

## But for Grace...

### Text: 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

**Introduction:** You've heard the phrase "There, but for the grace of God go I." It has been attributed to a man named John Bradford.

Bradford was born in Manchester in 1510. He received a good education and was on his way to becoming a lawyer when he was led to faith in Christ. He then enrolled at Cambridge to study theology and prepare for a lifetime of ministry.

Bradford was a man who became known for his commitment to righteous living and service to God. He devoted his time to studying, writing, and instructing others. It has been said that he had a sweet way of reproving sin that demonstrated his genuine care for the person he was correcting and his desire to see them draw near to God.

Sadly, the story of John Bradford can be found in Foxe's Book of Martyrs. History tells us that under the reign of Queen Mary, better known as Bloody Mary, John Bradford was arrested on a trivial charge and imprisoned in the Tower of London.

During his imprisonment, Bradford continued to preach twice a day to those who would listen. The words "There, but for the grace of God go John Bradford" are said to have been spoken as Bradford watched a criminal going to execution for his crimes. Even in his own imprisonment, Bradford recognized that everything he had in life was a gift from God.

While Bradford was no true criminal, his life did end in him being executed. We know that he and a fellow Christian man named John Leaf were burned at the stake together. It is said that Bradford's final words at the stake included, "O England, England, repent!" And as Bradford turned to John Leaf, he said, "Be of good comfort, brother, for we shall have a happy supper with the Lord tonight."

What a story. When I think about the passage before us this morning, I think of Bradford's words, "There, but for the grace of God go I." I also think of the words found in the third verse of the great hymn *Come Thou Fount*, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love." They are some of the most meaningful words to me of any hymn.

See, I know the sin of my own heart better than any other person. I know that it is only because of the grace of God that verses 9-10 of 1 Corinthians 6 do not describe me. I pray that God would remind us of that truth this morning concerning each of our lives.

We're in 1 Corinthians 6. Go ahead and turn there in your Bible if you haven't already. We're going to be looking at verses 9-11 this morning. Next week we will turn our attention to verses 12-20. I will be as discreet as the text is in addressing the subject of sexual immorality, but parents, you may want to read those verses prior to next Sunday.

We will start our sermon series through 2 Samuel on August 10. I'm looking forward to digging into David's reign as King of Israel with you.

(Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11...Pray)

As we consider these three verses this morning, I want you to see that **we cannot fully grasp the extravagance of God's grace without first understanding the seriousness of our sin.**

So, let's look first at...

#### I. The seriousness of sin (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

**A. And Paul doesn't pull any punches here. He makes clear that there are those who will not inherit the kingdom of God (vs. 9a).**

**1. He asks, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous WILL NOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD?" (vs. 9a).**

**2. Now, that question should grab our attention immediately. It should take us aback for a second.**

**a. Our hope as Christians is that we will one day inherit the kingdom of God.**

**b. The Bible teaches us that Christ will return. He will establish His kingdom forever. And all who are in Christ will be with Him in His kingdom for all eternity.**

- c. But apparently, there are some who will not inherit the kingdom of God.
3. This statement by Paul to the church at Corinth should strike us as significant because it tackles head on some of the lies of our culture.
  4. The first lie of the culture is that there is no life after death. There are some who deny that there is even such a thing as the kingdom of God. You'll notice that Paul doesn't provide an apologetic for the kingdom of God here in this text. He simply states the reality of God's kingdom when he says that there are some who will not inherit the kingdom of God.
  5. The second lie of the culture is that there are many ways to God. We'll all get there somehow. We live in a culture of inclusivism and universalism where it is narrow minded to suggest that there are those who will not inherit the kingdom of God.
    - a. I was having a conversation recently with someone who was doing ministry among Muslims. Their goal was to engage this community of Muslims with the message of the gospel.
    - b. To which someone responded, "Don't Muslims and Christians believe in the same God? What's the difference? Why would you be trying to convert them to Christianity? Isn't Islam just another way to God?"
    - c. And that's the mindset of the world we live in, isn't it? There are many ways to God. It doesn't matter which one you choose. Just do whatever works for you. It all leads to the same place.
    - d. And the Apostle Paul steps in and says, "No, not all will inherit the kingdom of God. There are some who will not inherit the kingdom of God."
  6. There's a third lie of the culture that Paul's statement about the kingdom of God confronts. And it's that only those who are really bad will be excluded from the kingdom of God.

- a. It's not universalism per se. There's an acknowledgement that not everyone will inherit the kingdom of God. But the bar for inheriting the kingdom of God is so low that practically everyone gets in unless you've done something REALLY bad.
- b. This is the lie that is most prevalent at funerals. I've seen it many times. I'm sure you have as well. So-and-so is in a better place. They're not suffering anymore. And it's all based on the idea that the person in the casket was a good person. Surely God wouldn't prevent them from entering His kingdom.

7. I want to say very clearly this morning based on the authority of God's Word that there are those who will not inherit the kingdom of God.

