

The Book of 1 Corinthians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 5: Lawsuits and Glorifying God in the Body

1 Corinthians 6:1–20

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This chapter joins a practical problem (lawsuits among believers) to one of the weightiest moral and doctrinal sections of the letter (the call to sexual purity and the meaning of the body). What is doctrinally at stake is the transforming power of the gospel and the lordship of Christ over the whole person, body included. Paul names sin with complete honesty, including sexual sins our culture is most eager to normalize, such as adultery and homosexual practice, and yet he names them precisely as one who believes the blood of Christ can wash any of them away. The teacher must hold these together: clear truth about sin and abundant grace toward the sinner. Handle the vice list of 6:9–11 as a sober warning that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom, and as the dark backdrop for the bright promise that follows, “such were some of you, but you were washed.” Present transformation in Christ as real and possible, received through faith, repentance, and baptism into him, and then lived out in ongoing faithfulness.

At the same time, this is profoundly formational. The chapter confronts our obsession with our rights, our misuse of freedom, and our tendency to treat the body as a throwaway thing. It calls us to a willingness to be wronged for the sake of Christ, to a freedom that refuses to be enslaved, and to a reverence for the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit, bought with a price.

Aim, then, for both honesty and hope, and for both truth and grace. Send students home taking sin seriously, including the sexual sins of our age, and send them home marveling that they have been washed, sanctified, justified, indwelt by the Spirit, and bought by the blood of Christ, and therefore called and able to glorify God in their bodies. The heaviest doctrinal block belongs at Question 9; give it the most time and the most care, speaking truth firmly and grace warmly, in a way that honors both the holiness of God and the dignity of every person made in his image.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul is shocked that believers would take their disputes “before the unrighteous instead of the saints,” reminding them that “the saints will judge the world” and even angels (6:1–6). Why does Paul consider it such a serious matter, and a public disgrace to the gospel, when Christians sue one another before unbelieving courts rather than settling matters within the body of Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Set the scene. Believers are hauling fellow believers before pagan courts to settle disputes, putting the church's internal conflicts on public display before unbelievers.

Explain why Paul is grieved. It is a disgrace to the name of Christ for a community that claims to be reconciled to God to be unable to reconcile with one another. The watching world sees not the love of Christ but petty self-interest.

Open up Paul's startling argument that the saints will judge the world, and even angels (6:2-3). If God's people share in Christ's reign and final judgment, surely they can handle the small disputes of this life among themselves. Note that this assumes the high destiny of the church.

Apply it to the present. The principle is not that Christians never use courts in any matter, but that believers should be eager to settle disputes within the body, with the help of wise brothers and sisters, rather than dragging the family quarrel before the world.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The disgrace to Christ when believers cannot settle disputes among themselves (6:6)
- The high destiny of the saints, who will share in judging the world and angels (6:2-3)
- The church as the proper place to resolve disputes between believers
- The watching world and the witness of reconciled relationships
- Self-interest versus the honor of Christ in our conflicts

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it such a serious matter for believers to sue one another before unbelievers?
- What does it say about the church's destiny that the saints will judge the world?
- How should disputes between Christians be handled instead?

Question 2

Student Question:

Think about a conflict you currently have with another believer, or a grievance you are holding onto. Are you more concerned with being proven right and protecting your interests, or with the honor of Christ and the health of the relationship? What would change if Christ's reputation mattered to you more than winning?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes the courtroom into our own conflicts. Few of us file lawsuits, but most of us fight to be proven right.

Help students name a real, current grievance. The aim is not abstract agreement but honest attention to an actual relationship.

Set two motives side by side: winning and protecting my interests, versus the honor of Christ and the health of the relationship. Ask which is actually driving them.

