

1 CORINTHIANS 6:9B

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Brad Norman

Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 6. We've now finished looking at the first eight verses of this chapter. In these verses Paul was dealing with the sin of Christians taking each other to civil court. Some of the Corinthian believers were deliberately putting themselves in a position where they would be judged in civil court by unbelievers. But Paul gave a better approach than going to court before the unrighteous. Instead he said that we should go before the saints. In other words, all of us should be willing and ready to help our fellow Christians resolve a dispute using the wisdom that God has given to us. Unbelievers should see us loving each other instead of fighting each other in court. We need to have a good testimony before the world!

Now in verses 1–8 Paul was zooming in with his camera and looking at the particular sin of Christians taking each other to court. But in verse 9 Paul zoomed out to look at a variety of sins. Look at what he wrote in verses 9–10: “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. But before we take a closer look at this list, let’s review Paul’s opening statement in the beginning of verse 9. This statement provides the link between his discussion about lawsuits in verses 1–8 and his list of sinners in verses 9–10. And Paul started by asking a question here that begins with the phrase “don’t you know.”

Now this isn’t the first time that we’ve seen Paul use this phrase. It already showed up in chapter 3 and verse 16 and again in chapter 5 and verse 6. Then we saw it in verses 2–3 of this chapter. And we’re going to see it three more times in this chapter and twice in chapter 9. So it appears a total of 10 times in this letter. But what’s amazing is that Paul used this phrase only once outside 1 Corinthians. So we should be asking ourselves why he used it so many times in this letter. And I think the reason is that he was trying to teach the Corinthian believers a lesson. They thought too highly of themselves and boasted in their knowledge and wisdom. So Paul knocked them off their pedestal and brought them down a few notches. He was showing them that they still had much to learn.

Now this doesn’t mean that the Corinthian believers didn’t have any knowledge about spiritual things. After all, we know from Acts 18:11 that Paul taught the word of God in Corinth for a year and a half. But the problem was that these people often didn’t live in accordance with the knowledge that they had. So I think that the obvious answer to Paul’s question here is yes. The Corinthian believers didn’t have as much knowledge as they thought, but they almost certainly knew what Paul was talking about in this question.

However, they weren't applying this knowledge to their lives. And so Paul had to pause and remind them that the unrighteous will not inherit God's kingdom.

The Greek word for unrighteous just refers to acting in a way that is not right. It's the same noun that we saw back in verse 1. There Paul said, "If any of you has a dispute against another, how dare you take it to court before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?" Paul was talking about the fact that most judges were unbelievers and didn't live in obedience to God. And their unrighteous behavior certainly had an impact on their rulings in court. They would often reach unjust decisions that favored those who were wealthy and prominent in society. But in verses 7–8 Paul used a verb that comes from the same root as this noun. In verse 8 it's translated in the Christian Standard Bible with the word "wrong." To do wrong is basically to treat someone unrighteously. And that's what some of the Corinthian believers were doing to their fellow Christians. They were acting just like those unrighteous judges!

So Paul gave these people a warning in verse 9. He reminded them that the unrighteous will not inherit God's kingdom. Paul made a similar statement in Galatians 5:21, which is the passage where Paul compared the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. And right after he listed the works of the flesh, he said that "those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." But Paul wasn't the first person who talked about inheriting God's kingdom. In Matthew 25:34 Jesus said that one day He will invite us to inherit the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world. Many of you know what it's like to receive an inheritance from your parents. They probably designated in their will that you would receive some money and possessions when they die. But the inheritance that Jesus and Paul were talking about is much better. We're going to inherit the kingdom of God.

The Greek word for kingdom basically refers to a place where people are under someone's rule. And Paul always used this word to refer to God's kingdom and not to a purely human kingdom. But Scripture teaches that there are two basic forms of God's kingdom. The first one is called "the universal kingdom," because this aspect of God's kingdom includes the entire universe. In Psalm 103:19 David wrote, "The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all." So there's a sense in which everyone is in God's kingdom. He's completely sovereign and in control of everything that happens. But we also see a more narrow sense of God's kingdom in Scripture. The second form of God's kingdom is called "the mediatorial kingdom." This phrase refers to the visible rule of God on earth through one or more human mediators. These people are divinely chosen representatives who speak and act for God. And of course the most prominent example of the mediatorial kingdom is the nation of Israel.