**B. Now, who is it that Paul says will not inherit the kingdom of God (vs. 9a)?**

1. Look at the verse: "Or do you not know that the UNRIGHTEOUS will not inherit the kingdom of God?" (vs. 9a).
2. Paul says that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God.
3. And this is because God is holy.
  - a. He's perfect in His righteousness. There is no sin in God. He cannot be in the presence of sin. He is wholly set apart from sin.
  - b. But not only is God perfectly separate from sin and evil, he also is perfectly devoted to what is good and right.
  - c. God is the standard of holiness. God's law is not just a list of rules that God likes. It's a reflection of His character. It's who He is.
4. And because God is holy, He requires holiness of His people. The unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God.

### C. Now, who are the unrighteous?

1. Paul answers this question with a list of sins in verses 9-10. But notice first what he says there: **“DO NOT BE DECEIVED”** (vs. 9b).

- a. I’m preaching this sermon this morning because I don’t want you to be deceived.
- b. Sin is so deceptive. And Satan is a deceiver. Jesus called him the “father of lies.”
- c. And Satan’s oldest lie is to try to convince us that our sin really isn’t that bad. Maybe it’s not even really sin at all.
- d. Remember his temptation of Eve in the garden? “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”
- e. The Corinthians were apparently prone to being deceived by Satan’s lies regarding the sins that Paul lists here. And surely we can see how people today are often deceived by Satan’s lies regarding these same sins.

2. First, Paul lists the **SEXUALLY IMMORAL**. He uses the generic term for sexual immorality here. The term is all-encompassing. Some translations say “fornicators,” which is a possible rendering as well.

- a. Sexual sin is particularly powerful and particularly deadly as we’ll talk about next week.
- b. Maybe you saw this week the CEO who was caught cheating on his wife on the Kiss Cam at a Cold Play concert. I’m sure they didn’t go there that evening expecting to have their sin exposed for the world to see.
- c. But their sin found them out. What they wanted to keep in the dark was brought out into the light.

d. And even if it had not been displayed on the big screen for all to see, the truth is that nothing is hidden from God.

3. Next, Paul lists **IDOLATERS**. We know that God prohibits idolatry in the second commandment. But idolatry is often very deceptive. We think we’ve got this one under control if we don’t have any graven images that we bow down to and worship. But idolatry is anything we put in the place of God and give our heart, time, and attention to more than we do God.
4. Next is **ADULTERERS**. This is a specific type of sexual immorality that is specifically prohibited in the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment. That of a married person having a relationship with another person outside of marriage.
5. Paul then lists **MEN WHO PRACTICE HOMOSEXUALITY**.

- a. This is the way the ESV renders two nouns that most scholars believe refer to both participants in a male homosexual relationship.
- b. We live in a day when all kinds of sexual immorality is minimized, accepted, and even celebrated.
- c. Goshen family, we need to take seriously what Paul says here about those who practice fornication, adultery, and homosexuality. They will not inherit the kingdom of God.
- d. We don’t make the rules. We don’t get to rewrite the rules. What God says is sin is sin. Regardless of what the culture around us says.
- e. Again, we’ll talk about that more next week.

6. Next, Paul lists **THIEVES**. Those who break the 8<sup>th</sup> commandment.
7. Then the **GREEDY** or covetous. Those who break the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment. Surely, we all should examine our hearts here.
8. **DRUNKARDS**. Let’s be clear about what the Bible says about substance abuse.

9. Then there's REVILERS. Revilers are those who slander others. And notice that Paul puts revilers in the same category as idolaters and adulterers. They are unrighteous. They will not inherit the kingdom of God.
10. Finally, SWINDLERS. Swindlers are those who use deceptive practices to take advantage of others.

**D. Now, what can we say about this list that Paul gives here?**

1. It's a list of sins. These really are things God calls sinful.
  - a. You can see very clearly the connection between Paul's list of unrighteousness and the law of Moses.
  - b. As I said before, God's law is not just a list of rules God likes or a list of prohibitions for things He doesn't like.
  - c. The moral law is a reflection of God's holy character. It does not change.
2. We also should say that this list of sins is not an exhaustive list of sins. There are a whole host of other sins that lead to death as well.
  - a. The truth is that all sin leads to death.
  - b. We also should remember Jesus' emphasis on the heart in His Sermon on the Mount. Anger is murder and lust is adultery.
  - c. We cannot easily excuse ourselves from Paul's list of sins here in 1 Corinthians 6.
3. We also should say that this list of sins is a list of equal sins with regard to eternal destiny. Paul doesn't make any exceptions here. Or grade them as more or less important. He lists all of these things together. And he says that those who practice these things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

**E. Goshen, we need to feel the weight of what Paul says here.**

1. We first need to feel the weight of it for ourselves. Examine our own lives. See if perhaps Paul is describing us here.
2. We also need to feel the weight of this for those we love.
3. Sin is serious. It's serious to God. And it should be serious to us as well.
4. Sin keeps us from God. The unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God.
5. The wages of sin is death.

