

Lesson 9
1 Corinthians 6

¹ Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? ² Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? ³ Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? ⁴ If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church. ⁵ I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? ⁶ But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. ⁷ Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather *suffer yourselves* to be defrauded? ⁸ Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that *your* brethren.

➤ **WHY DID PAUL WRITE THESE VERSES AND WHY DID HE PUT THEM HERE?**

- At first glance, these verses seem to be an intrusion into Paul's discussion of sexual immorality that began in Chapter 5, continues in the second half of Chapter 6, and then continues on into Chapter 7.
- There is, however, an important thread that explains his change of topic to litigation between Christians. The root cause behind the litigation and the sexual immorality was the same – pride and arrogance. **The primary concern to the Corinthians was their rights**, and they pounced on anyone they thought was infringing those rights or inhibiting their freedom, be it Paul or their fellow Christians in Corinth. The result was that they were once again allowing the world to invade the church, and Paul pauses here to deal with that problem as it relates to litigation.
- Paul had just told them that the church was to judge those inside, while leaving those outside for God to judge. As with the case of incest, there was another “inside” matter that needed to be dealt with – and it was not to be dealt with by going “outside” for judgments on “inside” matters.

➤ **PAUL IS DEALING HERE WITH A PROBLEM THAT ESPECIALLY AFFECTED THE GREEKS.**

- The Jews did not ordinarily go to law in the public courts at all. Instead, they settled things before the elders of the village or the leaders of the synagogue. In fact, Jewish law prohibited a Jew from bringing an action in a non-Jewish court – to do so was considered blasphemy against the law of God.
- The Greeks were very different. They were characteristically a litigious people, and the law courts were one of their chief entertainments. Juries could be as large as 6000 citizens! In a Greek city every man was more or less a lawyer and spent time listening to or deciding legal cases.
- These litigious tendencies had been brought into the church by the Greeks, and Paul was understandably appalled – both as an apostle and as a Jew. This must have been more than just an isolated lawsuit to arouse Paul's ire so forcefully.
- If rights was one obsession of the Corinthians, the other was judgment. The root Greek word for judgment occurs over 40 times in this letter. They were obsessed with asserting their rights and passing judgment on others – a very dangerous combination.

➤ **PAUL WAS NOT A STRANGER TO EARTHLY COURTS.**

- “The man who wrote this letter appealed to earthly courts. He appealed to Caesar, and claimed his Roman citizenship; and at the last, when secondary officers were trafficking with his liberty, he used the great talismanic word, ‘I appeal to Caesar.’”
- Paul appealed to Roman justice, but never in matters between brother and brother, and never with the purpose of accusing his fellow Jews. Paul appealed to Roman courts only in defense of his work as a minister of the gospel. If his ability to proclaim the gospel was at stake, then to Caesar

he would go – and we need to keep in mind Paul’s own use of the courts as we study these verses.

➤ **CHRISTIANS AT CORINTH WERE BEING FLEECEED BY SAINTS.**

- Anyone who has been in the church for much time has heard the old saying, “don’t do business with the brethren.” There have always been some (and thankfully only a few) who come into the church and take financial advantage of Christians while hiding behind the immunity provided by these verses. How sad!
- Something of that sort appears to have been going on in Corinth. Paul does not dispute and even appears to take for granted that someone had been defrauded by a fellow member of the congregation.
- In 1 Timothy 6:5 Paul wrote about “men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.” And he told Timothy, “from such withdraw yourself.” That suggests to me that these fleecers of the flock might not have as much unlimited immunity from these verses as they think, but we will consider those questions later in our study.

➤ **APPARENTLY NOTHING WAS BEING DONE ABOUT THE THIEVERY AT THE CONGREGATIONAL LEVEL.**

- **In this entire discussion, there is an implicit call for leaders to act like leaders.** The failure of these two involved in the lawsuit was primarily a failure of the church to be the church.
- The Corinthian elders had apparently done nothing to condemn or withdraw from the one who was doing the defrauding. And they apparently had done nothing to assist the one defrauded or resolve the dispute. If they tolerated incest, it is hardly surprising that they were not up in arms over this matter either. But their failure to act was a primary cause of this problem in Chapter 6 as well as the problem in Chapter 5.

