

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

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7-13-08

Introduction.

- A. According to many people in modern American society, we are witnessing the dawning of a new age of tolerance. Many in our nation have become convinced that traditional values are out of date, and they do whatever they can to help dismantle them. This has been most obvious with the recent California Supreme Court ruling that homosexuals have the right to marry. It is as though we think that people have never thought this way about sin before.
- B. In reality, of course, there is nothing new about sin. Tolerance for homosexuality, adultery, fornication, and every other evil is not some new invention. It is very, very old. In fact, the Greek cities to which the apostle Paul brought the gospel were filled with people who practiced the same sins that are so popular and so promoted today. The city of Corinth was so renowned for its prostitution industry that the Greek word for sex with a prostitute was "Corinthianize." Indeed, it would have been totally accurate to say, "Whatever happens in Corinth stays in Corinth."
- C. It was to people like this, people who lived in a time much like our own, that the supposedly outmoded message of the gospel was given. That tells us, friends, that there is nothing outmoded about the word of Christ at all. It spoke quite bluntly about what God thought of those sins then, and it tells us just as bluntly what God thinks of those same sins today. To see how true this is, let's look at a snippet from one of the letters that Paul wrote to Corinth itself. Let's see what we have to learn from 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

I. The Truth.

- A. Once we read the text together, we need to spend some time looking at what it means. Let's begin by considering the opening statement of 1 Corinthians 6:9, which tells us that **THE UNRIGHTEOUS WILL NOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD**. Boy! Talk about an absolute statement. There is no room for weaseling in what Paul says here. Only the righteous will inherit eternal life. By contrast, the unrighteous will be left to themselves in torment.
- B. This is not a popular notion around us. Most people in America prefer to believe that just like all dogs to heaven, all people go to heaven. They prefer to believe this because they know in their heart of hearts that they don't do what God wants. So they toss out the Bible, and believe that if they do basically what they want to, that will be enough.
- C. Of course, there's nothing new about this line of thinking. The first-century church in Corinth was filled with people who lived the way they wanted to live and figured that doing what they wanted to do was good enough. That's exactly why we see Paul's next instruction in this verse: **DO NOT BE DECEIVED**. Just as there were in the first century, there are many voices all around us that are attempting to persuade us that unrighteousness is good enough. Some of these voices are close to home, like the friends and family members who do not obey God and try to convince us that there's no real reason for us to obey either. We hear them most every time we turn the TV on.
- D. We even hear them in the supposedly responsible voices of our day, in the words of politicians, academics, and media figures. They want us to believe that as long as some activity is legal, it's just another lifestyle choice, neither better nor worse than any other. We are surrounded by deception, and this will almost certainly continue until the end of our lives. It's up to us not to be deceived, to always remember that those people will not inherit the kingdom.

II. The Unrighteous.

- A. Now that we've established that the category of the unrighteous does exist, and that ending up in this category has eternal consequences, we need to look at what Paul says about who is unrighteous. Paul does not mean to provide a complete listing in these next two verses. However, it's enough to give us an idea of what is meant.
- B. The first people on Paul's list of unrighteousness are the **FORNICATORS**. Young folks, hear me on this one. Fornication is when an unmarried person has sex. That means that if you have sex with your boyfriend, or have sex with your girlfriend, you are committing fornication. This is another word that our society wants to erase from the dictionary. Satan's got everybody here convinced that fornication is just as natural a part of coming to adulthood as a growth spurt or a zit on your chin. Five minutes of radio listening will tell us all about it. It's true, our educators warn of the dangers of fornication, but they also say those dangers can be dealt with if we just practice safe sex.
- C. It's a lie. From beginning to end, it's a evil, vicious lie that wrecks lives and destroys souls. Fornication is not some blessing of youth. It's a perversion of God's plan for man and the family that can have lifelong consequences. Lauren and I just got word about a month ago that a young Christian man and woman we knew and worked with in Beaumont started fornicating with each other, and now, guess what? She's going to be a mommy, and he's going to be a daddy. And that's not even the half of it. On a mental level, fornication will often leave scars that last for years or decades. But even if those things weren't true, those who fornicate will not inherit the kingdom of God. That means that if you commit fornication, it is sin, and if you do not repent of that sin, you will go to hell.
- D. Next, Paul takes things up with the **IDOLATERS**. This was a big deal back in the world of the first century. Some cities quite literally had an idol on every corner. In its literal form, it's even quietly coming into its own in today's America. If I recall rightly, just a few miles up I-55, there's a big Hindu temple next to the highway, and those folks are certainly idolaters. However, even if we never bow down before some statue with an elephant head, we can still fall prey to the cultural idols all around us: the pretty face, the fancy car, the big house, and the fat bank account. It's not at all hard to come to worship those things too, and if we do, we will not inherit the kingdom of God.

