

INTRODUCTION

The church at Corinth was struggling with three problems. The problem of immaturity: Paul said you ought to be teachers, but instead you are babes; you are carnal. Another problem they were dealing with was immorality. One man in the church was remaining in the church but openly living with his stepmother in sexual immorality. And Paul said that guy needs to either repent or you must kick him out of church. This message is about their continuing problem of immorality in the church. The third problem that we'll deal with a little later is confusion about immortality. They didn't understand what's going to happen to them when they died, or if Jesus came back, whatever happened first.

First Corinthians 6:9-11 says:

Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.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.

I. A PICTURE OF OUR PAST

We think that we're living in an immoral, wicked age, and indeed we are. But during the time Paul wrote this and in the setting in which he wrote this, they were living in an age that I think was at least as wicked, perhaps even more wicked, than we are. There was a city in Italy called Pompeii that was such a wicked city, along with other major cities in the Roman empire. One afternoon Mount Vesuvius erupted, and it covered that city in about seven or eight feet of ash. And it covered the city so quickly that many people were caught and died doing whatever activity they were doing when the ash fell. The ash preserved their bodies so that archeologists found all these cavities shaped exactly like the bodies. I was there in 1974 as part of an archeological expedition that we did to Israel and then to Rome and to other sites in Italy. They showed us sections of Pompeii that the tourists do not see. And what it showed to me was that the culture and the society of that day had really sunk to some real depths of depravity.

Pornography was very prevalent back then, even as it is today. We may sometimes think that we've advanced so far, but we're at least as wicked as they were. One of the reasons that the Roman empire fell is because they were such a wicked nation when it came to sexual sin.

Paul lists two categories of sins.

1. Sins against self

This is a picture of our past because Paul said this was what some of you were... before you came to Christ. He uses the words “sexually immoral.” Now that is a word for “porneia,” from which we get our word “pornography.” It is an umbrella term that encompasses all kinds of sexual sins, sexual immorality. Now underneath that umbrella there's a lot of different kinds of sexual sins. And he lists some of them like adultery, homosexuality. Others could be listed he doesn't list. But when he says sexual immorality, porneia, he covers the whole gambit of sexual sins.

Today in America pornography and sexual sin is really at an epidemic level. I read just this past week that there are more pornography outlets in America than there are McDonald's hamburger stands. Did you know that it is a \$9 billion business annually in America? And the crowd that is targeted by the pornographers are the 13 to 18 year old boys. And that's exactly what Paul is talking about here. That same kind of sexual sin.

The Bible doesn't say that sex is a sin. In fact, it says in Hebrews that the marriage bed (that's a euphemism for sex) is undefiled before God. Sex is a wonderful thing that God created to be experienced between a husband and a wife within the relationship of marriage. Why did he do that? So that a man and a woman who are husband and wife could express the most intimate kind of physical affection and they could do what he said to Adam and Eve: be fruitful and multiply. That is the use of sex that God created it for: to express intimate affection between a husband and a wife and propagate the human species.

Now, once you go outside the intended creation of sex, anything outside of that becomes sexual sin. There's nothing dirty about it when it's done according to God's plan. But when you step outside those boundaries, then it falls under this umbrella that Paul says of sexual sin. Now he goes ahead and mentions some others. These are sins against self: sexually immoral, idolaters. What is an idolater? Somebody who worships an idol. In your mind you may picture an idolater as somebody who builds a statue and they bow down before the statue. You may picture somebody who prays to a totem pole or something like that. But you see in America, we have many idolaters but we're much too sophisticated to have statues. Elsewhere, Paul talks about covetousness, which is idolatry—where people worship the almighty dollar. They want more and more. They want to work harder and harder so they can have more and more so they can keep more and more. He says that can become idolatry. Idolatry is looking for meaning in life in any other source except God.

Did you know that astrology would fall into the category of idolatry? Because there are people who are practicing astrology and they're trying to get their direction and purpose in life from another source other than God. They're looking at the stars and horoscopes. Don't read the horoscope in your newspaper, because it

falls in the category of idolatry, I believe, as well as fortune tellers, astrologers, the psychics, etc.