- Later in this letter, Paul will say “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.” (1 Corinthians 16:13) I think that command is implied here in Chapter 6 as well. The Corinthians needed leaders who weren’t afraid to act like leaders.

➤ **PAUL GIVES FOUR REASONS WHY THE CORINTHIANS’ LITIGIOUSNESS IS WRONG.**

- He tells them they are flaunting their failures (verse 1), they are forgetting their destiny (verses 2-4), they are bypassing their resources (verses 5-6), and they are betraying their calling (verses 7-8).
- **They were flaunting their failures.**
- By taking their disputes into the secular courts, they were bringing reproach on the church and were giving outsiders cause to blaspheme and look down on the church. While we should not sweep things under the carpet or pretend that we are sinless, we must always have a godly discretion and a due sense of shame when it comes to our failures – particularly when it comes to the outside world.
- We all know that Daniel was a great man of prayer. And we all know that he prayed those prayers while he and his fellow Jews were living in Babylonian exile and slavery far away from their home. But have you ever noticed what that great man of prayer actually asked from God. Did he ask God to save him from exile? No. Did he ask God to let him go back home? No. Daniel prayed “let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people are a reproach to all those around us.” (Daniel 9:16) Daniel’s primary concern was not Daniel. **Daniel’s primary concern was God’s reputation.** He knew that their own sin had caused the world to hold God and his chosen people in reproach, and Daniel prayed that God would bring that to an end.

- We need to watch very carefully how we present the church of Christ to the world. We should pray every day that we will never bring reproach on the body of Christ. Eternal destinies hang in the balance with regard to how the world views the church.
- **They were forgetting their destiny.**
- Six times in this chapter alone Paul turns to these wise Corinthians and asks “Do you not know?” Didn’t they know that they would judge the world and judge angels? How then could they be unable to judge these smallest matters?
- They would one day sit in judgment on these same secular judges who they were asking to judge their own trivial cases. Did that make any sense?
- It would make more sense for them to let those least esteemed in the church judge the matters rather than taking them to the most esteemed people out in the world. The Corinthians were still approaching things from a worldly perspective. They were measuring people with the world’s yardstick. They were very impressed with the top people out in the world, while ignoring what Jesus had to say about what it really meant to be a top person. **Matthew 23:11** “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.”
- Crucial to Paul’s entire argument is the view that our existence as God’s future people absolutely determines our life in this present age. In light of our destiny, the matters of this life are trivial and the pagan courts that concern themselves with such matters are themselves trivial. The issues at stake are infinitely bigger than these petty squabbles, and the fact that these petty issues seemed so important to the Corinthians was an indication that they did not have that bigger picture in view.

- **They were bypassing their resources.**
 - As he did before, Paul's tone now takes on a trace of mocking irony. The Corinthians were so proud of their wisdom, and yet it was apparently impossible to find among them even one Christian who was wise enough to judge their most trivial matters. Doesn't that seem odd for such a wise group?
 - Once again, Paul was trying to help the Corinthians see their true condition over against their perceived condition. We should always pray that we will see our condition as it really is, and the only way to do that is to look into the perfect law of liberty. (James 1:25)
 - **They were betraying their calling.**
 - They had been called to be saints. They had been called to share in Christ himself. They had been called to know in Christ the power and the wisdom of God. They had been called to shame the wise and the strong by the power of the gospel. And yet here they were living defeated lives and behaving like unconverted pagans given to resentment and covetousness.
 - They went to court to win a case against their brother in Christ – but to drag a brother into court was to admit defeat regardless of the outcome of the lawsuit. Both sides of their petty squabbles were at fault – the side that caused the injury and the side that ignored Christ's commands and refused to turn the other cheek. You can sense the sadness of Paul in these verses as he considers the situation there in Corinth.
- **WHY NOT RATHER BE DEFRAUDED?**
- "Why not, indeed! For one living in the old age, where selfishness in all of its sordid as well as domesticated forms still rules, one can give a thousand reasons why not; but they all begin with the word 'but' (as in,

‘But you don’t know what he did to me”) and are motivated by some form of self-protection or self-gain. ... **By enduring undeserved injury for the sake of the gospel we enter into the real meaning of the cross.”**

