

# Chapter 6

## The Christian, the Courts, and Sexual Immorality

### Don't Take Each Other to Court (6:1-11)

Incest was one manifestation of carnality in the Corinthian church (chapter 5), suing fellow believers in the public courts was another (6:1-11), and going to prostitutes was a third (6:12-20). Nevertheless, the underlying problem was a loose view of sin, a view taken by the unbelievers who lived among the Corinthian Christians.

### Don't Go to Court because Believers Are Competent to Judge Disputes

**Verse 1**—This issue is addressed directly. *Does any of you, when he has a case against his neighbor [believer] dare to go to law before the unrighteous [unbeliever] and not before the saints?*

- The answer is self-evident to the apostle—of course not!
- Believers must not settle disputes before unbelievers.
- This refers to personal or civil lawsuits, not criminal cases, which the state would try.

**Verse 2**—*Or do you not know* is repeated six times (verses 2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19), most likely introducing a subject the Corinthian believers had already been taught.

- *That the saints will judge the world* shows that the Lord will delegate to believers the authority to judge the world in the future kingdom (2 Timothy 2:12).
- If so, *are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts?*
- Obviously, believers are capable of settling disputes amongst one another now.

**Verse 3**—To press the point further, *do you not know that we will judge* [κρίνω “to decide, rule, or pronounce”] *angels?*

- Here are two realms of which we will rule:
  - one earthly, one heavenly
  - one physical, one spiritual
  - one natural, one supernatural
- So, man made a little lower than the angels, due to being mortal, will apparently judge angels when they are immortal.
- This may have to do with our reigning over angels in Christ's kingdom and *if so, how much more matters of this life?* The word βιωτικά means ‘deciding matters pertaining to life’ and ‘the affairs of this life’.
- We should bring our disputes before the God's people not before the world because believers are capable of appropriately discerning judgement to settle disputes in this life, cognizant of the fact that we will do so in the Kingdom to come.

### Don't Go to Court but Settle Your Own Disputes

**Verse 4**—If believers *have law courts dealing with matters of this life*, then why *do you appoint them* [unbelievers] *as judges who are of no account* [ἐξουθενημένους least esteemed or contemptible] *in the church?*

- It is never a better option to take your personal disputes before unbelievers.
- We should not take our personal disputes to be arbitrated by the world.

**Verse 5**—It was a *shame* to do that, especially if *there is not among you, one wise man who will be able to decide* [διακρίναι to discriminate; to make a distinction] *between his brethren.*

- The secular court cannot take into account all of the nuances of the Christian faith in its judgments, since the court is not accountable to the commandments of Christ.
- Ironically, viewing themselves as wise, the Corinthians apparently had no one wise enough to settle disputes amongst them.

**Verse 6**—Instead, *brother goes to law* [are summoned to court for examination], *and that before unbelievers*.

- The general rule is, do not take fellow believers to court, but settle matters of personal dispute between one another.
- If you can't find a believer competent to do so, then shame on you.

## **Don't Go to Court. Instead, Suffer Being Wronged and Cheated**

**Verse 7**—Understand that if you use the courts to settle your disputes, it is *already a defeat for you*.

- How would it already be a defeat or loss for them? The fact that they were using the secular law courts to settle their disputes revealed their immaturity and their inability for anyone to apply Christian wisdom to these disputes.
- Lawsuits are about winning and losing, rather than sharing and giving.
- Ironically, by taking each other to court, believers are already on the wrong side of the law.
- There is an alternative. *Why not rather be wronged* [hurt or damaged]?
- *Why not rather be cheated* [deprived or defrauded]?
- The Corinthians were too selfish and proud to be wronged or be defrauded, that's why. Greed and vengeance can motivate believers to file lawsuits and was also the basis of the Corinthians' partisanship.

**Verse 8**—Worse yet, some of the Corinthians were more than victims, they were perpetrators of these lawsuits.

- *You yourselves wrong and cheat, and you do this to your brothers and sisters!*
- Contrary to the world's wisdom, it is better to be sued and lose, than to sue and win.
- The solution to division in God's household is submission to suffering.
- It is righteous to take a hit and suffer a loss, rather than try to get justice in our personal disputes with each other.

