

Life Together

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.
(1 Corinthians 3:16-17. ESV)*

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same
image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
(2 Corinthians 3:18. ESV)*

Such Were Some Of You

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1 Corinthians 6:9-11

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Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; that's on page 954 in your pew Bible. As I mentioned last week this passage is really the conclusion of Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8. We shouldn't be having all of these disputes with other believers and we certainly shouldn't be airing them before all the watching world because after all, we know how this story ends! In the end, we all stand before God who examines our deeds and he tells us the truth about who we are. Our deeds reveal our faith and those who have persisted in faith inherit the kingdom of God and those who have persisted in sin and rebellion do not. They are exiled from God's presence and they face the awful prospect of an eternity in darkness and deep regret. Therefore, Paul seems to be saying, if that's true – if its true that at the end of all things God will tell us the truth about who we are then, in the meantime, we really don't have to! We don't have to go around telling everybody who we think they are and we don't have to wrestle in the mud over what we think we are entitled to. If you truly are a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ, Paul says, then you will inherit the world. Therefore, why not rather be wronged? That was last week's sermon and that really is the message of the text but here in verses 9-11 we encounter an argument that is so offensive to our modern ears that we really must pause and make sure we have understood it correctly. In all likelihood this is the most offensive passage in the Bible to many both inside and outside the visible church. Many Christians and even some pastors in our own denomination are doing everything they can to distance themselves from the meaning and

implications of this text and so, because we live in this world and because we need to be able to defend that which we believe, we are going to slow down and make sure that we are reading and understanding this text according to what it actually says. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

⁹Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9–11 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Old Testament Background:

If you really want to understand what this text is saying then you need to go back and look at the Old Testament passages that lie behind it. You have to remember that the Bible of the early church was the Old Testament. Paul could not write to the Corinthians and say: “Listen you knuckle heads! Just read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 – that will sort you out” – he was writing 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; they didn’t have that at their disposal. The Bible of the early church was the Old Testament. When Paul got up to preach the Gospel he didn’t get to say: “Open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 6” he said, “Open your Bibles to Deuteronomy chapter 1” and in fact that appears to be one of the passages that he has in mind. So, open your Bibles to Deuteronomy chapter 1. Moses says to the people of God:

And these *are* the commands, and the ordinances, and the judgments, as many as the Lord our God gave commandment to teach you to do so in the land on which ye enter **to inherit it**. (Deuteronomy 6:1 LXX-B)

The translation of the Bible in the early church was not the KJV – despite what you may have heard – it was the LXX and the word used in Deuteronomy 6:1 in the LXX for “to inherit” is *kleronomeo* and that is exactly the same word Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 6:9. In Deuteronomy chapters 1-6 Moses is telling the people of God what sort of people can live with God in his kingdom forever. Paul is doing the exact same thing in 1 Corinthians 6. Just for fun, notice that Paul gives a 10 rule summary of righteousness just like Moses did. They are both saying the same thing: People who love and live according to the character of God as expressed in the law will live in God’s kingdom forever. People who don’t love God’s character will be excluded. That is the consistent message of the Bible from cover to cover; Old Testament and New.

Now, turn quickly in your Bibles to Daniel chapter 7. Scholars agree that this is the second Old Testament passage that Paul seems to be referring to in 1 Corinthians 6. Look at Daniel 7:21-22:

²¹ I beheld, and that horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them; ²² until the Ancient of days came, and he gave judgment to the saints of the Most High; and the time came on, and the saints possessed the kingdom. (Daniel 7:21–22 LXX-B)

Here the prophet Daniel sees a day when the Ancient of Days will come and deliver judgment to the Saints and give to them a kingdom as their everlasting possession. That is exactly what Paul has been saying in 1 Corinthians 6! He is saying that we are going to judge the world! He is saying that we are going to inherit the kingdom! Therefore, we ought to be competent to judge petty disputes inside the church and we ought to be willing to forgo immediate personal justice in anticipation of our inheriting all things.