Aim for one reoriented attitude. Ask each student to imagine how the conflict would change if Christ's reputation mattered more than their being right.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Being right versus honoring Christ in our conflicts
- The health of relationships over the protection of interests
- Self-examination of our true motives in disputes
- The witness of how Christians handle being wronged

Discussion Prompts

- What conflict or grievance are you holding onto right now?
- Is your deeper concern to win or to honor Christ?
- How would the situation change if his reputation mattered most?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul says it is already "a defeat" that they have lawsuits at all, and asks why they will not rather be wronged or defrauded (6:7-8). How does this call to be willing to suffer wrong reflect the example and teaching of Jesus, and why is a readiness to absorb loss for the sake of peace such a powerful witness to the gospel?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Bring out the radical question of 6:7: why not rather be wronged, why not rather be defrauded? Paul says the very existence of these lawsuits is already a defeat, whoever wins.

Root this in Jesus. The Lord taught his people not to retaliate, to turn the other cheek, and he himself, when reviled, did not revile in return but entrusted himself to the God who judges justly. Willingness to absorb wrong is cross-shaped.

Explain why this is such a witness. A world built on self-assertion is stopped short by people who will quietly bear a loss for the sake of peace and the name of Christ. It points to a different kingdom and a different King.

Guard against misuse. This is not a command to enable abuse or to call injustice good; it is a call to lay down our personal rights and grievances rather than fracture the body and shame the gospel over them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Willingness to suffer wrong rather than retaliate (6:7)
- The example and teaching of Jesus on non-retaliation

- Absorbing loss for peace as a witness to the gospel
- Laying down personal rights without calling injustice good
- A different kingdom marked by self-giving rather than self-assertion

Discussion Prompts

- How does the willingness to be wronged reflect Jesus himself?
- Why is absorbing a loss for peace such a powerful witness?
- What is the difference between laying down a right and enabling injustice?

Question 4

Student Question:

Most of us instinctively defend our rights and keep score of wrongs. Where is God calling you to lay down a “right,” to forgive a debt, to absorb a loss, or to let go of a grievance for the sake of peace and the name of Christ? What makes that so hard, and what would help you do it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses non-retaliation into the student’s own grievances. We keep careful accounts of wrongs and defend our rights instinctively.

Help students identify a specific right or debt they are clutching: an apology owed, money owed, recognition withheld, a wrong they keep replaying.

Name what makes it hard. Fear of being taken advantage of, wounded pride, a sense of justice. Acknowledge these honestly while pointing to the freedom of release.

Aim for one concrete act of release. Ask each student to name one grievance they will lay down this week for the sake of peace and the name of Christ, and one practical step toward doing so.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Laying down a right or forgiving a debt for the sake of peace
- The grip of grievance and score-keeping on the heart
- Honest reckoning with what makes forgiveness hard
- The freedom found in release

Discussion Prompts

- What right or grievance are you currently clutching?
- What makes it so hard to let go?
- What is one step toward releasing it this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul warns that the unrighteous “will not inherit the kingdom of God,” and lists a series of sinful lifestyles, then declares, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (6:9–11). What does this passage teach about the power of the gospel to transform a person, and what does it mean that they were washed, sanctified, and justified?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Handle the vice list soberly and without flinching. Paul warns plainly that those who persist in such ways of life “will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Sin is serious, and unrepented sin has eternal consequences.

Then let the turn in 6:11 shine. “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified.” The good news is not that the Corinthians were respectable people, but that the gospel had transformed people who were anything but.

Open up the three verbs. Washed points to the cleansing from sin associated with baptism into Christ, where sins are forgiven. Sanctified means set apart as holy to God. Justified means declared righteous in Christ. All three are God’s gracious work, received in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit.

Stress the reality and the responsibility of the change. This transformation is genuine, not a legal fiction; God actually makes his people new. And because the warning about not inheriting the kingdom stands, the washed are called to walk in their new life and remain faithful, not to drift back into what they were.

Make it pastoral and hopeful. Whatever was on that list, the blood of Christ reaches it. No one should think their past, or their present struggle, is beyond the reach of the gospel.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The sober warning that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom (6:9–10)
- The transforming power of the gospel: washed, sanctified, justified (6:11)
- Washing, forgiveness, and the new life associated with baptism into Christ
- Transformation as real and God-worked, not a mere legal fiction
- The call to walk in the new life and remain faithful, not return to the old
- Hope that no sin is beyond the reach of the cross

Discussion Prompts

- What do the three verbs washed, sanctified, and justified each mean?
- Why does Paul say such were you rather than such are you?
- How is this passage both a sober warning and a word of great hope?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul does not say “such are you” but “such were you,” pointing to a real change God has worked. What is one pattern of sin or part of your old life that you need to stop carrying as your identity, believing instead that in Christ you have been washed and made new? How might living from that truth change the way you fight temptation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question takes “such were some of you” into the student’s sense of identity. Many believers still wear their old life, or their present struggle, as their truest name.