➤ **SO IS IT EVER OKAY TO SETTLE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHRISTIANS IN THE SECULAR COURTS?**

- Absolutely not, at least for the types of disputes that Paul is discussing here. The real question then is what types of disputes are being discussed here?
- But we need to be very careful when we ask that question. As one commentator noted, our modern world “places such a high priority on property that a number of hermeneutical ploys have been established to get around the plain sense of the text. ... Many spend most of their time trying to justify actions that are openly contrary to what the text says.” As with the Corinthians, our priorities tend to be warped toward the values of this age rather than of the age to come. We need to be certain that we are studying the passage to understand and then obey the truth rather than simply to justify what we have already decided to do.
- Let’s begin by looking at something that Paul is NOT dealing with here – a Christian’s response to a pagan who defrauds him. Paul does not consider that issue here – but Jesus did, at least from the reverse perspective of a Christian being sued by a pagan. In Matthew 5:40, Jesus said, “And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.” Is there any limit to that command? What if someone showed up tomorrow and sued us to take away this building? Are we to give him the parking lot also? The purpose of the command in Matthew 5:40 is to make us more effective in our proclamation of the gospel. **Demanding our rights on trivial matters has the opposite effect – it makes the world believe that those trivial matters are important because they seem so very important to us.** But not all

matters are trivial. If Matthew 5:40 were taken to a false extreme, then the result would be to greatly lessen our effectiveness in proclaiming the gospel. With that in mind, let's turn back now to Paul's discussion.

- Does Paul include all disputes between Christians? Perhaps, but in verse 2 he specifically refers to "the smallest matters" or "trivial matters." What are trivial matters. I do not think Paul means trivial in terms of monetary value. I think Paul means trivial in terms of eternal value. That is the principal he used when deciding when he himself would appeal to Roman law. Why not just be wrongfully accused, Paul? Because this was not a trivial matter – the proclamation of the gospel was at stake.
- My opinion (and that's all it is) is that a Christian may go to the civil courts against another Christian (as a last resort) if the matter is not trivial in an eternal sense. When division occurs in a congregation there is sometimes a dispute over who gets the building. In my opinion, these verses do not require the faithful brethren (often in the minority) to just hand the deed over to those who are straying from the path – and who would use that building to get others to follow them. That sad situation can be described in many ways – but it cannot in my opinion be described as a trivial matter.
- One final example that is not just my opinion comes from Matthew 19:9. When fornication occurs in a marriage, the innocent party can "put away" the guilty party and marry another. Elders cannot grant divorces. That requires a secular court. It must be true that the innocent party in such a situation has the right to sue the other party for divorce, and it cannot be the case that Paul has in this chapter taken away that right. Again, that matter is not a trivial matter in light of eternity.

➤ **VERSE 2 SAYS THAT WE WILL JUDGE THE WORLD? HOW WILL THE CHURCH PARTICIPATE IN THE JUDGMENT OF THE WORLD?**

- **The world will be judged in light of the choices that we have made.**

- As a former teacher, each examination would almost always be followed by complaints from someone that it was impossible and unfair. My response was almost always the same – if it were really so hard then why were others able to complete it and make a good grade?
- On the day of judgment, the church will stand as uncontestable evidence that the gospel was for all and that the gospel was not hidden. Our faithfulness to the end will judge the faithless world. Our fidelity to the word of God will judge those who cast the word behind their backs. But conversely, if we drift from those moorings, then others' faithfulness and fidelity will judge us.
- Our faithfulness in this life also judges people in the here and now. That is the very reason why the righteous are so often hated and despised by the world around them. We remind people that they are not living according to God's word, and people do not like having that reminder.

➤ **WHAT DOES IT MEAN IN VERSE 3 THAT WE WILL JUDGE ANGELS?**

- These angels are presumably wicked angels of the sort mentioned in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, 9. But how will they be judged by us?
- Jude 9 tells us that the fallen angels rebelled and kept not their "places of authority." They rebelled from what they could see. The church is faithful apart from sight, and thus our faithfulness on that last day will stand in stark contrast to the faithlessness of angels who were formerly in the very presence of God and yet rebelled against him anyway. What will be their defense when faced by faithful Christians who died never having seen God?