These are the things he expected them to know! He didn't expect them to know 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 – he hadn't written it yet! He expected them to know Deuteronomy 6:1 and Daniel 7:21-22. That's in YOUR BIBLE, he says and you should know that. You should know that in the end, God wins. Yes for a season it seems like evil has the upper hand – Daniel 7 said that:

²¹ I beheld, and that horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them (Daniel 7:21–22 LXX-B)

Yes for a time evil triumphs. Yes, for a time the wrong people appear to be in charge but you should know that in the end GOD WINS! God wins and those who have persevered in faith and trusted in his word inherit the kingdom of God.

Hopefully that helps you position this text in your minds. Think of what we have just done as “mapping” this text within the Bible as a whole. We've just given you the bird's eye view of the text in its Scriptural context but now I want to zoom down to street level and draw two very important implications to your attention.

Street Level Implications:

If we are right in our understanding of this text then, clearly the Bible is teaching that:

1. If we persist in sin, we are destined to be outside the Kingdom of God

That was what Moses was saying in Deuteronomy 6 and that is what Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians 6. I mentioned that Paul provides a representative 10 point list, just like Moses had done. I'll read you Paul's list this time from the NKJV because if you were trying to count a moment ago you may have noticed that the ESV translates two words from the Greek with just one word in the English – though they make mention of that in the footnotes. Here is Paul's list from the NKJV:

⁹Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10. NKJV)

If you persist in any of these things, you give ample evidence that you are not saved and that you are destined to be excluded from the eternal kingdom of God. Now I mentioned off the top that the reason we are going over this passage in such fine detail this morning is because it is so frequently disputed within Evangelicalism and indeed within the culture as a whole. Specifically we need to understand those two words translated here in this version as “homosexuals” and “sodomites”.

The first word translated here as “homosexuals” is the Greek word *mal-ak-os* and it means “effeminate one”, or “the **passive** partner in homosexual sex”. The second word here translated as “sodomite” is the Greek word *ar-sen-ok-oy'-tace* and it means “the **active** partner in homosexual intercourse”. Thus we can see that Paul has both sides of the homosexual sex act in view. Interestingly, it appears that Paul invented this word by combining two words from the LXX translation of Leviticus 18:22. He takes the word *arsenos* which means “man” and *koiten* which means “to bed” or “to lie with” and he makes a new word that linguists say shows up in the Greek language here for the first time; *arsenokoytace*. What that means is, beyond a shadow of a doubt, Paul's understanding of morality was entirely rooted in the Old Testament witness. Many things change as we move from Old Testament to New Testament – everyone acknowledges that – but morality is not one of them. Morality is God's character applied to human life – if God's character is unchanging then morality is unchanging. There is no trajectory

of change within the Bible on the issue of homosexuality, a fact even the educated critics of Christianity acknowledge.

At the risk of being pedantic, let me clarify this even further by providing a rather lengthy quote from a trusted scholarly source. I would normally not do this but it is common to hear, even in our own denomination that the Apostle Paul did not really thought about homosexuality, per se, he was just tossing out a standard vice list to make a point and that he had no real concept of consensual homosexual sex – therefore whatever he said in 1 Corinthians 6 has no contemporary relevance to us today. To be perfectly honest with you, that is pure and unadulterated nonsense. Ask Aristotle if he knew about consensual homosexual sex! These are the sorts of nonsensical tactics adopted by those desperate to make the Bible mean something other than what it plainly means. However convincing these arguments may be to those who want to be convinced, it doesn't take a lot of digging to discover that they are entirely without substance:

Paul's opposition to homosexuality seems to derive from Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, which represent absolute bans. There is a strong case for concluding that with the second word Paul employed a new term which was fashioned on the very basis of the Levitical prohibitions (18:22; 20:13). ... Paul's opposition to homosexuality was not because he had not thought about the subject. Neither is it the whole story to say that he had simply taken it over from a conventional list of vices from Hellenistic authors, whether Jewish or secular (the view of Scroggs). Paul opposed homosexuality because it is marked as a vice in the Torah and was stressed as a vice by Jews.^{1,2}

Paul knew all about homosexuality and he opposed it, on purpose, in all its forms, because it was marked as a vice in the Torah – that is in the Old Testament, the Bible of the early church. To suggest anything else is dishonest and transparently inventive.

