

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, church. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 6, verses 9 to 11. We're doing a series this year through this whole book, one of Paul's most lengthy epistles.

And this morning we are at chapter 6, starting at verse 9. As a parent raising kids and living in downtown New Haven, I find myself constantly warning my kids about potential dangers. When they were a bit younger, it was simple things like, when we're walking to our car, don't cross the parking lot unless we're with you. Or when we come to a crosswalk, don't walk into the street unless you're holding an adult's hand.

When you're climbing the tree near our front door, don't climb higher than you can climb down without help. When we're at the playground, don't pick up random pieces of trash, because you really never know what they're going to be.

Now, after reinforcing all these warnings, what feels like hundreds of times over, our kids are now 5 and 3, and we can take a walk around downtown without fear of grave danger. But along the way, we've had the occasional scare when our kids have disregarded our warnings.

[1 : 1 7] One day my wife was home alone. She gave me permission to share this story, by the way. And she was changing our daughter's diaper, who had just woken up for a nap upstairs. Our 2-year-old son was playing downstairs, and for some reason, he decided to open the front door, which he had just learned to do.

And not only did he walk out onto our front porch and onto the grass, but he walked down the walkway and toward the street. And when my wife realized what had happened and found him just a moment later, he said, Mommy, I saw a bus go by.

Well, let us say that was both an occasion for a stern warning and some strong comfort. And it hasn't, nothing like that has happened again.

Well, the Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians, he describes himself in chapter 4 as a spiritual father who is writing to admonish his beloved children in the church at Corinth.

And so he begins with today with a word of warning, but he ends with a word of encouragement. So let me read this passage to us, 1 Corinthians 6, 9 through 11. Paul says, Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?

[2 : 3 1] Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

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.

This passage begins with a very strong warning. Paul says, Do you not know? Paul uses this phrase a few times in his letter. Chapter 3, verse 16.

And several times in chapter 5 and 6. Most likely referring to basic Christian teachings that he had personally communicated to them during his visit to Corinth.

Just a couple of years before he wrote this letter. And he says, Do not be deceived. In other words, this should be obvious to you, but I know you are prone to forget or think that you know better.

[3 : 4 0] Don't be deceived. And twice he repeats himself, The unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. Now you might wonder what motivated Paul to issue such a strong warning.

Was Paul an angry religious traditionalist, venting his frustrations about all the sinful practices of godless Corinth? Well, no.

That's not Paul's motivation here. Paul certainly had his concerns about and criticisms of Corinthian culture. But Paul was not writing an open letter to the Corinthian parliament.

Or to the city of Corinth as a whole. Paul was writing first and foremost to the Christian church. And Paul's burning concern was that the Corinthian church was falling into, or perhaps running headlong into, the self-promoting, self-indulgent, and ultimately self-destructive patterns of the culture in which they lived.

So look back at chapter 5, verse 1. Chapter 5, verse 1, we learn that a man in the church was sleeping with his stepmother. And the church as a whole thought nothing of it.

[4 : 55] In fact, as Paul says in verse 2, they were arrogant. They celebrated it. And it seems like they thought as follows. We have freedom in Christ Jesus. We're no longer under the law.

We're under grace. And therefore, everything is lawful for us. We can do whatever we feel like. And Paul says no. In this case, he says, you must no longer treat this man as a fellow Christian.

Because his pattern, his ongoing pattern of life is so far out of line with his profession of faith.

Chapter 6. Beginning of chapter 6, we learn that some church members were suing each other in court.

Most likely, this involved a civil dispute over money or property. And again, Paul responds very strongly. Verse 7 and 8, he says, this is a shame. Is there no one in the church wise enough to mediate?

If you're hauling one another into court, you've already lost the battle. You're wronging each other. This is not how the church is supposed to be.

[6 : 01] You see, Paul's underlying belief here is that being a Christian means belonging to the kingdom of God.

In other words, living under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Romans chapter 14, verse 17, Paul described the kingdom of God.

He said, the kingdom of God is characterized by righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. And Paul is concerned that many of the Corinthian Christians' patterns of life were way out of line.