Once we understand the seriousness of sin, we're prepared to grasp...

## **II. The extravagance of God's grace (1 Corinthians 6:11).**

- A. Notice what Paul says at the beginning of verse 11 – "And such were some of you" (vs. 11a).
  1. The Corinthians were not immune from sin. Some of them had been characterized by the exact sins that Paul lists here. And if not these specific sins, then certainly other sins like these.
  2. And the truth is that all sin leads to death. Some had engaged in these specific sins. But all had sinned. And the wages of sin is death.
  3. In fact, Paul could have included himself here. We know that prior to coming to faith in Jesus, he was a reviler of Christians. More than that, he was a murderer of Christians.
  4. The truth is that we too are guilty before God because of our sin. Again, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That includes you and me.
  5. But notice the important word "were" there in the first sentence of verse 11 – "Such WERE some of you."
  6. Something was different about the Corinthian believers. Some of them had been characterized by the specific sins that Paul lists here. But they weren't any longer.
- B. And Paul tells us exactly what had changed – "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" (vs. 11b).

1. The reason the Corinthian believers were no longer characterized by the sins that Paul lists here is because God had transformed their lives by the power of His gospel. They had received God's grace. God saved them out of their sin and made them new creations in Christ.
  - a. Paul says, "You were washed." When a person turns from their sin and places their faith in Jesus Christ, they are cleansed from the filth of their sin.
    - 1) *Isaiah 1:18 says, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."*
    - 2) *1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to CLEANSE us from all unrighteousness."*
  - b. Paul also says, "You were sanctified." We often use sanctification in a progressive sense to describe the work that God does throughout our lives as Christians. But here, Paul is talking about something that takes place at salvation. When a person comes to faith in Christ, they are set apart by God for holy living.
  - c. Then Paul says, "You were justified." We've talked about justification recently in our study of Titus. When a person turns from their sin and places their trust in Jesus, they are declared righteous by God. Their sin was placed on Jesus on the cross and His righteousness is placed on them. Such that God is able to look at sinners and see the righteousness of Jesus instead of the unrighteousness described in verses 9-10.
  - d. And all of this is in the name of Jesus and by the work of the Holy Spirit. This isn't man's work. It's God's work. He does it. He washes. He sanctifies. He justifies.
2. And if you are in Christ today, this is your story too. You've been washed, you were sanctified, and you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.
3. That's good news, isn't it?
4. It should also change some things about the way we think about God, ourselves, and other people.
  - a. First of all, our hearts should be filled with gratitude to God for saving us. We were lost in our sin. But God intervened on our behalf. He saved us. Not because of works done by us in righteousness. But because of His grace.
  - b. Second, we don't have any room for boasting in ourselves. It's an amazing thing for a professing Christian to look down their nose at other people when the truth is that we were all far from God and lost in our sin. If we boast, we don't boast in ourselves. We boast in Christ.
  - c. Third, this passage gives us hope for our lost friends, family members, neighbors, and coworkers.
    - 1) *Maybe you know and love a thief. They can experience the same grace you have experienced and have their life transformed by the gospel.*
    - 2) *Maybe you know and love a reviler. They can experience the same grace you have experienced and have their life transformed by the gospel.*
    - 3) *Maybe you know and love a fornicator or an adulterer or a homosexual. They can experience the same grace you have experienced and have their life transformed by the gospel.*
    - 4) *Maybe you know and love a drunkard. They can experience the same grace you have experienced and have their life transformed by the gospel.*
    - 5) *And on down the list. The message of the gospel is that there is no one who is too far gone for God to save them. God loves to save sinners. So much so that He sent His own Son to die to save sinners. He loves to intervene in broken lives and turn them around for our good and His glory.*

**Conclusion:** There's a very real sense in which there are only two types of people in this room this morning.

Those who WERE unrighteous and those who ARE STILL walking in unrighteousness. Those who ARE righteous and those who are NOT YET righteous. Those who WILL inherit the kingdom of God and those who WILL NOT inherit the kingdom of God.

If you are not in Christ this morning. If you have never turned from your sin and placed your trust in Jesus. If these sins characterize your life. If you are marked by unrighteousness. You are on a path that leads only to death. You will not inherit the kingdom of God. Your only hope is to turn from your sin and place your trust in Jesus. You can be saved today. You can be made right with God today. You can be given the promise of eternal life today. But you must confess your sin to God, turn away from your sin, and place your total trust in the finished work of Jesus on the cross to save you.

If you are in Christ this morning, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 is your testimony. You were far from God because of your sin. But you've been washed, you've been sanctified, you've been justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

That's why we celebrate the Lord's Supper. To remember and celebrate what God has done for us by sending His Son Jesus to live and die to pay for our sin. Let's pray together, and then we'll go to the Lord's table.