

## Study 7 - Courting Trouble - 1 Corinthians 6:1-20

(Sermon on 29-Mar-2020)

One of the most common reasons people give for dismissing Christianity is "**Oh they're always fighting amongst themselves**". This may not be particularly fair, but it shows how damaging public brawling is for Christians.

1. Do you know of any situations where people who were publicly known to be Christians ended up in court against each other?

*I heard of a situation where at a Christian School - some of the Christian parents on the Parents/Teachers council - took the School Board to court. I won't reveal on the specifics of the matter; but it was an ugly brawl in court, which cost each parent roughly \$30,000 out of their own pocket; and they lost the case. This caused a great deal of disunity and disharmony in the school; led to some families leaving the school; and one parent giving up their faith (if it was genuine in the first place?) Not only that, it was a bad look to non-Christians watching on...*

### Read 1 Corinthians 6:1-8

2. From what you know of the Corinthians, so far, does it surprise you they ended up in court? Why/Why not?

*Not surprising; pride often leads to only seeing things from one perspective. The Corinthians' pride had them following one leader over another. This naturally puts people in opposing groups; and once you are in opposing groups; it's easy to find plenty of things to argue about. Pride also leads to being stubborn and so not surprisingly, stubbornness leads to 'sticking to your guns' and going to court if necessary.*

*We also need to realise that the Greeks loved debating and rhetoric, so law courts were one of their chief entertainments. Listening to some eloquent lawyer, twisting people's words, was wonderful for them.*

*Note: Paul says these matters are trivial cases (v2); i.e. they are civil matters - complaints which are of a non-criminal nature. Examples of civil matters today: might be: divorce, child support, probate, being owed money, business contracts, personal injury; real estate disputes etc.*

*Paul has a different thing to say about criminal courts (See Romans 13:1-7)*

3. Does Paul expect the Corinthians to not have grievances with one another?

*No, Paul does not expect them to have grievances with one another; we all have grievances with one another. It's how these grievances are resolved that Paul is referring to. Why take disagreements between Christians, to a non-Christian to resolve, is Paul's concern.*

*Paul's basically saying 'how can anyone follow the paradoxical course of looking for justice amongst the unjust'?*

4. What do the expressions "the Lord's people will judge the world" (verse 2) and "we will judge angels" (verse 3) mean?

*<sup>1</sup>We can surmise from this passage, that we, as God's children, will be given a higher position than the angels. We're not only created in God's image but redeemed by Jesus (Gal 3:13; 1 Peter 2:9; Luke 1:68; Eph 1:7). Angels are not created in God's image and are not redeemed by Jesus (Heb 1:14; 2:16). Also, God sends His angels to serve His saints, i.e., those who are to inherit eternal life (Heb 1:14); see also Psalm 34:7; 91:11.*

*Also, the word used for judge here (krino) also means govern or rule. So, this passage strongly implies that we (as God's redeemed people) will one day, in Heaven, have authority over angels. Most likely, the meaning is that believers in Heaven will take part in the judgment of the fallen angels and exercise some authority over the holy angels. Jesus has been exalted above all the angels (see Ephesians 1:20-23), and it seems reasonable that those who are in Him and made in His likeness (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; Eph 4:24; 1 John 3:2) will share in His authority, including authority over the angels (Matt 19:28; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 20:4)*

5. How should grievances between the Corinthians be resolved?

*By involving someone wise within the church to mediate the matter. In our context, we could ask the minister or one or two elders to meet with both parties and try to resolve the matter peaceably.*

6. What's the problem with lawsuits between believers? (verse 6)

*It is a poor witness to non-believers. Washing their dirty linen in public, would not encourage non-believers to come and join the believers in Corinth.*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/judge-angels.html>

7. Put Paul's argument in your own words.

*The church is a family, God's family. Yes, families fight and have disputes; but families sort things out as a family; they don't involve others in the dispute. And people outside the family, don't have the wisdom or insight to understand the family dynamics, like people inside the family do. So, sort it out, in the family.*

8. What would be better than having lawsuits against one another?

*Paul says, rather than bring the church into disrepute, it would better to be wronged (and forgive) or accept you have been cheated (rather than push the point). Agree to differ - rather than have to be right about everything. Sometimes unity is more important than being right.*

Paul is horrified that the Corinthians would take each other to court. Surely, he says, there's someone among you who is smart enough to sort out your problems. Surely you don't have to make Christ's church a laughing stock by having public legal brawls, If you've got disputes with each other keep it in house!