I drove in front of Tyler Junior College just the other night and noticed there's a new psychic advisor shop there. Every time I drive by something like that, I point and say, "In the name of Jesus Christ, I rebuke you." People are looking for direction and purpose in life from those people. A number of years ago, they gathered together 24 of the leading astrologers in America who say they can tell by looking at your life, when you were born, etc. to tell the future. If someone asks you what is your sign, don't say Sagittarius or Capricorn or something like that. Say your sign is the sign of the cross, praise God. Astrologers say that if you're born on a certain date, your life will have certain qualities and attributes. Well, there was a study done, a scientific study done where these 24 astrologers were given 186 profiles of individuals and were asked to then trace their birthdate/sign. Out of 186 personality profiles, you know how many they got right? They got 15 out of 186. It's a bunch of bunk, and it's idolatry. And so don't practice it.

Paul also mentions the sin of drunkenness. He talks about those who continually drink to excess and have no control over themselves. The number one drug problem in America is alcohol. And it amazes me that we put so much effort and so much time into getting kids and young people to just say no to drugs. And thank God that now it seems like our society has taken on tobacco and smoking. It is becoming less and less socially acceptable. And I thank God for that because nicotine and tobacco are drugs that will destroy you and your friends. Alcohol will do the same thing, and we've seen it happen. The US Supreme Court has outlawed snake handling because in a seven-year period, three people died of snake-handling. But we continue to license alcohol. And every year, 48,000 Americans die from alcohol-related deaths. To me, there's just something wrong with that. Paul says, "All of you people out there in the church, that's who you used to be."

2. Sin against others

He mentions adulterers, someone being unfaithful to their spouse. Adultery is a sexual sin that is committed when you are married. He also talks about male prostitutes, and homosexual offenders. He's talking about males who literally rape other males. Now you and I know that homosexuality is a problem in America today. I'd say the two biggest social and moral problems that the church is going to have to address in the next decade is abortion and homosexuality.

There are homosexual churches full of homosexuals who say, "God made me this way. Tell me where in the Bible it says that homosexuality is wrong." Leviticus mentions it very graphically to say that it's wrong. The New Testament example is in 1 Corinthians six, verse nine and ten where it says there will be no homosexual offenders in heaven. God loves homosexuals. And there are many homosexuals

who have been saved and who repented of their lifestyle. I have ministered to many of them who've come out of the homosexual lifestyle.

They can be helped. Now, there is a difference between a homosexual orientation and a homosexual practice. Now that's really true of just about any sin.

Consider the sin of drunkenness alcoholism. There are some people who just have a tendency toward alcoholism, but they can't say they don't have any control over it. Or "God just made me this way." They choose to drink, but they need to recognize that they have that tendency. And once they recognize they have that tendency, only then can they get help for it. That's why they go to Alcoholics Anonymous. And that's why the very first step they take in the 12-step process is to say to a group: "Hello. My name is Bob and I am an alcoholic." These guys may go for 30 years without taking a drink, but they'll say, "I am an alcoholic."

And you see what they're saying? "I have the alcoholic tendency, but I'm not practicing alcoholism. I've repented of it, and I'm not practicing it." And there are some people who seem to have a homosexual tendency, but there's a difference between that and practicing homosexuality. I can't go into a lot of detail about this because we really want to respect the anonymity of this group. There's a group of reformed homosexuals here in Tyler. And I have referred a number of men to this group. These are men who say, "I am a homosexual. I am a sinner. I am not practicing homosexuality. I have repented of the sin of homosexuality. It is a sin and I no longer practice it." It is possible for those who were adulterers, who were sexually immoral, who were idolaters, to repent and be saved. But don't you let anybody get away with trying to convince you that homosexuality is not a sin. It is a sin. It's no worse of a sin than anything else. I think in God's sight, all sin is equal. Sin is sin and it can be repented of. God can save a homosexual just as he can save an adulterer or an alcoholic.

3. Sins of thieves

In verse 10, Paul talks about those who are greedy. That means those that are just selfish and want more for themselves. That is also the word "covetous." And then he mentioned slanderers, somebody who uses their tongue like a sword to constantly be running down people. He places the sin of slander right there with the sin of adultery and the sin of covetousness. You know, there's some people that will say with great pride, "I've never committed adultery. I am not a homosexual. I am not an alcoholic," but they constantly use their tongue to hurt people. And Paul says that's the same kind of sin. And then he mentions the sin of swindlers. A swindler is somebody who steals money, but they are real sneaky about it. They don't go into a bank with a mask and point a gun at somebody and say, "Give me all your money." It's somebody who steals your money in a different way.

