

1 CORINTHIANS 6:10

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Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 6. In verses 1–8 Paul was focused on the sin of Christians taking each other to civil court. Instead of going before unbelieving judges, we need to find wise people in the church to help us resolve our disputes. That way we can have a good testimony before the world. But in verses 9–10 Paul zoomed out his camera to look at a variety of sins. Look at what he wrote in these verses: “Don’t you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God’s kingdom? Do not be deceived: No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or males who have sex with males, no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit God’s kingdom.”

So we have a long list here of different types of sinners. And Paul started this list by referring to sexually immoral people. The phrase “sexually immoral people” comes from one word in the original Greek. It’s used four times in this letter, and we’ve already seen the first three of them. They’re all found in chapter 5 and verses 9–11. Look at what Paul wrote in these verses: “I wrote to you in a letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. I did not mean the immoral people of this world or the greedy and swindlers or idolaters; otherwise you would have to leave the world. But actually, I wrote you not to associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister and is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or verbally abusive, a drunkard or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person.”

So in these verses Paul gave us two shorter lists of sinners. The first one is in verse 10, and it’s the shortest list. Then the second one is in verse 11, and it includes all the same terms that are in the first list, but it’s a little longer. Now we have a third list that’s even longer here in chapter 6 and verses 9–10. But once again we have all the same terms that are found in the previous list. And one of these terms that’s in all three lists is this Greek word for sexually immoral people. In fact, it comes first in all three lists for emphasis. That’s because Paul started this section at the beginning of chapter 5 by stating that there was sexual immorality among them. Someone in the church was sleeping with his father’s wife. But Paul used a term that can refer to a person who practiced any kind of sexual sin. The Bible teaches clearly that all sexual activity outside of marriage is off limits. God requires us to make a long-term commitment to one person of the opposite gender before we enjoy the pleasures of sexual intimacy.

Then in chapter 6 and verse 9 Paul mentioned a second type of sinner: idolaters. We already saw the Greek word for idolaters in Paul’s first two lists of sinners back in chapter 5 and verses 10–11. And in the second list it comes right after Paul mentioned the greedy. This arrangement is appropriate because Ephesians 5:5 says that a greedy person is an idolater. But in 1 Corinthians 6:9 Paul connected idolatry more closely with sexual immorality. And I think this connection is pointing us to the fact that sexual

immorality took place regularly at the pagan temples in Corinth. But sexual intimacy itself can even become an idol if we're not careful. We should not let this good gift become more important to us than the giver of the gift. So we need to make sure that we're submitting to God in every area of our lives, including our sexuality.

And this leads to the third type of sinner in verse 9: adulterers. This word is a term that we didn't see in the previous two lists of sinners. The Greek word here just refers to someone who is sexually unfaithful to his or her spouse. So adultery is a specific kind of sexual immorality that only married people can commit. We need to be content with our spouse and find sexual satisfaction in that person alone. But if sexual intimacy becomes an idol for us, then sexual immorality will be the natural result, even if we're married. So it's appropriate that Paul listed adulterers right after idolaters in verse 9. If God doesn't come first in our lives, then we're not going to be able to honor him in our marriage, and we'll have great difficulty resisting the temptation to commit adultery.

Then Paul added two more types of sinners at the end of verse 9. They're combined in the Christian Standard Bible with the phrase "males who have sex with males." But this translation has a helpful footnote here that says, "Both passive and active participants in homosexual acts." This footnote is based on two key words in the Greek text that Paul didn't use in his previous two lists of sinners. So the fourth type of sinner in this list is a passive participant in homosexual acts, and the fifth type of sinner is an active participant in homosexual acts. Paul was confronting both sides of the coin with regard to homosexual behavior by men. He certainly didn't approve of female homosexuality, as we can see in Romans 1:26–27. But in 1 Corinthians 6:9 his focus was on condemning male homosexuality because it was more prevalent at that time.