⁹ Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, ¹⁰ Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit

the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

➤ **THIS TERRIBLE CATALOG OF SINS IS A GRIM COMMENTARY ON THE DEPRAVED SOCIETY WITHIN WHICH THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH WAS LOCATED.**

- We considered most of the items on the list in our comments on Chapter 5:10-11.

➤ **TWO SINS IN THIS CATALOG DEAL WITH HOMOSEXUALITY.**

- **Barclay:** “This sin had swept like a cancer through Greek life and from Greece, invaded Rome. We can scarcely realize how riddled the ancient world was with it. Even so great a man as Socrates practiced it; Plato’s dialogue *The Symposium* is always said to be one of the greatest works on love in the world, but its subject is not natural but unnatural love. Fourteen out of the first fifteen Roman Emperors practiced the unnatural vice. At this very time Nero was emperor. He had taken a boy called Sporus and had him castrated. He then married him with a full marriage ceremony and took him home in procession to his palace and lived with him as wife. ... In this particular vice, in the time of the early church, the world was lost to shame; and there can be little doubt that this was one of the main causes of its degeneracy and the final collapse of its civilization.”
- Barclay wrote that in 1954. What he describes may have been hard to imagine then (as he said), but how hard is it to imagine today 50 years later? What will our society be like in another 50 years? Does this world really believe that the eternal laws of God will be changed for our generation just because we were born into it? God’s law transcends time and cultures; it is unchanging. Man must change to conform to God’s law; God’s law will not change to conform to man.

- Most commentators see the two terms used at the end of verse 9 as referring to the passive and active partners in a male homosexual relationship.
- The word translated “effeminate” in verse 9 refers to a behavior rather than a characteristic. We know that because of verse 11, where Paul says that such were some of you, implying that a change of behavior had taken place. A better translation is “male prostitute.”

➤ **THOSE WHO PRACTICE THESE SINS WILL NOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD.**

- As members of the Lord’s church, we enjoy our citizenship in the kingdom of God here on earth. Paul tells us in Colossians 1:13 that we have been translated into the kingdom of his dear Son.
- But one day we will enter into full possession of something that we have been promised, and on that day we will inherit the kingdom of God. Peter explained it in 1 Peter 1:3-5.

1 Peter 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 To an **inheritance** incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

- **This kingdom reflects the character of God, and those who insist on living by different standards will not be there.** Paul is not talking here about isolated acts of unrighteousness, but about a whole way of life that is pursued with persistence and delight by those who stand against and apart from God. These are those who are without. (Revelation 22:15)

- Paul warns us not to be deceived – and does our society ever need that warning today! Many have wandered off course into a minefield of false teaching and false behavior.
- Groups purporting to represent Christ are openly embracing and celebrating some of the very sins on this list in verses 9-10 and are electing as their leaders those who practice these sins. Other groups preach a strong message, but tolerate every conceivable sin under the guise of non-judgmental open-mindedness.
- (NKJV) “Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.”
- **VERSE 11 IS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL VERSES IN THE BIBLE! “AND SUCH WERE SOME OF YOU!”**
- Paul did not preach the gospel of the changed life. Paul preached the gospel of the Life that changes lives. Theology to Paul was not an abstraction. It did not consist simply of big ideas to be bandied about in theoretical discussions. To Paul, theology was the application of the gospel to life in the real world.
- “There are few more exciting and energizing statements in the New Testament than this little phrase, *And such were some you*. We have only to recall the moral cess-pit of first century Corinth to appreciate the wonder of Paul’s assertion. No power on earth could have produced such a transformation in this motley collection of Christians, to whom he is so deeply devoted that he explicitly addresses them as brethren 20 times in this single epistle. ... Every single individual rescued from the tentacles of rampant vice was a glorious trophy of divine grace. Never had Paul been more convinced that God is able to save to the uttermost all who come to him through Jesus. (Hebrews 7:25) Every Corinthian Christian was living

evidence that God's answer to sophisticated Greek wisdom was not clever arguments but changed lives."

- The crucial question is WHY were they no longer these things? What had happened? Verse 11 tells us – "but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." Washed; Sanctified; Justified. All three verbs are in the aorist tense, indicating a once-for-all event that produced this incredible transformation. And what was that event? As one denominational commentator (perhaps reluctantly) admits, this verse has a "definite baptismal ring" to it! This transformation occurred at their baptism!
- At our baptism, we were washed. At our baptism, we were sanctified. At our baptism, we are justified.

