

# On Sexual Immorality and Lawsuits (1 Corinthians 6)

Expository Lessons from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

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## I. Review from Prior Lessons

- a. Paul was writing to the Corinthian church, addressing a number of problems there that he had become aware of and answering questions they had raised to him.
- b. The first problem Paul addressed was division in the church, a sectarian spirit. Disciples in Corinth had been strongly identifying with prominent leaders (Paul, Apollos, Peter, etc.) rather than simply identifying as followers of Christ.
- c. The second major sin addressed by Paul was sexual immorality in the church. In this case, the problem was incest: "a man has his father's wife". This was a sin that Paul said even the pagan Gentiles did not practice!
  - i. Paul addresses the serious problem of the church's tolerance of serious sin in their midst and challenges them to expel the wicked person from the church.
  - ii. In the prior lesson, we discussed the reasons Paul gave to justify the extreme solution he recommended (expulsion). The reasons included:
    1. For the good of the person involved in sin, in the hopes that he would see the seriousness of his sin and repent, so that he might be saved on the Last Day. (**1 Corinthians 5:4-5**)
    2. The danger of this sin (sexual immorality) spreading throughout the church, like yeast spreading through a lump of dough, imperiling others if it was not addressed promptly. (**1 Corinthians 5:6**)
    3. The Passover story provided a template for the Christian life. Now that the Passover Lamb has been slain (Christ has been crucified for us), we all must eat the bread without yeast (get rid of sin in our lives). Those who did not remove the yeast from their homes were to be expelled from the community. (**1 Corinthians 5:7-8**, pointing back to the events of **Exodus 12**)
    4. Paul also reminded them that we in the church are to "judge" others in the church (but not those in the world).

- a. “For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? *Do you not judge those who are inside?* But those who are outside God judges. Therefore ‘put away from yourselves the evil person.’” (**1 Corinthians 5:12-13**, NKJV)
- iii. In the prior lesson, we also discussed that although Paul’s instructions (to put out of the church a person who is in serious sin) are very clear, most churches today do not practice this.
  - 1. Church leaders are imperiling their own members and not showing the hearts of good shepherds, when they refuse to do what Paul said here. They are not looking out for the good of the person in sin, nor are they protecting the rest of the church.
  - 2. On the other hand, we are not to be passing judgment on opinion matters (things not spelled out as sin in the Scriptures, as Paul explained in **Romans 14**).
  - 3. Also, we will not have a flawless church even when we practice church discipline.
    - a. We see that even from the beginning of the church, in **Acts**.
    - b. There will be some sin in the church that will only be revealed on the Day of Judgment, when the angels sort the wicked out of the kingdom, as Jesus explained in the Parable of the Wheat and Tares, in **Matthew 13**.
- d. In the current lesson, on **1 Corinthians chapter 6**, Paul continues his discussion on sexual immorality and also addresses another problem: lawsuits in the church (where one member is taking another before the government courts).
  - i. The discussion on the dangers of sexual immorality is a continuation of the subject introduced in **1 Corinthians 5**.
  - ii. We focused on the matter of church discipline (and the problem of tolerating sin in the church) in the prior message. In the current one, we will be taking a serious look at the dangers of this category of sins: various forms of *sexual immorality*.

## II. Lawsuits in the Church

- a. As we are reading the next passage from **1 Corinthians**, let us keep in mind that Jesus had said that the distinctive sign to the world that we are his disciples would be *the love we have for one another*.

- i. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. *By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*” (**John 13:34–35**, NKJV)
- b. Read **1 Corinthians 6:1-11**.
- c. The problem: members of the church were going to the public courts to press lawsuits against other members of the church, to seek ‘justice’.
  - i. “But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!” (**1 Corinthians 6:6**, NKJV)
  - ii. This was disgraceful in the eyes of Paul. The followers of Jesus were supposed to be a light in the midst of a dark world. Instead, they are “biting and devouring one another”. (**Galatians 5:15**)
    1. This was publicly degrading the witness of Christ in the eyes of the world around them.
  - iii. Paul said members of the church were *wronging and cheating* each other. He reminds them that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God! That includes those who steal, who are covetous, and who revile or extort others.
    1. Many of them had *come out of* a lifestyle immersed in that kind of behavior. Were they now going back to their old ways?
- d. Paul provides the solution: how they should handle disputes that come up in the church.
  - i. Disputes will come up between Christians. We see this from the very beginning of the church, even in the **Book of Acts**. The fact that there are problems means that there are imperfect people in the church, and that Satan is still working to create disunity. So, it should be no surprise when we see this!
  - ii. If a dispute arises among members of the church, they need to find other members of the church to judge the matter.
    1. Under no circumstances do we look to the world to resolve problems that come up in the church!
    2. Consider also other passages that address resolving conflict among brothers, including dealing with church leaders involved in sin (**Matthew 5:21-26**, **Matthew 18:15-20**, **1 Timothy 5:19-20**, etc.).