And Paul certainly wasn't coming out of left field here. He was pointing us back to God's laws for the Israelites in the Book of Leviticus. In chapter 18 and verse 22 God said, "You are not to sleep with a man as with a woman; it is detestable." Then in chapter 20 and verse 13 he said, "If a man sleeps with a man as with a woman, they have both committed a detestable act. They must be put to death; their death is their own fault." So God's prohibition against homosexuality under the old covenant still applies to Christians under the new covenant. We're not under the law of Moses as a unit anymore, but many of these laws are part of the law of Christ. They need to be obeyed by all God's people during every era of history.

Now many liberal Bible scholars argue that Scripture only condemns an abusive kind of homosexual relationship in which one person is exploiting the other. But this restriction does not hold up under close scrutiny. When Paul condemned homosexuality in Romans 1:27, he said that men "were inflamed in their lust for one another." So Paul was describing a situation in which two men were lusting for each other. In other words, they both wanted this relationship! It was a consenting relationship, not an abusive relationship. There is no evidence in Scripture that God prohibited only abusive homosexuality. All forms of homosexual behavior are sinful.

But unfortunately more and more conservative Bible scholars are starting to say that there's nothing wrong with homosexual desires as long as we don't act on them. They believe that some people are born

with an orientation toward homosexuality. In other words, these people are romantically attracted to those of the same gender and not to those of the opposite gender. And people who hold this view say that we shouldn't condemn those with this orientation since they were born with it. But the problem with this view is that we're all born with an orientation toward sin in general. It may take different forms for different people, but all of us were naturally inclined to commit a wide variety of sins before we were saved. Yet we were under divine condemnation because of those sinful inclinations! And the same thing is true for anyone who has an inclination toward homosexuality.

You see, the Bible teaches that it's not just sinful behavior that is wrong. The desire to sin is also wrong! Otherwise the last of the Ten Commandments would make no sense. The eighth commandment tells us that stealing is wrong, but the tenth commandment goes further and tells us that coveting is also wrong. The act of stealing is sinful, but so is the desire to steal. That's why Jesus said in Matthew 5:28 that "everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." It's not just the act of adultery that's wrong. It's also the desire to commit adultery. Now certainly sinful behavior is worse than sinful desire. Adultery is what disqualifies a man from church leadership, not lust. But both of them are wrong.

However, we need to understand that there's also a difference between experiencing temptation and giving in to that temptation. It's not wrong to be tempted, because Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus "has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin." But when we're tempted to sin, we need to make sure that we resist that temptation immediately. The longer we entertain that temptation in our hearts, the more we risk giving in to that temptation. As soon as we desire to do the thing that we're being tempted to do, we've fallen into sin. So we must guard our hearts and constantly say no to temptation. That's true not just for temptation to homosexuality but also for every kind of temptation. Colossians 3:5 says that we must put to death what belongs to our earthly nature, and that includes evil desire. And we know that the Holy Spirit lives in us and will help us in this area.

Now let's move on to 1 Corinthians 6:10. We're ready to cover some new material and look at the rest of this list of sinners. The sixth type of sinner that Paul mentioned is thieves. The Greek word for thieves is pronounced *kleptes*. We get our English word "kleptomania" from it. A kleptomaniac is someone who has a strong and persistent desire to steal. This Greek word is used 16 times in the New Testament, and Paul wrote three of them. It's only used here in 1 Corinthians, which means that we didn't see it in Paul's previous lists of sinners in chapter 5. But he did use it twice in 1 Thessalonians 5. In verse 2 he said "that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night." Then in verse 4 he said, "You, brothers and sisters, are not in the dark, for this day to surprise you like a thief." So just like most thieves surprise people when they steal, the Lord's return will surprise unbelievers.

