

Common Lies of Our Age:

Lie #2: What I Feel is Who I Am

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Intro: How Feelings Became the Authority

[Break from Genesis. Four part series]

“...emotions are given to us by God. The all-wise Creator has wired us to feel,” says Jared Wilson, in his book *The Gospel According to Satan*. (71) The problem is not *that* we feel. The problem is that we often let what we feel be the decisive determination of what we believe is true. We live in an age where our feelings ultimately define our reality. The air we breathe, whether we realize it or not, is this: “What I feel is who I am. What I feel is always real.”

Carl Trueman, professor of Christian history, wrote a book called *A Strange New World*, that captures this point: “The modern self assumes the authority of inner feelings and sees authenticity as defined by the ability to give social expression to [such feelings].” (Trueman, 22) In other words, the way people identify (where they find their true identity, who they are, what makes them...them) is determined by what’s

going on inside of them. We no longer are we defined by the transcendent God outside of us who made us and tells us who we are; rather we're defined by the immediate of what's happening inside of us, and therefore, WE determine for ourselves who we are.

If you're not yet a Christian, I hope by the end of this message you'll see Christianity offers something so much better. It is so much better to define your true self not based on what you feel, but on the basis of what your Creator says about you. And even more...to receive a new identity, not based on what you feel or even anything you've done. But based on who Jesus is and what he did for you.

Your true self isn't defined by your feelings; it's defined by what God. I want us to see that point unfold in 3 steps in this passage. First...

1) Who you were is not who you should still want to be. [v9a] There's a context here. Paul just rebuked this church in Corinth for suing each other—members taking fellow members to court (6:1-8). The Corinthian church was not healthy.

So Paul asks this question in [v9a] to get this church to realize how foolish it is to settle earthly kingdom disputes with those who won't even inherit the true heavenly kingdom. The word "unrighteous" is the same word he uses in v1 to describe those who ran the court system. [v1] In other words, "You're getting a non-Christians (unrighteous) to settle disputes for Christians!"

Now, it's important to note that they were suing each other over silly *civil* matters. These are not criminal cases. Paul's not saying, "You should *never* bring another person who claims to be a believer to court." He's saying, "In cases of civil disputes, that should not be your first option."

- In v1 he calls it as *grievance*.
- In v2, he calls it a *trivial* case.
- In v5, it's a *dispute*.

So he's not talking about what we might call "criminal cases," where a crime was committed against another. This is more like a breach of contract, not a murder. His point is: "Why would you take your civil disputes before the unrighteous? Before the world? Can't you settle things between your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ?"

That's why he says in **[v9a]**. "These people whom you're getting to help you settle your earthly disputes in this earthly kingdom are not even gonna inherit God's eternal kingdom." Who are these people? Who are those who will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Paul provides a list of sinful descriptions of people who will not go to heaven. And at first, it appears he's *only* doing this to wake them up to the silliness of getting THESE people to settle their earthly disputes. But as his argument unfolds, we quickly find he's listing these vices to show them what THEY are like, as well.

We can categorized this list in two parts: sexual sins (v9) and social sins (v10). **[v9-10]** Look at that first category in v9: sexual sins. The first term is the "sexually immoral." *Pornoi* (from which we get the word "pornography"), refers to various kinds of sexual immorality. It's the sexual exploitation of another for selfish pleasure.

No one here is guilty of that, right? What did you look at this week as you pursued the internet? Where did your eyes wander?

The next term is “idolater.” This is one who worships a statue or image or any false god, but the reason Paul includes this word here is because idol worship was often associated with sexually immoral behavior. The things that people would do in their worship of false gods included gross sexual sin. (DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?*, 66)

You might say, “Good. I’m off the hook on this one!” Interestingly, in Colossians 3:5, Paul says that sexually coveting (desiring) another person whom you’re not married to...is idolatry!

The next term is “adulterer.” This is someone who is sexually unfaithful to their spouse...who goes outside the bounds of covenant marriage and is intimate with another. (And remember from last week, Jesus said from Matt. 5 if a person looks with lust on another, they’ve committed adultery in their heart!)

Paul is saying, “These are the people who don’t inherit the kingdom of God!” If we’re honest, we’re all in trouble here! That’s really important to understand as we turn to the last description at the end of v9: “men who practice homosexuality.”

Now, before I talk about this any further, I wanna say to those for whom same-sex attraction feels more natural than opposite-sex attraction, I'm really glad you're here. Perhaps it wasn't easy for you to walk through those doors. Perhaps you think, "If anyone here knew what was going on inside of me, they would immediately discard me."

