

*I Corinthians 6:9-11*  
*The way we were and are*

- Paul is quite clear in his letters that we are justified by faith.
- But we frequently find passages in the Bible (even in Paul's letters) that raise questions in our minds about the Gospel of Grace. This is such a passage.
- If you are interested in other similar passages in the Bible and how to understand them look at [apptoteach.org](http://apptoteach.org) theology file #108.
- Take a look at three texts that convey the same message - Gal.5:19-21; Eph.5:5-8; Col.3:5-6; and Heb.12:14-29.

**A. The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God.**

“9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor {the} covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.”

1. **“Inheriting the Kingdom or God”** - The Kingdom of God is an expression found most often in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) where the expression “eternal life” is less common.

- “The Kingdom” is found in John only in 3:3,5. John seems to use “eternal life” to refer to the kingdom of God.
- In Matt.19:16-29 we find the kingdom (vs.24) equated with salvation (vs.25) and eternal life (vs.16, 29). Mark 9:43,47 provide a similar parallel.

2. **The unrighteous defined as those whose lives are characterized as:**

- **“fornicators”** - (PORNOI) refers to any kind of illicit sexual intercourse.
- **“idolaters”** - (EIDOLOLATRIA) literally meaning “to serve idols.” It is not limited to ceremonial service but also may include a lifestyle of following the dictates of anything but God.
- **“adulterers”** - (MOIXOI) Those who have sexual relations with another person's mate.
- **“effeminate”** - (MALAKOI) literally meaning “soft to the touch.” It came to refer to the passive role in a homosexual union. This term and the one that follows are somewhat obscure with the result that they are controversial. Gay activists insist that they refer to male prostitution only and not homosexuality generally.
- **“homosexuals”** - (ARSENOKOITAI) This word probably refers to the active role in a homosexual relationship. Note: Fourteen out of the first fifteen Roman Emperors practiced unnatural vice. The ancient world was riddled with homosexuality. Both Socrates and Plato were involved.
- **“thieves”** - (KLEPTAI) Those who steal. The stealing can be of materials belonging to another or even of the truth or the souls of others that are taken away unlawfully.

- "covetous" - (PLEONEKTAI) literally meaning "a desire to have more." It refers to a person who is never satisfied with what they have.
- "drunkards" - (METHUSOI) those intoxicated with mixed or spiced drink.
- "revilers" - (LOIDOROI) those who verbally abuse others.
- "swindlers" - (HARPAGES) literally meaning to take with force. It can refer to anyone who uses physical, emotional, or social force for personal gain.

### C. How have Christians understood this passage (and others like it)?

1. Only those who live holy lives will go to heaven.
  - a. This seems like the clearest reading of the text.
  - b. It recognizes the context of Chapter 5 where a "so called" believer is behaving badly.
  - c. This is the Roman Catholic position. The Catholic doctrine of purgatory solves the problem of Christian imperfection in this life. But the doctrine of purgatory is not found in the canonical writings of the Bible.
2. We are justified by faith and this passage is an enigma.
  - a. Unfortunately many Christians tend to ignore texts that do not fit their systems of doctrine.
  - b. We do not have to understand every text but we cannot ignore texts that provide serious challenges to our traditions without weakening them.
3. We are justified by faith but must follow through with obedience (sort of).
  - a. This is the most common approach by evangelical Protestants.
  - b. Those from the Reformed tradition (Presbyterians) point out that true faith will always result in a changed life that is free from serious unresolved sins. Unresolved sin is an indication of false faith.
  - c. Those from the holiness traditions (Methodists) point out that if faith is not accompanied by faithfulness, salvation may be lost.
  - d. This position get around the reality of imperfect Christians by making an assumption that the text refers to the intent of the heart not the details of outward behavior. But this assumption must be imported because the text gives no indication that only good intentions are needed.

### D. The context may give us help in understanding Paul's intent.

1. In chapter 5, Paul speaks of sinners within the church. If this context is our guide, we might conclude that true believers must be free from the sins mentioned in 6:9-11 if they expect to see the Kingdom of God.
  - a. The Kingdom of God was often equated with the blessed end of the Gospel promise.

- b. **John 3** “<sup>3</sup> In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” <sup>4</sup> How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!” <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.”
2. If the context is the first eight verses of chapter six Paul may have a different group in mind.
- In this context (6:1-8), the “unrighteous” (vs.1,9) are the unbelievers to whom the Corinthian Christians were turning to judge their civil disputes.
  - Paul is simply saying that those in the world without Christ are yet in their sins and unfit for the Kingdom of God. He is not suggesting that the Corinthian believers could be in this group although they once were.
  - The fact that Paul indicates that some of the Corinthian believers “were” (past tense) like the sinners mentioned is significant. Especially in light of the fact that he had already indicated that they were acting like “mere men” 3:3.
3. Eph.2 provides a helpful balance.

“<sup>5</sup> even when **we were dead** in our transgressions, (God) **made us alive together with Christ** (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with Him, and **seated us with Him in the heavenly {places}, in Christ Jesus**, <sup>7</sup> in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For **by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, {it is} the gift of God;** <sup>9</sup> **not as a result of works, that no one should boast.** <sup>10</sup> **For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**”

### E. There are two types of holiness.

- Experiential holiness** - this is the moral virtue that actually lived out by a person. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the believer.
- Positional holiness** - this is the legal or ceremonial holiness that applies to anything associated with the temple service in the Old Testament.
  - Physical Utensils used in the temple service were ceremonially cleansed by washing or the sprinkling of water. The Levitical Priests were cleansed with the sprinkling of water (Numbers 8) in preparation for service in the temple. The purification ritual had nothing to do with their personal character or moral conduct.
  - Christian baptism is sometimes presented as a parallel ceremony.
  - The language used by Paul in 6:9-11 is the language of “positional truth.”
  - Titus 3:5 “he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,”  
Matt.28:19 “therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,”
  - Distinctives of Positional truth.

1. It is **non-experiential** - it consists of facts about us that may not be felt by us.
2. It is **not progressive** - it is complete and cannot be improved upon.
3. It must be **learned** through teaching - it is known through the revelation of Scripture.
4. It is **acknowledged through faith** - it is accepted only as we believe what the Bible says.
5. It is not related to human merit.
6. It **fully satisfies** the demands of a perfectly holy God.

#### **F. We are challenged to see ourselves as God sees us.**

1. I Cor.1:2 “to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, **saints by calling**, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours;”
2. Matt.6:22-23 “22 The lamp of the body is the eye; **if therefore your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light.** 23 But if your eye is bad your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”
3. II Cor.5:16-17 “Therefore from now on we **recognize no man according to the flesh**; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come.”
4. Ephesians 2 provides an illustration where Paul invites us to see our old life and new life as God sees them.

#### **G. The point**

**How we see out former selves  
and present lives in Christ  
will effect our self image and behavior.**