

VIEWS ON PAUL'S VICE LISTS AND INHERITING THE KINGDOM*

René A. López

IN 1 CORINTHIANS 6:9–10 PAUL LISTED ten kinds of sinners who, he said, “will not inherit the kingdom of God”: fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, the covetous, drunkards, revilers, swindlers. If, as it seems, Paul was addressing believers,¹ why then did he say that those who participated in these vices would not inherit the kingdom? Did he mean they would lose their salvation? Or would believers lose fellowship with the Lord? Or miss the millennial kingdom? Or lose rewards in heaven?

None of the views above account for all the details. Rather Paul was simply using this list of vices characteristic of unbelievers as a way of exhorting believers not to emulate them. “Paul was addressing believers who were behaving like unbelievers,”² and he was encouraging them to live in light of their position in Christ.

However, in a number of passages Paul wrote that those who are guilty of these vices will not inherit the kingdom. Are these passages to be understood in the same way? What about Galatians 5:19–24 and Ephesians 5:3–8? And how were vice lists understood in the Old Testament and in extrabiblical literature? The quest to understand the biblical teaching on this subject has resulted in a number of conflicting interpretations, which may leave some readers confused. This series of six articles discusses these topics in

René A. López is Adjunct Professor of Greek and New Testament and Spanish Biblical Studies, Criswell College, Dallas, Texas.

* This is the first article in a six-part series, “The Pauline Vice Lists and Inheriting the Kingdom.”

¹ See René López, “Does the Vice List in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 Refer to Believers or Unbelievers?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164 (January–March 2007): 59–73.

² *Ibid.*, 73.

order to understand how Paul used the vice lists and the phrase “inherit the kingdom.” This first article discusses six views on the subject. The second article examines vice lists in the Old Testament and extrabiblical literature before and after the New Testament era. Article three surveys Paul’s references to vice lists in nine epistles, and article four surveys Paul’s references in ten epistles to inheriting the kingdom. The fifth article examines the vice list in Galatians 5:19–21, and the sixth article considers the vice list in Ephesians 5:3–5.

A survey of the interpretive history of three Pauline passages (1 Cor. 6:9–11; Gal. 5:19–24; Eph. 5:3–8) surfaces six options that attempt to explain what Paul meant by using the combination of a vice list and the phrase “inherit the kingdom of God.” These conflicting interpretations include (a) Christians who lose their salvation, (b) people professing but not possessing salvation, (c) believers who fail to remain in fellowship with God, (d) believers who will not enter the kingdom as a reward, though they have eternal life, (e) believers who will forfeit rewards in the kingdom and will not rule with Christ, and (f) believers who are exhorted to live like saints instead of like unbelievers who will miss the kingdom.

VIEW ONE: LOSS OF SALVATION AND FORFEITURE OF ENTRANCE INTO THE KINGDOM

In this view the vice lists and the words “inherit the kingdom” refer to believers who forfeit their salvation.³ Many church fathers seem to have adopted this view. Ignatius warned believers not to practice the sins mentioned in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10; Galatians 5:19–21; and Ephesians 5:3–5 because those sins may lead, he said, to eternal damnation.⁴ Ignatius noted that a Christian who behaves corruptly “will not inherit the kingdom of God” and “having polluted himself, will go to the unquenchable fire, as will also the one who listens to him.”⁵ A similar view appears again in Ignatius’ address to the Philadelphians. “Do not be misled, my brothers: if anyone

³ Since the noun σωτηρία (“salvation”) and the verb σώζω (“to save”), sometimes have a temporal aspect and other times an eternal aspect, the use of the terms “salvation” and “save” in this series carries the meaning of “eternal salvation.” For a survey of these terms in the Old and New Testaments see René A. López, “An Exposition of ‘Sōtēria’ and ‘Sōzō’ in the Epistle to the Romans” (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2002), 4–31.

⁴ Ignatius, *Letter to the Ephesians* 16:1–2.

⁵ Ibid.

follows a schismatic [i.e., divisive teacher], he will not inherit the kingdom of God.”⁶ Polycarp wrote, “Similarly, the younger men must be blameless in all things . . . because every ‘sinful desire wages war against the spirit,’ and ‘neither fornicators nor male prostitutes nor homosexuals will inherit the kingdom of God,’ nor those who do perverse things.”⁷ Ignatius used terms similar to those in Galatians 5:17–21 to speak of individuals who will fail to “inherit the kingdom of God or lose their salvation.” To Ignatius those who practice the sins in this vice list will not “inherit the kingdom of God,” which means either losing their salvation or never having had it in the first place.⁸ Either view ends in a similar predicament: to inherit the kingdom one must not practice the sins in the vice list.

The *Shepherd of Hermas* mentions that if one “refrains from every evil desire he will inherit eternal life.”⁹

Second Clement also states that to eliminate vices is a condition for entering the kingdom. “Now if even such righteous men as these are not able, by means of their own righteous deeds, to save their children, what assurance do we have of entering the kingdom of God if we fail to keep our baptism pure and undefiled? Or who will be our advocate, if we are not found to have holy and righteous works?”¹⁰

These church fathers clearly believed that faith in Jesus Christ at salvation¹¹ along with continual obedience (hence avoiding the sins of the vice list) were necessary conditions for inheriting (entering) the kingdom of God.¹² The strength of this view centers on the proximity of the church fathers to the apostles.

Centuries later John Wesley, G. G. Findlay, and John Eadie held this view. Contemporary proponents include Gordon Fee,

⁶ Ignatius, *Letter to the Philadelphians* 3.3.