And that's not true. We had plenty of people come through our church who feel a similar way. It is possible for a Christian to have such feelings. But, as we can see in this verse (and plenty of others in the Bible) that it is not God's design to be settled in those feelings, and it's certainly not God's design to act on them. WHY, if it feels natural? Hold on to that thought.

There have been many attempts over the years to try to prove the Bible does not say anything negative about consensual, monogamous homosexual relationships. Some say what Paul really has in mind here is some sort of an abusive relationship, like pederasty. But Paul could've used a specific Greek word for that, and he doesn't.

The phrase “men who practice homosexuality” translates two Greek words: *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*.

- *Malakoi* means “soft” and is sometimes translated “effeminate.” But the way Paul is using it here describes the passive participant in homosexual behavior. (BDAG, 613)
- *Arsenokoitai* is comes from two different words: the word “men” (*arsen*) and the word “bed” (*koite*)—*arsenokoite*. So a wooden translation could be “bedders of men” or “those who take males to bed.” He’s most likely getting this word from Lev. 18:22, “You shall not lie with [*koiten*] a male [*arsenos*] as with a woman.”

So these two words refer to the passive and active participants in a consensual homosexual act. It just won’t do for people who claim to be Christians to say that God affirms this.

Again, if you’re not a Christian, and you’re thinking, “I don’t understand why people can’t do what feels natural to them.” Jump down to **[vv18-20]**. God really cares how you use your body. Why? Because you don’t own it! He does! He made you! And he designed your body to be

utilized in a certain way. He did not design it to be sexually used with anyone anytime you feel like it. No matter how natural it feels, if you do not use your body in a way it was designed by your Creator to be used, then it would not be loving to affirm it's misuses.

That's why there's so much emphasis in this passage on *all kinds* of sexual sin. I'll be the first to admit how frustrating it is when people hypocritically condemn homosexuality while they themselves are walking in all the other sins in this list! And quite often, this is done as form of self-atonement/justification. "If I can just get the focus off my pornography problem, my wandering eyes, my flirting with co-workers, my premarital relations...and put all my focus on the "really bad sins," then it makes me feel better about myself."

I was talking to a brother last night who was lamenting this very thing of self-proclaimed Christians he knows who vehemently condemn homosexuality, even though they've been hooking up with their boyfriend or girlfriend.

If we read this list with a finger pointed away from ourselves, we're missing the whole point! In fact, let's just continue in the list. These principles don't pertain only to sexual sin. Look at the next category of social sins. **[v10]**

"Thieves" is the word *kleptes* from which we get *kleptomania*. Referring to someone who takes what belongs to another. "I've never robbed anyone." Ok, but how many of us steal *time* at work? Who among us has never stolen an answer in a test? Who hasn't pirated videos?

"Greedy" describes a person who wants and wants and is never satisfied. We've seen this play out in the book of Genesis with Laban and Jacob. Laban is greedy for free labor from Jacob and so he cheats Jacob several times. And we concluded: greedy people can't love people; they can only use people. And this is not just talking about being greedy money. *I talked to a brother after the sermon on Laban's greed who said, "I feel very convicted by this because I realize how greedy I am. But not for money; for recognition. And I don't love others when I'm greedy for their approval. I only use them. Anyone relate?*

“Drunkard” is one who abuses alcohol. This is not a condemnation on drinking in itself; this is a condemnation on getting drunk. And I would imagine few in this room have never gone too far in their alcohol consumption. And I think Paul includes it in the list of social sins because of the damaging effects alcohol abuse has on others.

“Slanderer” means more than just one who spreads lies about another. It carries the idea of *reviling*. One Greek dictionary translates it “abusive person,” referring to verbal abuse. This is one who is out of control in their prideful anger that leads them to say things toward those around them that are despising and disparaging.

“Swindler” carries the idea of cheating someone of their money. This is why tax collectors in the NT were often associated with swindling (Lk. 18:11).

How are we feeling right now? Paul is saying that THESE people will not inherit the kingdom of God. And all of us in here are guilty of at least one of the things on this list, if not multiple. In fact, if you were to read this entire letter to this church in Corinth, you would find that the people

in this list sound an awful lot like the people in that church. In ch5, Paul confronts the church for its tolerance of sexual sin. In ch11, Paul confronts the church for getting drunk at the Lord's supper and being greedy towards each other and getting into fights with each other.

The list in this passage is not meant for Christians to say, "Look how bad everyone else!" It's a list that lays bare our own hearts and lives, showing, none one deserves the kingdom of God.

