

A SERMON IN TENSES

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In I Corinthians 6:9-11, the apostle Paul, writing by inspiration, makes a significant statement about conversion to Christ. With the phrase, “know ye not,” Paul confidently affirms that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven. This powerful phrase is found ten times in I Corinthians. Paul uses it to introduce a rhetorical question. He is confident that the Corinthians already know the correct answer, but he asks them to recall what they already know in order to apply it to a new concept. He is stressing the necessity for each of the Christians at Corinth to live a pure, holy life before God. Only the righteous will enjoy the bliss of heaven. Paul wants them to be counted among the righteous and thus to enjoy heaven.

TRANSFORMATION FROM

Paul states, “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (I Cor. 6:9, 10). Paul lists ten specific sins. This list was not meant to be exhaustive. It was meant to be illustrative of the types of sins committed among the Gentiles. Some of the Christians at Corinth had been guilty of participation in these sins.

Paul declares “and such were some of you.” The use of the predicate *ēte* is important. The word is an **imperfect tense** and indicates “you were” once, but now are no longer. The imperfect tense indicates continuous action in past time. The Corinthians were living a life devoted to sin. The unrighteous had to become righteous. The unrighteous have no hope of

heaven. The righteous have hope of eternal life in heavenly realms. A transformation (conversion) had to take place in the lives of those now enjoying the promise of heaven. Many of the Corinthians had undergone a significant transformation that altered their future destiny. They were transformed from a life of sin to a life of righteousness.

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Paul continues, “but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (I Cor. 6:11). Three **aorists** are used to describe the process whereby the Corinthians became righteous. These are historical aorists, i.e. they state only what occurred in the past. But, this is significant. The aorists (denoting point action in past time) mark the moment that the Corinthians were converted to Christ. First, their conversion involved being **washed**. This is a clear reference to baptism. The apostle Paul himself had washed away his sins in the waters of baptism (Acts 22:16). This baptism is an immersion in water for the remission (forgiveness) of sins (Acts 2:38). The power to remit sins is found only in the blood of Christ (Heb. 9:14). Therefore, in baptism, the blood of Christ remits our sins. This first aorist is also a middle voice verb. In the middle voice in Greek, the subject participates in the results of the action. The force of the word is “you had yourselves washed” (R.C.H. Lenski, *Interpretation of I Corinthians*, 251). This clearly indicates their choice in the decision to become a Christian. This is a causative or permissive middle. The meaning is this: “with their own hearts the Corinthians themselves desired and accepted this washing and cleansing. In their case, baptism was not a mere outward, formal, or only symbolic act. And what they desired, they obtained: they were cleansed of sin and guilt” (see Lenski, *Interpretation of I Corinthians*, 251). Second, they were **sanctified**. This word indicates that they were set apart for a holy use at the same time that they were washed. When sins are remitted

by the power of the blood of Christ, the result is sanctification. A Christian is purchased by the blood of Christ and becomes a servant of righteousness. Every Christian belongs to God by virtue of being redeemed by the blood of Christ. Consequently, a Christian must use his/her body and spirit to glorify God. Third, they were **justified**. Justification is a legal term. It means that one is acquitted of sin and so stands before God and Christ as if he had never sinned! The words **sanctified** and **justified** are in the passive voice in the Greek. The passive voice indicates that the subject is being acted upon. Sanctification and justification are the spiritual work of God through Christ. Christians are justified by the blood of Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:8, 9) and saved from the wrath of God. This fact emphasizes the substitutionary atonement of Jesus. Jesus took our place and died in our behalf. The Corinthians were guilty of the sins Paul enumerated in verses 9 and 10. But, they did not have to die for their sins. Christ died for them and so paid the price that satisfied the justice of God and justified them before God. However, they were justified by an obedient faith (Rom. 1:5, 5:1, 16:26). In Acts 18:8, Luke the historian writes this account of the conversion of the Corinthians, "And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized." The aorist tenses in I Cor. 6:11, indicates the historical moment when the marvelous transformation from unrighteousness to righteousness was complete. That moment occurred when they were washed, sanctified and justified. All three actions take place at the same historical moment which we call their conversion to Christ. The actions indicated involved their will-power and God's power.

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What did they become? The answer is New Testament Christians. They changed their identity from children of the devil to children of God. Now what should they do? They have a

new identity and, with it, a new purpose. This new purpose is the result of their redemption. It is their *redemptive purpose* to use their bodies and their spirits to glorify God (I Cor. 6:19, 20).

The word *glorify* is an **aorist imperative** and denotes the climax of Paul's argument. They were called to holiness and must now exhibit lives that exemplify their high calling in Christ Jesus.

They must flee every sin Paul lists in verses 9 and 10. Paul especially emphasizes that they must flee the sin of fornication. They must remember that the Holy Spirit dwells in them. They must remember that they are the Lord's possession. They must live righteously for only the righteous shall inherit the everlasting kingdom (heaven). This was true **before** their conversion and it is equally true **after** their conversion. Paul clearly teaches the Corinthians that if they truly desire to experience the wonders of heaven, what they once were (sinners), they must never become again and what they are now (Christians), they must always remain.