- iii. Paul answers an objection that he anticipates from the Corinthians: “But we don’t have anyone in the church who is equipped to judge in matters like this!”
  - 1. Paul responds to the anticipated objection with a rhetorical question (which needs no response).
    - a. “...Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, *not even one*, who will be able to judge between his brethren?” (**1 Corinthians 6:5**, NKJV)
  - 2. Paul also reminds them that the saints (Christians) will “judge the world” and that “we shall judge angels”. He reasons, if we will judge the world, aren’t we equipped to judge in relatively small matters like these disputes that have arisen in the church?
- iv. Paul then concludes his argument by reminding them that it would be *better to accept being wrong or being cheated* than to engage in lawsuits against other Christians.
  - 1. This reminds me of what Jesus and the apostles taught, about being willing to suffer for righteousness' sake, following the example of Jesus.
    - a. Read what Jesus taught in **Matthew 5:38-48**.
    - b. Read what Peter taught in **1 Peter 2:11-25**, **1 Peter 3:8-9** and **1 Peter 3:13-17**.
      - i. Peter calls us to follow the example of Jesus when we are being wronged by others despite being innocent.
      - ii. This is foundational Christian teaching on non-resistance, applied to when we are wronged by others in the church.
- e. **Challenges for Us:**
  - i. Most churches do not follow what Jesus and the apostles taught regarding resolving conflicts that come up. Problems I have seen over the years include:
    - 1. Pretending that the church is a perfect community and, therefore, it is not possible that major problems could exist therein. Deny that there are problems.

2. Allowing problems to fester for months or years, hoping they will just somehow go away on their own (or that some of the people involved will leave).
  3. Minimizing problems, “sweeping them under the rug”, and not bringing them to Biblical resolution.
  4. Playing favorites when problems come up (automatically tending to favor those who are leaders, or who are popular, wealthy, or influential).
  5. Treating a problem of sin as a ‘public relations issue and never addressing the actual sin. Looking to worldly solutions to a spiritual problem.
  6. Doing everything “behind the scenes” so that there is no transparency nor public accountability to the church members.
- ii. **[Note:** In general, church issues should be addressed and resolved within the local church. **HOWEVER**, in churches where there has been a charge of sexual or other personal abuse, this is a special situation that may require bringing the matter to the attention of authorities in the government, to comply with the law and to protect people. Wisdom and discretion are required in special cases like these.]
- iii. Paul’s instructions here are very simple and easy to understand. This is not complicated. While these instructions may not be easy to follow, we must be committed to doing this, and promptly, whenever conflict comes up between Christians.
1. Conflicts will come up in any church. Count on it!
    - a. The question is: “How will we respond *when* conflicts like these come up?”
  2. Satan is always trying to get a foothold in the church. In order to maintain unity, we must resolve conflicts in the manner Paul lays out here.
- f. **Question:** What is Paul referring to here when he says that the *saints will judge the world?* And *we will judge angels?*
- i. There are plenty of passages in Scripture that speak about Jesus or God judging us, and even about the angels sorting the wicked out from among the righteous.
    1. But where does it teach that we Christians will be judging the world or judging angels?