We also see this Greek word used in John 12:6, where it describes Judas Iscariot. In that verse John called him a thief and then said that "he was in charge of the money-bag and would steal part of what was put in it." So a thief is simply someone who steals another person's property, whether it's done by force or by secret. And we know from Scripture that stealing is clearly wrong. It's condemned in the eighth commandment, as I mentioned earlier. In Ephesians 4:28 Paul said, "Let the thief no longer steal. Instead, he

is to do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need.” So in this verse Paul didn’t just condemn stealing. He also told us what to do instead. It’s not good enough to stop stealing and just be lazy. We need to be hard workers and make an honest living. And the reason isn’t that we can spend all the money we earn on ourselves. We need to be ready help people in need, especially fellow believers.

Then in 1 Corinthians 6:10 Paul listed a seventh type of sinner: greedy people. The Greek word for greedy is used four times in the New Testament, and Paul wrote all of them. Three of these occurrences are found in this letter, and we already saw the first two back in chapter 5 and verses 10–11. Paul used this term in his earlier lists of sinners. And in both lists it comes second right after sexual immorality. These two sins are often listed together in Scripture because they’re similar. Both of them involve taking something good and turning it into evil. Sex is a good gift from God, but it becomes evil when we enjoy it outside of marriage. Money is a very useful and beneficial thing to have, but we fall into sin when we become greedy.

In fact, the sin of greed is so dangerous that Paul referred to a greedy person as an idolater in Ephesians 5:5, as I mentioned earlier. That’s a strong statement, but Paul was just following the teaching of Jesus. In Matthew 6:24 Jesus said that we cannot be a slave of both God and money. So if we’re greedy for money, then money is our master, and we’re an idolater. That’s why Jesus said in Luke 12:15 that we need to “watch out and be on guard against all greed.” Now this doesn’t mean that it’s inherently wrong to be wealthy. Being rich isn’t a sin; wanting to be rich is the problem. Having money isn’t wrong; it’s when we love money that we run into trouble. Paul said in 1 Timothy 6:9 that “those who want to be rich fall into temptation.” And then in verse 10 he said that “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”

So we need to keep our lives free from the love of money, as we’re told in Hebrews 13:5. And the writer proceeded in that verse to tell us how to do that. He said, “Be satisfied with what you have, for he himself has said, I will never leave you or abandon you.” So the secret to overcoming greed is to be content. And we can be content with just a little money because we have Jesus. Before he ascended to heaven, he promised his followers that he would be with them always. And that promise still applies to us today! It’s far better to have Jesus than lots of money. One day he’s going to take us to our heavenly home, and we won’t be able to take our money with us. That’s why we should be storing up treasures in heaven, as Jesus said in Matthew 6:20. We should be investing our money in things that will last for eternity.

So in 1 Corinthians 6:10 the sixth and seventh types of sinners are thieves and greedy people. Paul moved from the behavior of stealing to the attitude behind that behavior. The desire for money is what leads people to steal. If we’re going to resist the temptation to steal and become a thief, we need to deal this sin at the root and get rid of greed in our hearts. Then Paul mentioned an eighth type of sinner: drunkards. The Greek word for drunkards is used only twice in the New Testament, and Paul wrote both of them. We already saw the other one back in chapter 5 and verse 11, where Paul gave us his second list of sinners. In that list it’s in the second-to-last position right after the verbally abusive. But in this list Paul switched the order of these two terms and put drunkards right after greedy people. After all, greedy people often use their money to get drunk.

And we certainly see the concept of drunkenness mentioned in some of Paul's other letters. In Galatians 5:21 he included drunkenness among the works of the flesh. In Romans 13:13 he said, "Let us walk with decency, as in the daytime: not in carousing and drunkenness." But the most famous verse that Paul wrote about drunkenness is Ephesians 5:18. In this verse he wrote, "And don't get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless living, but be filled by the Spirit." So there's a contrast here between being drunk with wine and being filled by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives in every Christian, but we hinder the Spirit's sanctifying work in our lives if we get drunk. Paul said in Galatians 5:23 that part of the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. But we lose control of our faculties when we're drunk.