Even more, this is not a list of *things*...it's a list of people. These are not mere vices; these are identities. He doesn't merely say, "The people who have done sexual immoral things..." he says, "the sexually immoral." He doesn't merely say, "Those who've committed adultery..." he says, "the adulterer."

These sinful acts are their identity. If you steal, you ARE a thief. If you abuse alcohol, you ARE a drunkard. If you angrily speak demanding words, you ARE a reviler. That's who you are!...Because that's how GOD sees you, and God's perception of reality is most accurate.

How, then, does ANYONE inherit heaven? The answer is: your identity before God needs to change from sinner to saint. And that takes us to the second step in Paul's argument...

2) Who you were is no longer who you are.

If you're a Christian, take in these glorious words in [v11a]. NOT, "Such ARE some of you." There's been a change in who they are. How can he say that when so many of them are still acting like who they were? Paul is reminding them *mainly* of their IDENTITY change. Their STATUS change before a holy God.

"Such WERE some of you. That's who you used to be! That's who you were. The things you're still doing now and even feeling now that are more in line who you used to be...that's not who you are anymore!" This is something you should remind yourself of often, if you're a Christian...

Especially when you're tempted to let your feelings determine your identity. Have you been there this week? How have you let your feelings determine reality? I love the way John Piper puts it in this book *Finally Alive*, "My feelings are not

God. God is God. My feelings do not define truth. God's word defines truth. My feelings are echoes and responses to what my mind perceives. And sometimes—many times—my feelings are out of sync with the truth. When that happens—and it happens every day in some measure—I try not to bend the truth to justify my imperfect feelings, but rather, I plead with God: Purify my perceptions of your truth and transform my feelings so that they are in sync with the truth.”

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“Such were some of you.” The means by which the Bible calls us to fight against the pull towards our old self is to fight to believe the truth of who we now are: Beloved children of the living God. How did we become that? This takes us to the last step in Paul's argument...

3) You are no longer who you *were* because God changed you into who you now are. [v11]

In the original language, the conjunction “but” is before each phrase. “BUT you were washed, BUT you were sanctified, BUT you were justified.”

Paul is laboring to show us: You have a new identity because something happened to you!

What happened? He says, “You WERE washed. You WERE sanctified. You WERE justified.” NOT, “You washed *yourself*. You sanctified *yourself*. You justified *yourself*.” This isn’t something YOU did. This is something that was done TO YOU! Who did it? You know who did it. God did it.

“God washed you.” This is probably an allusion to a few OT passages. Ezekiel 16 pictures the hopeless and helpless state of God’s people before he got a hold of them. It’s a picture of an unwanted baby thrown into the middle of an open field, left to die in its own blood. And God says to his people Ezekiel 16:6, “When I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’” Then he goes onto say, “I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you...”

Later in Ezekiel, this is a key promise of the NC. Ezekiel 36:25, God says, “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.” Do you know yourself clean before God? How can this happen? We’ll get there.

V11 also says you were *sanctified*. This is not referring to the process after you become a Christian growing in holiness. This is referring to the moment you became a Christian when God set you apart for himself. He took possession of you. You are now his! Your body and your inner man—all of you is his!

Lastly, it says you were *justified*—you were declared righteous before God. God the judge casts his verdict on sinners who deserve his judgment and says, “You are righteous. I will not condemn you for all those things mentioned in vv9-10. Because that’s not who you are anymore. Why? Because what I declare about you defines you. You are righteous in my sight.”

Now how can all this be? How can God just decide to wash us of all this sin and set us apart unto himself and declare us right in his sight and label us with a new identity? Notice that phrase at the end of v11, “in the name the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God.” You were washed, sanctified, justified IN the name of Jesus and BY the Spirit of God. What does that mean?

That phrase “in the name of Jesus” is identity language. You were washed, sanctified, and justified IN THE NAME of Jesus...meaning, who he is. He is totally clean, totally set apart unto God the Father, totally right and good and without sin. Who he is, is credited to you who trust him. **[Gospel appeal]**

Now, how can the work of Jesus just be applied to us? That last phrase helps: “by the Spirit of God.” It’s the third person of the Trinity who applies the work of Jesus to you, and changes who you are.

Conclusion

Listen, don’t believe the lie that “What I feel is who I am.” Don’t settle for that. God offers you something so much bigger and better than the feelings you have inside you.

Of course, this in no way means you won’t struggle with your feelings that pull toward the identity of your old self! But it does mean that, in that struggle, you gotta cling to this truth: What God has done for me in Christ is my most fundamental identity. Cling to that.