## 2. What does that mean?

## ii. Regarding the saints judging the world.

1. It is not clear to me in what sense this statement should be understood. Some other Scriptures that have come to mind that might shed some light on this include:

a. In the Eastern Orthodox Bible (EOB), there is a footnote for this passage in **1 Corinthians 6:2** that points the reader to **Wisdom of Solomon 3:8**.

i. Read **Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-4** and **3:8**.

ii. Note that this passage speaks of the righteous judging the nations and ruling over people, which does sound quite similar to Paul's statement in **1 Corinthians 6:2** regarding the saints judging the world in the future.

b. Jesus spoke of the apostles sitting on twelve thrones, to judge the twelve tribes of Israel (**Luke 22:30, Matthew 19:28**).

c. Jesus also spoke of the promise of *us* sitting on thrones with Him and ruling over the nations, as well.

i. "Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations— 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'— as I also have received from My Father;" (**Revelation 2:24–27**, NKJV; quoting **Psalm 2:9** and applying it to Christians)

ii. "[*To the church in Laodicea*] To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." (**Revelation 3:21**, NKJV)

iii. Regarding the saints *judging angels*.

1. The first thing that comes to mind, for me, is that we might be involved in judging the wicked angels who sinned.

- a. “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*; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly...then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to *reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment...*”  
(from **2 Peter 2:4–9**, NKJV)
  - b. “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....” (**Jude 6**, NKJV)
2. Tertullian (an early Christian writer from Carthage, North Africa) pointed to this statement by Paul that we would judge angels as referring to the wicked angels who rebelled and sinned in the days of Noah.
    - a. “He [*Satan, our foe*] grieves that that sinner, (now) Christ’s servant, is destined to judge him and his angels.”
      - i. (Source: Tertullian, *On Repentance*, chapter 7; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 663; written c. 203 AD)
    - b. “And these [*referring to fallen angels who engage in relations with human women, as in Genesis 6:1-2, Jude v. 6 and 2 Peter 2:4-5*] are the angels whom we are destined to judge: these are the angels whom in baptism we renounce: these, of course, are the reasons why they have deserved to be *judged by man*.”
      - i. (Source: Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women*, book 1, chapter 2; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 4, p. 15; written c. 198 AD)

### III. On Sexual Immorality

- a. Read **1 Corinthians 6:9-20**.
- b. Reasons why Christians must avoid sexual immorality, at all cost.
  - i. **Reason No. 1:** If we live that way, *we will not inherit the kingdom of God*. We will be condemned on the Day of Judgment.

1. “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, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.” (**1 Corinthians 6:9–10**, NKJV)
  2. Jesus used this expression to “inherit the kingdom of God” in connection with the Day of Judgment.
    - a. “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, *inherit the kingdom* prepared for you from the foundation of the world....’” (**Matthew 25:31–34**, NKJV)
    - b. In contrast, Jesus describes the fate of the wicked, who will not inherit the kingdom: “...Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels....’” (**Matthew 25:41**, NKJV)
  3. Essentially, Paul is saying here in **1 Corinthians 6** that if we live like that (serious sins, including several types of sexual immorality), we will end up, on the Day of Judgment, being cast into the eternal fire of hell, prepared for Satan and his wicked angels!
    - a. While many today consider the fear of God and impending judgment as an inferior motivation, Jesus used this powerfully throughout His teaching, including in the Sermon on the Mount.
    - b. While this alone should be enough of a motivation, Paul provides *even more reasons* for us to stay out of these sins.
- ii. **Reason No. 2:** We have been *washed clean* of those sins (therefore, we must not return to them).
1. After listing all sorts of sins of depravity, Paul continues:



- a. “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.” (**1 Corinthians 6:11**, NKJV)
2. The Corinthian society was decadent and depraved. There were members of the church who had been involved in all of the sins of the world around them.
  - a. **Challenge:** As we see those around us here in Boston, let us not dismiss anyone as ‘closed to the gospel’ based on the sin they are currently enslaved to. Let us reach out to everyone with the good news, love them, and call them to repent and come into the light.
  - b. Let us be willing, as Paul was, to go to the cities where all the depravity is, to *liberate people from spiritual bondage* and to evangelize the world.
  - c. Let us appreciate the wonderful mercy of God in being happy whenever a sinner repents, to forgive that person, to “wash him clean of sin” to become a new creation!
3. Consider the term Paul uses here regarding their conversion, that they were “washed”. Other places where that word is used include:
  - a. “For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, *having washed*, to her wallowing in the mire.’” (**2 Peter 2:20–22**, NKJV)
    - i. Peter makes a similar argument as Paul does. We are like pigs (unclean animals) who were living in the mud. However, we were “washed”, and cannot now return to wallowing in the mud!
  - b. Paul recounts the story of his own conversion: “Then he [*Ananias*] said, ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you

that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and *wash away your sins*, calling on the name of the Lord.” (**Acts 22:14–16**, NKJV)