Now at first the Israelites didn't have a king, but they always had various human leaders like Moses, Joshua, and Gideon. And eventually they demanded a human king because they wanted to be like the other nations. So God granted their request and appointed Saul to be their king. But Saul failed to obey God, and so God chose David to replace him. And thankfully David was a much better king than Saul. He had a long and successful reign over Israel. And that reign turned into a dynasty in which David's sons continued to rule over at least a portion of Israel. In fact, God made a very special promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:16. He said, "Your house and kingdom will endure before me forever, and your throne will be established forever."

But after a few hundred years, the Israelites became so evil that God sent them away into captivity. Even many of the Davidic kings were wicked during this time. But God did not completely destroy the Israelites or David's family. And he promised through his prophets that one day the kingdom would be restored. Listen to Isaiah 9:6–7: “For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. The dominion will be vast, and its prosperity will never end. He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever.”

This passage is of course talking about Jesus! He's the promised descendant of David who will rule over his kingdom. He already came to save us from our sins, but one day he will return to reign as king over the whole the earth. Revelation 20 tells us that his rule will last for a thousand years. Then after a final rebellion from Satan, Jesus will rule for all eternity. So when Paul and the other New Testament writers referred to God's kingdom, this is what they were talking about. Now many Bible scholars today believe that the Old Testament promises about the kingdom are being fulfilled right now in the church. But what this means is that we have to interpret those promises figuratively instead of literally. And there's really no legitimate justification for taking this approach. We should take those promises at face value. One day Jesus is going to come back and set up his earthly kingdom in Israel, and we're going to reign with him and help him judge the world.

Now it's true that when Jesus came to earth 2,000 years ago, he said in Mark 1:15 that the kingdom of God had come near. Many Bible scholars interpret this statement to mean that the kingdom had arrived. But his point was simply that the king was among them and was offering to set up his earthly kingdom. And of course the Israelites rejected their king and crucified him, so the kingdom was not set up at that time. But these events were part of God's plan to save us from our sins. And when God saved us, he did indeed make us citizens of his kingdom. In Colossians 1:13 Paul said that God “has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.” But this statement doesn't mean that we're actually living in the kingdom right now. Jesus taught clearly in Matthew 6:10 that we should pray for God's kingdom to come. In other words, it hadn't been set up at that time, and it still hasn't arrived yet today! It's part of our future inheritance.

But we shouldn't just assume that everyone who makes a profession of faith is a genuine Christian. We need to watch people's lives and look for either the works of the flesh or the fruit of the Spirit. And if they're behaving unrighteously like some of the people in the Corinthian church, then we should conclude that they're not going to inherit God's kingdom. So Paul was giving the Christians in Corinth a strong warning here. If they continued to do unrighteous things like cheating each other and taking each other to court, then they were in danger of being excluded from God's kingdom. Instead of reigning with Jesus, they would be punished in hell for all eternity.

So let's move on to some new material and take a closer look at Paul's list of sins in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10. It's a pretty long list, so today we'll just look at the first few types of sinners in verse 9. But before Paul begin his list, notice that he said, “Do not be deceived.” The Greek word for deceived basically means “to go

astray.” In 1 Peter 2:25 the apostle Peter said that before we were saved, we “were like sheep going astray.” But this word can also be used to talk about going astray mentally instead of physically. And so the idea is that we’re deceived. Unfortunately people are easily deceived into believing things that aren’t true. This happens all the time today, and it’s been going on for thousands of years. It started in the Garden of Eden when the serpent deceived Eve into eating the forbidden fruit. We even have a famous saying now that if you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.