⁷ Polycarp, *Letter to the Philippians* 5:3.

⁸ Ignatius, *Letter to the Ephesians* 16:2.

⁹ *The Shepherd of Hermas, Vision* 16:4.

¹⁰ *2 Clement* 6:9.

¹¹ *The Shepherd of Hermas, Similitudes* 89:3–5, 8; 90:2.

¹² The following passages emphasize this point: *2 Clement* 6:9; 9:6; 11:6–21:1; *The Epistle of Barnabas* 4:13; 21:1; *The Shepherd of Hermas, Similitudes* 92:3; 93:2–4; 97:2–3; 106:2. Other church fathers who held this view include Clement of Alexandria (*The Instructor* 2.3.11); Tertullian (*On Modesty* 4.7.17); Cyprian (*The Treatise of Cyprian* 5.12.65); idem (*Seventh Council of Carthage* 5); idem (*The Epistle of Cyprian* 5.51.27); Augustine (*Letters of St. Augustine* 1.93.48); and Chrysostom (*Homilies on Matthew* 10.57.6).

George Pixley, and I. Howard Marshall.¹³ Marshall and others assert that unless believers stop practicing the sins mentioned in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 they will forfeit their salvation.¹⁴ Fee connects the verb ἀδικεῖτε (“do wrong”) in verse 8, which applies to believers, with those described by the word ἄδικοι (“unrighteous”) in verse 9.¹⁵ Also Findlay links the Christian “wrongdoers” in verse 8 with those who behave unrighteously in verses 9–10, and he says verse 11 is a reminder “that the sins they thus commit belong to their unregenerate state.”¹⁶ Hence as Enslin states, “In their new state of consecration to Christ they must keep themselves entirely separate from the old taint, and must realize that no idolater could be an heir of the kingdom of God.”¹⁷

Some who hold this view believe that some sins listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10; Galatians 5:19–21; and Ephesians 5:3–5 will bar a person from entrance into the kingdom, whereas other sins will not.¹⁸

¹³ John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (Nashville: Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1894), 419; George Findlay, “The Epistles to the Galatians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, 2nd ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1888), 355; John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1883; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 377, 379; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 242; George V. Pixley, *God’s Kingdom: A Guide for Biblical Study*, trans. Donald D. Walsh (Buenos Aires: Asociación Editorial La Aurora, 1977; reprint, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1981), 94–95; and I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1969), 112.

¹⁴ Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God*, 112; Robert L. Shank, *Life in the Son: A Study of the Doctrine of Perseverance* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1960), 145; and Marie-Joseph Lagrange (*Épître aux Galates* [Paris: Gabalda, 1950], 151).

¹⁵ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 242. See also Brian S. Rosner, “The Origin and Meaning of 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 in Context,” *Biblische Zeitschrift* 40 (1996): 253.

¹⁶ G. G. Findlay, “St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians,” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1903; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 2:816.

¹⁷ Morton Scott Enslin, *The Ethics of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1957), 143. Similar to this view Hans Conzelmann believes that eliminating these sins is a condition for “entry into the kingdom of God” (*1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. James W. Leitch, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975], 106). Judaism in general also viewed participating in the life to come as conditioned on practicing virtues and eliminating vices (Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash* (Munich: Beck, 1961), 4:1188. Josephus noted that the Pharisees believed that participating in the future resurrection depended on whether one “lived virtuously or viciously in this life” (*Jewish Antiquities* 18:1.3, 12–17). See also Josephus, *Against Apion* 2:31, 217.

¹⁸ Karl Benz, *Die Ethik des Apostels Paulus*, Herders Biblische Studien (Freiburg:

In this view the words “Do you not know” and “Do not be deceived” in 1 Corinthians 6:9 are viewed as real warnings to believers. Many translators and commentators see a similar warning in Galatians 5:21 (“I forewarn you” and “I have forewarned you”).¹⁹ And the clauses “This you know with certainty” and “Let no one deceive you”²⁰ in Ephesians 5:5–6 are viewed as warnings to believers.²¹ Gager says these phrases warn believers to discontinue the sins that characterize the ἄδικοι, for “unless they change their ways, they, too, will be numbered among the *adikoi* at the coming of the kingdom. In short, Paul uses the threat of future judgment [here as in Gal. 5:21] as a sanction and motivation for ethical exhortation.”²²

Various arguments are given in support of this view. First, the proximity of the church fathers to the apostles assumes little room for error. Their understanding of Scripture may be correct because they had immediate access to the interpretive tradition of the passages in question. Second, at first glance the wording of 1 Corinthians 6:9–10; Galatians 5:19–21; and Ephesians 5:3–5 seems to teach that believers who do not avoid the sins of the vice list will not “inherit the kingdom of God.” Third, it is argued that the verb ἀδικεῖτε (“do wrong”) in 1 Corinthians 6:8 to describe believers refers to the ἄδικοι (“unrighteous”) in verse 9. Fourth, the phrases “Do you not know” (οὐκ οἶδατε) and “Do not be deceived” (μὴ πλανᾶσθε) in verse 9 may be warnings instead of mere exhortations.

Breisgau Herdersche, 1912), 124–25; and Hans Lietzmann, *Die Briefe des Apostels Paulus*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1919), 30. The Stoics seem to have held a similar view.

¹⁹ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 242; Frank J. Matera, *Galatians*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1992), 202; and Timothy George, *Galatians*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 397–98.

²⁰ Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture quotations are the author's translations.

