

The Book of 1 Corinthians

Lesson 5: Lawsuits and Glorifying God in the Body -- 1 Corinthians 6:1-20

Two brothers in Christ, sitting on opposite sides of a pagan courtroom, glaring at each other while an unbelieving judge sorts out their quarrel and the whole city watches the spectacle. That is the picture that grieves Paul as this chapter opens. Christians dragging Christians before secular courts, airing the family's dirty laundry in front of a world that needs to see something better. "Why not rather suffer wrong?" Paul asks. "Why not rather be defrauded?" It is a question that turns our instincts upside down. We are sure our rights matter most. Paul is sure the name of Christ matters more.

But Paul is after something deeper than courtroom etiquette. He drops a vice list into the middle of the chapter, the kinds of lives that do not inherit the kingdom of God: the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, men who practice homosexuality, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, swindlers. It is a sobering list, and an honest one. None of us reads it without flinching somewhere. And then comes one of the most beautiful sentences in all of Scripture: "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."

Such were some of you. Not such are you, but such were you. The gospel does not merely forgive people; it changes them. The waters of baptism do not leave us where they found us. Whatever was on that list, whatever is on yours, the blood of Christ is able to wash it away and the Spirit of God is able to make a person new. This is the heart of the chapter, and it is a heart full of hope. Paul names sin honestly, all of it, including the sins our own age is most eager to excuse, precisely because he believes so deeply that no sin is beyond the reach of the cross.

Then Paul lands on the body. The Corinthians had a slogan, "all things are lawful for me," and they used it to justify everything, including visits to the city's prostitutes. Paul will not let it stand. Your body, he tells them, is not a throwaway thing. It belongs to the Lord. It is a member of Christ himself. It is a temple of the Holy Spirit who lives in you. You were bought with a price, the precious blood of Jesus. So glorify God in your body. Read this chapter slowly and let it do two things at once: let it humble you with the honesty of that vice list, and lift you with the wonder of being washed, indwelt, and bought by God.

Group Discussion: Paul is grieved that believers are taking one another to court before unbelievers, and asks, "Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?" (6:7). Why is our culture, and often our own heart, so focused on standing up for our rights, and what might the world learn about Christ if his people were known for being willing to absorb a wrong rather than retaliate?

Personal Reflection: Paul reminds the Corinthians, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified" (6:11). When you read that you have been

washed and made new in Christ, do you actually live out of that new identity, or do you still define yourself by your past or your present struggles? Where do you most need to believe what God says is now true of you?

Read 1 Corinthians 6:1-20

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?

9. 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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Matthew 5:38–48, refusing retaliation and loving even enemies; Romans 6:1–14, dead to sin and alive to God through baptism into Christ; 1 Thessalonians 4:3–8, God's will for our sanctification and sexual purity; Titus 3:3–7, what we were and the washing of regeneration that saved us; Romans 12:1–2, presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice