and destined for judgment." That is a pretty good term: "open rebellion." A believer in possession of God's Spirit cannot for long be in a state of rebellion against God. Some would say that a Christian can *never* be in a state of rebellion, but for most of us, our own history—as well as the character studies in God's word—proves that untrue. The Christian can, for a time, whether minutes or months, rebel against His Lord. But if he or she truly belongs to Him, Christ Jesus will always bring him or her back—some times rather painfully, limping and scarred, but back.

...[none of these] will inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul closes the list by restating that those who persist in such sins, those who make this a way of life, will not inherit the kingdom.

v11

Such were some of you;

Interesting phrase this, when you think about it. I suppose one can make the case that, as Paul says “some,” not *everyone* in the church was once guilty of at least one of these behaviors. But it is also true that *everyone* in the church, was, at one time, unsanctified and unjustified, and on their way to hell.

but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified

Verse 11 brings welcome relief to the tension we have felt in this passage up till now. The apostle has *not* been saying that the eternal kingdom life of every believer in the Corinth church is in jeopardy. No, they had been

- washed
This *may* be an allusion to baptism, but Paul is primarily concerned with the “spiritual transformation made possible through Christ and effected by the Spirit” (Fee). Their old life had been scrubbed away, rendering them
- sanctified
They were now set apart for Christ, holy, and different from the unsaved world because they had been
- justified
The believers in the Corinth church had a right legal standing before a holy God; they had been declared righteous by Him.

How was this accomplished?

in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

CONCLUSION

The indwelling Holy Spirit is key to all this. Without Him, we remain as those described in the list of evil behaviors, and we have no means by which to extricate ourselves from such a lifestyle. We are lost. Period.

With Him, however, we are not lost. But because we remain in flesh, and the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit remains, we can, from time to time, behave as if we are *not* children of God and fellow heirs with Christ Jesus. Even so, the Spirit is the key.

Read Ephesians 1:13-14. (*a most precious verse*)

Some of us, also from time to time, may wonder if we are truly believers. We know painfully well the ongoing struggle we have with the flesh—the old sin nature. *Would I behave this way if I were a Christian? Shouldn't it be easier to live a righteous life? Maybe I am not a Christian.* The fact that such introspection occurs is one possible sign that indeed you are.

Those in whom the Spirit dwells cannot forever be in a state and condition of rebellion and sin. Christ will not let them. At some point the believer will be driven to his knees in confession and repentance. He will cry out to his Savior and Lord, pleading for forgiveness and the restoration of the sweet communion he had once enjoyed—as King David put it in Psalm 51, “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation.”

Short of conversion, the one without the Spirit cannot and will not do this. He will continue “practicing” ([Galatians 5:21](#)) their unrighteousness.

In this passage, the apostle Paul is once again prodding the Corinthians to “become what they are”—to stop behaving as the unrighteous that are without the Spirit, and start behaving as those who *do* have the Spirit. *Because they do!* And that is to be the lesson for us: For Christ's sake and the sake of His kingdom we are to live as if He is our Lord. Because He is.

I can do no better than to conclude this lesson with, first, Gordon Fee's, then second, John MacArthur's respective summations.

Fee: For Paul there is to be the closest possible relationship between the experience of grace and one's behavior that evidences that experience of grace. Paul himself is as concerned as anyone that the latter (right behavior) should not be perceived as coming first or as leading to the former (the experience of grace). But those who concern themselves with grace without equal concern for behavior have missed Paul's own theological urgencies by several furlongs. It is precisely for these reasons that the warning texts in Paul must be taken with real seriousness. Security in Christ there is, to be sure, but it is a false security that would justify sinners who have never taken seriously "but such *were* some of you." That is to whitewash the sinner without regeneration or transformation; Paul simply would not understand such theology.