The simple message of this passage is that if a person persists in sin – any sin as characterized by this comprehensive, Old Testament suggested summary – they show themselves outside the grace of God and destined to be excluded from his kingdom and from his presence forever. What you persist in, ultimately tells the truth about who you are. If you persist in any of these sins you give evidence that the saving and transforming grace of God is not active in your life!

¹Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 242.

² For those of you familiar with the original or catalysing struggle of CLRA you will note that both those assertions were made by the pastor in question when attempting to dismiss the Apostle's teaching here in 1 Corinthians 6. She said in her sermon that Paul had never thought about homosexuality as such and that he was simply taking over conventional vice lists from other contemporary authors. Such claims cannot stand up to even the most rudimentary investigation.

Now as a pastor I want to stress something very carefully. Paul is not saying that if you ever do any of these things you are destined for hell – no in fact he makes it clear that the people in the Corinthian church have been saved out of just such things – he says “and such were some of you”. Neither is he saying that if as a Christian you continue to struggle with any of these sins you are going to hell, rather he is saying that over time, as we respond to grace, real Christians put to death the sins that once condemned them to death. Over time, by degrees, through continual supplies of the Spirit – Christians grow and change and become practically and experientially free! That is the universal habit of the Gospel – it frees people immediately and progressively EVERY TIME from the grip and hold of sin. If that doesn’t happen – if instead you sit and wallow in your sin, then you show, beyond doubt that you are not saved, you are not changed and you are destined to be excluded from the eternal kingdom of God.

In the end our deeds tell the truth about who we are in Christ. Thankfully, God does not look at snapshots of our life, he evaluates our life as a whole. And thankfully, over time, by one degree of glory to the next – THE GRACE OF GOD WINS.

The second implication I want to draw to your attention comes out of those wonderful words: “and such were some of you.”

Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.¹¹ **And such were some of you.** But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9–11 ESV)

What that seems clearly to mean is that:

2. Everybody has been saved out of something that would have killed them apart from the grace of God

When Paul says: “and such were some of you” he doesn’t mean that some of them weren’t sinners and some were, he means that some people have been saved out of sins such as those he has just listed while others were saved out of other sins he could just as easily have listed.

According to Paul, all people are some kind of sinner:

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23 ESV)

Everyone has been saved out of something that would have killed them apart from the grace of God – even if your something isn't found on this particular list. Having said that, I bet you that everyone here, if they are honest with themselves and if they understand what these words actually mean, can find themselves on that list. Let's read it again:

Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ **And such were some of you.**

Now let me ask you, can you find yourself on that list? Had not God saved you – can you spot the sin which would have dragged you into hell?

Let me define a couple of those words for you. “Sexually immoral” translates the Greek word *pornoi* – I'm guessing you don't need help understanding what that means. It means people doing sex in any way other than that which God has ordained. It is the word from which we get our word “pornography”. If you ever were or if you are ever tempted to do sex that way then that's the thing that would have dragged you to hell apart from the grace of God.

The word “idolaters” refers to a person who is tempted to put something other than God at the centre of his life or affections. It refers to someone who is tempted to love something or someone more than they love God. Remember after all that Jesus said:

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, **he cannot be my disciple.** (Luke 14:26 ESV)

Its hard to believe that's in the bible, isn't it? Let alone the Red Letters. Apparently to be saved you have to love Jesus the most – so much so that every lesser love almost looks like hate in comparison. Anyone in here feel a strong, abiding temptation to love their children more than God? Anyone here struggle to do that which GOD commands as opposed to that which their children demand? Well then, that's the thing that would have dragged you to hell apart from the grace of God. We're just two words in – anyone feel like we haven't got to them yet? I feel double convicted so I feel like we can move on.

This text is NOT targeted at homosexuals. This text is targeted at sinners. I have been hit twice

and we're just two words in. What this text is saying is that certain behaviours – lets call them sins – have no business being associated with the kingdom of God and anyone who persists in them will have no business and inheritance within the kingdom of God. Those who willfully persist in sin give indisputable evidence that they know nothing of the grace of God in Christ.

Now there is one last question that we need to ask of the text because of the contemporary argument swirling around the text. That question is as follows:

Does A Saved Person Struggle With Their Sin After They Are Truly Converted?