²¹ “Such a definite reminder stating that absolute and certain ruin and finally eternal damnation awaits all whoremongers and misers serves as a drastic and forceful warning which, to be sure, also Christians have need to, for they also still have their sinful flesh and blood” (G. Stoeckhardt, *Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*, trans. Martin S. Sommer [St. Louis: Concordia, 1952], 229).

²² John G. Gager Jr., “Functional Diversity in Paul's Use of End-Time Language,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89 (September 1970): 334–35. For a similar view see B. J. Oropeza, *Paul and Apostasy: Eschatology, Perseverance, and Falling Away in the Corinthian Congregation* (Tübingen: Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 2000), 165–66, 174, 179, 182, 212; and idem, “Situational Immorality: Paul's ‘Vice Lists’ at Corinth,” *Expository Times* 110 (October 1998): 10. Oropeza concludes, “The Corinthian members who commit vices are in danger of divine rejection and the forfeiture of their place in the eschatological kingdom (1 Cor. 10:5; 6:9–11)” (*Paul and Apostasy*, 179).

This interpretation, however, raises serious questions. How does this view harmonize with other New Testament passages that teach nonmeritorious inheritance and eternal security for believers on the basis of faith alone (John 3:3–8, 16; 10:28–29; Rom. 3:21–4:25; 8:17a, 30–39; Eph. 1:13–14; 4:30)? How much sin disqualifies a believer from entering the kingdom?²³ That the early church fathers closely followed the apostles and soon thereafter fell into error is not surprising. Very soon after the Galatians heard the gospel, believers there reverted “quickly” to “a different gospel” (Gal. 1:6). How can this view answer the contrast of positional righteousness in verses that follow (1 Cor. 6:11; Gal. 5:24; Eph. 5:8) regarding ungodly behavior that Christians were practicing?

VIEW TWO: PROFESSING BUT NOT POSSESSING SALVATION

In this view persistence in habitual sins disqualifies one from entering God’s kingdom and shows that though a person professed salvation he did not possess it. Martin Luther, John Calvin, Louis Berkhof, Charles Hodge, Stephen H. Travis, and John MacArthur believe these passages serve to sift the chaff (professing Christians) from the wheat (possessing Christians).²⁴ In this view people cannot continuously behave like unbelievers and expect to inherit the kingdom.²⁵ Advocates of this view believe that though salvation is

²³ Does committing adultery once or only occasionally disqualify a person from entering the kingdom? What about a person who practices idolatry and nothing else? Is that enough to bar him from inheriting the kingdom?

²⁴ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1860), 418–20; John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 166, 307; Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: R. Carter, 1857; reprint, Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1995), 197; Stephen H. Travis, “Judgment,” in *Dictionary of Paul’s Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Donald G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 517; John MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 202; and Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1941), 546.

²⁵ “Although according to Paul’s argumentation it is not possible to gain entrance to the kingdom of God by means of what were deemed to be *good* practices (law-works), it is definitely possible to shut oneself out by *evil* practices. A person must bid farewell to *all* the works of darkness. Otherwise he proves that he is not yet walking in the light (1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 4:20; 5:7–11)” (William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Galatians*, New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968], 222, italics his). See also idem, *Exposition of Ephesians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), 229; Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 206; John H. Armstrong, “Final Thoughts,” *Reformation and Revival* 11 (spring 2002): 188; and William F. Cook III, “Twenty-First Century Problems in a First Century

a gift received by faith alone in Christ, it never comes alone and is never detached from works in the life of a genuine believer.²⁶

Unlike view one, since Reformed advocates believe in eternal security, they state that habitual sin proves that a person's profession of faith is false.²⁷ Some Reformed theologians identify τῶν ἀδικῶν in 1 Corinthians 6:1 as the ἀπίστων in verse 6 and as those who practice the sins listed in verses 9–10. Thus since the “so-called brother” in 5:11 performs sins similar to those in 6:9–10, this may prove by his sinning continuously that he (like many in Corinth) merely professed Christ (i.e., they were Christian in name only).²⁸ The fact that the vice lists in 5:11 and 6:9–10 are almost identical strengthens this view.

However, this view too raises concerns. First, according to proponents of this view believers cannot commit these sins for a prolonged period of time; yet 5:9–12 repeats an almost identical list without stating how long each sin may be committed. Second, Paul addressed believers (cf. 1:2–10) who were immature (3:1–2) and were causing church divisions (1:11–13; 3:3–9; 11:18) by behaving immorally. Why would Paul exhort believers to “flee sexual immorality” (6:18) if he did not believe they could commit such sins?

Church (1 Corinthians 5–7),” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 6 (fall 2002): 48.

²⁶ This is almost saying the same thing as the first view in the sense that works are a necessary *result* that comes from a genuine believer. The first view believes that works are a *condition* to enter the kingdom. Reformed theology is closer to Arminianism than most people realize. Reformed Calvinism says works are a necessary result that proves one's salvation, and Arminianism says works are a necessary condition to attain salvation. Both recognize that works play a role in determining who is saved.

²⁷ James D. Hester, *Paul's Concept of Inheritance: A Contribution to the Understanding of Heilsgeschichte*, Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1968), 86; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 187, 189. Others, not necessarily of the Reformed persuasion, also hold this view (e.g., Donald K. Campbell, “Galatians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck [Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983; reprint, Colorado Springs: Cook, 1996], 607–8). Jack L. Arnold wrote, “The Apostle Paul does not teach that a person who professes Christianity is saved no matter what his practice may be. He warns the believer that if his state after regeneracy does not change to some degree by holiness in sanctification, he may not have the reality of salvation (1 Cor. 6:9–11; Eph. 5:5–10). . . . Paul did not say that the Christian may not at times do the works of the flesh, but he did say that no Christian can have a habit[ual] pattern of life characterized by sin” (“The Pauline Doctrine of Progressive Sanctification” [Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1967], 214–15, see also 216).