Ephesians 5:25-26 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, ...

Acts 22:16 And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

¹² All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. ¹³ Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power. ¹⁵ Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make *them* the members of an harlot? God forbid. ¹⁶ What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. ¹⁷ But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.

➤ **THESE VERSES BEGIN A MASTERLY PRESENTATION BY PAUL ON THE BEAUTY OF SEXUAL HOLINESS.**

- What Paul tells the Corinthians here is particularly relevant in our sex-obsessed modern world where sex is a universal panacea for man's emptiness apart from God.
- Paul is about to unfold the Christian view of the body, in stark contrast to the prevailing views held by the pagan society of that day. **No other religion holds such a high view of the body as does Christianity.** God's commitment to and estimation of the body is shown both by his creation of the body and his incarnation.
- And keep in mind that Paul is talking here about our physical bodies. Our physical bodies will be changed on the last day, but they will not be replaced. We will be raised as was Christ, and Christ's resurrection was a bodily resurrection.
- It is our bodies that we must present to God as living sacrifices. Our obedience to God is expressed in our bodies or it is expressed nowhere.

➤ **THE GREEKS LOOKED DOWN ON THE BODY.**

- To the Greeks, the important thing was the soul, the spirit of a man. The body did not matter at all. In Corinth, this view was taken to its logical conclusion – if the body does not matter at all, then you can do with it whatever you want, and you can sate all of its appetites.
- This Greek view of the body met Paul's message about our freedom in Christ – and, perhaps not surprisingly, some of the Greek's seemed to have latched onto Paul's preaching as proof of their false view of the body. Paul clears up their confusion in this section of his letter.
- As we will see, freedom in Christ does not make us free to sin; it makes us free not to sin. Further, Paul will tell us that we cannot do whatever we want with our body for the simple reason that our body does not belong to us.

➤ **“ALL THINGS ARE LAWFUL UNTO ME!”**

- The first thing we note about that statement from verse 12 is that Paul does not dispute it. In fact, it is quite possible that this was something Paul had told them, and that they were now wresting out of context and throwing back in his face. It is also possible that this phrase was purely a Corinthian motto, but again Paul does not tell them it is not true. It is similar to Augustine’s oft-quoted phrase – “Love God and do what you like” – with the “Love God” part being understood but unstated in the motto quoted by Paul.
- In Titus 1:15, Paul said that to the pure, all things are pure. In chapter 13 of this letter, Paul will tell us that love believes all things. And here I think Paul would agree that all things are lawful. But what are all things?
- The sins in verses 9-10 are clearly not lawful, and so there must be some implied reservation to the meaning of all things. The context – both immediate and remote – tells us that Paul was discussing things that are in themselves morally neutral.
- All morally neutral activities are lawful for a Christian, but not all morally neutral activities are expedient. If something is unlawful then it is never right to do that thing. If something is merely inexpedient, then it may be right or wrong depending on the circumstances. If something is unlawful, then it can never be expedient. But we must note that if something is truly inexpedient, then under those circumstances it is wrong for us to do it – even though in other circumstances it may not be wrong.
- Is it lawful to eat meat that was sacrificed to an idol? Yes. Is it expedient to do so? Not always. Paul deals with that issue in Chapter 8, where he will warn us that our liberty can become a stumbling block to others. **Romans 14:15** “Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.” It is never right to act unlawfully, and it is sometimes wrong to act lawfully.

- Paul had a dilemma in Corinth. The church there included legalistic Jews who wanted to bind the Old Law on Christians, and it included Greek converts who wanted to enjoy their freedom in Christ by maintaining sinful practices from their former life without Christ. Paul had to get them all to come to the middle ground away from too many rules and regulations on the one side and away from too much license on the other.