This question comes up again when wrestling with the homosexual issue. Suppose a person who is a practicing homosexual is really and truly converted – will they continue to struggle with same sex attraction after they are forgiven by God and filled with the Holy Spirit? That is a very important question. Again, I want to be clear that this question and the answer can be applied to any of the 10 sins mentioned in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 – and in fact to any sins NOT mentioned in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Homosexuality is NOT singled out into a special class unto itself. We could just as easily ask whether a person tempted toward pornography or a person tempted to love their children more than God will still wrestle with those sinful inclinations AFTER they've been converted by the grace of God in Christ.

What we're asking is this: what is the nature of our relationship AFTER we've been converted with the sin that would formerly have condemned us to hell? The answer is the same no matter what that sin is. You should expect a long struggle as against a finally defeated foe. Let me use three words to describe what that struggle looks like:

1. Ongoing

By that I mean that it is not as though we open our eyes from having prayed the sinners' prayer only to discover that our lusts and sinful inclinations have entirely disappeared. Nowhere is that promised in the Bible! If it were then why would Paul tell his people to:

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. (Colossians 3:5 ESV)

He's talking to Christians there – truly saved people – and he tells them that they will have to work with the Spirit to put to death that which has been ultimately defeated by the cross. Our great grand parents used to call this “the mortification of sin”. Mortification means “to put to death”. Our grandparents knew that even as saved people we have to **STICK IT** to the sin remaining in us. We have to **WAGE WAR** against all our sinful inclinations. That is an ongoing battle that every believer has to daily engage in.

Paul does not promise in this passage that after you become a Christian you will no longer wrestle with sinful orientations – he does not say that. Look at what he says:

But you were **washed**, you were **sanctified**, you were **justified** in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:11 ESV)

He is using three words to describe one new reality. He is saying that all the stains from your former sins have been **WASHED AWAY**. That happens immediately when we put saving faith in Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:9 says:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and **to cleanse us** from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9 ESV)

When you become a Christian – **IMMEDIATELY** – the stain of your sins is washed away and no longer represents a barrier to your fellowship with God for all eternity.

Paul says that you are **SANCTIFIED**. The word sanctification is used two ways in the New Testament – often it is used to refer to the slow gradual process of change and growth and often it is used, as here, to refer to our being immediately prepared and suited for the presence of the Lord. Scholars refer to this as positional as opposed to practical sanctification. You are **RIGHT NOW**, because of Christ able to enter boldly into the very presence of God. Hebrews 10 says that too:

¹⁹Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus ... ²²let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19–22 ESV)

Lastly Paul says we are justified. Our catechism students are required to memorize the meaning

of that word – so important is it to our understanding of the Christian faith. Ask our catechism students what it means to be justified and they will tell you that: “Justification is an act of God’s free grace wherein He forgives sinners, declaring them to be righteous.”³ When you become a Christian God takes the list of your former offenses and he subsumes it under the universal acid of Christ’s blood upon the cross. It no longer exists. You are declared innocent and without offense. FOREVER. All that happens IMMEDIATELY upon your confession, repentance and saving faith upon Jesus Christ as Lord.

That is the best news in the world – AND YET – it nowhere promises that you will not have to struggle a little while, yet on this earth, in order to grow into all of what you are. In fact it says that you will. It says that God will leave you here a little while under trial and under the operation of his grace so that you may show your faith and to prepare yourself for eternity.

However, lest you should lose hope or grow weary in this trial, let me give you very quickly two other words that will characterize this trial:

- 2. Perpetual**
- 3. Diminishing**

By perpetual I just mean that to some degree this struggle will continue until you die or the Lord returns. I don’t expect a day to come on this earth when I will not need to crucify my flesh. The Apostle Paul never knew such a day. He said at the end of 1 Corinthians:

I die daily. (1 Corinthians 15:31 NASB)

Paul was still having to die every day to his sin in order to live for Christ. And I expect that I will have to do the same. However, I also expect that my struggle will get easier as the days go by. As I grow in Christ, my desires change. They are bent by His Word and by continual supplies of His Spirit in the direction of my eventual home. Paul spoke of that as well saying:

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV)

³ Faith Foundations, Section 7, Question 4.

This will get easier, over time, by one degree of glory to the next – this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit and this is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God. Let's pray together.