

1 Corinthians 6:1-11 – “Litigation In The Church”

In the first 5 chapters of Corinthians we've seen Paul giving instructions on issues that the church was dealing with. In the first 4 chapters it was issues of disunity and division. In Chapter 5 it was dealing with unity on issues they should have been divided over.

Now in Chapter 6 we see them carrying on in disputes with one another and taking each other to court.

A minister and a lawyer were chatting at a party.

The minister asked, "What do you do if you make a mistake on a case?"

"I try to fix it if it's big; and I ignore it if it's insignificant," replied the lawyer. "What do you do?" he asked.

The minister replied, "Oh, more or less the same. For instance, the other day I meant to say 'the devil is the father of liars,' but instead I said 'the devil is the father of lawyers,' so I let it go."

Paul was hearing that lawyers were getting dragged into the affairs of the church a little too often here at Corinth. It's another issue that Paul needs to address with this still growing and maturing church.

1. Saints Who Will Judge – 6:1-4

6:1 - *Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?*

Paul is kind of shocked at the boldness these believers had to take their disputes to the courts before asking the church for help in these matters.

Over the last 10 years, Canada has had an average of 915,000 civil court cases per year. Being quick to sue someone or lean on the legal system to correct wrongs is something we're very familiar with here in our culture.

William Barclay shares some insights of the culture around Corinth:

- "Paul is dealing with a problem which specially affected the Greeks. The Jews did not normally go to law in the public law courts at all; they settled things before the elders of the village or the elders of the synagogue. To them, justice was far more a thing to be settled in a family spirit than in a legal spirit. In fact, the Jewish law expressly forbade a Jew to go to law at all in a non-Jewish court; to do so was considered blasphemy against the

divine law of God. It was quite different with the Greeks; they were characteristically a litigious people. The law courts were one of their chief entertainments.”¹

- It's become that for many today. Many people were tuned in recently to the drama unfolding in Johnny Depp's defamation case against his ex, Amanda Heard.

But we're seeing here in God's Word that it is not to be that way in the church and among believers. When there are problems that arise between one another – and there will be – we are to deal with it within the church.

Why? Because as Christians we have different attitudes, different thinking, different agendas than those in the world.

- When we take our matters to the legal systems of the world, we are putting our decisions and outcomes in the hands of the unrighteous. This is not to imply that they're always corrupt, but that they're simply not in Christ. They don't have the same values a Christian is going to hold to. So why look to them to bring proper ruling into matters between believers?

Paul is going to build the case to show that the church is more than capable of bringing counsel and wisdom to issues and disputes among believers.

6:2 - *Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?*

The saints are going to one day judge the world! That's pretty huge. Paul is showing that if they're going to do something on such a grand scale, aren't they able to judge matters on a much smaller scale – like helping someone who's accusing another member of taking their casserole dish home after a church potluck?

Now the obvious question I'm sure you're having here is, *'what kind of casserole dish are we talking about here??'*

Ok, the real question is what is meant by, ***the saints will judge the world?***

Some of you are thinking, *I can't even get my kids to stay in their beds at bedtime, how am I going to judge the world?*

¹ Barclay, W. (2002). *The Letters to the Corinthians* (3rd ed., pp. 58–59). Westminster John Knox Press.

So what exactly is Paul talking about here? Well, we understand from **Revelation 20** that when Christ comes back again at His Second Coming, we will be returning with Him; we're going to be at His side. And Jesus will judge the nations that have come against Him at the end of the Tribulation. After this He will usher in His Millennial reign on earth; a thousand years where Christ is ruling here on the earth. And it's here that we will be reigning with Him. During this time there will be people who were saved during the Tribulation and survived through it and they will be living in the Millennium in their still human bodies. We who were raptured up before the Tribulation will be in our glorified bodies, but others will not. And we will be ruling over them, administrators of righteousness, judging the world.

- **Revelation 20:4**, *"And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them."*
- This is also a fulfillment of **Daniel 7:22**, *"until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom."*
- **Matthew 19:28**, *"So Jesus said to them, 'Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'"*
- **Revelation 2:26**, *"And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—"*

So with this kind of judgment being entrusted to those who are in Christ – the saints, then why would we not take matters of less significance to each other?

Paul continues to reveal the significance of what kind of judgment is going to be entrusted to us...

6:3 - Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?

Saints judging the world is one thing, we can kind of get our brain around that, but saints judging angels?? How does that work?