That instead of displaying righteousness, joy, and peace, there was evidence of disloyalty and division and dissatisfaction. And Paul says, you can't have it both ways.

This is a walking contradiction. Now, before we dive into the content of verse 9 and 10, let me make two broader observations about these verses.

[7 : 00] First, in one commentator's words, that Paul is not talking about isolated acts of unrighteousness, but a whole way of life pursued persistently.

The words in this list are nouns. He says, the sexually immoral or idolaters. In other words, these are ongoing patterns that have come to define a person's character.

Second, this is not an entrance exam for joining the Christian community. So it's not like a job application where you have to answer a series of yes-no questions.

Have you ever been convicted of a felony? Have you ever been evicted from a prior apartment? Are you a U.S. citizen with proper ID? Did you finish high school?

And if you answer even one of those questions the wrong way, you're automatically out. That's not what Paul is doing here. In fact, in verse 11, he says, such were some of you.

[8 : 02] Now, what Paul is doing is he's warning against patterns of unrighteousness, what he calls unrighteousness, that don't belong in God's kingdom. Paul does this a few places in his letters, most extensively in Galatians 5 and Romans 1 and 2, more briefly in Colossians 3 and Ephesians 5.

But here, Paul focuses mostly on two categories in this list. He focuses on sex and he focuses on money. And that's not an accident because, as we saw, the issue in chapter 5 was sexual immorality, and the issue in chapter 6 was a dispute over money.

In chapter 6 and 7, Paul gives more extensive teaching about sex and marriage. In chapter 11, he addresses, among other things, divisions between the rich and the poor and the community. Paul has already addressed issues of power and status in chapters 1 through 4.

So, the big picture is Paul's concern that the Corinthian Christians are using power, money, and sex in order to gratify themselves rather than to advance God's kingdom.

And Paul wants to reorient their thinking. Now, if we think about money and sex, the prevailing assumption in our world, which is similar to that of ancient Corinth, is that money and sex are basically private matters where each individual should determine what is right for themselves.

[9 : 33] All right, so many people would say that sex is generally okay as long as it's between consenting adults. As long as you don't violate someone else's autonomy and privacy.

And similarly with money. Right? Nobody else needs to know how much you earn or how much you give or how you spend your money. That's your business, not theirs.

Let me put it this way. Have you ever raised a serious concern with someone, perhaps a close friend, about their attitude or their practices with regard to sex or money?

And if so, how did they respond? Right? Most of us are naturally very self-protective in both of these areas. We think no one ought to tell us otherwise.

It's not an accident that two out of the three most common factors in marital conflicts are sex and money. The other one is the in-laws, which is sometimes a power issue.

[10:42] Right? Sex, money, and power. And for the most part, the only time we seek help in these areas is when our lives have nearly fallen apart. If there's an affair.

Right? Or when we're facing bankruptcy or eviction. But the Bible has an entirely different vision of the purpose of money, sex, and power.

You see, in the kingdom of God, power, money, and sex are not our own to use as we please.

They're gifts from God entrusted to us for the sake of building God's kingdom.

So in God's kingdom, money is a blessing from God. Deuteronomy says, it is God who gives you the power to get wealth. First Timothy says, God richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

But it's a blessing not just for ourselves, it's a blessing to be shared with God's people in need throughout the world. Paul talks about this in 2 Corinthians, chapters 8 and 9, quite extensively.

[11:48] At that time, he was raising money to help the famine-stricken Christians in Jerusalem.

And he says this, he says, you will be enriched in every way in order to be generous in every way.

And the result will be thanksgiving to God. Money, which is inherently temporary and fleeting, is a tool for serving and blessing and honoring people who will last forever.

That's the purpose of money in the kingdom of God. And therefore, greed, when money becomes an idol, Paul says it's out of place in God's kingdom. Now, of course, very few of us self-identify as greedy.

There was a pastor who was teaching a Sunday school class on the seven deadly sins. Greed is one of those. Greed was the lowest attendance of all the days, by far.

