

In the last couple of weeks we've seen how Paul has addressed sexual immorality in the midst of the Corinthian church and how people in that group brought lawsuits against one another over matters that apparently had nothing to do with criminal behavior, but things which should have been dealt with among themselves instead of parading such issues before the civil courts of the unrighteous.

But the attitudes of some of these people have actually gone beyond defending themselves from those who would defraud or wrong them. They now are taking the eye for eye and tooth for tooth attitude as they return evil for evil.

1CO 6:8 "Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers."

The sinful attitudes here seem to be compounded by turning away from God in these matters and taking the carnal way as their solution. And what Paul is about to do is to bring into focus how a pattern of unrestrained sin is indicative of a life which is not under the control of God. And such an attitude toward sin cannot give a person any assurance of salvation if persisted in.

1CO 6:9-10 "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 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."

Paul begins with another rhetorical question. "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?"

The implied answer is, yes, we know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God. But why would you ask believers such a question if they have been assured that they will be part of the kingdom of God through faith in Christ?

For the same reason that Paul could encourage the Philippians to consider that their salvation is a salvation which is not to be taken lightly in the way they pursue the life they've been given in Christ.

PHI 2:12-13 "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed - not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence -continue to work out your salvation with fear and

trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."

If we are not acting according to God's good purpose then one of two things is happening. We are either walking in a carnal way, which should tip others off that we need to be approached and encouraged to repent and seek Christ as we get back on the path of righteousness, or we are actually not a believer who needs to be approached and encouraged to repent and seek Christ for the forgiveness of our sins.

In other words, we need to be evaluating the way in which we live for the Lord. It's not enough to simply consider a time in the past when we made a profession of faith in Christ. It's not enough to put all of our hope in walking down an aisle as they sang one more refrain of "Just as I am."

Paul is saying that if there is no fruit with your profession then you need to consider if you are actually alive in Christ. If you are, then there will be a sense of grief over your sin and hopefully sooner than later you will turn back and begin to serve God and bear fruit to the glory of God.

However, if your pattern of sinful behavior is one where there is no sense of guilt and grief then there is a very good chance that whatever profession you made, or however long that walk down to the front was, you didn't truly embrace Christ as Lord and Savior.

And to the shame of these Christians in Corinth Paul is saying that you might profess Christ, but your behavior is showing that you are acting like unbelievers. Paul's asking, 'Which is it?'

If you think that you can pursue sin without regard for the consequences then you need to wake up and not be deceived. The wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God. Is this meant to scare someone back to Christ if they truly know Him? Absolutely! Is this meant to scare someone into truly seeking Christ and His forgiveness? Absolutely!

Paul is not playing some theological game here. He doesn't want anyone to have a false hope in some sort of fire insurance from hell where because you signed a profession of faith card that now you can do whatever you want.

If that's the attitude of a person then this shows that person never truly understood forgiveness or the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The wicked look for a way to get around their

responsibilities. The wicked deceive themselves into thinking that they've got the magic bullet for all of their problems, and it's in themselves.

By the way, the word wicked, as the NIV uses it here in verse 9 of our text, is also translated unrighteous in both the KJV and the NASB. The word wicked carries with it the idea of people who are nasty and inconsiderate and just down right bad. And though that could certainly be part of the definition of wicked, the word unrighteous is probably closer to the original Greek.

The word in the Greek is *adikos*, and it's descriptive of one who violates or has violated justice. And though it might include the idea of wickedness as we understand it, it would also include any violation of just laws. And so, there should be no false hope for those who see themselves as anything but wicked and nasty.

Anyone who pursues a life without Christ is unrighteous whether you're a murderer or a thief or not. All unrighteousness is considered wicked and will be dealt with in a just way by our God who is just and holy. The penalty for sin is death, whether you're a Hitler or a mild mannered reporter who goes around helping people, but who doesn't know Christ.

In our context Paul is making it clear that the type of sin being demonstrated in Corinth is of such a type that even the world might consider it wicked. And as long as these people practice such sin they do not have the assurance of their salvation until their lives begin conforming to the kind of righteousness they claim to possess because of the righteousness of Christ put to their account by faith.