Help students hear the difference between a struggle and an identity. A Christian may battle a particular sin, yet their identity is now washed, holy, and justified in Christ. What God says is true of them is truer than what their failures suggest.

Show how this reshapes the fight against temptation. We resist sin not to earn a new identity but because we already have one. We say no to the old self because it is no longer who we are.

Aim for one specific reframing. Ask each student to name a label from their past or their struggle that they need to stop wearing, and to replace it with what God declares true of them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- New identity in Christ over the labels of past and struggle
- The difference between battling a sin and being defined by it
- Fighting temptation from identity rather than for it
- Believing what God declares true of the washed

Discussion Prompts

- What old label or struggle do you still carry as your identity?
- How does being washed and made new change how you see yourself?
- How might living from that truth change the way you fight temptation?

Question 7

Student Question:

The Corinthians used the slogan “all things are lawful for me,” and Paul answers, “but not all things are helpful,” and “I will not be dominated by anything” (6:12). He insists the body “is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord” (6:13). How does Paul correct a wrong view of Christian freedom, and what does it mean that even permitted things can become enslaving and that our bodies belong to the Lord?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Explain the Corinthian slogan, “all things are lawful for me.” They twisted Christian freedom into a license to do anything, including indulging the body’s appetites without limit.

Lay out Paul’s two correctives. First, not everything that is permissible is beneficial; freedom is not the highest value, love and good are. Second, “I will not be dominated by anything”; a freedom that enslaves is no freedom at all.

Open up 6:13. The body is not a throwaway vehicle for appetite; it “is meant ... for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” God cares about what we do with our bodies, and our bodies are destined for resurrection, not the trash heap.

Apply it broadly. The principle reaches beyond sexual sin to any appetite or habit, food, drink, screens, comforts, that we excuse as freedom while it quietly masters us. Christian liberty is always under the lordship of Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christian freedom misunderstood as license (6:12)
- Not all permissible things are beneficial; love and good outrank mere liberty
- Refusing to be enslaved by any appetite or habit
- The body as meant for the Lord, not for indulgence (6:13)
- All liberty held under the lordship of Christ

Discussion Prompts

- How does Paul correct the slogan all things are lawful?
- How can even a permitted thing become enslaving?
- What does it mean that the body is meant for the Lord?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul refuses to be mastered by anything. Is there an appetite, habit, or so-called freedom in your life that has quietly begun to master you, something you tell yourself you can stop anytime but never do? What would it look like to surrender that to the Lord, who alone has rightful claim on your body?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the principle of 6:12 onto a real area of the student’s life. The test Paul gives is simple: what is mastering me?

Help students examine honestly. The mark of a freedom that has become bondage is the gap between I can stop anytime and I never do.

Avoid both legalism and denial. The point is not to manufacture guilt over every pleasure, but to notice where an appetite has taken the throne that belongs to Christ.

Aim for one concrete surrender. Ask each student to name one habit or appetite that has begun to master them and one step of surrender to the Lord who owns their body.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Discerning what has begun to master us
- The gap between I can stop and I never do
- Avoiding both legalism and denial
- Surrendering appetites to the lordship of Christ

Discussion Prompts

- What so-called freedom has quietly begun to master you?
- How do you know when an appetite has taken the throne?
- What would surrendering it to the Lord look like this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul commands, "Flee from sexual immorality," teaching that the believer's body is "a member of Christ," that the one joined to the Lord "becomes one spirit with him," and that the body "is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you," so that, having been "bought with a price," we must "glorify God in your body" (6:15–20). Why does Paul treat sexual sin as so serious, what does it mean that our bodies are members of Christ and temples of the Spirit, and how do truth about sin and grace toward the sinner both belong in the way we hold these teachings, including regarding homosexual practice and every form of sexual immorality named in this chapter?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and it requires both clarity and compassion. Paul commands, "Flee from sexual immorality" (6:18), and grounds the command in some of the most exalted statements about the body in all of Scripture.

