

Sermon 20: 1 Corinthians 6:9-11: A New Creation in Christ

OUTLINE

What we once were
What we are now

INTRODUCTION

Christians are people who are saved from sin, not merely those who are forgiven. We are saved from the power of sin not only the guilt of sin. We are to be those who repent, turn away from sin and pursue righteousness. There is a massive disconnect when someone says they are a Christian but is living in sin. This sort of teaching is all over the NT, 1 John 3:7-10, 'Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. ⁸ Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹ No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. ¹⁰ By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.' The portion we come to today in 1 Cor. 6:9-11 says the same thing, 'Or 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, 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.' Sadly there is a disconnect between what the Corinthians are 'saints' and how they are acting 'carnal'. They are not living up to reality of their new identity in Christ. Paul is in the middle of a section where he is confronting them on three fronts, incest; taking each other to court; and prostitutes. It is in this context that Paul speaks these strong words of warning and rebuke. We will be looking at these verses in two parts, v9-10 describe what we once were; and v11 describes what we are.

What we once were

V9, 'Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?' Paul begins with a universal truth: those who are unrighteous will not, cannot, inherit the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God here is a reference to the New Creation that God has for His people at the end of all things. The word inherit reminds us of the OT way in which Israel inherited the land. In the NT it has the added idea of us being adopted by God and having a legal entitlement; it is not earned but inherited. Paul tells us that the unrighteous will not enter into this new creation, they will not inherit it. This is in part because no sinner can enter into God's presence only those who have been justified, only those who are God's children. And also in part because those who are unrighteous must be judged, every sin that is ever committed will be judged by the God of perfect justice. That justice is either paid by Christ dying on the cross; or by us having to bear it ourselves on judgement day. Here Paul reminds us that the human race is divided into two groups, those who inherit God's kingdom and those who don't. Those who don't are called the unrighteous. This is no doubt a description of their lives in relation to the law of God, to the sins that typify their lives; several

of these sins are listed by Paul in these verses. Paul is not saying that here is a list of sins that cause Christians to lose their salvation. No he is saying that those whose lives are typified by these sins are not Christians. Those who are justified cannot be unjustified; those who are adopted cannot be unadopted; those predestined and called and justified, they will be glorified. Nothing can separate the true believer from the love of God in Christ Jesus. This list of sins put forward is not a list of sins that can cause a Christian to break God's salvation, it is a list of sins that we have left behind, it is a list of sins of those if they profess faith should come under church discipline, being put out of the church and called to repentance in order to be truly saved.

V9b-10, '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.' 'Do not be deceived.' These words are used often. We have seen them in 1 John 3:7, and they are used again in Gal. 6:7, 'Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.' Paul is aware of a tendency of the human heart to deny this key truth, that those who live in sin will suffer judgement and not be saved. Too many people who think they are Christians who live in these sins think they will still go to heaven, they are self-deceiving. It appears that they may be some among the Corinthians who are thinking this way, Paul insistently seeks to set them straight. Let us note the sins Paul lists.

Now Paul has curated this list for the Corinthians. This is not an exhaustive list of sins but specific to the sins in Corinth. There is a lot of overlap with the list in 5:11. We can easily see that the sexual sins and idolatry will be typical of the Corinthian context; the thieves and greedy relate to those who are defrauding their brethren by taking them to court; the revilers are probably linked to those causing divisions in the church. This is a fierce warning by Paul to wake up those who have a false sense of security in their sins.

'The sexually immoral'. This has also been translated as 'fornicators.' This can be an umbrella term referring to all sorts of unlawful sexual activity, but given its close proximity to adultery and homosexuality, it is most likely referring to sexual activity outside the bounds of marriage in particular. Sex before marriage; cohabiting without marriage; promiscuity. Paul is upholding the OT sexual ethic here. Our age is so sexualized and what we do with our bodies so individualized that we cannot dream that this would be a serious sin, but it is. Christians are those who recognize that their bodies belong to God; that their sexuality is given by God for a particular purpose, and that it is our job to glorify God with our sexuality. Sexual purity is a mark of those whose lives have been changed. We no longer live driven by our lusts, seeking to find our fulfillment or identity or significance in sexual sin; we are those marked by self-control. The attitudes, the language, the practices, the humour that has grown up around these sins are no longer part of a believer's life. Saving ourselves for marriage is our counter cultural stance.