➤ **PAUL WILL REPEAT THE MOTTO FROM VERSE 12 LATER IN 10:23.**

- If we put 6:12 together with 10:23 we have three crucial qualifications on the apparent carte blanche in the phrase “all things are lawful.”
- First, not all things are helpful. Morally neutral activities do not always have neutral results. Some morally neutral activities may have positive results in our lives and the lives of others, while others may have negative results.
- Second, all things are lawful, but we should not allow anything to take control of us apart from Christ. “Whatever overcomes a man, to that he is enslaved.” (2 Peter 2:19) We have one master, Jesus Christ, and we cannot have two. When our morally neutral activity or pastime takes control of our life, then it ceases to be morally neutral as far as we are concerned. We cannot permit our behavior to be controlled by anyone other than Jesus. These Corinthians were trumpeting their “freedom” with regard to sexual sin while at the very moment they had been enslaved by the very thing they argued was under their authority.
- The third qualification to “all things are lawful” comes from 10:23 – not all things build up. Not only does Paul want what we do to be positive, he wants it to be constructive. We should, of course, never use our freedom in such a way that it might lead us or others away from Christ. But Paul is saying more – we should use our freedom in such a way that we draw ourselves and others closer to Christ.

➤ **THE CORINTHIAN'S MOTTO APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN "I'LL GET MY RIGHTS!"**

- In Chapters 8-10 Paul will tell us that the essential Christian freedom is the freedom not to be free – a deliberate choice to restrain our freedom for the sake of the gospel.
- Corinth, it seems, was a city obsessed with personal rights – something else it has in common with our own society and its obsession with rights of all kinds. While Christianity has done more than anything else to affirm the dignity and worth of man against the dehumanization of such things as abortion and slavery, our rights are defined only in our relation to Jesus Christ. We have no rights apart from him, and whatever rights we have must always take a backseat to the will of God.
- If I am constantly concerned about my rights, then how can I be concerned with what God wants me to do? **Truly Christian conduct is never predicated on whether I have the right to do something.** If my rights are my primary concern, then I am not carrying my cross and following Christ.

➤ **APPARENTLY THERE WERE SOME WHO WERE DEFENDING FORNICATION WITH THE ARGUMENT THAT IT WAS JUST AS NATURAL AS EATING FOOD.**

- Paul refutes that argument by telling them that the body does not exist for fornication the way that the stomach exists for meat. Paul emphatically denies any parallel between meat and fornication. God made meat for the belly and the belly for meat – but he did not make the body for fornication; he made it for himself. The Corinthians actually thought that by practicing fornication they were engaging in something that was morally neutral!
- Paul also notes that the end of the belly is very different from the end of the body. The belly will be destroyed, but the body will be raised.

¹⁸ Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. ¹⁹ What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? ²⁰ For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

➤ **FLEE FORNICATION!**

- Don't debate with it. Don't rationalize it. Run from it! We should not live right next to the line when it comes to fornication. We should stay as far away from it as possible, and we should run to get as far away from it as possible.
- Paul commands the Corinthians to flee from two sins: fornication (verse 18) and idolatry (10:14). A valuable study is to take a very close look at the Biblical "flees." Joseph had to run from the sexual advances of Potiphar's wife. We today do not have to be citizens of Corinth or Egyptian slaves to understand the practical wisdom of running from temptation when the odds are stacked too high against us.

➤ **EVERY SIN THAT A MAN DOETH IS WITHOUT THE BODY; BUT HE THAT COMMITTETH FORNICATION SINNETH AGAINST HIS OWN BODY.**

- What does this verse mean? Isn't gluttony, for example, also a sin against our own body? After all, didn't Paul tell the Philippians in 3:18-21 that many were living as enemies of the cross because their god was their belly? What then is Paul's point here? Why doesn't he say "Flee gluttony"? How is fornication different from gluttony or countless other sins?
- Fornication is different from other sins because God views it differently – and that should be enough for us to agree and understand that it is different. To God, fornication is uniquely against all that the body stands for. Gluttony is not uniquely against the body because God did not

choose eating as the act that expresses the glory of man as male and female. The “one flesh” in Genesis 2:24 depicts the relationship between Christ and his church. (Ephesians 5:31-32) Of all of the sins that men commit, fornication has a unique relation to the body in the sight of God. All other sins are against the will of God and many use the body as the instrument of the sin, but those others sins are not viewed by God as he views fornication.