²⁸ Judith M. Gundry Volf, *Paul and Perseverance: Staying In and Falling Away* (Tübingen: Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1990), 136. Volf also believes that Christians can forfeit entering the kingdom if disobedience continues (*ibid.*, 133).

Third, since the verb ἀδικεῖτε (“do wrong”) in verse 8 refers to believers and the substantive ἄδικοι (“wrongdoers”) in verse 9 is of the same word group, some argue that it is reasonable to see the antecedent of verse 9 in verse 8 as describing the characteristics of believers rather than unbelievers of verse 1.²⁹ How would inheriting the kingdom of God in these passages harmonize with a Christian’s assurance of salvation as taught in 1 John 5:13, especially since in this view one cannot ascertain until the end of life whether anyone has persevered?³⁰

Fourth, 1 Corinthians 6:9–11; Galatians 5:19–21; and Ephesians 5:3–6 do not state that Paul was addressing professing believers. This view seems to be a theological presupposition imposed on the text, making perseverance in good works a requirement for entering the kingdom. As Oropeza says about Volf’s view, “Problematic in her approach is the seemingly arbitrary starting point: her exegetical foundation rests on a Reformed understanding of election and predestination, which she then presupposes when examining texts that might reflect apostasy.”³¹

VIEW THREE: BELIEVERS WHO FAIL TO REMAIN IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

This view maintains that the vice list refers to believers who habitually sin and thus forfeit fellowship with God. In this view the kingdom refers to a present reality that believers fail to experience

²⁹ Many make this connection, including Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man* (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle, 1992), 71; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 242; and Zane C. Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse: A Study on Eternal Rewards* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1985; reprint, Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2007), 84–85.

³⁰ In 1 Corinthians 5:11 the New American Standard Bible refers to an immoral Christian as a τις ἀδελφός ὀνομαζόμενος (“a so-called brother”). This translation implies that he was not a genuine believer but only claimed to be (Findlay, “St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians,” 2:813; and Volf, *Paul and Perseverance*, 136). While this view is possible, it is contextually indefensible. This person is contrasted with Gentiles (5:1) and with those in the world (v. 12) and outside the church (vv. 9–10, 12–13). Furthermore nowhere else does the Greek verb ὀνομαζόμενος (“named” or “called”) carry a sense of doubt. See Mark 3:14; Acts 19:13; Romans 15:20; Ephesians 3:15; 5:3; and 2 Timothy 2:19; 1 Maccabees 3:9; and 3 Maccabees 3:17. Hence Paul distinguished immoral believers from unbelievers. Though alike in behavior, they differ in position (Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, 321–22; and John H. Elliott, “No Kingdom of God for Softies? or, What Was Paul Really Saying? 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 in Context,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 34 [spring 2004]: 21).

³¹ Oropeza, *Paul and Apostasy*, 31.

as a result of being disobedient to God.³²

Although Kendall admits that “the kingdom of God” occasionally means salvation (John 3:3, 5; Col. 1:13), he states that the kingdom can also mean God’s sovereign rule over man (Luke 11:20), the eschatological millennial kingdom (2 Tim. 4:1), or God’s immediate presence in fellowship with believers.³³ Kendall sees this last sense in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11; Galatians 5:19–24; and Ephesians 5:3–8. Paul warned believers that behaving immorally leads to broken fellowship with God.

Wall says, “In fact, inheriting the kingdom in both 1 Corinthians 6:9 and Galatians 5:21 is surrounded by a context which speaks of Christians disobeying. Since the audiences are heirs to the eternal life inheritance as believers, Paul’s exhortation warns that if one disobeys (Gal. 5:15–16; 1 Cor. 6:8–11), he must lose out on some present but temporal aspect of the kingdom inheritance, which foreshadows the heavenly life.”³⁴

This view has several commendable features. Kendall and others are correct in affirming that immoral behavior results in broken fellowship with God. The vice lists address believers, whom Kendall correctly considers eternally secure (John 10:28–29; Rom. 8:30–39). Therefore this view accurately notes that Paul addressed believers who will not be banned from entering the future kingdom but who could lose present fellowship with God.

Various factors, however, plague this view. First, when Paul used the words “inherit the kingdom of God” elsewhere (1 Cor. 15:50; Gal. 5:21) and a variation of them (Eph. 5:5), he referred to an eschatological inheritance demonstrated by the future tense οὐ κληρονομήσουσιν (1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:21) or concept (1 Cor. 15:50; Eph. 5:5).³⁵

³² R. T. Kendall, *Once Saved, Always Saved* (Chicago: Moody, 1983), 127–32.

³³ *Ibid.*, 125–26, 129–30.

³⁴ Robert Walter Wall, “The Nature of Obedience in the Ethics of Paul: With Special Application to the Problem of Homosexual Ordination for Christian Ministry” (Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979), 253–54. Elsewhere Wall states, “The problem, while perceived from a future position in the kingdom, is profoundly present in its impact. The Corinthian Christians were engaged in *porneia*; their wickedness was present and real, thus Paul’s warning is directed at present and real consequences” (*ibid.*, 321; see also 322).