Now, the amazing thing is that our churches today, as in Paul's day, are filled with swindlers who come into the church, and they never get born again. I often warn

people to be very careful when anybody offers a financial deal or get-rich-quick scheme. There are con men and swindlers out there, and it happens in the church! I can't tell you how many times people have come to me in my ministry and said, "This person talked to me about a business deal. And it sounded so good, and they were a brother in Christ. So I got in on it. I thought I could trust them." They may be believers who are just totally backslidden. Or they're not born again.

Paul spends the first part of this passage saying this is who you used to be. This is a picture of who all of you were. As a pastor, I have pastored and I believe I am pastoring people on that list: those who were sexually immoral, those who were idolaters, those who were adulterers, or male prostitutes, or homosexuals. I'm pastoring those who were thieves, who were covetous, greedy, drunkards, slanderers, and swindlers. I'm talking about those of you in the church! That's what you used to be, but what happened? That's the second point of our message.

II. THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

A little conjunction appears three times in this passage. Not only does it appear in English once in verse 11, but in the Greek grammar it comes out like this: but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified. Paul says you've been changed. And you see folks, if you can say anything about being a Christian, it is that the power of the gospel changes you. You are a different person than you used to be. You've heard of St. Augustine, that great Christian from North Africa. He used to live a very immoral life before he heard about Jesus Christ and became a Christian. He used to frequent prostitutes in the city of Carthage. And one day after he became a Christian, he was walking down the street and one of his prostitutes with whom he had been familiar, said, "Augustine, Augustine! It is I!" And he turned his back and he said, "Yes, but it is no longer I." He was saying, "I'm a different person." What makes you a different person is because when you become a Christian, you enter a new kind of relationship.

It is like getting married. Before I got married, I was a different kind of person than I was after I got married. Especially in terms of my neatness. If you could've seen my dormitory room in college, you wouldn't have been proud of me. We didn't figure we needed to clean it up because, you know, the semester was going to be over in a few months anyway. And the janitors would come in and clean all the rooms in between semesters. I would take my clothes down to the laundromat and wash them once or twice a semester or so. It reminds me of the college boys who wanted to keep the school mascot (a goat) in their dorm room. The administrators said, "What about the smell?" And the boys replied, "The goat will have to just get used to it." That was my room. And when I got married, things changed.

I remember we came back from the honeymoon and I walked in the little apartment we were living in. I used to throw my clothes on the floor and kick my shoes off anywhere I wanted. It was convenient. And that didn't go over real well

with my wife. She was nice about it at first and said, “Did your mother teach you to do that?” It didn't take me long to figure out if I wanted to be happy in this relationship, I needed to change. I hang up everything in my closet these days. You know why? Because I want to please the one I love.

That's what it means to be a Christian. When you come into a living, loving relationship with Jesus Christ, you'll be different. You'll change. Now, there are three things that Paul says that Jesus does to us that represent the power of the gospel. He uses three beautiful words here.

1. You've been washed

It is not baptism that washes you. It is the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, that cleanses us. Washing has to do with your past and all of those sins...against self and others.. When you came to Jesus Christ, he washed you. He cleansed you of that.

2. You've been sanctified

Now that word “sanctified” means you have been set apart for a purpose. It means he wants to use you. All these are past tense. These are things that have already happened to you. Now, the word “sanctified” means that God considers you to be acceptable for his use. I am a dirty, rotten, filthy sinner, unacceptable to God and usable to God. But when we come to Jesus Christ in faith, we say, “Lord, I'm a sinner. I cannot save myself. I'm dirty. Wash me, cleanse me.” That's what he does. He cleanses us with his blood, and then he sanctifies us. He makes us useful.

Now that's what that word “sanctified” means. It is the root word from which we get our word “holy.” That's the word that the angels use to describe the character of God. “Holy” basically just means different. It means special. And the best way to understand “sanctified” is that it's when you are using something for the purpose for which it was created. If you're sitting in a pew in church, you're sanctifying that pew that you're sitting in. You know why? Because that pew was designed and constructed for people to sit in when they're worshiping. And because you're doing it, you're using it for the purpose for which it was created. The pew will not be sanctified during the week when they're empty. They're not being used for that purpose for which they were built. So what does it mean for you to be sanctified? It means God is using you for the purpose for which he created you. He gifted you, and now he wants to use you.