➤ **YOU ARE BOUGHT WITH A PRICE!**

- We have been purchased by God and decisions have already been made for us! We are not our own. The pagans may justify their sin by saying “It’s my body. I can do with it what I please,” but a Christian can never say that. We are slaves to Christ; our bodies are not our own. What a transformation would occur if we really understood that!
- The Greeks saw the body as unimportant; Paul did not. In these last nine verses, Paul speaks of the body eight times. He tells us about its glorious destiny, its holiness, and its essential unity with the whole person.

➤ **VERSES 13-20 TELL US FIVE PROFOUND TRUTHS ABOUT THE BODY.**

- **Verse 13 tells us about the purpose of the body in the Lord.**
- God has a purpose for our bodies and it is not to indulge in sexual immorality. “The body is for Christ, to belong to him and to serve him, and Christ is for the body, to inhabit and to glorify it.”
- **Verse 14 tells us about the resurrection of the body in the Lord.**
- **God’s purpose for our bodies is in no way thwarted by death.** God raised up Jesus and he will also raise us up by his power. Notice that Paul rejects the Greek notion that the body and the spirit will be forever separated – he says that God will raise us up. Our bodies are an integral

part of what we are. Our bodies are not dispensable but are instead the raw materials for the changed bodies we will have for eternity. “Paul was confident about the bodily resurrection of both these arrogant, divided Corinthians and of his own whip-lashed, fever-wracked, stoned, and exposed fragile human frame.” “The immoral man sins against his body as it will become in eternity.”

- **The idea that our body counts for nothing either in this life or the next is a completely pagan view of the body. Philippians 3:20-21** “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” God has a plan for our bodies, and it not that they be destroyed as if they count for nothing.
- (My co-teacher was chosen to present the keynote address at the 2003 Faulkner University Lectureship, and his topic was the bodily resurrection. A video of that lecture is available at www.thywordistruth.com.)
- **Verses 15-17 tell us about the interaction of the body with the Lord.**
- “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?” Our physical bodies are limbs of Christ, and Paul’s rhetorical question (“Do you not know this?”) reveals just how fundamental is this union between Christ and the Christian.
- “He who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.” The two personalities become one. They become so merged that Paul uses the same phrases (kollomenos, meaning “glued together”) to describe the Christian’s integration with Christ as to describe the sexual union in verse 16.

- The relation between Christ and his church is like the relation between the bridegroom and the bride. The complete and permanent oneness between husband and wife is intended by God to be a powerful pointer to the relationship between Christ and his church. Is it any wonder that God considers fornication to be uniquely opposed to his will?
- “This [oneness] is the ideal that judges all the rest of Christian sexual ethics in the Scriptures. That is what is behind every prohibition in this area. Why should men not sleep with animals? Why is adultery wrong? Why are homosexual practices wrong? Why is pre-marital intercourse wrong? Simply because there is no true oneness and therefore there should be no one-flesh either.”
- We hear a lot today about the attack on the family, and such an attack is taking place. Hollywood attacks the family by promoting fornication, adultery, and homosexuality. Our government attacks the family by supporting abortion, no-fault divorce, and homosexual marriages. If we leave here today with only one message, it should be this: **an attack against the family is an attack against the church**, and we should see it that way. As our society spirals downward we will have more and more opportunities to stand up for what is right, and we should pray that we never let such an opportunity pass us by.
- **Verse 19 tells us about the habitation of the body by the Lord.**
- Earlier in chapter 3, Paul affirmed that the whole church is God’s temple, with a stern warning against any that would destroy that temple. Now Paul uses the same metaphor to apply to each individual Christian. We are each a temple of God.
- **Verses 19-20 tell us about the redemption of the body by the Lord.**

- Paul's final plea for purity is based on the cost of redeeming our bodies. "You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." Before Christ, we were slaves to ourselves, our self-centered desires, our self-indulgences, and our bodily passions. Then came a master with the resources to set us completely free. He paid the ransom. We have a new master, and it is he who we must obey. How can we even consider returning to the futility and servitude of our former life under our former master?
- Paul's final command is a positive one – glorify God in your body! "Display positively in the use of your body the glory and especially the holiness of the heavenly master who has taken possession of our person." The Psalmist beautifully described God's view of our bodies:

Psalm 139:13-16 For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. 14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. 15 My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. 16 Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them.

- **The body is for Christ – and Christ is for the body!** That is a motto that both we and the Corinthians would benefit from remembering.