

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. 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. (NIV84)

Theme: Who you are

1. You were made by Christ
2. Who you were is not who you are

Who are you? What makes you, you? Not what you think you should be, not what society has convinced you that you are, not what your parents or spouses are leading you to be, but who you really and truly are—what are your likes and dislikes, what makes you happy and upset, what do you want to do with your life, on what does your heart truly lie?

Some people spend years of their life trying to figure that out. That search for self-discovery is key to the one who honestly doesn't really know. You hear of people going on trips in order to "find themselves." Psychologists try to answer the question, others turn to meditation and other pseudo-religious/spiritual practices to figure out that all important question, who am I?

Today, we take a look at this question from a different perspective. Today we see who we are in the eyes of the Lord, which is far more important than how we look at ourselves. We see that we were made by Christ and that who we are now is not who we were.

Let's get this out of the way: homosexuality is a sin. This, of course, is a highly contentious topic in today's society. Many would label us unloving bigots by saying such things. But there is no debate on the subject when it comes to God's Word. Those who claim to be Christian and yet deny that homosexuality is a sin have clearly rejected God's Word in favor of the popular opinion of the day. Although there are not a lot of passages that deal with the subject, our text for today clearly says homosexuality is contrary to God's Word.

The Greek is more precise than the NIV's translation. Paul really mentions both partners in the homosexual sexual relationship. Those who practice such a detestable relationship and engage in such a perverse act will not enter the kingdom of God.

But let's also be clear, homosexuality is not "the ultimate sin," as if homosexuality is somehow such a horrible and disgusting sin that it is far worse to commit this sin than anything else. No, Paul lists this sin among many others—10 total sins are listed here. He mentions sins against the sixth commandment, which abuse God's gift of sex; sins against the first, fifth, seventh, and eighth commandments are also mentioned. Those who love the things of this world other than God, those who steal, and take by force, those who spread lies, those who have any kind of sex outside of marriage, and those who get drunk—they are sinners. And those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

No sin is any worse than any other sin. This list of sins is not a complete list of sins that lead to eternal damnation, rather they are examples of wickedness, just ten examples of countless sins that lead to death. Any unrepentant sin—no matter what it is, whether it is sex outside of marriage, gossip, murder, theft, choosing someone or something over God and his Word, or anything else contrary to God's Word, leads to eternal death. Those who sin and continue to sin without repenting are not Christians and therefore they will not inherit the kingdom of God.

We often define the kingdom of God as Christ's rule in our hearts through faith. But when Paul talks about inheriting this kingdom in the future, we can think of heaven. Those who do such things will not be saved and enjoy the eternal glories of heaven. Because they do not believe they will not receive the blessings that Christ won for them. The requirements to get to heaven were accomplished by Christ, and received by us through faith in him; the presence of such sins in a person's life is evidence that they are barred from heaven because of unbelief.

And this is the way we were. Sure, Paul says after his list of 10 sins, **And this is what some of you were.** Some of them were liars, some practiced homosexuality, others cheated on their spouses, some got drunk, others stole. We could go on. But remember that these sins are examples of wickedness; and when it comes to us and being wicked,

then we must say about ourselves, “this is what we all were.” Take this list and add to it—what were you at one time in your life? Have you lied, gossiped, lusted, stolen, hurt someone physically or emotionally, chose something or someone ahead of God—we could go on and on, but you get it: at one point in our lives we all were wicked, we were all sinners who would not inherit eternal life. That is how God saw you.

But (and this ‘but’ is important), you were this way, **but you were washed.** This is clearly a reference to baptism. Through the waters of baptism your sins were washed away, you were covered in a robe of Christ’s righteousness. Your sinful nature was drowned and you were cleansed from your wicked sin. It was through the waters of baptism that for many of us the Lord brought us to faith and adopted us as his own dear children. Therefore it is through the waters of baptism that the Lord saved you.

You were wicked, but you were sanctified. To sanctify means to make holy, that is to be without sin. That is what the Holy Spirit did through the waters of baptism—he made you holy. He brought you to faith, he converted you from a sinful, wicked unbeliever to a believer. And for those of us who were brought to faith when we were older, he did this through the hearing or reading of the gospel Word. You were sanctified, you were made holy by the Holy Spirit working through the gospel.