Now, this is not to suggest that a true believer can lose his or her salvation. Once we have been purchased by the blood of Christ and have placed our faith in His atoning work on the cross, we have been sealed for the day of redemption. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

But, if on the same note we can have this understanding and still pursue a life of unrighteousness, then we must consider if we have been deceived in a false hope by simply intellectually acknowledging the truth of our sin and the work of Christ on the cross.

We're told that faith without works is dead. If the only works we have are of the wicked or unrighteous type then we have been

deceived into thinking that sin is okay, now that we've been saved. Paul says, there is no assurance of your salvation when you are in that state. And now he is about to spell it out for these Christians in Corinth.

1CO 6:9-10 "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 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."

What Paul is not talking about here are Christians who may find themselves falling into such sin and then being grieved over it and turning from it. What he is talking about here are those whose pattern of life is dominated by such sin.

Such people will not inherit the kingdom of God if they persist to the end in such sin as they reject Christ, is what Paul implies. Does this mean that such people cannot come to Christ and receive forgiveness? Of course not. All who call on the name of the Lord and repent of their sin seeking forgiveness in Christ will find it. But these people in verses 9 and 10 are not looking for that.

And if any of those in Corinth whose attitude is the same they are also deceived and will not inherit the kingdom of God until they come to Christ and truly seek Him for forgiveness of their sin.

And along with that they will find that their perspective on sin has changed to the degree that it now grieves them when they move in that direction because the Spirit of God who resides in every true believer will grieve over such sin and move them to see their sin and turn back to the Lord for forgiveness.

But, look at the list of sins that Paul gives here in these two verses: "The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexual offenders, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, slanderers and swindlers..."

This looks like a "who's who" of the dregs of the world. But keep in mind that Paul is trying to drive home a point here for this church by showing them what they should not look like after they've embraced the risen Christ by faith.

These types of sins were indicative of what was happening in Corinth with those outside of the church. The first five are of the type that are sexual in nature. Remember, that the city of Corinth was the epitome of sexual sin. It was in Corinth that the temple of

Aphrodite was located. This temple had prostitutes who were part of their religious system.

It's one thing to have prostitution, but to disguise it as a religion only heightened the sin to where people could actually justify their sin by making it look like they were pleasing the gods in participating in this practice. In fact, one writer points out that there were a thousand prostitutes at the temple of Aphrodite alone.

You wouldn't need that number unless there was a booming business in Corinth. And in fact there was with more than a dozen such temples with prostitutes. The Greeks had coined the term *korinthia-zesthai* which literally means "to live a Corinthian life." (Kistemaker)

This is what surrounded this church in Corinth. But, Paul says, the sexually immoral will not inherit the kingdom of God. This could include all sorts of sexual sin, but primarily deals with those who are unmarried having relations with other people, as opposed to adultery which deals with a married person having relations with others as they break their vows of marriage.

What's interesting in this list is the second one mentioned. It's idolatry. How does this fit in with a list of sexual sins? Unfortunately very well. Aphrodite was the goddess of love, or maybe lust would be a better description. And in that case the very act of sexuality became a way of satisfying not only the physical desires, but also gave a sense of honoring the goddess.

But, even today, sexual misconduct can be a god or an idol as it becomes the chief end of man. It is often pursued with religious zeal as it is seen on T.V., or in the movies as something which is not to be judged, but elevated to a height of normalcy and therefore to be overlooked as something which is not abhorrent to God.

If you don't think that sexual misconduct hasn't become an idol in this country, then you need only look to the attitude of many people who didn't seem to give it a second thought as to accepting what Clinton did was okay.

The cry went out from Washington and the media; what we do in our private lives is none of your business. And in fact, it's a noble thing to do whatever we please, as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else. Never mind that this misconduct went on at the workplace in the capital while the President was at work.

Never mind that the other person involved was an employee of sorts, working as well, in the White House and was a 21 year old young woman who was not discouraged by the President from making advances. But the spin was to make it look like they were both consenting adults which made everything just fine, and none of our business.