Lay out why sexual sin is treated so seriously. Paul says the believer's body is "a member of Christ" (6:15); to join that body to sexual immorality is to take what belongs to Christ and unite it to sin. Sexual union is not trivial; "the two will become one flesh" (6:16). Sexual sin is uniquely a sin against one's own body (6:18), against the very temple where God has chosen to dwell.

Open up the temple language of 6:19. The body is “a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God.” Under the old covenant God dwelt in a building made holy by his presence; now he dwells in his redeemed people, and that makes the body holy ground. To defile it with immorality is a kind of profanation of God’s temple.

Hold truth and grace together, and name sin honestly. Earlier in the chapter Paul listed sexual sins that exclude from the kingdom, including adultery and homosexual practice (6:9). Scripture consistently presents sexual intimacy as God’s good gift reserved for the marriage of one man and one woman, and it names every departure from that, whether heterosexual immorality, adultery, or homosexual practice, as sin. The teacher should say this plainly, without singling out any one group as worse than others, since the same list includes greed, drunkenness, and reviling, sins that may sit closer to home for many in the room.

Then let grace have the last and loudest word, exactly as Paul does. The very next breath after that list is “such were some of you, but you were washed.” The gospel does not merely tell people to stop sinning; it offers cleansing, the indwelling Spirit, and real power to live a new life. Hold out hope to everyone who struggles, of any kind, that union with Christ is deeper than any sin and that the Spirit who lives in them is at work to make them new. Speak the truth firmly and the grace warmly, remembering that every person in the conversation is made in God’s image and dearly loved by him.

Close on 6:20: “you were bought with a price, so glorify God in your body.” The price was the blood of Christ. Our bodies are not our own to do with as we please; they belong to the One who redeemed them. The call to purity is finally a call to gratitude and worship, offering the whole self to the God who bought us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The command to flee sexual immorality rather than negotiate with it (6:18)
- The body as a member of Christ and the seriousness of joining it to sin (6:15–16)
- The body as a temple of the Holy Spirit, making it holy ground (6:19)
- God’s good design for sexual intimacy within the marriage of a man and a woman, and the naming of every departure as sin, including adultery and homosexual practice (6:9)
- Truth and grace held together: sin named honestly, the sinner loved and offered cleansing (6:11)
- Bought with a price: the body belongs to Christ, and purity as gratitude and worship (6:20)
- Hope of real transformation by the Spirit for everyone who struggles, of any kind

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul treat sexual sin as so serious and call us to flee rather than resist slowly?
- What does it mean that our bodies are members of Christ and temples of the Spirit?
- How do we hold truth about sin and grace toward the sinner together when we speak of these things?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole chapter. Paul moves from the courtroom to the vice list to the wonder of being washed, and finally to the call to glorify God in our bodies. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from 1 Corinthians 6 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone asks students to gather the chapter and name one way Christ is forming them. Let them speak first.

If needed, recall the movements: the courtroom and the willingness to be wronged, the vice list and the wonder of being washed, the misuse of freedom, and the call to glorify God in the body.

Watch the tone as students respond. Some may carry shame; meet them with the hope of 6:11. Some may carry self-righteousness; remind them the same list named sins of greed and the tongue. Steer everyone toward grace-fueled holiness.

Push toward the specific and close in prayer that students would glorify God in their bodies this week, living as the washed, indwelt, and purchased people they are.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Personal formation through truth and grace together
- Holiness fueled by gratitude for being bought with a price
- Meeting both shame and self-righteousness with the gospel
- Moving from general agreement to a specific, named response

Discussion Prompts

- Which part of this chapter pressed on you most, and why?
- What is the one truth from 1 Corinthians 6 you most need this week?
- What named step is God asking you to take in response?