

WHEN CHURCH PROBLEMS WON'T GO AWAY

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Let's Begin

Few would doubt a litigious society has unfortunately engulfed our country. Not long ago, a study showed that more civil lawsuits are filed in the state of Massachusetts than in the entire nation of Japan! With a 1,000+ percent increase in lawsuits since 1975, we spend in excess of \$30 billion a year suing each other. As we will soon see, this sounds a lot like ancient Corinth.

Up until chapter 5, Paul focused primarily on unity in the church. Division had branded its ugly scar on the fledgling church. Paul pleaded with them to put aside their petty differences and unite around the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Indeed division could very well be the source of many of Corinth's problems later to appear. Before the Apostle is through, he deals with divorce (chapter 7), doctrine (chapters 8-10), worship (chapter 11), spiritual gifts, the problem of tongues (chapters 12-14), and the resurrection (chapter 15).

For now, we will focus on chapter 6. It is here the Apostle zeros in on two costly mistakes the Corinthians made. First, they accepted instruction by misguided counsel. Instead of deciding their own disputes, they turned to secular courts to handle their personal litigations. Second, they allowed indoctrination of mistaken conviction. The Corinthians completely misunderstood the nature of the physical body, and therefore Paul had to straighten out some false convictions they had forged.

Hence, as we study this chapter, let's follow the simple outline below:

I. The Misguided Counsel (vv. 1-11)

II. The Mistaken Conviction (vv. 12-20)

I. The Misguided Counsel (vv. 1-11)

While Jews routinely settled disputes among themselves, Greeks were known for exploiting the courts. Lawsuits became a part of everyday life, a social event you might say. And, since the congregation at Corinth was obviously influenced by Greek culture in many other ways, it stands as no surprise that the Greek Christians allowed the litigation baggage to follow them into the church family.

Paul confronts Corinth's practice of going to court like unbelievers. Before we look at the lowdown on Christian litigation, we must understand Paul had no intention of teaching Christians should never go to court. Our justice system has its proper place and authority, and Christians as much as non-Christians can exercise their rights under established law. Even the Apostle himself appealed to the Roman justice system (cp. Acts 25:11; 28:19).

Nevertheless, when Christian brothers and sisters have a disagreement, the first place to head is not the Areopagus. Instead, the loving fellowship of the family of God should be able to assist them in coming to suitable terms. To resort to civil courts before the unsaved, therefore, ruins the church's testimony. With devastating logic, Paul disassembles the Corinthians' habit of flooding the civil courts with matters that are better handled in the local assembly.

First, lawsuits between Christians are a disgrace for the church. Read well the Apostle's words, "Dare any of

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you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church" (1 Cor. 6:1-4). Paul begins with a question, which indicates shock by their actions—"Dare any of you...?"

Christians of all people should not be exercising this "right." Why? Initially, because civil lawsuits between Christians disgrace the *dignity* of the church. The church's lofty future includes a role in judging the world (cp. Mt. 19:28; 2 Tim. 2:12). Indeed fallen angels shall stand before the church of God (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). If this is so, how can the church flounder concerning petty squabbles it might entertain now? If we can sit on the Supreme Court, are we not able to handle justice in the fellowship of the saints?

In addition, litigation disgraces the *policy* of the church (v. 4). Unconverted judges knew nothing of the grace of God. God's assemblies should handle their own inside disagreements. The Word of God should play a primary role (Ps. 1:1-2). The misguided counsel of the unbelieving world is no match for the Wisdom of God.

Second, lawsuits between Christians are a defeat for the church. Paul goes on to write, "I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather *suffer yourselves* to be defrauded? Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that *your brethren*" (1 Cor. 6:5-8). Paul mentions there was among them "utterly a fault." Even though legal victories happen when Christian sues Christian, moral defeats inevitably result.

Additionally, the church's *leadership* was defeated. Boast as they did about having "wisdom," why was there not someone among them wise enough to judge between these matters? The Holy Spirit endowed the Corinthians with power and giftedness. Why then did they stoop to seeking counsel from ungodly sources?

Moreover, the church's *fellowship* was defeated. We are to "suffer" one another, forgiving each other since God in Christ has forgiven all our faults (Col. 3:13). The way of love demanded this action. Indeed suffering wrong unjustly was precisely the way of the cross. And, if the church cannot settle the dispute, the way of the cross counsels one to accept the wrong rather than pursue one's "rights."

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Reflection Connection

Do you think the church takes seriously her duty to judge matters between Christians? Why or why not?



Third, lawsuits between Christians are a defection for the church. Paul writes, “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. And such were some of you: 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” (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

The grace of God brought a miracle to the lost sinner. Sins were forgiven; a new nature was created; an eternal home was promised. However, lawsuits were a defection to their *past corruption*. The catalog of sins Paul creates astounds us. This equals the roll call of the eternally hell-bound. If any of these characterize a person’s life, Christ is absent from the heart.

Hence, lawsuits defected from a *present conversion*. A shout of triumph comes from Paul— “And such were some of you”! The greatest proof of Christian reality is the proof of a changed life. In these verses, Paul speaks three terms which declare this dynamic change:

- ✦ Regeneration: "washed". Filthy sin is bleached away (cp. Tit. 3:5).
- ✦ Sanctification: "sanctified." Sin’s pollution is purified through our being set apart for God.
- ✦ Justification: "justified." Guilty sin is covered and believers are declared righteous before a holy God!

