

1. Who will inherit the Kingdom of God?

A sermon preached by Henry Dixon
at Poplar Baptist Church, on "16th July 2017

⁹Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And that is what some of you were. 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)

2. Introduction

These verses deal with a very important question: who is going to go inherit the Kingdom of God? By the term the "Kingdom of God", the Bible means the wonderful Kingdom that Jesus will establish when he comes again. All those who are part of this Kingdom will have wonderful new resurrection bodies. They never experience any suffering ever again. They will have all their needs met. They will live in perfect harmony with all of the rest of God's people, and in harmony with all of creation. They will see God, and know him directly. They will shine in glory.

But the question is, who is going to be a beneficiary of this Kingdom? Who will inherit these blessings? It is absolutely vital that we should be clear on this. If you believe the wrong answer to this question, then you could go through all your life thinking that you are OK and that you are going to inherit these blessings, only to wake up, after you die, in Hades, in terrible pain, waiting for the final judgement. At that judgement all your sins will be revealed, and you will have no way of avoiding the punishment that you deserve for these sins. Jesus will condemn you and send you to everlasting torment in hell.

Before we go much further, let me ask you a question for you to think about. The question is this: What sort of a person do you think you are? Do you think that you are the sort of person who should inherit the Kingdom of God, or do you think that you are the sort of person who should go to hell? Please remember the answer you give to that question, because we will come back to it.

These verses tell us who will NOT inherit the Kingdom of God, and then tell us who WILL inherit it. I plan to think about the verses under these headings:

1. Those who will not inherit the Kingdom of God
2. Those who will inherit the Kingdom of God

3. Those who will not inherit the Kingdom of God

The apostle says, in verses 9 and 10:

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

What is he saying here? Is he saying that all those who have ever committed any of these sins in the past will be excluded from the Kingdom of God? No. He cannot be saying that, because that would exclude from heaven every person who has ever lived, apart from Jesus. We know from the Bible that there is going to be a vast number of people in heaven. Revelation chapter 7 verse 9 says, "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands."

Is he saying that those who, having trusted in Christ to save them, if they ever fall into any of these sins, will lose their salvation and no longer go to heaven, unless they get saved again? No. He cannot be saying that, because that would contradict the clear teaching of Scripture that all those who truly trust in Jesus for their salvation are saved for ever, because of the completed work of Christ. Their sins, past, present and future are fully paid for. It is impossible for them to be condemned for their sin, because Christ was condemned in their place. Moreover, those who truly trust in Christ have been born again. They will not continue in the same lifestyle that they had before. The Holy Spirit in

them will move them to obey God. They will never be perfect in this life, but they will be fundamentally different from what they were before.

So, who is it that the apostle is talking about here in verses 9 and 10? He is talking about those who continue in a lifestyle of sin, without truly repenting of their sin and trusting in Jesus to save them. It is those whose lives are so characterised by sins that those sins define them. They are known as being sexually immoral, or as being idolaters, or adulterers, and so on. These ones who habitually practice sin, he says, will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

The apostle says to his readers, “Do not be deceived.” We see from this that there is a great danger of deception in this matter. It is only too easy to imagine that just because you are religious, or because you try to live a fairly decent life, or because you have had some sort of emotional experience, or because you have you have known God’s goodness in some way, you are therefore OK and going to go to heaven. Many, many people are deceived in this way. But what these verses tell us is that those who continue in sin without turning from that sin and trusting in Jesus to save them will not inherit the Kingdom of God, even if they have been religious in some way, or have known God’s help in this life. We must not be deceived by the devil into thinking that we are right with God when we are not.

The apostle then goes on to give examples of sins, which, if continued in without repentance, will prevent people from entering the Kingdom of God. Let’s consider this list.

1) Sexual immorality

What is sexual immorality? It is having sex with someone to whom you are not married. Sex is a good thing which was created by God to join a man and his wife together. But God has said that sex should **only** take place between a man and his wife. Any other sexual activity outside of marriage is a very serious sin in God’s sight. This applies even if the couple who are having sex are “committed” to each other, and in a “long term relationship”. If they are not married, then sex which takes place between them is sin.

2) Idolatry

Idolatry is the worship of man made gods, which the Bible calls idols. It can take a religious form, like prayer towards a statue of the Buddha, or towards Hindu gods, or towards ancestors, or towards statues of Jesus, or Mary or

“saints”. Islam says that it is opposed to idolatry, yet at the heart of Islam is a stone in Mecca towards which worshippers are required to visit and bow down at least once in their lives. This is idolatry, because it is the worship of something that is created.