Paul does not seem to be talking about angels that are serving God. We're not going to be casting judgment for all those times those guardian angels missed those assignments, like when you were a kid and you fell out of a tree. We're not going to be holding them accountable for things we weren't happy about.

It seems more fitting that Paul is speaking of fallen angels.

- These fallen angels rebelled against God even after seeing His glory and beauty. We who have never seen God, continue to follow and believe and we will pass on judgment to these ones who foolishly forsook all.
- We see some Scriptural background for this in **2 Peter 2:4**, *"For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment;"*
- **Jude 6**, *"And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day;"*

So Paul's conclusion is this: since we're going to be given such heavy responsibility to not only judge angels but the world as well (and all this is coming after this earthly life), how much more then should we be able to handle the things that affect this life.

6:4 - *If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge?*

There will be things (disputes) that will come up in this life that will need help coming to a reasoned outcome and decision. But the question stated here is why take that dispute to those who are least esteemed by the church? Why go to the judges of the world that don't follow God's Word to find help in matters that need Godly wisdom? That's like taking your car to a baker to get a tune up.

- "The most legally untrained believers, who know the Word of God and are obedient to the Spirit, are far more competent to settle disagreements between believers than the most experienced unbeliever, void of God's truth and Spirit."²
- "Imagine Christians looking for justice from those who have none to give!"³

2. Saints Who Show Poor Judgment – 6:5-8

6:5-6 - *I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? ⁶ But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!*

² MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2005). *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (1 Co 6:4). Thomas Nelson.

³ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (A. Farstad, Ed.; p. 1762). Thomas Nelson.

It was a shameful thing what some of these believers were doing. It wasn't bringing any honour to God. It's almost as though Paul is being sarcastic with them, *is there no one among you who is wise?*

- Earlier in 1 Corinthians 3:18 he spoke of their so called wisdom. And true enough, we do not rely on the wisdom of this age – it's foolishness. But the believer is tapped into a whole new realm of wisdom through the Spirit. We are the ones who should be equipped to provide discernment and judgment into matters of life.
- **1 Corinthians 2:12–16**, *"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. ¹³ These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. ¹⁴ But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. ¹⁶ For "who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ."*

Again, Paul is specifically speaking to Christians who are suing other Christians. And he's saying this should not be. Not that we don't look to have things settled, but we do it through the counsel of other Christians, having things settled with the help of the church.

- Now is it right for a Christian to sue a non-Christian? Well, if you think you may get a large settlement and plan to give a percentage of that to the church – then yes, go for it 😊.
- Paul is really quite unclear on this. I can only give you my opinion, which really doesn't amount to much. You really need to be led of the Lord. When you're dealing with a non-Christian who is acting like a fool, sometimes the only way to deal with them is to go through the courts.
- But it should not be that way with two believers because it sets a bad example (again, unless one is not acting like a Christian). The world looks at that and wonders, *aren't you people to be loving and kind to one another? Why are you suing and squabbling like children?*

Things should be settled within the body so as to not leave a bad testimony outside the body. And that way you don't have to work with any lawyers 😊.

So this was becoming a shameful thing in the church because it was blowing their witness in the world. All these legal disputes were being carried out before unbelievers and it was demonstrating that the church was living no different than those in the world who are quick to fight for themselves.

6:7-8 - *Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? ⁸ No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!*

This was a colossal failure because of the way they were behaving among fellow Christians. It was a terrible witness to the world for believers to be treating each other this way.

It was a colossal failure because they were not aligning themselves with how God has directed them to live their lives.

Wouldn't it be better to just ***accept wrong***? Isn't it better to be a person of integrity and be accused falsely, than to fight against one another in a carnal fashion and blow any witness of Christ that might impact others?

- Illustration: Some ladies were at a gathering away from church and one woman accused another woman of taking her shoes. It created a big problem. The one woman was shocked and thought it was absurd but was willing to give up the shoes so as to keep the peace.

This is the way Jesus instructed us in:

Matthew 5:38–40, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. ⁴⁰ If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.”*

- Now some may think, well you can't just let people walk all over you. No, but we can trust the Lord in these matters. **Proverbs 20:22**, *“Do not say, I will recompense evil; wait for the Lord and He will save you.”*

The church was not only carnal, they were corrupt. They were suing one another, seeking to profit from it, and they were being dishonest in the process. Again, what a terrible witness they were.

- Sadly, we're not exempt from this sort of conduct either in the church. When the world sees the church behaving like the world, it just validates their

reason for not wanting any part of the church. They see it just as a bunch of hypocrites who have nothing different to offer.