Unworthy judges offering misguided counsel could never match the redeeming wisdom of God’s church. The Corinthians must forfeit their ungodly practice of taking each other before the civil authorities.

II. The Mistaken Conviction (vv. 12-20)

Paul shifts into another gear in the second half of the chapter. He begins with personal disputes between believers and ends with problematic doctrines about the body. While the two issues have seemingly little in common, both come from the same source—Greek culture. The Greeks had a tendency to look negatively toward the physical body. Contrarily, they believed the soul had value. This unfortunate dichotomy led to two polarizing extremes. On the one hand, asceticism and on the other, license. Neither was acceptable to the Christian faith.

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Paul’s solution is to face the problem head-on. Too often the church hides when tough issues surface. However, we learn from Paul, hiding is not an option for the church which wants to remain faithful to the Lord Jesus.

First, Paul speaks of the body’s elevation. Christ suffered for our sins in His own body. Consequently, our body is now joined to Him! Paul writes, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. And God hath



both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power” (1 Cor. 6:12-14).

When Jesus saved us, our bodies were raised to a new level of liberty and sanctity. This does not mean, however, there are no *limits* to the elevation Christ has given (v. 12). When Paul said, “all things are lawful” he was rehearsing our liberty in Christ as new creations. The Corinthians were taking Paul’s philosophy in Christ much to literally, however. They were going to the extreme. In essence, they were saying, “If I am saved, I can do anything I want.” For Paul, this was a terrible perversion of his message. Liberty does not mean one is able to do what one wants, but do what Christ wants.

To make his point, Paul uses the term “expedient.” The term Paul uses is *symppherō*, which literally means “to bring together, to be profitable.” In other words, Paul is saying that while all things are lawful, some things though lawful are not helpful; that is, profitable for me nor anyone else, especially the Lord Jesus! Therefore, Paul refused to “be brought under the power of any.”

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In addition to sure *limits* of the body’s elevation, there is also sound *logic* to the body’s elevation (v. 13). The Corinthians must have had a moral dictum which, in part was, “Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats.” By this, they denounced the body’s worth to such an extreme that they were even able to justify sexual immorality! The argument would go something like this: since my natural desire is to satisfy my bodily hunger with food, and since satisfaction is a good thing, it must also be a good thing to satisfy my natural desires for sex. Could a more accurate description be found to depict our culture today?

For Paul, this logic is conceived in hell. It is normal to satisfy bodily desires but it is immoral to satisfy bodily desires in an immoral way. Sexual desires are fulfilled in the bonds of holy matrimony (cp. Heb. 13:4). Evolution has taught two generations of young people we evolved from the animal kingdom. Why are we surprised when they end up acting like animals? The body has higher functions than satisfaction of physical desires. Physical satisfactions relate only to time. But as believers, our bodies belong to eternity, to Christ forever.

Second, Paul speaks of the body’s desecration. Listen closely to Paul, “...shall I then take the members of Christ, and make *them* the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body” (1 Cor. 6:15b-18). For the believer to use his or her body for sexual sin is a desecration of our Savior. Our bodies are the limbs of Christ. How then can one be joined to a prostitute? However once joined in an illicit, sinful relationship, only the power of Jesus Christ can deliver!

Reflection Connection

How prominent is evolution in your public schools? What does your church do to offset the teaching of evolution to our children? What do parents personally do to balance the teaching their children receive?



Also, to use our body for sexual sin is a desecration of our selves. Of all sins, sexual sin seems the worst. It is “against one’s own body” the sin is committed. Unlike some sins, which only affect certain portions of the body, fornication affects the entire body. Every facet of one’s being is contaminated—emotionally, physically, and spiritually. God’s Word says to flee!

Finally, Paul speaks of the body’s consecration. He writes, “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). God the Father will consecrate our body in the resurrection (cp. v. 14). A glorious destiny awaits every child of God (Rom. 8:11; Phil. 3:21).

In addition, God the Son consecrates our body in redemption (v. 20). We are literally “bought with a price.” In the marketplace of sin, Christ purchased us, cleansed us, and saved us for all eternity. For this reason, God the Spirit resides in us. Indeed our body is the “temple of the Holy Spirit.” How is it possible to allow the temple of God to become a moral trash heap? Paul’s argument is impeccable.

Golden Greek Nugget

Paul writes in verse 16 that, “he which is joined to an harlot is one body.” The term translated “joined” is *kollaō*, and it literally means “to glue.” It is as if the one who commits fornication is welded body-to-body by a sticky substance which contaminates one’s entire being. No other sin is placed in the category where Paul places fornication. Its acids destroy everything it contaminates.

Wrap Up

The church at Corinth appeared to have unending problems, all stemming from an absence of Jesus Christ’s Lordship. They possessed no unity in their assembly. Hence, they turned to outsiders to settle their disputes and indoctrinate them in mistaken convictions. Only as they turned to the Word of God given through the Apostle could their fellowship receive a clean bill of health.