³⁵ Paul L. Hammer argues that “Paul’s use of the term [*kléronomia*] is oriented toward the past” (“A Comparison of *Kléronomia* in Paul and Ephesians,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 79 [September 1960]: 268). Yet D. R. Denton notes that Hammer’s conclusion does not take into account clear references to future inheritance (esp. 1 Cor. 6:9–10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21) in the Pauline Epistles (“Inheritance in Paul and Ephesians,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 54 [July–September 1982]: 159, esp. n 20).

Second, the future tense in Matthew 5:5 also refers to a future inheritance, not a present loss of fellowship (cf. 5:3, 10; 7:21). This view would reduce Paul's exhortation or warning to something like, "Don't you know that wrongdoers are out of fellowship with God?" Although this is true, it does not seem to be the issue, since 1 Corinthians 6:2–4 contrasts the future with "matters of this life."

Third, this view does not take into account contextually the contrast between believers and unbelievers (1 Cor. 5–6).

Fourth, this view does not take into account Paul's and others' use of vice lists where they characterize unbelievers (Matt. 15:19 [= Mark 7:21–22]; Rom. 1:29–32; Phil. 3:2; Col. 3:6–8 [cf. Eph. 2:1]; 1 Tim. 1:9–10; 2 Tim. 3:2–4; Titus 3:3; 1 Pet. 4:3; Rev. 9:21; 21:8, 27; 22:15).³⁶

Fifth, this view does not take into account how the phrase "inherit the kingdom of God" was used in the first century, which influenced how biblical authors used it.

VIEW FOUR: BELIEVERS WHO WILL NOT ENTER THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM

In this view believers who practice the vice-list sins will be excluded from the kingdom of God, though they are eternally saved. Entrance into the kingdom is a reward that the unfaithful will forfeit, though they will remain eternally justified by faith alone in Christ.³⁷

Advocates of this view maintain that eternal life is a gift that comes by faith alone. They believe, however, that entrance into the millennium is conditioned on faithfulness (1 Cor. 1:11–12; 3:1–9; 4:18; 5:1–5; 6:1–20; 11:18; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:3–7).³⁸ "After eternal

³⁶ Although the vice lists characterize how unbelievers may behave, 1 Timothy 1:9–10 and 2 Timothy 3:2–4 may also have in mind believers who were clearly capable of practicing these sins. Believers are the referent in 1 Corinthians 5:10–11; 2 Corinthians 12:20–21; Ephesians 4:31; Colossians 3:5; 1 Timothy 6:4–5; and Titus 3:3. Non-Pauline vice lists in which believers are the referent are in Matthew 15:19 (=Mark 7:21–22) and 1 Peter 2:1.

³⁷ G. H. Lang, *Firstborn Sons, Their Rights and Risks: An Inquiry as to the Privileges and Perils of Members of the Church of God* (London: Oliphants, 1943; reprint, Miami Springs, FL: Conley and Schoettle, 1984), 108, 110, 112–15; and Robert Govett, *Entrance into the Kingdom: Or Reward According to Works*, 2nd ed. (London: C. J. Thynne, 1853; reprint, Miami Springs, FL: Conley and Schoettle, 1978), 1–9.

³⁸ J. D. Faust, *The Rod: Will God Spare It? An Exhaustive Study of Temporary Punishment for Unfaithful Christians at the Judgment Seat and During the Millennial Kingdom* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle, 2002), 72, 81–82; and Lang, *Firstborn*

life is possessed, the kingdom is still a further object to be sought. He who obtains the kingdom of Christ will assuredly attain eternal life; but he who enters eternal life may lose the kingdom.”³⁹ Lang concludes, “The warning has no *possible* application to one who is not a child of God.”⁴⁰ Thus in this view entrance into the kingdom and having eternal life are not identical concepts. Although it is impossible for a believer to lose his or her salvation, Paul’s warning applies to Christians.⁴¹ Like those who hold views one and five, Lang connects ἀδικεῖτε (“do wrong”) in verse 8 with ἄδικοι (“wrongdoers”) in verse 9. He says the “wrongdoers” are “those who had been justified, sanctified, and washed from their old sins [but who] may *do wrong* and *were doing it*.” He defends this view by noting that the anarthrous term ἄδικοι characterizes the “wrongdoers” in verse 9 as those who “do wrong” (v. 8) who will not inherit the kingdom.⁴² In a similar vein Lang says the Galatian believers (Gal. 5:19–21) were in danger of falling into legalism and of “forfeiting the moral energy which grace alone supplies. . . . Consequently the flesh would soon assert its old supremacy . . . [and ultimately the disobedient believers would] not inherit the kingdom of God.” Like advocates of views one, three, and five, Lang interprets both Greek terms “I forewarn you” (προλέγω ὑμῖν) and “I have forewarned” (προεἶπον) in Galatians 5:21 (like 1 Cor. 6:9 and Eph. 5:5–6) as warnings to believers.⁴³

Some may ask, “Where will the believers be if they miss the kingdom?” Peculiarly Faust says that carnal believers will be banished to hades “in the center of the earth.” Then “after the millennium, the banished Christians will be restored to endless bliss and the unbelievers will perish forever in the Lake of Fire.”⁴⁴

This view correctly maintains that salvation is by faith alone

Sons, 109–10, 112–14.

³⁹ Govett, *Entrance into the Kingdom*, 134. Lang gives a similar explanation (*Firstborn Sons*, 113).

⁴⁰ Lang, *Firstborn Son*, 110 (italics his).

⁴¹ Faust, *The Rod*, 77.