Non-religious people also have idols. Their idols are celebrities, football stars, their homes, their careers, their families, their possessions and comforts. Anything that takes the place that God should have in our lives is an idol.

3) Adultery

Adultery is when a married person sleeps with someone who is not his or her spouse, or when an unmarried person sleeps with someone who is married. It is a form of sexual immorality, but it is more serious, because it involves the violation of the covenant, or agreement, of marriage.

It is not just those who physically have sex with those to whom they are not married who are guilty of adultery, however. Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5.27 – 28). Looking at pornography is therefore a form of adultery.

4) The practice of homosexuality

The next two sins that are mentioned are two aspects of homosexual sin. The Greek word for the first term, that is translated “male prostitutes”, refers to men who submit themselves to homosexual acts being done on them by other men, whereas the second term, “homosexual offenders” refers to men who are the dominant party in the practice of homosexual sex.

But the practice of homosexual sex, fantasising about this practice, and homosexual lust are serious sins in God’s sight. They are a form of sexual immorality, but a more serious form, because they involve a perversion of God’s order for sex, which is that a man should unite with a woman in the context of marriage. The same must be said also for the practice of lesbianism, and lesbian lust. There are those who say that they are “proud” to practice this sin. But it is nothing to be proud of. It is something to be deeply ashamed about. People say in defence of their practice that they were born that way. But being born with a sinful tendency does not make that sinful tendency right. Some people were born with a tendency to be violent, and from their earliest days were violent towards others, even as very young children. Does that make it right to be violent? Of course not. Likewise, even if a person

has had homosexual tendencies from a very young age, this does not make it right for those tendencies to be practiced.

5) Stealing

Stealing is taking property which does not belong to you and to which you have no right. It covers robbery, burglary, as well as other sins like stealing by finding. “Stealing by finding” is where you find something that someone has lost, or might have lost, and make no reasonable steps to return it to the owner, but instead keep it for yourself.

6) Greed

Greed is where you are consumed with a desire for more. You are constantly dreaming about the next purchase. Having obtained that, you then want something else.

There are those who say that they are Christians who encourage people to be greedy. They say, “God wants you to prosper. Name the next thing you want, and claim it from God.” But the Bible says,

People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (1 Timothy 6.9 – 10).

Greed is a very serious sin, because it is effectively turning possessions into gods, and loving them in the place of God. It is, in fact, another form of idolatry.

7) Drunkenness

Drunkenness is the misuse of alcohol. Alcohol is a gift created by God, but drinking in excess is sinful because it leads to loss of self-control and many other sins. It is also damages the body of the person who drinks excessively. Misuse of drugs is a form of drunkenness and is also a serious sin in God’s sight. Our world says that the misuse of alcohol is a disease, which it calls “alcoholism”. But the Bible says that being a drunkard is a sin, and the same would be said for being a drug user. You might say, “But I am a slave of my habit”. That is true for many sins. Many are slaves of lying, or of violence. But that does not stop these things from being sins.

8) Slander

Slander is saying untrue things about other people. This is wrong not only because God wants us to be truthful, but because it brings harm to the other person. The other person's reputation is damaged by what is said. The word that is used here also carries with it the idea of arguing fiercely with someone, and saying rude things about him in the context of that argument. Jesus said, "I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment....[and] anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell." (Matthew 5.22)

9) Swindling

This is a subtle form of theft; it includes things like claiming benefits to which one is not entitled, paying less tax than is due, and exaggerating insurance claims.

So the apostle is saying that those who continue in these sins without repentance will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Now, let me come back to that question that I asked you at the beginning of the talk. What sort of a person are you? Are you the sort of person who should be admitted to the Kingdom of God, or are you the sort of person who should be sent to hell? If you answered in your mind, "the sort of person who should be admitted to the Kingdom of God", would you now want to revise that view? You may not be someone who murders others or who robs banks, but are you viewing pornography? Are you greedy? Do you get angry with others and say things that you should not say?

4. Those who will inherit the Kingdom of God

In verse 11 Paul says, "And that is what some of you were. 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."

Some of those to whom he was writing used to have the sort of lifestyle that he had been describing. But something had happened to them. What was it? Was it that they decided that they would improve their lives? Was it that they became to be religious?

No. God did something for them. The apostle says that three things happened to them, by the power of God. They were washed. They were sanctified. They were justified.

Let me explain these terms.