9. What makes Paul's instructions hard for us to follow today?

*I think it's fair to say our way of life these days is a very public one. Social media often has situations go viral very quickly. What might have started of as a private matter, only takes one person to break that privacy and news travels fast. If Paul's letter tells us one thing in general, it's the importance of unity and harmony within the church. More than ever, our culture is very much one in which we have to be right, and opinions are often rammed down people's throats whether their right or not; and whether they were asked for or not! It's so easy for this culture to creep into our church setting.*

10. How can we do what Paul is saying?

*I'm reminded of Romans 12: 17-18*

*<sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*

As embarrassing and unhelpful as lawsuits are, they're only a symptom of the real problem. Paul goes on to address this problem in the next few verses...

**Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11**

11. What underlying problem is leading to the lawsuits?

*The underlying problem is residue wrong-doing. The wrong-doing the Corinthians were supposed to have left behind, when they became believers. Things like: sexual immorality, idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, theft, greed, drunkenness, slander and swindling. They have really repented!*

12. What is Paul's warning for the quarrelsome Corinthians?

*His warning is people who continue in these sins and are unrepentant, will not inherit the Kingdom of God; i.e. they will not be saved because their repentance is not genuine, if they continue to behave this way.*

13. How should verse 11 make the Corinthians think twice before running off to court?

*Basically, Paul's saying the believing Christians are a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), now that they have become believers in Jesus. Their sins have been **washed away** by Jesus' death on the cross (His blood has washed away their sin and they have been baptized with water and the Spirit (John 3:1-16 and Matt 3:11)). They have also been **sanctified** (made holy) by the Holy Spirit dwelling inside them; and they have been pronounced **justified** (i.e. not guilty - just-as-if-they never sinned) because Jesus has taken their guilt and punishment and placed it on Himself. So, Paul's argument is, if you are a New Creation - court cases and continuing in sinful behaviour is not acceptable for a "Jesus' person.*

14. **Discuss** in your group: How should Christians handle disagreements? (cf. Matthew 18:15-20)

- a. Pray
- b. Meet with your fellow believer and point out the problem
- c. If the fellow believer listens - great - no more action necessary. Repentance and forgiveness will have taken place
- d. If unresolved between the two believers; then pray and take a couple of people from the church family - who are wise, experienced and impartial. Let them mediate the matter
- e. If still unresolved, pray again; then it may be that the elders/minister needs to get involved - for the sake of the church (as we discussed in 1 Cor 5)
- f. It may result in discipline - with the intention of repentance and bringing back to the fold.

*g. Remember the promise in Matt 18:20 - where two or more are gathered in my name, there am I with them*

In 1 Corinthians 6:12, Paul picks up on the first of a number of slogans that the Christians at Corinth were using to explain what it meant to be a Christian. We'll be seeing more of these slogans as we go through 1 Corinthians, and unfortunately, they're particularly unhelpful in getting the Corinthians to understand what God wants.

15. What do you think of the phrase '**I have the right to do anything**'? Is this right or wrong for a Christian and why?

*First, we need to understand the Greek culture. The body was not important - the important thing was the soul. Because the body was not important; two attitudes in Corinth followed. Either - the body had to be kept in the most rigorous asceticism to suppress the instincts and desires of the body. Or - as in Corinth, the body was so unimportant, you could do whatever you liked with it.*

*What complicated the matter, for Paul, was the teaching of Christian freedom that Paul preached. The Corinthian attitude was - 'if the Christian is the freest of humans, then they are free to do whatever they like, especially with this completely unimportant body'*

*Second, with this attitude then; the Corinthians - then had no problem doing whatever they wanted with their bodies (food, drink, sex). What the Corinthians did was took Paul's teaching on Christian freedom, e.g. (Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day - Col 2:16) and they applied it to areas that Paul, or the Lord, never intended. They used their 'liberty' as a license to sin.*

### **Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20**

16. By the end of the passage it's clear that Paul is dealing with the problem of sexual immorality. What kind of sexual standards would be encouraged by the slogan 'I have the right to do anything?'