⁴² Lang, *Firstborn Sons*, 110 (italics his).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 110–14. Lang says, “Can anything be plainer than these repeated and emphatic words, ‘Of which I forewarn *you* (not carnal unregenerate professors among you; but ‘you,’ all of you who form the churches of Galatia), even as I did forewarn *you* that if an *unregenerate man* does these things *he* shall not inherit a portion that he never has had any real right to expect.’ But surely this is to emasculate the warning of its whole strength and value” (*ibid.*, 112, italics his).

⁴⁴ Faust, *The Rod*, 113. He says hades, Gehenna, and Tartarus are temporal and differ from the lake of fire (*ibid.*, 106).

in Christ, but it allows for believers to be disciplined (by missing the kingdom without losing their salvation). Also the anarthrous ἄδικοι (“wrongdoers”) in 1 Corinthians 6:9 is linked to those who “do wrong” in verse 8 and who will not inherit the kingdom.

However, the claim that believers can miss the kingdom contradicts other passages. In John 3:3–18 being born again is a synonym for attaining eternal life. To “see the kingdom of God” means to “enter the kingdom of God” (v. 5).⁴⁵ The only condition set forth here to “enter the kingdom of God” is to “believe in Jesus.”

Also 1 Corinthians 15:50–54 does not exclude any believers in the church age from being in the millennial kingdom regardless of their behavior or wrong doctrinal views. This is significant, since many believers in Corinth were living carnally and were denying the physical resurrection of both Jesus and believers. Also 1 Thessalonians 5:5–10 does not state that immoral believers will miss the kingdom. Whether they “wake or sleep,” they will “live together with Him” (v. 10).⁴⁶

No passage teaches that some believers will be in hades along with unbelievers for one thousand years! And as has been asked before, where does Scripture quantify how many sins will disqualify a believer from entering the kingdom?

VIEW FIVE: BELIEVERS WHO WILL FORFEIT REWARDS IN THE KINGDOM AND WILL NOT RULE WITH CHRIST

In this view Paul referred to unfaithful believers who will forfeit rewards and will not rule with Christ in the millennial kingdom, though they will be there.⁴⁷ Advocates of this view include Theo-

⁴⁵ Raymond Brown correctly explains the meaning of the term “see” in John 3:3. “This means ‘to experience encounter, participate in,’ as, e.g., in ‘see death’ (viii 51), ‘see life’ (iii 36). Notice the synonymous, parallel expression ‘enter’ in vs. 5; perhaps ‘see’ brings out more clearly the relationship of the kingdom to the revelation brought by Jesus, revelation that has to be seen, accepted, believed” (*The Gospel According to John [I–XII]*, Anchor Bible [New York: Doubleday, 1966], 130).

⁴⁶ The word καθεύδω in 1 Thessalonians 5:10, rendered “sleep,” is taken by many to refer to a believer’s physical death. However, it actually refers to moral laxity (“to be spiritually indolent or indifferent”). Thomas R. Edgar clarifies this in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11 (“*Lethargic or Dead in 1 Thessalonians 5:10?*” *Calvin Theological Journal* 6 [October–December 2000]: 36–51). See also Zane C. Hodges, “1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 and the Rapture,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 6 (October–December 2000): 22–35. Hence this verse teaches that when the Lord returns at the beginning of the millennium, all believers, including the unfaithful ones, will be with Him—without a thousand-year gap.

⁴⁷ Harlan D. Betz writes, “All believers will enter the kingdom. This is the question. *What kind of entrance will you have?* It is required of a servant that he be

dore P. Ayre, Harlan D. Betz, Joseph Dillow, Zane Hodges, and Robert N. Wilkin.⁴⁸

In this view “to inherit” the kingdom means more than merely “entering” it. Instead it carries the idea of ownership. Dillow says several passages on inheritance point to ownership and reigning based on obedience (e.g., Deut. 16:20; Isa. 57:13; Jer. 8:10; Rom. 8:17). Although all believers will be in the millennial kingdom because of their faith in Christ (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:1–7), some believers will not receive rewards because of disobedience. Inheritance in the Old Testament was equated with being in the land of Canaan (Deut. 15:4; 19:14; 25:19; 26:1).⁴⁹ Though God gave Canaan to Israel (Gen. 15:7–18; Lev. 20:24), the Israelites’ failure to obey the Lord resulted in forfeiting that inheritance (Gen. 17:14; Num. 14:24; Deut. 11:13–24; 16:20; 19:8–9; Josh. 1:6–7; 14:8–9).⁵⁰ However, not entering Canaan is not the same as not entering heaven; Moses who disobeyed (Deut. 4:21–22) was excluded from inheriting Canaan, but he was eternally saved (Matt. 17:3).

Dillow and Hodges, two advocates of this view, also argue that the verb ἀδικεῖτε (“do wrong”) in 1 Corinthians 6:8 and the noun ἄδικοι (“unrighteous”) in verse 9 both describe believers.⁵¹ Dillow says that since ἄδικοι (“unrighteous”) is anarthrous, this points to

found faithful. We may know the most famous servants, but we don't know the most faithful servants. Only God knows, and He will reward them!” (*Setting the Stage for Eternity: A Study of the Judgment Seat of Christ and Its Impact on a Believer in This Life and in the Life to Come* [Kingwood, TX: Falcon, 2005], 269, italics his).

⁴⁸ Theodore P. Ayre, *Win Your Race, Gain the Prize: Rewards and Inheritance after Jesus Returns* (Bellaire, TX: Olive, 2000), 48; Betz, *Setting the Stage for Eternity*, 269, 286, 291; Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, 70–72; Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel under Siege: Faith and Works in Tension* (Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 1981), 133; Robert N. Wilkin, *Confident in Christ: Living by Faith Really Works* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 66, 223; idem, *Road to Reward*, 88–90, 126; and idem, *Secure and Safe: Grasping the Promises of God* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2005), 104. Another advocate of this view says of these passages in question that Paul “warns them ‘For this ye know that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God’ ([Eph] 5:5). This is practically the same exhortation given in 1 Corinthians 6:10 and Galatians 5:21. People who live a life of open, habitual sin will forfeit their inheritance in the kingdom of God. This is not talking about salvation, but about the privilege in having a part in the reign of Christ’s kingdom” (Ray E. Baughman, *The Kingdom of God Visualized* [Chicago: Moody, 1972], 142–43).

⁴⁹ Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, 45–59.

⁵⁰ See also Rosner, “The Origin and Meaning of 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 in Context,” 252.

⁵¹ Hodges, *The Gospel under Siege*, 133; and Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, 70–72.

the character of those whose behavior is mentioned in verse 8.⁵²

Proponents of this view also argue that if these verses and Galatians 5:19–21 and Ephesians 5:3–6 are saying that *unbelievers* or professing believers will not enter the kingdom, this provides no warning or motivation for godly living. On the other hand the possibility of losing rewards, it is argued, provides a strong warning that motivates believers.⁵³ As Hodges says, “It is unfortunate that these words [1 Cor. 6:9–11; Gal. 5:19–21; Eph. 5:5–6] have been so widely misconstrued. When the thought of ‘inheriting’ the kingdom is reduced to a mere synonym for ‘entering’ it, the force of the warning is largely lost.”⁵⁴ Elsewhere Hodges concludes, “The Pauline passage found in Galatians 5:19–21 is similar to 1 Corinthians 6:9–11. It can be interpreted in exactly the same way.

In Galatians, also, the statement about ‘inheriting’ the kingdom of God occurs in the heart of an exhortation that warns believers against fulfilling ‘the lust of the flesh’ (Gal. 5:16–26). Evidently the Apostle used this truth about the Kingdom as a powerful motivational technique for his Christian brethren. And so should we.”⁵⁵

This view maintains a consistent approach to the believer’s security while allowing 1 Corinthians 6:9–10; Galatians 5:19–21; and Ephesians 5:3–5 to speak on disciplinary issues that bar believers from having rewards while being eternally saved. Advocates of this view also link the “wrongdoers” of verse 8 with the “unright-

⁵² Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, 71.

⁵³ Baughman, *The Kingdom of God Visualized*, 213.

⁵⁴ Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse*, 84. In like manner Wilkin wrote, “While no one can take away our God-given inheritance, we *can* forfeit it by the way we live. How much we will receive depends on how we live our Christian lives. To receive the ultimate inheritance—ruling with Christ—we must persevere in faith and good works. On three occasions the apostle Paul listed various vices, warning that people who live like that ‘will not inherit the kingdom of God’ (1 Corinthians 6:9–11; Galatians 5:19–21; and Ephesians 5:5–7)” (*Road to Reward* [Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2003], 126, italics his). Three pages later Wilkin clarifies that Scripture teaches two types of inheritance, “passive inheritance” and “active inheritance.” Yet, “only those believers who persevere in faith and good works will inherit these things: rulership with Christ, His approval, and the right to wear special white garments, to mention just a few. In Galatians 5:19–21, *inheriting the kingdom* refers to *active inheritance*” (ibid., 129, italics his). For a similar conclusion see Harry Ashe Lane, “Paul’s Use of the Root *Kleronomeō* in Relationship to the Believer’s Inheritance in the Eternal Kingdom” (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978), 43–62. See also Robert N. Wilkin, “Christians Who Lose Their Legacy: Galatians 5:21,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 4 (autumn 1991): 23–37.

⁵⁵ Hodges, *The Gospel under Siege*, 137.

eous” of verse 9. Distinctions between “entering” and “inheriting” are also helpful when considering other biblical passages that emphasize this.

However, this view is not without problems. First, although the distinctions between nonmeritorious and meritorious inheritance are correct, the question here is how the phrase “inherit the kingdom of God” was understood during the period from 323 B.C. to A.D. 500, and how it therefore influenced the way Paul used it in all three passages. Second, even though ἄδικεῖτε (1 Cor. 6:8) is the nearest antecedent of ἄδικοι (v. 9), this does not prove that verse 8 refers to the same class of people described by the vice list. Third, the fact that ἄδικοι is anarthrous does not help identify a certain class of people. The anarthrous nominative ἄδικοι refers only to what characterizes the people in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10.⁵⁶ Whether the vice lists refer to believers or unbelievers must be determined by other exegetical details. Fourth, this view does not clarify how all three passages contrast the believers’ position with their practical behavior, when it is clear these believers were guilty of many of the sins mentioned in the vice list.⁵⁷ Why make a contrast by denying the very thing it purports to correct (e.g., “such were some of you,” but they were practicing such sins)?

VIEW SIX: BELIEVERS WHO ARE EXHORTED NOT TO LIVE LIKE UNBELIEVERS

The sixth option understands that the vice list is addressing believers by using a common stock list (characteristic of unbelievers who have no share in the kingdom) to persuade believers to live up to what should characterize all saints. David K. Lowery, William E. Brown, Harold W. Hoehner, and others maintain that Paul exhorted believers to live like saints.⁵⁸ In this view behavior plays no part

⁵⁶ H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), 140.