Right? People came when it was pride and lust and sloth and gluttony, but not greed. You see, greed is insidious.

[12:56] Sometimes it's manifested in envy, fantasizing as we browse catalogs or store aisles or internet sites, even if we don't buy anything.

Maybe it's manifested in anxiety, constantly checking the account balances or feeling that our security correlates to our financial status.

Or distraction. We become so engaged in enjoying and managing and increasing our possessions that we ignore the people who are right next to us.

That was an issue in the church in Corinth. Later on, Paul goes on and he says, when you gather together to eat, one of you is going hungry and the other is getting drunk. Some of you are so focused on enjoying yourselves and overindulging yourselves that you're completely ignoring the person next to you who's hungry, who doesn't have enough to eat.

Greed sometimes blinds us to the basic needs of our neighbors who we pass on the street or sitting next to us in church. Jesus said, be on your guard against all kinds of greed, for life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.

[14:11] Now in God's kingdom, just as our money belongs to God and God enriches us so that we might be generous, our bodies belong to God. So in God's kingdom, sex is not primarily a biological drive or a means of self-expression.

Sex is the embodiment of God's covenant faithfulness. Sex is intended to be a physical union that accompanies a whole life union.

Sex is meant to be a reaffirmation of the marriage promises, a way of saying, I would marry you all over again today. And so in God's kingdom, marriage is not just two people entering into a mutually beneficial arrangement to please one another.

It's two people vowing to display to the world something far greater than themselves. Paul says, Christian marriage depicts the union of Christ and the church.

That is two fundamentally different entities joined together as one for all time. And you know, if you think about it, the way we think about money and the way we think about sex, we tend to think of them in a self-centered way.

[15 : 29] And when we hear about this God's kingdom way of thinking, it feels different to us. Right? Marriage is not primarily about the two of you. No! Not in God's kingdom.

It's about displaying to the world Christ's love for his people and the union between two fundamentally different entities. And that is one reason why the Bible, including Jesus himself, always describes marriage as male plus female.

That is, our fundamental difference is inscribed on our very own bodies and in our unity together we display the reconciling grace of God.

That's the broader biblical vision for the purpose of marriage in God's kingdom. And that is one reason why Paul includes men who practice homosexuality alongside the sexually immoral and adulterers in verse 9.

Now, that is the elephant in the room we have gotten here. Okay? So, let me take a few moments to clarify three things about what Paul is saying and what Paul is not saying in including that in the list.

[16 : 41] Number one, Paul is speaking about sexual practice, not what we would call sexual attraction or orientation. So, Paul is not saying that the only people who belong in the church are those who feel exclusive attraction to the opposite sex.

If you're a Christian who experiences homosexual feelings, you will have particular struggles as well as particular insights and gifts to bring to the church.

We need you. One book that's particularly insightful in this respect is called *Washed and Waiting* by a guy named Wesley Hill. It's available on the bookstall downstairs.

I'd recommend it to anybody who wants to explore this topic and wants to hear his insights. So, sexual practice, not sexual attraction or orientation.

Second, Paul mentions gay sex generally as a practice that does not belong in God's kingdom.

Now, some scholars have argued that Paul is referring specifically to prostitution or exploitation.

[17 : 55] But there is a pair of Greek words that refer specifically to sexual relations between an older man and a younger boy, which was one prominent form of homosexuality in the ancient world.

Paul did not use those words in this list. If you look in the Pew Bibles or the ESV, there's a text note at the bottom which rightly says the two Greek words translated by this phrase refer to the passive and active partners in consensual homosexual acts.

In particular, the second word Paul uses is *arsenokoitai*. It's a compound word from *arsen*, which means male, and *koitai*, which means bed or intercourse.

It's derived from the Greek translation of Leviticus 20.13, which says, whoever lies with a male as with a woman, they have both done what is not pleasing to God.

So that's the second thing. Third, though Paul mentions gay sex as one among many practices that do not belong in God's kingdom, Paul does not single it out.