*The Corinthians are applying the liberty they have for food - to the area of sex. The area specifically mentioned is prostitution - but in general terms - any sexual relationships outside of the exclusive marriage union of a man and a woman.*

17. How does Paul correct this slogan? Is it surprising that he doesn't come straight out and say the slogan is WRONG?

*Probably not surprising. Remember the culture of philosophy, debating and rhetoric. Paul has to be a bit flowery and creative to get the point across. Like someone would do in a debate, to emphasize their argument.*

18. How does Paul's correction apply in the area of sex?

*Paul's correction is that just because we can have bodies capable of multiple sex partners and homosexuality does not make it right. God's original purpose for sex was within a marriage - and marriage is the lifelong exclusive union between a man and a woman.*

19. There is another slogan in verse 13; what does this slogan mean? Can you put it in your own words?

*The MSG paraphrase says this: You know the old saying, "First you eat to live, and then you live to eat"? Well, it may be true that the body is only a temporary thing, but that's no excuse for stuffing your body with food, or indulging it with sex. Since the Master honors you with a body, honor him with your body!*

20: **Ponder:** The Corinthians have worked out that what you put in your stomach doesn't matter at all to God. This is right as far as it goes, the problem is they've started to think that nothing they do with their bodies matters to God, only what they do with their 'spirits'. How would the idea of stomach and food not mattering to God get applied to the area of sexual practice?

*Their reasoning would be, that since the body doesn't matter; it's not just food and drink going into the body that doesn't matter, but anything we do with our 'temporary, unimportant' body.*

*We should note too that at Greek pagan festivals - gluttony and sexual immorality went hand in hand with each other. It was just one big party!*

20. How does Paul respond to this slogan at the end of verse 13? (cf. Rom 12:1) He supplies a slogan of his own "the body was meant for the Lord, and the Lord for the body". So, for a Christian, their body does not belong to them; it belongs to the Lord, the Creator.

21. Looking at verses 14 and 15, why are bodies important?

*Because:*

- a. *V14 - one day we will have a resurrected body. Just like God, the Father, raised Jesus from the dead - He will raise us into a new body too. Therefore, the body IS important.*
- b. *V15 - because we are united to Christ as Christians - remember the church is the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27) - we are members of Christ's body - so whatever we do with our bodies as members of Jesus' body - we are offending His body. So, Paul argues, we shouldn't unite ourselves to prostitutes as we offend Christ's body when we do that! As Christians we should never say "my body" (see v19b-20)*

22. Discuss in your group, why sexual immorality is a particularly damaging sin? *Sexual immorality first breaks the union between a man and a woman (if the person committing this immorality is married); and second, it is prostituting the body to someone else, when the body rightly belongs to Jesus. In either case, it is cheating and unfaithfulness. And unfaithfulness has far reaching consequences - it affects whole families and it prevents trust being given again. For example, a marriage breakup due to unfaithfulness or sexual sin - affects both parties, plus any children involved, plus grandparents - and it affects any future relationships that either party might have etc.*

23. Looking at the passage, do you think the problem of sexual immorality has changed since Paul's time?

*No, there is nothing new under the sun (Ecc 1:9). The picture painted of Corinth is like modern day Sydney.*

24. What is Paul's plan for dealing with sexual immorality in verse 18?

*One word - Flee! See the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Gen 39:12)*

25. Verses 19 and 20, give two more reasons why what we do with our bodies is so important. What are they?

*V19 - Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit that we received when we believed in Jesus. Therefore, our bodies are not our own.*

*V20 - Jesus paid for us to have a forgiven body - with His life taken on the cross. Our forgiven body cost Him His life, so He own us.*

26. What is Paul's overall instruction on how to treat our bodies?

*Therefore, honour God with our bodies. Ask ourselves - is what I say, what I think and what I do, honouring God? If not - don't say it, don't think it, and don't do it.*

What's the BIG IDEA of 1 Corinthians 6:1-20?

*The Big Idea - is don't court trouble - remember our bodies are not our own. Jesus bought our body on the cross - our bodies belong to God - therefore Honour Him!*



Give a **light globe** moment you experienced in this passage?

*The great truth of Christian faith - is not that the Christian has the freedom to sin - but that a Christian has the freedom NOT to sin.*

*The idea that I can't call my body my own body - it belongs to Jesus.*



How does this passage **apply to your life?**

*Honouring God with my body - in all aspects of life*

**Share the verse** that had a special meaning to you in this study?

*V17 - But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.*

*V19 - Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;*

*V20 - you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies.*

**Finish in prayer:** Pray that we would deal with conflicts in our church with love and godly wisdom. Pray we would honour God with our bodies.