- E. For those of us who are married, we need to be careful not to join the **ADULTERERS**. Adultery isn't quite as celebrated in our culture, at least not yet, but it is all too common. As Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount, the root problem with adultery is lust, which is itself a sin. The only way to keep from sexual sin with another man or another woman is never to look lustfully on another man or another woman. We need to make a covenant with our eyes never to look upon another in that way, whether we find them at the workplace or on the Internet. When we divert to another the desires that belong to our spouses alone, we give the devil the opportunity to lead our actions there too. Adultery is a sin, and if we commit adultery and do not repent, we will not inherit the kingdom of God.
- F. Next in line, Paul condemns **HOMOSEXUALS** and **SODOMITES**. Here, there are two words and not one because the Gentiles of the first century made a distinction that we don't need to go into. Both of these are talking about what we would call homosexual behavior. Today, even though there is scant scientific evidence on the subject, our cultural consensus is homosexuality is genetic and can't be helped. That's not the way the Bible uses the term. Biblically speaking, you become a homosexual in the same way you become a murderer, by committing the act in question. Unquestionably, some are more tempted to homosexual acts than others. I've known Christians who fight that battle daily. However, with God's help, it is a battle that can be won. In every instance, we choose to sin. No one forces us to it. That means, that contrary to what others say, homosexual sex too is a sin. Those who practice it and do not repent will not inherit the kingdom of God. They are no worse than the adulterer, but no better.
- G. After this, we come to **THIEVES**. Most of us don't have much to do with thieves, although one girl who was on my law-school journal was fond of going into department stores and shoplifting items for fun. However, there is one kind of theft that is becoming increasingly common in our society: theft of intellectual property. When a movie studio makes a movie, or a band records an album, they do so to make money just the same way that we might open a convenience store. When we download a movie or a song without paying the rightful owners for it, it's exactly the same thing morally as breaking into somebody else's convenience store and taking what we want. It's theft. To be honest with you, folks, it's something I used to do until I realized how wrong it was, and I suspect a lot of other Christians are in the same boat. That means that if we are sinning by stealing intellectual property, we need to erase those songs or throw those DVD's away and repent. If we don't, we will not inherit the kingdom.
- H. Paul likewise includes the **COVETOUS** with the unrighteous. Covetousness is an overwhelming desire for material gain, especially if what we want belongs to somebody else. It is everywhere in our society. The gambler at the casino is coveting, but so is the businessman who neglects his family and his God just so he can make more and more money. This can be a very private thing. I don't have any idea who in this congregation loves money, but I do know this. If we are covetous, it is sin. If we do not repent of that sin, we will not inherit the kingdom of God.
- I. Nor does Paul neglect to mention **DRUNKARDS**. Obviously, in Joliet, which has a bar on every corner, this is not a sin that the world neglects to share in. The Greek word here refers to any sort of intoxication. How drunk is drunk? It's impossible to say. Certainly, the Scripture doesn't give a number for acceptable blood-alcohol content anywhere. This idea encompasses anything from getting a little tipsy to getting falling-down drunk. I don't have time here to explore the topic of social drinking and drunkenness in depth, but let me say this: in this country, I can't think of any reason why we must drink alcohol, and every time we do at all, we risk being numbered with the drunkards. Drunkenness is a sin, and those who practice it and do not repent will not inherit the kingdom of God.
- J. After the drunkards, Paul mentions the **REVILERS**. This is an idea we wouldn't normally expect to see on the list. Scripturally speaking, a reviler is anyone who uses abusive or insulting language, particularly as a way of expressing anger. The boss who yells at his employees because he can is a reviler. So is the husband who browbeats his wife, or the parent who insults his children and tells them they're no good. There are many problems with reviling, but perhaps most fatally, it expresses the opposite of the love that God commands us to have for everyone. We need to put reviling out of our lives. It is sin, and if we practice it and do not repent, we will not inherit the kingdom of God.
- K. Finally, Paul indicts the **EXTORTIONERS** as unrighteous. This has a very legal meaning in our society, but that doesn't seem to be the idea that the Scriptures are trying to get across. Here, it simply refers to those who use force to get money or possessions from someone else. Once again, this isn't a battle that many Christians fight in a physical sense, but the term seems to include not just the armed robber, but also the businessman who uses unfair business practices to swindle and strongarm his suppliers and competitors. There needs to be a basic fairness to the way we do everything as Christians, and that includes the economic decisions we make. If we ignore this and practice extortion, we are sinning, and if we do not repent, we will not inherit the kingdom of God.

III. The Solution.

- A. Paul, however, after rattling off this list of the unrighteous, makes a startling statement at its end. He says of the Corinthians, **"SUCH WERE SOME OF YOU."** This is startling in two main ways. First of all, it tells us that Paul didn't just preach the gospel to nice, God-fearing folks who just needed a little nudge to get to heaven, as though there were such a thing. Instead, some of the people he brought to Christ came from terrible sin.
- B. Even more important, though, is the past tense. Paul says, "Such WERE some of you." The fornicator was a fornicator no longer. The homosexual was a homosexual no longer. The thief, the reviler, and the extortioner had all moved on from that point of their lives. This is a message of hope for all of us. It tells us that no matter what we've done, no matter how far we've gone, we can leave it all behind and come back to God.
- C. Paul tells us how in the section of Scripture beginning with **"BUT YOU WERE WASHED."** None of us can cleanse ourselves, but God can cleanse all of us. Through the authority of Jesus and the life imparted by the Holy Spirit, we can erase all of the sins we've committed and start fresh, with a new life we can live for Him.