Sexuality of any type has been elevated to idolatry as the young people in this country, for example, are sacrificed on the altars of safe sex and sex education while we throw them condoms and encourage them not to tell their parents if those condoms don't work. Just as they use them and throw them out, you can do the same with people you want to use and discard.

It may not be pleasant to talk about or even listen to, but Paul has no problem calling it what it is; idolatry and fornication. And those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

He also raises the issue of homosexuality as is inferred from two descriptions the NIV translates as male prostitutes and homosexual offenders. Other translations would put it as effeminate and homosexuals.

The word for effeminate or male prostitutes is a Greek word which means soft, soft to the touch. And it implies "those who have lost their manhood and live for the luxuries of [life]. It describes what we can only call a kind of wallowing in luxury in which a man has lost all resistance to pleasure." (William Barclay)

And this would infer that such a man has become passive to any pleasure even that of being taken advantage of by a predator. That's why the NIV uses the term male prostitute. It's a man who has relinquished himself to the pleasures of another.

The one he relinquishes himself to would be the second term which is homosexual. It's a term which simply means to lay with another man as with a woman. Again, keep in mind that this was normal and accepted behavior in Corinth. And there were both male and female prostitutes in these different temples.

It's not unlike what we see today being taught in our public schools where sexual education classes actually teach that homosexuality is normal and should not be looked down on as anything but an alternative lifestyle which should not be judged as bad.

There are many corporations today that require classes for their employees on sensitivity to the sexual preferences of others. And if you don't think that homosexuality is to be viewed as normal, just tune into a program like Geraldo Rivera and watch someone make the comment that homosexuality is sin according to God's word, and see how fast such a person is labeled a "homophobe."

Black has become white, good has become bad. Everything has been turned on its head so that sin might appear as anything but sinful. This is mankind's attempt to take God out of the picture and convince others that as long as we all agree that sin is acceptable, then we can go about worshipping the creature rather than the creator.

Now, the last few sins which Paul deals with covers those areas which would certainly involve the taking of possessions from others and possibly hurting others; thieves, the greedy, drunkards, slanderers, swindlers, all of whom will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Again, keep in mind that Paul is trying to make an impression on the church there in Corinth to consider the life they've been given in Christ and the influences that come from both outside and inside the church so as to be conformed to the ways of the world.

It's not impossible for Christians to be tempted to be greedy or to resort to thievery. But this kind of behavior is not to characterize the believer and in fact should be the type of behavior which should be avoided.

There is a movement which, over the last 30 or 40 years, has taken certain types of sins and turned them into diseases. Thievery for example has been turned into kleptomania. Drunkenness has been turned into the disease of alcoholism. I even did an interview with a Christian a number of years ago who wrote a book on sexual addiction.

This is one way in which the world can excuse sin and make themselves feel like victims in the process. The problem with these attitudes is that sin is sin, it's not a disease in the same sense as the flu is a disease or cancer is a disease. It may be loosely considered a spiritual disease, but in that case there is only a spiritual solution, which is found in the forgiveness of sin through Christ's shed blood.

In fact, if sexual misconduct, or thievery or drunkenness, for example, are really diseases like we find in the bible; (leprosy comes to mind), then God is a most cruel God for punishing these people who cannot help what happens to them.

But, if these behavioral problems are in fact sins which can be forgiven, then God is most gracious and merciful. To label a person who is a sinner as one who has a disease, is to misdiagnose the problem which most certainly means the solution to the problem will be missed as well.

To take a drunkard and only put him through some 12 step program and then label that person an alcoholic the rest of his life, with no hope of deliverance from such a label, is to give him or her a feeble solution at best and only the hope that such a disease is in remission.

The word of God, however, tells us that we are new creations in Christ and that sin can not only be forgiven, but we can have the power over sin so that it no longer has dominion over us. That doesn't mean for example that if we have had a problem with any particular type of sin that we can then place ourselves back in its path and not find ourselves being drawn back to it.