You were wicked, but you were justified. This is God, as our just judge, declaring us not guilty on account of his son. Even though we were wicked sinners and deserve nothing but God’s wrath and punishment, he has declared us not guilty. That is because of Jesus, who suffered and died in our place, who gave us his perfect life and then rose from the dead. Because of his work as our substitute the Lord has declared us not guilty.

You were wicked and on your way to hell, but your sins were washed away by the Lord through the waters of baptism, you were made holy by the Holy Spirit working through the gospel, and you were declared not guilty by our merciful judge. Three separate ways to show us how we were saved. These three words in the Greek indicate that this is done, it is a fact—it is not something we hope for in the future, but we have already been baptized, made holy, and declared not guilty. This is a fact; it is done.

And this is done, **in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.** All three persons of the Trinity are present and active in our salvation. And you know who isn’t active? You. There is nothing you have done or can ever do to save yourself. It is strictly a gift of God given to you by his grace. You were wicked, but now you are God’s own child, perfect and holy in his sight. That is who you are, that is how Christ made you; and that is how God sees you.

Part of the reason why some struggle to determine who they truly are is because they spend so much time and effort trying to fit in. No one wants to be different, no one wants to stand out as the “weird one.” We buy the brands that everyone else buys, even if they don’t look that good or fit right. We listen to the same music, watch the same movies and shows, even if we don’t like it. Often cost isn’t a consideration—we’ll try to fit in and be like everyone else no matter what the cost. You may do this so much—being worried about being like everyone else, that you may lose sight of who you really are.

But here is the truth—as a Christian, you are different. You are not wicked, you are not like the rest of the world. Christ comes first in your life. You are deeply concerned with what God says in his Word, you do not want to sin and offend the creator of the world. You don’t do what the unbelieving world does, you don’t have the same interests, beliefs, or priorities. And while you want to fit in, you also don’t mind being different when it comes to your faith and life.

There is a key word in the first phrase of verse 11 that leads us to understand this truth. It is a past tense, not a present tense verb. You were—you were wicked, but that is not who you are. You are no longer wicked. Who you are is not who you were, and who you are now, is not what you were at one time.

You are not an adulterer, a slanderer, robber, thief, homosexual, a drunkard, and the like. Do you fall into such sins and many others from time to time? Sure you do. You are a sinful human being who loses the battle against your sinful flesh on a regular basis. But you strive to obey God’s Word, you don’t willingly continue to sin and go against God’s Word. That is not what Christians do. When we fall into sin we repent with a deep heart-felt sorrow and we believe that we are freely forgiven by Christ. And so we strive to turn from our evil ways and do what is right.

So while we may fall into certain sins, don't fall into despair thinking that this means you aren't a Christian and will not be saved. There is a difference in committing a sin and turning away from it in repentance, and practicing and dwelling in that sin on a regular basis. There is a difference between drinking too much and then repenting and being a drunk. There is a difference between having sexual desires of someone you are not married to maybe even someone of the same sex, which some people do suffer through, and acting on those sinful desires, and then there are those that repeat this sin of sexual immorality. There is a difference between spreading a rumor and hurting someone reputation, and someone who makes it a habit of gossiping. The point is, you are different, you are not wicked in this way, and while you may fall into temptation from time to time you don't do it on a regular basis, you always strive to obey God's Word, and repent when you don't.

And you know that when you do sin, you have a savior, Jesus Christ. He has paid for all your sins and has won for you the gift of eternal life. All your sins have been wiped away by his blood; and by his work the Lord declares us not guilty. There is no sin, whether its homosexuality, murder, rape, theft, gossip, or anything else that is too great the Lord didn't pay for, no amount of sins that were not covered by our gracious Lord. So when we do fall into sin and into a wicked action and life, we fall about on the love of the Lord, and know that it is a fact that we were washed, sanctified, and justified.

Therefore, let no one, not even God, find you living a wicked lifestyle. May you always strive to obey his Word and say no to sin, no matter what temptation entices you. It is okay to be different, that is the way God made you, that is what he wants you to do. Don't dwell in the wicked ways of unbelievers, but in the way of the Lord, the one who saves you.

Who are you? What makes you, you? An important question, but not as important as who God made you. He made you his own; for he washed, sanctified, and justified you. You are different—and that's a good thing. Because you are child of God who has been made holy and declared not guilty. That is not what you were, but by the grace of God, it is who you are because Christ made you. Amen.