3. You've been justified

“Just as if I'd never sinned.” That's what “justified” means. Just as if I'd never sinned. God looks at you and he considers you acceptable to him. You say to God, “Do you remember how dirty and filthy and sinful I used to be? God, do you remember how it used to be an adulterer? Do you remember how I used to be a slanderer? Do you remember how I used to be a homosexual?” God looks at you

and says, “No, I don't.” That's what it means for you to be justified because God, who is perfect in his love and who is perfect in his justice, is also perfect in his forgiveness. If that doesn't ring a bell, your clapper's really broken!

III. OUR POSITION IN CHRIST

How did we get from where we used to be to where we are right now? Paul gives us the key in the latter part of verse 11: in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. And so what is our position in Christ? The first thing that it took to change us was doing so “in the name of Jesus.” There is power in the name of Jesus Christ. The Bible says there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby you must be saved. And God says he's taken the name of Jesus and has exalted it above every other name. At the name of Jesus, every knee should bow. And every tongue should confess that that Jesus is Lord.

Now there's power in the name of Jesus. I want to misquote a verse for you again, I've done it before, but tell me how I misquote this verse. “Whosoever shall call upon the Lord shall be saved.” What's wrong with that? It says, “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Am I just splitting hairs? It is possible and even probable that many look up into the sky and talk about “the man upstairs” or “the good Lord” They really believe in God...but you must believe that Jesus is the Lord in order to be washed, to be sanctified, to be justified. But how does that happen?

A lot of people misunderstand what it means. Not only is it in the name of Jesus, it is also by the Spirit of God. Now let me ask you a simple question. Where is Jesus right now? Well, some say he's everywhere. In the sense that God is omnipresent, he is. But where is the localized presence of Jesus Christ? The same Jesus who was crucified, who was resurrected, and who ascended up into heaven? Where is he right now? He is seated at the right hand of God the Father, and one day he's going to come back. That's true. But how does he operate right now?

Jesus said to his disciples, “When I go away, I will send the “paraclete”—it means “one called alongside.” God lives inside of us and he works by his Spirit. Titus chapter three, verse three talks about the operation of the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit. I want you to see how God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit operate in salvation because it expresses our position in Christ. This passage is written by Paul to young Titus. You'll see the similarity between 1 Corinthians 6. Paul says, “At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, and slaves to all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. [This is what you used to be]. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us. Not because of righteous things that we had done, but because of his mercy.” [This is what God the Father has done. He loves you. And through his mercy and kindness, he has saved you.] He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. Who is it that

washes you? Who is it that renews you? It's the Holy Spirit. Where does Jesus come in this? Verse six says, "...whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ, our Savior."

God has loved you. And through his mercy, he has saved you. Jesus was the one who *bought* it. The Holy Spirit is the one who *brought* it and praise God, I'm the one who *caught* it.

CONCLUSION

Gordon MacDonald is an excellent author and was a pastor at one time. But there was a time in his ministry when he experienced some sexual indiscretion and had to get out of the ministry for a while. But after a time of healing and renewal and restoration in his life, he and his wife are restored, and he is pastor of a church again. And I read recently in *Leadership* magazine an article about him. He had a dream where a bunch of Christians were milling around, and they all had name tags on that said: hello, my name is _____. well. In the dream, he said he had a nametag that said, "hello, my name is Gordon" and then underneath his name, it said "adulterer." And then you looked at the next person and it said, "hello, my name is John." And it said "drunkard." And the next person had one that said, "hello, my name is Jim." And it said "homosexual." And there was a lady whose tag said, "hello, my name is Janet." And it said "slanderer." Everybody in the room had a tag on and underneath their name it had some sin. And he said, the beautiful thing was that Jesus was there, and he walked around peeling off their name tags and putting them upon himself. Gordon McDonald said in the end of the dream, no one had their name tags on, but here was the Lord Jesus with adulterer, homosexual, slanderer, etc. on him. He was just covered with name tags. Gordon McDonald said that might not have been correct, but it is spiritually true of what Jesus did on the cross when he took our sins upon him. Paul said, that's who you used to be, but now you're different.

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