But as Christians we have the Spirit of truth living in us, and so we have the ability to distinguish truth from error. That’s why Scripture tells us over and over not to be deceived. Listen to James 1:16–17: “Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” In Galatians 6:7 Paul said, “Don’t be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a person sows he will also reap.” In 1 Corinthians Paul actually gave two commands not to be deceived. The second one is found in chapter 15 and verse 33, where Paul said, “Don’t be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals.’”

But in chapter 6 and verse 9 Paul’s focus was on how the Corinthian believers were in danger of being deceived about their spiritual state. Their church was full of problems, and some of these people were living in unrepentant sin. But in their pride they assumed that they were saved even though they were behaving unrighteously. And so Paul warned them not to be deceived. He basically wanted them to examine themselves to see if they were in the faith. That’s what he later told them to do in 2 Corinthians 13:5. And he was helping them to do that here by giving them a list of sins. If they were practicing any of these sins, then they wouldn’t inherit God’s kingdom.

Paul started his list of sinners by referring to sexually immoral people. The phrase “sexually immoral people” comes from one word in the original Greek. It’s used 10 times in the New Testament, and Paul wrote six of them. But four of those occurrences are found in 1 Corinthians, 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 you can see that Paul already gave us two shorter lists of sinners in chapter 5. 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’re going to see 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. We need to remember that the section we’re in starts at the beginning of chapter 5. Look at what Paul wrote in verse 1 of this chapter: “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and the kind of sexual immorality that is not even tolerated among the Gentiles—a man is sleeping with his father’s wife.”

So in this verse Paul used a Greek word that comes from the same root as the one that we see at the beginning of his three lists of sinners. In chapter 5 and verse 1 the word is pronounced *porneia*, and it refers to the act of sexual immorality. But in the three lists Paul used the word *pornos*, which refers to a person who commits sexual immorality. So it's pretty clear that when Paul wrote these three lists of sinners, he was pointing back to the sin that he mentioned earlier at the beginning of chapter 5. There he was talking about the sin of incest, but he used a term that can refer to a person who practiced any kind of sexual sin, whether it's adultery, prostitution, incest, or homosexuality.

You see, the Bible teaches clearly that any sexual activity outside of marriage is off limits. Listen to Hebrews 13:4: "Marriage is to be honored by all and the marriage bed kept undefiled, because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers." The Greek word for sexually immoral there is the same one that Paul used at the beginning of his three lists of sinners in 1 Corinthians 5–6. So this verse talks about the need for everyone to honor marriage. That's basically the opposite of what's happening today! Marriage is being redefined right before our very eyes. But Scripture teaches that marriage is a covenant between one man and one woman to be lifelong companions. God requires us to make a long-term commitment to one person of the opposite gender before we enjoy the pleasures of sexual intimacy.

But if we don't honor marriage and defile the marriage bed instead, then we're going to find ourselves under divine judgment. This verse says that God will judge the sexually immoral. In other words, those who practice sexual immorality and don't repent will experience the wrath of God for all eternity in hell. We see this same truth taught at the end of the Bible. Revelation 21:8 says that "the cowards, faithless, detestable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars—their share will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death." So Scripture warns us quite bluntly that there are very serious consequences for engaging in sexual immorality. And that's basically what Paul was talking about when he gave his list of sinners in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10.

So let's return to that list and look at the second type of sinner: idolaters. The Greek word for idolaters is used seven times in the New Testament, and Paul wrote five of them. Four of these occurrences are found in this letter. We've already seen the first two back in chapter 5 and verses 10–11 where Paul gave us his first two lists of sinners. In the first list this word comes at the end of the list after Paul mentioned the greedy and the swindlers. But in the second list this word comes third right after Paul mentioned the greedy. And this arrangement is appropriate because of what Paul wrote elsewhere. In Colossians 3:5 he said that greed is idolatry, and in Ephesians 5:5 he said that a greedy person is an idolater. Paul was warning us about the great spiritual danger that comes from wanting to be rich. In 1 Timothy 6:10 he said that "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

But in 1 Corinthians 6:9 Paul was not thinking primarily about greed when he mentioned idolatry. After all, he didn't mention greedy people in this list until verse 10. Instead he connected idolatry more closely with sexual immorality. And later in this letter Paul elaborated on this connection. The fourth and final place in this letter where Paul used the Greek word for idolater is found in chapter 10 and verse 7. In this chapter Paul was reflecting on how the Israelites behaved when they were in the wilderness. In verse 5 he

said that “God was not pleased with most of them, since they were struck down in the wilderness.” In verse 6 Paul said that “these things took place as examples for us, so that we will not desire evil things as they did.”