First of all, they were washed. What is this? Is this talking about washing your hands before you pray? No. Is this talking about having been baptised in water? No. This is talking about spiritual washing, when God washes a person inside, by causing him to be born again. God gives this person a new heart, and cleanses him from his old desires. Paul speaks about this also in Titus chapter 3 and verse 5, where he says, speaking to Christians, that God “saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” When a person is born again by the Holy Spirit, his heart is washed clean and renewed. New desires are born in him. He becomes a new creation.

Secondly, he says that they were “sanctified”. What does that mean? To sanctify someone is to make him holy. But what does “holy” mean? The word holy means, literally, “separate”. Someone who is holy has been separated from sin. He is clean and pure in his life. When God works in a person’s life to make him born again, God also makes that person clean and holy in his sight. God treats that person as though he had never sinned. The person is now clean and spotless before him, and regarded by God as without any blemish in his character. The holiness and perfection of Jesus is placed upon that person, and the person is thought of by God as being as pure and holy as Jesus. Moreover, God starts to work in that person’s life so that he starts to become actually sinless in his life. This is a lifelong process, and will not be completed until the person dies and sees the Lord. But the process of becoming perfect starts in this life.

The third term that the apostle uses is “justified”. This is a term that comes from the law court. A person who has been found not guilty of a crime is “justified”. God has declared his people to be “not guilty” in his sight. They are acquitted for their sins, even though their sins have been many. This is a once and for all declaration. Once God has said that a person is “not guilty”, that declaration stands. It can never be rescinded.

So, we see that the person in whom God has worked is made fit, by God, to inherit God’s Kingdom. This is not because of any goodness or merit in the person himself. It is rather because God, in his kindness, has done what is necessary to make that person clean, holy, and not guilty in God’s sight. God has made that person fit to inherit the Kingdom of God.

And the tremendous thing is that the person who is made fit for heaven also lives differently. He will never be perfect in this life, but his life is transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit in his life, so that sins that used dominate him and control him do so no longer. He might from time to time fall into the sins that Paul has listed here, but the dominating power in his life is now the power of God.

How is it that these things have happened? The apostle says that they have happened, for the true Christian, “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” This means that they have come about through the combined work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in the life of that believer.

The work of the Lord Jesus Christ to which the apostle is referring here is his work of dying on the Cross for the sins of those who would believe in him, and rising again from the dead. This is how God is able to justify those who trust in Jesus, without being guilty of denying his justice. Because Jesus was punished for the sins of those who trust in him, God’s justice has been satisfied. No payment for sin is necessary, because the payment has been made in full through what Jesus did on the Cross.

The work of the Holy Spirit to which the apostle refers is the work that the Holy Spirit does inside the believer to make him born again, to grant faith and repentance, and also to strengthen him to live a new life.

Note here how the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are distinguished from each other. They are distinct persons. Jesus is not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not Jesus. Both Jesus and the Holy Spirit are distinct also from God the Father. Yet, although there are three distinct persons spoken of, there is only one God. The term that Christians often use to speak of the fact that God is three persons but only one God is “the Trinity”. The word “trinity” does not occur in the Bible, but the word summarises a teaching that is found in many places, including here.

5. Conclusion

We have learned today who is not going to inherit the Kingdom of God, and who is going to inherit the Kingdom of God. The person who is not going to inherit the Kingdom of God is the person who continues in a lifestyle of sin without repentance, and without having trusted Christ for salvation. Those sins may be very obvious sins like sexual immorality, robbery or violence, or they may be more subtle sins like greed, pride or lust. It makes no difference. The

person who continues in sin without repentance will not inherit the glorious new world that God is going to bring into being.

We have also learned who is going to inherit the Kingdom of God. This is the person in whom God has worked. It is the person who has been washed, sanctified and justified. These three actions have been carried out by the joint operation of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

As we finish, let me put before you this question: What about you? If you were to die today, where would you go? Would you be welcomed into heaven to await the resurrection and glory, and to receive your inheritance, the Kingdom of God? Or would you be sent to Hades to await the final judgement, at which Jesus will say to you, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25.41)?

If you know that you have been saved, then give all the credit to God. Rejoice in his love. If you have not yet been baptised, get baptised, to testify openly of what God has done for you. Live the new life that God has given you the power to live.

If you are not sure that you have been saved, then I urge you to come to God through Jesus Christ. Turn from your sins. Confess your sins to God. Ask him to save you. Ask him to give you eternal life. Ask him to make you born again. Receive from him the gift of eternal life. God promises that everyone who asks will receive his gift.

This booklet contains the edited notes of a sermon which was preached by Henry Dixon. A recording of the actual sermon that was preached may be found at <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=7161735202>

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