'Adulterers': I will take the sexual sins together. Adultery is a violation of the 7th commandment. God made marriage to be between one man and one woman; this covenantal relationship is supposed to be until death does us part. Adultery is when one partner of the marriage is unfaithful to their vows with another person. For the Christian adultery extends beyond the mere act. The Christian spouse seeks to keep their hearts and minds committed to their spouse by not even allowing imaginations and thoughts of unfaithfulness to take root in their

hearts. They guard their friendships so that they do not commit emotional adultery. They control what they watch with their eyes. They do not have secret accounts on dating apps.

‘Men who practice homosexuality’: if you look down at the footnote you will see that this phrase stands in for two words related to the two sides of the homosexual relationship. The first word literally means ‘soft’ and was used in the first century context as a contrast to manliness, our word effeminate would capture it well. This word speaks about men who do not try to be men but who give up their manly characteristics. In relation to homosexual activity it is describing those who submit themselves to be used. These two words taken together pour condemnation on all of what this present generation is legalizing and celebrating and legitimizing. Transvestites, crossdressing, identifying not as the man or woman that God made you, all homosexual activity, etc. these two words cover all that ground. Christians no matter their past are those who have left these matters behind them, the identity, the activity, the lies that kept them in bondage. We will return to this matter under our second point because our generation insists that people are born this way; that this is their identity, and becoming a Christian cannot change it.

‘Idolatry.’ Christians are those who have left all false worship behind to worship the true God. The first commandment is that we must have no other gods besides God; the second is that we must not make idols and bow down to them. There is only one God who has made us to worship Him, the Father; the Son and the Holy Spirit; our God who is three in one. To worship any other God; to unite the truth with any false worship is an abomination. God is a jealous God and will not give His glory to another. Corinth was an age where pluralism and tolerance was the common practice. Every town had a pantheon of gods and Rome encouraged tolerance allowing each people to keep their own gods as long as they added some key ones from the Roman pantheon. Many aspects of life were bound up in these religions, Christians put these things behind them, they were even accused of being atheists because they did not acknowledge the gods of the pantheons. We cannot worship God and participate in the worship of other gods in other temples, this is to participate with demons.

‘Thieves;’ ‘greedy;’ ‘swindlers’: Here we have the sins related to money and things. Thieves are those who violate the eighth commandment, instead of enjoying the fruit of their own labour they steal another’s property and another’s work and the fruit they deserve. Christians are those who have given up the laziness that so often led to stealing and commit themselves to hard work that they might have their needs met and be able to give to those in need. Theft is often driven by greed. Greed is called a respectable sin because we all envy the rich and want the comforts and luxuries they enjoy. The rich and the poor can commit the sin of greed, and it can manifest in many ways be it theft; gambling; submitting false receipts; not paying taxes, etc. Christians are those whose hearts no longer serve Mammon but God and have only one master. God is their treasure and they live content accepting what He says we should have not what our sinful desires say we should have. Swindlers is talking about those shady practices where we deceive in order to get money out of people be it email scams; extortion; black mail; selling an overpriced or bad product or service, etc. our integrity and good name as we represent God is more important than making a quick buck.

'Drunkards': drunkenness was a problem in Corinth where people were getting drunk at the Lord's Supper; and it appears that those who wanted a drink would go so far as to participate in idolatrous worship to get some. Paul is not saying that alcohol is sinful but drunkenness. Christians are no longer those who try and escape reality and create a false sense of happiness by chemically inducing it; they are not those who depend upon substances for joy; courage; identity; sleep, etc. Self-control not overindulgence is what marks the life of those who have been saved from sin.

'Revilers': we know that the Corinthian church was full of divisions, Paul is likely linking this war making trait; this neighbor despising trait of reviling; this tongue driven sin which hates those it speaks against and creates divisions to the factionalism that is ripping the Corinthian church apart. Christians are those who have put away this destructive use of the tongue; who no longer hurl hate through lies and gossip and demeaning speech. We no longer view those we may differ with as enemies, but those made in the image of God who are worthy of respect. We are truth tellers who speak in love, who speak to build up not tear down; to reconcile not divide.

Is this you? Do you call yourself a Christian yet are living in these sins or sins like them. Someone who is born again cannot continue to live in these sorts of sins. These things characterize those who are going to be judged but not those changed by God's power.

What we are now

V11, '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.' Feel the power in these words. Look at all those sins, feel how gripping, how addictive, how identity defining they are. Think about the many lives we have seen taken as slaves to these sins, how sticky they are and how easy they are to fall into. Think about how you were once overcome and incapable of freeing yourself. And feel Paul confidence in the gospel as it has the power to change broken sin enslaved lives, 'such were some of you.' If you are a born again Christian this is not what you are any more, you are a new creation in Christ; you have died and been resurrected with Christ; you have been given a heart of flesh in the place of a heart of stone; you have the Holy Spirit living inside your heart enabling change.