## **Adopting Unrighteous Behavior Can Imperil a Believer's Inheritance**

**Verse 9**—Here is the third *do you not know*.

- The content of the warning is that *the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God*.
- Christians (verse 8), as well as unbelievers (verses 1, 6), are guilty of unrighteous conduct.
- Therefore, what Paul said about the unrighteous seems to apply to anyone who is unrighteous in his or her behavior, whether saved or unsaved.
- The Corinthians must *not be deceived* [be in error or led astray] about this, which is probably a failure to see how Christians choose to live here and now will affect their eternal reward.
- The Corinthians were guilty of behaving as unbelievers. Their eternal *inheritance* [κληρονομήσουσιν means to 'receive a lot, to receive a portion, or to become a partaker'] was jeopardized by such behavior.
- Those kinds of sins included—*sexually immoral sins or idolaters or passive homosexual partners, practicing homosexuals*.

**Verse 10**—This unrighteous behavior also included *the greedy, drunkards* or sins related to destroying one another, *the verbally abusive*, and *thieves and swindlers*, sins relating to stealing from one another.

- This sinful behavior can erupt into disputes and divisions, hatred, revenge, and demanding rights, that can potentially precipitate hauling one another to court.
- This fleshly behavior has eternal and spiritual consequences, *will* [not] *inherit the kingdom of God*, causing believers to lose their reward.
- We should never imperil our eternal inheritance by participating in sinful behavior and activity that ultimately ends up taking one another to court.

**Verse 11**—Some of [the Corinthians] once lived this way, *such were some of you*.

- But this unrighteous behavior was contrary to a believer's new identity in Christ.
- *But* (ἀλλὰ a very strong contrast, nevertheless) *you were washed, but* (ἀλλὰ) *you were sanctified, but* (ἀλλὰ) *you were justified*, to juxtapose in the strongest possible contrast who the Corinthian believers are positionally in Christ.
- By contrast, they have been cleansed from all of that. They have been set apart from all of that. They have been given a new standing from all of that.
- Such a transformed life should produce transformed living.
- Here, then, are two powerful appeals to stop settling personal and civil disputes in the law-courts:
  - One based on future judgment of inheritance (verses 9-10)
  - The other based on an appeal to present standing (verse 11).
 Both of these are warnings to not participate in or tolerate these sins.

## Application

God takes very seriously our relationships of one believer to another. At all costs, avoid harming one another financially, relationally, personally, reputationally, sexually, or spiritually, but if it happens, resolve it within the church, not in secular law courts.

## Don't Practice Sexual Immorality (6:12-20)

In this section, the point of the instruction is to expose sexual immoral practices, so that the sanctity of the believer's body as a temple of the Holy Spirit can be preserved.

### It Is Not Profitable for Our Bodies to be Controlled by its Appetites

**Verse 12**—Twice the verse repeats *all things are lawful* [allowed or permitted] *for me*, which may have been a common saying in Corinth, possibly to cloak their penchant for immorality.

- Christian liberty is a very real outcome of the spiritual life but is not a license for sinful behavior.
- Christian freedom must be strongly qualified in at least two ways:
  - First, *but not all things are profitable* [beneficial or expedient].
  - Second, *but I will not be mastered* [brought under the power or authority] *by anything*.
- A believer's conduct is not predicated on whether one has a right to do something, but is conduct that is beneficial by nature and free from sinful control.

**Verse 13**—This directly applies to the use of our bodies. *Food is for the stomach and the stomach for food*.

- This may have been another Corinthian slogan to justify fulfilling physical appetites which they believed were irrelevant spiritually.
- When the stomach signaled food, then they thought one should satisfy that appetite.
- Yet, *God will do away with both of them*, which indicates that our physical constitution has more to do than just with our physical appetites.
- So, too, *the body is not for immorality*, just as it is not for gluttony.
- It's equally wrong to conclude that sexual appetites are also only physical in nature, and should be indulged.

- Our body is *for the Lord*, in that He wants to rule it, *and the Lord for the body*, in that He wants to use it.
- There is more to our body than just fulfilling its cravings. Our body belongs to God, who has a future eternal destiny planned for it.