What is most often missing in such theologies is the central ingredient in Paul: the transforming work of the Spirit. And in his case that is not simply to be understood as theological jargon. It is rather predicated on the Spirit's coming into the world, signifying the turning of the ages, so that the realities of the future are already at work in *power* in the present age. **The Corinthian problem was not with their experience of the Spirit, but with their misunderstanding of what it meant to be Spirit people.** Our problems are usually of another kind. The Spirit belongs to the creed and to our theology, but is all too often left there, so that the Spirit's genuinely transforming and empowering work is often left until the Eschaton [end times; return of Christ], rather than experienced in the process of arriving there. (bold emphasis added)

John MacArthur: Paul's purpose here is not to give a list of sins that will indicate one has lost his salvation. There are no such sins. He is rather giving a catalog of sinners who are typical of the unsaved. Persons whose lives are totally characterized by such sins are not saved and [are] therefore unrighteous, unjustified. They shall not inherit the kingdom of God, because they are not right with God. They are outside the kingdom, the sphere of salvation.

The application to believers is clear. "Why, then," Paul asks the Corinthians, "do you keep living like the unsaved, the unrighteous? Why do you keep falling into the ways of your old life, the life from which Christ has saved you? Why are you following the old standards, and having the old selfish, ungodly motives? You are to be separated from the world's ways, not following them. And specifically, why are you taking your problems to the world's courts?"

A believer is a new creation, with a new inner personhood made after God's own person, and there is no longer unbroken unrighteousness. But the flesh can become dominant in the disobedient Christian, so that he may take on the *appearance* of an unbeliever...

A transformed life should produce transformed living. Paul is saying very strongly that it was unacceptable that some believers were behaving like those outside the kingdom. They were acting like their former selves. They were not saved *for* that, but *from* that. (emphasis added)

1 Corinthians 6:9

Pederasty was the most common male homosexual act in the ancient world (Schrage 1991: 432). That is because sexual propriety was judged according to social values: “The ancients did not classify kinds of sexual desire or behaviour according to the sameness or difference of the sexes of the persons who engaged in a sexual act; rather, they evaluated sexual acts according to the degree to which such acts either violated or conformed to the norms of conduct deemed appropriate to individual sexual actors by reason of their gender, age, and social status” (Halperin, OCD 720; cf. Dover 1978: 277). A person’s rank and status determined what was considered acceptable or unacceptable. On one side were free males; on the other side were women and slaves. A free male was free to choose women, men, or boys as sexual objects without the majority taking offense as long as he did not demean his status as a free male. A free male could not “indulge in passive acts of love like a woman or a slave” without incurring a stigma (Stegemann 1993:164). But he could use boys, slaves, or persons of no account with impunity as long as he remained “on top.” “Phallic insertion functioned as a marker of male precedence; it also expressed social domination and seniority... Any sexual relation that involved the penetration of a social inferior (whether inferior in age, gender, or status) qualified as sexually normal for a male, irrespective of the penetrated person’s anatomical sex, whereas to be sexually penetrated was always potentially shaming, especially for a free male of citizen status [e.g., Tacitus, *Annales* 11.36]” (Halperin, OCD721). Homosexual acts between free males were regarded with contempt because one partner would have to take on the passive role (insertivity) suited only to women and slaves (Veyne 1987: 204). We see this cultural attitude manifested in Petronius’s novel, *Satyricon* (91-100). Two close friends, Encolpius and Ascyltus, fight over the sexual favors of their slave boy, Giton; but they never engage in any homosexual act between themselves.

It should be noted also that “neither sexual desire nor sexual pleasure represented an acceptable motive for a boy’s compliance with the sexual demands of his lover” (Halperin, OCD 721). The younger partner was not to be motivated by, or express, passionate sexual desire for his senior lover, lest he compromise his own future status as a man. As a result, sexually receptive or effeminate males were ridiculed. Society would have considered same-sex sexual acts between two men of equal standing to be shameful. What some in modern society find acceptable—male same-sex eroticism between equals in a committed relationship—would have been condemned in ancient society. Dover (1978:104) contends that penetration was not regarded as an expression of love but “as an aggressive act demonstrating the superiority of the active to the passive partner.” J. Davidson (1997:169-82) challenges this interpretation as anachronistic but imposes his own biases on the evidence and does not win the argument. Paul differed from his society’s sexual mores in condemning all same-sex sexual acts. (David Garland, *1 Corinthians*)