[19 : 04] If the church preaches against homosexuality while tolerating or ignoring other sins in this list, that displays hypocrisy and self-righteousness of which we must repent.

To take one other example from this list, along with the sexually immoral and the greedy, which are sort of the true major categories, Paul lists in verse 10 revilers.

Reviling means verbal abuse, slander or gossip that destroys someone's reputation, misrepresenting someone else's views in order to undermine them, treating someone with scorn and derision.

Sometimes the LGBT community has received this from the church and it is wrong. Our world is full of reviling, especially on the internet.

But Paul says, reviling has no place in the kingdom of God. In chapter 4, Paul said, when reviled, we bless. Chapter 13, he says, love is patient and kind, is not arrogant or rude.

[20 : 16] So this is Paul's warning. Paul's warning is that to the church in Corinth, Paul's warning to the Christian community today is that those who persist in patterns of unrighteousness will not inherit God's kingdom.

We are called to be part of the kingdom of God and to orient our whole lives, sex, money, power, our words, under the authority of Jesus Christ and for the good of our neighbors.

So that's the warning. It's a strong warning, but it's also followed by an even stronger word of encouragement. Paul says in verse 11, 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.

Such were some of you. The Corinthian church was not a social club dominated by people with impeccable moral and religious upbringings from nice middle-class families and everyone who

didn't fit that profile was marginalized.

No. The Corinthian church included people who had complicated sexual histories. The church included people who had manipulated others financially in order to get ahead.

[21 : 38] The church included people who had turned to alcohol to drown their sorrows. The church included people who had slandered others behind their backs. The church included people who had been hurt by people who had done all these things to them.

Paul says, such were some of you. And he says, God didn't choose you to be part of his kingdom because you were better suited for it than everyone else. God chose you in his mercy. And the door is open for anyone who wants to come in. Paul says, such were some of you, but God has intervened and set your life on a new course.

In Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, you have a new identity and a new calling. You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified. Now, those aren't three things that happen one after the other in sequence, but three ways of describing what it means to become a Christian, to be brought into the kingdom of God.

First, we've been washed clean from sin and shame. I mean, think about how you feel if you don't take a shower for a few days. Before my freshman year in college, I went on foot on freshman pre-orientation camping trip, hiking on the Appalachian Trail for four days.

[22 : 56] By the end of the trip, we all stank. Our clothes had got wet in the rain, we were sweaty and dirty. Now, when we were on the trip, all of us could tolerate each other because we were all in the same boat.

We were all stinky. And then when we got back to campus and met our new roommates for the first time, we were immediately self-conscious, immediately aware of how dirty and stinky we were compared to everyone else.

But of course, it's a lot easier to shower and change than to cleanse our conscience from shame.

Maybe you felt shame because of past sexual sin, whether it's adultery or pornography.

Perhaps you've been sexually abused and you bear the shame of what someone else has done to you. Whatever the source, shame can make us feel extremely self-conscious, maybe even self-hating.

It can make us anxious and unsettled around other people that we perceive to be clean relatively in some way or other. We feel dirty.

[24 : 14] We don't know how to deal with it and so we try to hide. We don't want anyone to know about certain parts of our past or some of our present struggles and temptations. Paul says there is good news.

There's a way to move beyond shame because God and Jesus Christ has come to find us in our shame, in our ugliness, in our dirtiness.

He has come to embrace us and to wash us clean and clothe us in his beauty and his love. Wesley Hill in that book *Washed and Waiting* writes, God has cleansed the stains of sin from the crevices of my mind, heart, and body.

He has included me in his family, the church, where I can find support, comfort, and provocation toward Christian maturity. Of course, that's what baptism symbolizes.

God washing us clean, renewing us through his Holy Spirit, making us part of his family and Paul says, live as people who've been washed. You know, if you've been washed clean through Christ and the Holy Spirit, you can approach God with confidence.

[25 : 26] You can face your past with honesty and transparency instead of hiding and defensiveness. You don't have to go around extremely self-conscious feeling like you're stinky and dirty because you're not anymore before God.