Someone who had a problem with pornography can certainly be forgiven of that sin and can have the power over it in the power of the Holy Spirit. But it certainly wouldn't be prudent to continue subscribing to Playboy or Hustler.

The same is true of a drunkard. Once they are forgiven in Christ and have had time to dry out, (and just let me add that alcohol can certainly be addictive from a physiological stand-point), then they have the power, in the Spirit, to stay sober. But to go to the bars to witness to all of your old drinking buddies is probably not very wise.

Praise God drunkenness and sexual sins and other types of behavioral problems, where sinful choices are made, are not diseases, but patterns of sin which can not only be forgiven but also overcome in Christ, so that they no longer are a pattern of sinful behavior in our lives. This is why Paul continues in our text.

1CO 6:11 "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."

What sobering words these must have been to these Corinthian believers. Not only should they have been cut to the quick because of their own slipping back into some of these sins, but to know that God has delivered them from such sin and that they don't have to go back, nor be labeled for the rest of their lives as any particular type of sinner, but as children of the Most High God forgiven in Christ.

If we carry any label, that should be it. Children of God redeemed by the blood of Christ who has risen from the dead and given us a resurrection life in the power of the Spirit to follow our Lord and to be conformed into His image.

Not the image of this world which wants to label itself with every disease imaginable, which is nothing more than a disguise for their unwillingness to submit to Christ and find forgiveness.

Yes, sin was a real part of our lives outside of Christ. And yes, we were identified with this world. But that is what some of us were, past tense. And part of what Paul is implying in our text is that some of these people were sexually immoral, some of these people were idolaters.

Some of them were in extra-marital affairs and were therefore adulterers. And yes, it was certainly possible that some of them were male prostitutes or homosexual offenders, along with being thieves or greedy or drunkards or slanderers or swindlers. And at the time, if they had died in their sin without Christ, they would not have inherited the kingdom of God. They would have been lost forever.

That's the kind fruit that will kill. And Paul gives a similar list when writing to the church in Galatia

GAL 5:19-21 "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissension's, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."

He's talking about a pattern of sin which does not consider God, but only self.

And yet, we see the grace of God at work in the lives of people. We may not be saved by good works, but one of the fruits of being saved is to have our lives transformed from darkness to light, not

only positionally before God, but also experientially as we go from practicing sinners, with no regard for God or others, to those whose lives are now directed by the Spirit of God.

Instead of showing the fruit of this world, the fruit which is growing in our lives is now being produced by God as we submit to Him. Paul shares with the Galatians what this fruit should look like.

GAL 5:22-25 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

Paul wants these Corinthian believers to consider these two types of fruit in their lives and determine what fruit dominates their lives. If it's the fruit of this world then they should not be deceived into thinking that if they continue in such sin, without any regard for how it grieves God, that they have a part of His kingdom of righteousness. They don't, according to God's word.

If however, these stinging words humble them and help them reevaluate their behavior, then they will be compelled to run back to a forgiving God who loves them with an everlasting love and the Spirit He has placed in us will draw us back and we will never be lost.

All of us will mess up. None of us have arrived to where we can say we have no sin. In fact, the apostle John addresses this in his first epistle.

1JO 1:8-10 "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives."

Don't think you can fake God out. If you've sinned admit it and come humbly before God and those you've sinned against and ask for forgiveness. And know this with certainty, that God does forgive and He restores us to fellowship and then enables us to go forward. I love the way John puts it in this same epistle.

1JO2:1-3 "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the

Father in our defense - Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2 He is the one who turns aside God's wrath, taking away our sins, and not only ours but also the sins of the whole world. 3 We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands."

May we always be sensitive to the Spirit's leading and may we appreciate our salvation in such a way that we never use it as an excuse to continue to sin.

ROM 6:1-4 "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

Next week I want to spend some time dealing with the last part of verse 11 of our text, "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."

Until then, let's meditate this week on the reality of where we stand with the Lord and how that should affect our daily walk with Christ.

1JO 1:6-7,9 "If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."