Paul uses three key words to describe what God has done to us to make this change, we are washed, sanctified and justified. We see the Trinity active to make us anew as Jesus Christ; the Spirit; and the God of the Spirit are mentioned as the powerful enactors of this change. Changing us where we have failed to change ourselves. Paul is reflecting back at that critical moment when you were made a Christian and broke with your past. Some commentators feel that Paul's language is probably equating this time of change with the time of one's baptism. I think this is correct, the language of 'in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' is a give away. Not to say that baptism saves us, it does not; in the minds of the bible writers it is the historical moment connected to the internal work of salvation by the Spirit. But let us think about these three aspects Paul points us to.

Washed: When we first get saved we are washed, I cannot help but think of Ananias's words to Paul on the day he was baptized, Acts 22:16, 'And now why

do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.' Paul the murderer; Paul the persecutor of the Church; Paul the chief of sinners knows what it means to have your sins washed away. As far as the East is from the West God removes our transgressions from us. God casts the memory of our sin and shame into His forgetfulness. You no longer walk around marked and defined by your past sins, God gives you a clean slate before Him.

Sanctified: we have already spoken about how the word sanctification has one of two meanings in the NT. It can either mean the ongoing process of becoming more and more like Christ, what we call progressive sanctification. But there is also positional sanctification, where the moment you get saved you become a saint. Not because you are suddenly advanced and perfect but because in Christ you have been taken out of the domain of death and sin, you have become a citizen of heaven. You have experienced a breach with your past sins and placed in a new position where with a new heart and the power of the Spirit you can now walk a path of progressive holiness. A saint is what you are, and so holy is how you should walk. The Corinthians are called saints, and now Paul is calling them to live like it.

Justified: this word we know well. This is a new legal standing. Where once you were a condemned criminal righteously prepared for judgement due to your sins. Jesus Christ has taken the death penalty you deserve by dying on the cross; but more than that He has clothed you in His righteousness so that you are now holy in the eyes of God. Your judgement day verdict has been brought forward; the judge has ruled in your favour; and He has declared you to be as holy as someone who gets into heaven on judgement day. This is an irreversible decree; if God the judge has ruled in your favour who can accuse you; who can reopen the case of your guilt against you if God is satisfied that the finished work of Christ is enough.

This is such an important set of truths that Paul is putting before these stumbling saints. Friends you know what it feels like. Sometimes the filth of your past feels like it is stuck to you like superglue. Worse sometimes it feels like no matter what you try and do you are just a pretender and it is only a matter of time before you show your true colours and go back to your vomit. This is one of Satan's greatest lies to keep a Christian from progressing in holiness. He loves nothing more than to hang your sin around your neck the stink of it in your nostrils so that you think it is you who stinks and not your sins. He loves nothing more than to muddy the waters and make the rescuing power of God that is greater than sin seem to weak against your sins. Think of the addictive sins like alcoholism and the ways in which people believe that the gospel cannot release someone who has been addicted to substances. Or think about homosexuality and the lies the world lives by when it says they are born that way and they cannot change and reorganize the desires of their hearts to agree with God. Here is the good news to those sinners who are haunted by a powerful sin defined past. You have been washed; sanctified and justified. You are a new creation in Christ; your relationship to your past has changed; you do have resources now to stop doing those old actions and cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in the place of sin.

Paul does not pretend that the Christian life is not a fight; he does not pretend that sin does not still dwell within us, but He does recognize that the gospel has changed everything and that we can no longer live in sin the way that we used to. Paul is thinking about the sorts of people that are in the Corinthian church perhaps some had been prostitutes and those who practiced homosexuality;

those who were hopeless drunks; some had been womanizers and adulterers; many had been gripped by defining sins and to all of them he gives the hope of change; to all of them the power of the Spirit is spoken of to put space between them and their sins; to all of them victory over sin is true. It is not only certain types of sinners that can leave their past behind. All sorts of sinners can have this hope in the gospel. Now maybe you are here today and you were saved as a young child who was brought up in a Christian home. Well there is good news for you here to. God by His keeping power can strengthen you to resist temptations that try and take you away from Christ in these areas.

Christians are people who have been saved not only from the guilt of sin but the power of sin; we are those who have been so changed by God it cannot but show in a changed life. Are you living out this change? Have you forgotten the power of God to live a holy life? Are you someone who has been self-deceiving thinking you are a Christian but are not? This change is to be evident in every child of God's life.