**Verse 14**—The relationship between our bodies and God will continue throughout eternity.

- *God has not only raised the Lord*, which is an historical fact, *but will raise us up through His power* which reveals that God has future plans for our physical bodies, which will then be immortal.

## **Sexual Immorality Is Incompatible with Our Spiritual Union in Christ**

**Verse 15**—Here is the fourth *do you not know* again, possibly referring to something the Corinthians have already been taught, namely, *that your bodies are members of Christ*.

- As we are spiritually members of Christ's body, so our bodies are members of Him.
- Our spiritual union in Christ also entails our physical bodies. Based on this reality, *shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute?*
- Of course not! That would be tantamount to involving Christ in the sexual immorality!

**Verse 16**—Sexual relations are much more than just a physical union between two people.

- *Or do you not know that anyone who is united* [glued, or fastened together] *with a prostitute is one body with her?*
- God views sexual intercourse as involving the entire person, not just the body needing to have its appetites indulged.
- This is the point of the quote from Genesis 2:24, *the two will become one flesh*.
- The fact that the believer is so intimately united with Christ means that one cannot act without affecting the other.
- Sexual sins like fornication and adultery create unions but not marriages.

**Verse 17**—Compared to the sexual union between two people, *the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him*, making that union an even stronger and more encompassing oneness or bond.

- When one is sexually immoral, that illicit physical union contradicts the greater claim God has due to the much more pervasive spiritual union that exists.
- One is not just giving something away to a prostitute, they are also taking from what belongs to God and stealing from Him.

**Verse 18**—The only recourse is to *flee immorality*, which is a present imperative meaning to be in a continual, perpetual, and habitual state of shunning, running, and fleeing.

- You might believe that *every* [other] *sin that a man commits is outside the body*. This could be another Corinthian slogan to justify their sexual sin that Paul is correcting *but the immoral man sins against his own body*.
- Sexual sin is more than just a physical indulging of the flesh. It is a violation of the oneness a believer has with Christ.
- Or, possibly, Paul is making a comparison between sexual sin and all other sin, which in that case would mean that sexual sin is worse because people who engage in it cannot undo their act.
- It is also a more serious sin because its nature is to place the body, which belongs to the Lord, under the control of another agent, an illegitimate partner.

**Since the Holy Spirit Indwells Our Body, It Must be Put to Holy Use**

**Verse 19**—Here is the sixth *do you not know* as something the Corinthians had previously learned. Specifically, *that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you*, which affirms that within a believer’s body is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit *whom we have from God*.

- The result is that we are not free to do what we want. We have to answer to Him.
- So we should never grieve the Holy Spirit. A believer has a responsibility to the Holy Spirit, and sexual sin is incompatible with that.
- The outcome is *that you are not your own*, so that we have a moral obligation to the Holy Spirit who indwells us and to God who owns us.

**Verse 20**—Paul declared *for you have been bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body*.

- After warning believers to avoid fornication (verse 18), he said we have a moral obligation to God, since we now belong to Him by means of the indwelling Holy Spirit (verse 19).
- Based on that Biblical rationale, believers purchased by God’s plan of redemption must *glorify God in your body*.
- We can summarize the meaning of glory as “intrinsic value” and the glory of God as “the intrinsic value of God.”
- In other words, that which belongs to the very nature of God (intrinsic) is of ultimate worth, excellence, and usefulness (value). It is this quality of God, His glory, that is, His intrinsic value, that formulates the unifying principle of the Bible and the goal of history.
- So how are we to manifest the intrinsic value of God with our bodies? We do that by not participating in sexually immoral acts (verses 16-18). It is God’s glory that governs our sexual sanctification.

## **Application**

There is a link between our spiritual identity in Christ, and our conduct in our physical bodies. Take seriously what you do with and how you use your body!

- Don’t take a fellow believer to court to benefit yourself—not to be wronged. Wise mature believers should decide disputes between believers.
- Specifically avoid the sins of verses 9-10 because you have a new spiritual position. Otherwise, you will jeopardize your kingdom inheritance.
- God takes very seriously our relationship with one another. At all costs, avoid harming one another financially, relationally, personally, reputationally, sexually, or spiritually.