Now this doesn't mean that it's a sin to drink wine in general. We need to maintain a distinction between drinking wine and getting drunk with wine. God allows us to drink wine as long as we don't get drunk. And the strongest proof for this distinction is found in 1 Timothy 5:23. Listen to what Paul said to Timothy in this verse: "Don't continue drinking only water, but use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses." So in this verse Paul actually commanded Timothy to drink a little wine! Paul wouldn't have done that if it was a sin to drink any wine. Now I'm not saying that we all must drink wine; Paul was referring specifically to drinking wine for medicinal purposes. And even today we have alcohol in various medicines. For example, some forms of NyQuil contain 10% alcohol. That's not much lower than the average alcohol content in wine today.

But my point here is that it's not a sin to drink some wine as long as you don't get drunk. When Paul listed the qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3, he said in verse 3 that an elder must not be "an excessive drinker." In other words, an elder needs to avoid getting drunk. And there's a similar qualification for deacons in verse 8 of that chapter. Paul said that a deacon should not be "drinking a lot of wine." But I do think that it's a good idea not to drink any alcoholic beverages at all. That's because these beverages can be pretty addicting. For many people it's very difficult to drink just a little wine. So I personally don't drink any alcoholic beverages as a general rule. The last time I had any wine was when I took communion in Macedonia during a missions trip in 2006.

Now I don't have any regrets about drinking that wine, and I would do it again in a similar situation. I wouldn't abstain from communion in a church that uses wine instead of grape juice. But otherwise I don't drink alcohol beverages because I don't want to risk putting myself in a position in which I could face a strong temptation to get drunk. Besides, it's a lot cheaper to drink water than alcohol beverages! And thankfully we have access to pretty clean water in our country today. But you're not sinning if you drink a little wine, as long as you don't get drunk. You also need to make sure that you follow Paul's instructions in Romans 14. In verse 21 he said, "It is a good thing not to eat meat, or drink wine, or do anything that makes your brother or sister stumble." So you shouldn't drink in the presence of any Christians who believe that it would be wrong for them to drink. We should never do anything that would cause our fellow believers to sin against their conscience.

Then in 1 Corinthians 6:10 Paul listed a ninth type of sinner: verbally abusive people. This phrase comes from one Greek word, and it's used only twice in the New Testament. Paul wrote both of them, and we already saw the other one back in chapter 5 and verse 11, where Paul gave us his second list of sinners. In

that list it comes right before the word “drunkard,” but here Paul put it after drunkards. And I think this order stresses that drunkenness can easily lead to being verbally abusive. If we’re not in control of our body as a whole, then we won’t be in control of our speech. Now our Greek word here can also be translated with the term “revilers.” That’s what we see in the English Standard Version and the Legacy Standard Bible. This word basically refers to people who insult and ridicule others. They’re treating people in a verbally abusive manner.

Now it’s pretty easy to avoid insulting and ridiculing people if they’re being nice to us. But it’s much harder when they’re insulting and ridiculing us. Our natural tendency is to reciprocate and treat them in the same way. But that’s not what Jesus did when he was on the cross. We’re told in 1 Peter 2:23 that “when he was insulted, he did not insult in return.” Instead he prayed these words in Luke 23:34: “Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing.” So whenever people insult and ridicule us, we should follow the example of Jesus. In 1 Peter 3:9 we see that we should not be “paying back evil for evil or insult for insult but, on the contrary, giving a blessing.” And in Luke 6:28 Jesus himself said, “Pray for those who mistreat you.” We should bless them by praying that they would repent and receive God’s free offer of forgiveness.