- May we be careful to realize that we have a higher calling than just living for ourselves or trying to protect ourselves. We are living for the glory of God and He will uphold you and protect you.

Now Paul moves into a few verses that seem to be out of place. But he's tying this in to show what happens to people that are behaving in a lifestyle of greed, corruption, and selfishness – very similar to how the Corinthians were living.

3. Sinners Who Will Be Judged – 6:9-11

6:9-10 - *Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.*

The unrighteous are those that haven't put their trust in Jesus and received the only righteousness available for them to enter the kingdom of God.

These Corinthian Christians would know that the unrighteous don't enter the kingdom.

But Paul says, ***do not be deceived***... Don't think that you can just continue in your own sin now that you know Jesus.

Many think that they'll be okay. *My sin isn't really that bad. God will show mercy on me in that day.* There will be many on that day who will say, *Lord, Lord.* And His response will be, *I never knew you* (**Matt. 7:22**).

Now Paul is painting a picture for this church (and us). Showing that their sin is as bad as those who will be refused entrance into heaven.

- Now before we get into this list, it's important to note that we're not talking of a Christian who falls in one of these areas suddenly becoming disqualified from eternal life. We are looking at those who live a lifestyle of these kinds of sin. Their lives are characterized by sin.

Fornicators – This spoke of engaging in a flagrant sexual offense. Sex is intended to be between a husband and wife. Outside of marriage it is unlawful in God's eyes.

Idolaters – those who worship false gods or have a greater devotion to other things than the one true God. Remember in Corinth they had the great Temple of Aphrodite – the goddess of love.

Adulterers – We today look at this as those who are unfaithful in the marriage relationship. In this passage it can also refer to those who are faithless toward God.

Homosexuals – Those who have unnatural relations with the same sex. It referred to male prostitutes specifically.

- Now some who attempt to excuse or justify homosexuality say that the Bible speaks against homosexual prostitution. But a homosexual relationship that is monogamous and loving is accepted. Clearly not the case!

Sodomites – This very term spoke against homosexuality in any form.

Paul starts out with the sexual sins as we would often see fornication listed first among lists of sins given. It was an extremely debased society sexually where anything went, and quite often very openly. Paul had to deal with an area in the church that was a sexual violation in the previous chapter. So we move now from sins of a sexual nature to dealing more specifically with the brother who was sinning by suing.

Thieves were rampant at this time. If it weren't chained down you could expect it gone.

Covetous – spoke of being greedy for more. This was the character of the brother taking another brother to the courts. He was looking to cheat His way to money and profit.

Drunkards – Again, this was a common thing in this day and especially in this town.

Revilers – were abusers.

Extortioners – those who were swindlers, robbers.

This is quite a catalogue of vices and sins. Now some of these we can really look down on and others sort of be a little lenient on. But yet, they're all mentioned with the same results. In other words, we have to be careful that we don't rail on certain sins. Some are quick to speak against homosexuality yet side-step an area that doesn't seem as bad. Yet in God's eyes, sin is sin. There are no levels. The robber is told they will not inherit the kingdom of God right alongside the homosexual.

6:11 - *And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.*

This was the condition that these Christians were once in. Not that they have participated in all these sins, but they were guilty of sin and deserving of God's judgment. They've all received great grace, and they should be quick to show that to others.

- This is the beauty of Christianity. There is power in the gospel! God takes lives that have been messed up, abused, lost, and brings change for the good! He turns lives around. God brings life to that which was desolate. We can all attest to that work.

Here's what God has done for us:

We **were washed**. We ourselves were unclean sinners. But we've been washed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Washed and cleansed.

- **Isaiah 1:18**, *"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool."*

We **were sanctified**. This means we've been set apart, declared holy. When we understand the awesome work that God has done for us, we would want to separate ourselves from the things that pollute. We should want to be wholly consecrated to Him. But wait there's more!

We **were justified**. We're washed, sanctified, and so we're now seen as just before Him. No longer does He look at past failures, He sees present righteousness – through Christ.

- Now we are all a work in progress. But notice these are listed in the past tense. This is something God has already done for us. He's not saying, *if you do this, I will do this*. He's saying, *as believers in Me, I've already done this work*. Isn't God good?

So the lesson is that these Christians should no longer live like they once did. It may have been common to take someone to court over disputes, but God has made them new – so live like it. Don't conduct yourself like the unrighteous of the world – be righteous in Christ.