⁵⁷ Hodges answers this way regarding 1 Corinthians 6:11: “Paul is so far from suggesting to them that perhaps they are not Christians at all, that he even appeals to the fact that they *are*” (*The Gospel under Siege*, 133, italics his; see also 181–82).

⁵⁸ William E. Brown, “The New Testament Concept of the Believer’s Inheritance” (Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984); idem, “Inheritance,” in *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 374–75; Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 658; David K. Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, 516; J. Eric Binion, “Paul’s Concept of Inheritance” (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1987); William L. Pettin-gill, *By Grace through Faith plus Nothing* (Findlay, OH: Fundamental Truth, 1938),

in determining entrance into the kingdom because that entrance is based on faith alone in Jesus.

While the vice lists characterize unbelievers, believers sometimes behave like unbelievers, a reality not characteristic of their position in Christ. As Lowery explains,

The word *adikoi* (“the wicked”) in 1 Corinthians 6:9 was used in verse 1, there translated “the ungodly.” The verb form *adikeite* (“do wrong”) however, was used in verse 8 to describe the Corinthians’ behavior. Their future role should have radically affected their practice in the present (cf. 1 John 3:3). If they thought otherwise, Paul warned, they were deceived (cf. 1 Cor. 5:11; Rev. 21:7–8; 22:14–15). The list of offenders was similar to that noted earlier (1 Cor. 5:10–11), which no doubt corresponded to problems in Corinth and in other large cities of the day (cf. Eph. 5:3–6).⁵⁹

Unlike the previous positions, this view sees Paul exhorting instead of warning believers not to live like unbelievers who will not inherit the kingdom of God. As Hoehner states regarding Ephesians 5:3–5, “Paul exhorts the new person not to live like the old person, explaining that the old person has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and can expect only the coming wrath of God. In verses 3–5 Paul listed vices characteristic of unbelievers which, consequently, exclude them from the kingdom of God (cf. also 1 Cor 5:9–11; 6:9–10; Gal 5:19–21; Col 3:5–8).”⁶⁰

Five arguments support this view. First, the immediate context addresses Christians, not professing believers (1 Cor. 1:1–9; 5:11; 6:6 [twice]; 7:12, 15, 15; 8:11, 13; 16:12).⁶¹ Second, although the verb ἀδικεῖτε (6:8) may be the nearest antecedent of the nominative ἄδικοι (v. 9), this does not prove that verse 8 refers to the same class of people described by the vice list. Other contextual facts must be taken into account in order to identify which group is the immediate referent of the vice list. Third, this view also seeks to validate the vice list and the phrase “inherit the kingdom of

90–91; Bob Yandian, *Galatians: The Spirit-Controlled Life* (Tulsa: Harrison, 1985), 230–32; and López, “Does the Vice List in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 Describe Believers or Unbelievers?” 59–73.

⁵⁹ Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” 576. Although Lowery does not state it here, from personal conversations with him, he admits, like Hoehner, that persistence in practicing the sins of the vice list ultimately proves that such individuals are spurious Christians and will not enter the kingdom (cf. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 662, n 77).

⁶⁰ Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 658.

⁶¹ Though most interpreters see a mixed group, nowhere did Paul question their justification; yet throughout the epistle he did address their sanctification.

God” in light of how it was used in its cultural milieu. In the intertestamental period the meaning of the phrase “inherit the kingdom of God” in Jewish literature became synonymous with having eternal life in the world to come. In the Gospels the phrase “inherit eternal life” was understood as including the future realm when the righteous will reign with Christ. Fourth, Paul contrasted believers and unbelievers throughout 1 Corinthians 5:10–6:11 in which some justified, though carnal, believers are contrasted with the unjustified in the vice list of 6:9–10.⁶² Galatians 5:24 and Ephesians 5:8 also refer to the believers’ position in contrast to unbelievers. Fifth, 1 Corinthians 6:9 uses the words οὐκ οἶδατε and μὴ πλανᾶσθε to state that believers ought not behave like unbelievers. This view explains why verse 11 contrasts the believer’s justified position with unbelievers in verses 9–10. Paul exhorted believers to behave like believers, those who are in Christ.⁶³

CONCLUSION

A survey of the exegetical history of how Paul used the vice lists linked to the words “inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9–11; Gal. 5:19–24; Eph. 5:3–8) yields six interpretations.

Having surveyed these views, this article has surfaced key issues that will facilitate a better understanding of Paul’s meaning in light of the biblical and extrabiblical evidence, to be discussed in the next article in this series.

⁶² Though believers committed these sins, they were still secure in Christ, as 1 Corinthians 6:11 attests (F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953], 141).

⁶³ Although Hoehner’s exegesis of Ephesians 5:3–8 agrees in part with that of 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, his conclusion is similar to the Reformed position. “Here in Ephesians Paul, addressing believers, rightly assumes that they have inherited the kingdom of God. However, Paul warns that those whose lives are characterized by immorality, impurity, and greed, even though they may claim to be Christians, are not included in the kingdom of God” (*Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 662). Lewis Sperry Chafer also makes a similar observation. “The believer who sins even to the terrible length indicated above is not to be classified as an unregenerate sinner. For, though the evil character of the sin is in no way lessened by the fact that a saint commits it, he is not when thus sinning an *habitual* or *lawless* sinner, as the agony of his soul will fully prove (*cf.* 1 John 3:10)” (*The Epistle to the Ephesians* [New York: Loizeaux, 1935; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1991], 126, italics his).