Then in verse 7 we start to see some of their wicked actions. Look at what Paul wrote here: “Don’t become idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to party.” Paul was quoting from Exodus 32:6 here. In the beginning of this chapter the Israelites convinced Aaron to make a golden calf for them to worship. And once this idol was constructed, they had a celebration. They sat down to eat and drink, and they got up to party. Now we tend to think of eating and drinking as being included in a party, but the word “party” here is being used in a more specific sense. We learn from Exodus 32:18–19 that Moses heard the sound of singing and saw the people dancing when he descended Mount Sinai with the stone tablets.

But it’s likely that this dancing was sensual in nature and led to sexual immorality. After all, this is the subject that Paul addressed next in 1 Corinthians 10. Look at what he wrote in verse 8: “Let us not commit sexual immorality as some of them did, and in a single day twenty-three thousand people died.” Now Paul was referring here to Numbers 25 and not to Exodus 32. But in Numbers 25 the sexual immorality was connected to worshipping Baal of Peor. And so it’s clear that there is sometimes a connection between idolatry and sexual immorality. That was certainly the case in the city of Corinth. When we study the historical background of this city, we learn that sexual immorality took place regularly at the pagan temples.

But sexual intimacy itself can even become an idol if we’re not careful. Just like we can crave money, we can also crave sex. Now it’s not wrong to have money and enjoy sex. Money can be used to do a lot of good in the world. We can bless people who are in need and support the spread of the gospel. And sexual intimacy is a good gift from God that we should enjoy if we’re married. But nothing should ever take the place of God in our lives. That’s why the apostle John ended his first letter in chapter 5 and verse 21 by saying, “Little children, guard yourselves from idols.” And sexual pleasure can easily become one of these idols. But there’s nothing on earth that we should desire more than God. We should strive to obey him in every area of our lives. And if we want to please him in our marriage, then we need to love our spouse more than ourselves. We should be focused more on our spouse’s sexual pleasure than our own.

So in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 Paul warned us against a variety of sins. He started with sexual immorality and idolatry. And then he added a third type of sinner: adulterers. This word is a term that we didn’t see in the previous two lists. The Greek word here is used only three times in the New Testament, and this is the only one that Paul wrote. It 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. Adultery takes place when a married person has sexual intimacy with anyone besides his or her spouse. The only person we should be having sex with is someone of the opposite gender to whom we have made a lifelong commitment. We need to be content with our spouse and find sexual satisfaction in that person alone.

But if sex becomes an idol for us, then even if we’re married, sexual immorality will be the natural result. 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. But we need to understand that adultery doesn't just happen out of the blue. It starts in the heart, just like every other sin. In Matthew 15:19 Jesus said that "from the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, slander." Jesus even singled out the root of adultery for special attention in Matthew 5. Listen to what he said in verses 27–28: "You have heard that it was said, Do not commit adultery. But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

So adultery starts with looking lustfully at someone who isn't your spouse. That's what Potiphar's wife did in Genesis 39. Verse 7 says that she "looked longingly at Joseph and said, 'Sleep with me.'" It was after she looked at him with desire that she tried to commit adultery with him. So we need to follow Solomon's advice in Proverbs 4. In verse 23 he said, "Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life." Then in verse 25 he said, "Let your eyes look forward; fix your gaze straight ahead." In other words, we need to resist the lust of the eyes, as the apostle John warned us in 1 John 2:16. If we're going to steer clear of adultery, we need to start in the heart and engage in battle there against temptation. Let's close in prayer and ask for God's help to do that.