But sometimes we even struggle to avoid insulting and ridiculing our fellow Christians. That’s what was apparently happening in the Corinthian church. Paul’s reference to verbal abuse seems to point back to chapters 1–4 and the divisions in the church. In chapter 3 and verse 3 Paul said that there was strife among them. They were arguing with each other about their spiritual leaders, and it’s not too hard to imagine them insulting and ridiculing each other during these arguments. But that’s not how we should treat our fellow believers or anyone else. In Colossians 4:6 Paul wrote, “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person.” In Ephesians 4:29 Paul said something similar: “No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear.” So Scripture is clear that we should not be marked by being verbally abusive toward others.

Then in 1 Corinthians 6:10 mentioned a tenth and final kind of sinner: swindlers. The Greek word for swindlers is used five times in the New Testament, and Paul wrote three of them. All three are found in this letter, and we already saw the first two back in chapter 5 and verses 10–11. Paul used this term in both of his earlier lists of sinners. In the first list it comes third right after the greedy. And this arrangement makes sense because greed is the attitude behind swindling people. But in the second list this word comes at the very end, just like we have here in the third list. And I think the reason for this arrangement is that Paul wanted to delay the reference to the swindler for emphasis. In chapter 5 and verse 11 he was preparing us for the beginning of chapter 6 where he focused on believers who were basically swindling each other in civil court. And in chapter 6 and verse 10 he was reminding us about this major problem that he had just addressed.

Now the Greek word for swindlers is also used in Matthew 7 at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. In verse 15 Jesus said, “Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves.” There our word is translated “ravaging.” A ravaging wolf is one that is vi-

cious and causes severe damage. And that's what swindlers do in a financial sense. A swindler is basically a special kind of thief that normally uses dishonesty to defraud and cheat people. And they often do this to people they have some kind of relationship with. For example, about 15 years Bernie Madoff was caught operating the largest Ponzi scheme in history. He persuaded a bunch of people to invest with him, and he ended up defrauding them of about 65 billion dollars.

But this sort of thing is prevalent in religion as well. For years the Roman Catholic Church manipulated people to buy indulgences with the false hope that their punishment for sin could be reduced. Today the Catholic Church is so wealthy that it's estimated to be worth over a trillion dollars. But plenty of Protestant churches are guilty of manipulating people to give them money. Many pastors of charismatic churches preach the prosperity gospel, which promises health and wealth to those who give generously to them. But in large charismatic churches the pastor tends to be very wealthy, while the people are fairly poor. These pastors have expensive clothes, fancy cars, large homes, and private jets. And those things are all paid for by the people they've deceived and manipulated into believing their false gospel and financing their wealthy lifestyle. These pastors are essentially greedy charlatans who swindle people.

Now we might think that we would never do anything like that. But swindling people can happen on a small scale too, and so we need to be constantly on guard against the temptation to deceive people and cheat them out of even a little money. In fact, we need to watch out for all 10 of the sins that Paul listed here in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10. And Paul gave us a strong warning at the end of verse 10 to motivate us. He said that none of these people “will inherit God's kingdom.” Paul used the same phrase at the beginning of verse 9, and so he was surrounding his list of sinners with these bookends. He was warning us that if we practice any of these sins and don't repent, then we will be excluded from God's kingdom. Instead of reigning with Jesus when he comes back to set up his earthly kingdom, we will end up being punished in hell for all eternity.

This is why Paul warned us in verse 9 not to be deceived. If we've made a profession of faith in Jesus, then it's easy for us in our pride to assume that we're saved and on our way to heaven. But if we're living in unrepentant sin, then our profession of faith may not be genuine. In 1 John 2:4 we're told that “the one who says, ‘I have come to know him,’ and yet doesn't keep his commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” So we need to do what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 13:5. We need to examine ourselves to see if we're in the faith. Are we living in regular and habitual obedience to God? Are we behaving as citizens of God's kingdom and serving him faithfully? Are we waiting patiently for Jesus to return and looking forward to the day that he sets up his kingdom? Our goal should be to answer “yes” to all those questions at all times. Let's close in prayer and ask for God's help to live for his glory.