God's washed you clean from the inside out. Your past doesn't define you anymore. Second, Paul says, we've been sanctified. That word means set apart for God's holy purposes.

It was a word that was used in the Old Testament for the priests and for the instruments in the temple. They were sanctified. That is, set apart as fitting vessels in which God's presence could dwell and through which his glory could be displayed.

Andrew Walls wrote, not only does God in Christ take people as they are, he takes them in order to transform them into what he wants them to be. It's like the great sculptor Michelangelo walking through a stone quarry and coming upon a large slab of marble.

And he says to the owner of the quarry, I want to buy that piece of marble because I don't just see a large slab of marble with some jagged edges. I see the sculpture that I will one day make from it.
[26 : 44] It will take a long time. I will have to chip away at it relentlessly, but one day it will become one of my masterpieces. That is how God looks at us through Jesus Christ.

Or it's like a restoration architect coming upon a boarded up house with peeling paint, a leaky roof, and a backyard full of trash in the middle of a bad neighborhood.
And he says to the real estate agent, I want to buy this house. I'm not buying it so I can become a slum lord and make minimal repairs and rent it out at the highest price I can and make money.
No, I'm moving in. I'm buying the house so I can move in and renovate the whole thing. I'm going to clean up the yard and plant a garden. I'm going to fix up the roof and put in a balcony.
I'm going to knock down the side wall and put on an addition. When the renovation is finished, you will hardly recognize what it once was. But this will be my home. Ephesians 2 says in Jesus Christ, we are being built together into a dwelling place for God by his spirit.

[27 : 57] God has claimed us for his own. He has bought us. We have been sanctified. That is set apart for his holy purposes and so that means our lives will never be the same. God, the master artist, will gradually chip away at everything that does not display his glory, at our greed and our lust and our anger and our power hungriness.

God, the master architect, will not allow the garbage to remain in the backyard because he has come to dwell in us by his spirit. You see, God doesn't just wash us clean and then say, here's a bunch of rules to follow, work really hard.

He comes to dwell in us. He's with us every step of the way. When the spirit came on Jesus, when he was baptized, it said the spirit descended on him and remained on him and when the Holy Spirit came upon the church on the day of Pentecost, it descended upon them and it didn't fly back away but the Holy Spirit remained with God's people.

When the Holy Spirit comes to you, when you ask Jesus to fill you with his spirit, he comes to dwell and to remain and to be with you every day, we've been sanctified, set apart for God.

Third, we've been justified. That is, given a new status before God. The word justified means to be declared righteous. That is to be on good terms with God.

[29 : 38] We've received pardon for our past offenses. We have a place in his family. Some time ago, I was talking with a guy who had been in and out of prison multiple times.

Even though he hadn't been convicted of a crime in several years, his life was still very much constrained by his past offenses. His criminal record made him ineligible to apply for most jobs, so he struggled to find steady work.

Because he struggled to find work, he couldn't pay for an apartment, so he bounced around from one place to another. He was on probation, which created additional demands and restrictions. But if he violated his probation, he would end up in jail again, and he was often depressed and fearful and anxious.

When you're on probation, you're living under the shadow of a guilty verdict. And the burden is on you to demonstrate to the courts and to society at large that you're worthy of obtaining freedom once again.

Now, from a human perspective, the rationale for probation is understandable, though the system can be flawed. But when it comes to our relationship with God, Jesus Christ, through his death on the cross, has provided not probation, but pardon for everyone who repents and turns to him.

[31 : 03] You see, we don't have to live under the shadow of a guilty verdict. Through Jesus Christ, we live in the light of resurrection promise. Jesus Christ died for our sins.

He was condemned for us, and he was raised to life for our justification. It is his verdict that matters. In Jesus Christ, there is no condemnation.

And so we can live in that freedom. We can live in that joy. We've been brought into the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. That is Paul's encouragement. May we heed his warning and be strengthened by his encouragement today.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, Lord Jesus, we thank you for your transforming power.

[32 : 23] That is at work in this world. That is at work in us who trust in you.