- i. **Questions:** Does a person need to be “washed” to be saved? How would Paul answer that question? Also, how and when was the *apostle Paul* “washed”?
  - c. Also consider what Paul told Titus:
    - i. “For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the *washing of regeneration* and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” (**Titus 3:3–7**, NKJV)
- 4. Paul is reminding them that they had been spiritually washed in baptism, and therefore could not go back to their old sinful ways.
  - a. He uses a similar argument in **Romans 6:1-5** when explaining why Christians must turn away from sin, again pointing back to what happened at their baptism.
- iii. **Reason No. 3:** Our bodies now belong to Christ. He paid the price for us and now owns us.
  - 1. “...Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For ‘the two,’ He says, ‘shall

become one flesh.’ But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.” (1 Corinthians 6:13–17, NKJV)

2. Paul says our bodies belong to Christ. They will be raised up on the last day by God’s power.
3. Our bodies are part of the body of Christ. In sexual relations, the two become “one flesh” as revealed in **Genesis 2:24**. How can we, who are members of Christ, become “one flesh” with a prostitute?
4. We were purchased at a high cost (the death of Jesus on the cross). Therefore, our bodies belong to Him. He bought and paid for us; He now owns us.
  - a. “...you are not your own...For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (1 Corinthians 6:19–20, NKJV)
  - b. “Therefore...shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” (Acts 20:28, NKJV)
  - c. **Challenge:** When tempted in this area, think of the blood of Christ, which He shed to pay to redeem your body and spirit from Satan’s control.

iv. **Reason No. 4:** Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit.

1. “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:19, NKJV)
2. The Holy Spirit dwells within our bodies.
3. This also points to the divinity of the Holy Spirit, when we consider this passage together with what Paul said in his **Second Letter to the Corinthians**.
  - a. “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.’” (2 Corinthians 6:14–16, NKJV)

- b. Temple of the Holy Spirit (our bodies) = Temple of the Living God. God is in us.
  - i. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is God (divine).
- 4. We must never defile the temple of God, in which the Holy Spirit dwells.
- v. **Reason No. 5:** Committing sins of the flesh (sexual immorality) is even more serious than just a sin of the spirit (like lust).
  - 1. “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality *sins against his own body.*” (**1 Corinthians 6:18**, NKJV)
  - 2. Not all sin is the same.
    - a. While most of us know that in our hearts (spiritual common sense), Protestant theology sometimes creeps in and clouds our perspectives.
    - b. However, the Scriptures are clear on this point.
  - 3. There are more serious sins.
    - a. “Jesus answered, ‘You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has *the greater sin.*’” (**John 19:11**, NKJV)
    - b. “If anyone sees his brother sinning *a sin which does not lead to death*, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. *There is sin leading to death.* I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.” (**1 John 5:16–17**, NKJV)
  - 4. Man was created body and spirit, before the Fall. God’s plan is *to save man completely, body and spirit both*, in the end.
    - a. That is why the doctrine of *the physical resurrection of the dead* (that our bodies will be raised on the Last Day and reunited with our spirits, and both will face judgment together) is foundational. We plan to address that further when we get to **1 Corinthians 15**.
      - i. Our bodies and spirits sinned together, and will be judged (lost or saved) together.

- ii. The resurrection of the body is one of the six “elementary principles of the Christ” listed in **Hebrews 6:1-3**.
- b. That is why our body (not just our spirit) is involved in the conversion process (being washed in water, in baptism).
- c. That also is why sexual immorality is an especially devastating sin, since we are sinning *with our body* as well as with our spirit.

#### IV. *Flee Sexual Immorality!*

- a. “*Flee* sexual immorality....” (**1 Corinthians 6:18**, NKJV)
- b. While some today attempt to dispute what Paul says here regarding homosexuality and other forms of sexual immorality, it is quite clear what he is referring to. (Also see **Romans 1:24-32**, and **Jude v.7**.)
  - i. Polycarp, in his letter to Philippians (in the region of Macedonia), writing c. 135 AD, warns the young men of that city of the dangers of sexual immorality, including homosexual sin. He uses the same three terms, which the translator renders “active or passive participants in homosexual relations”.
    - 1. “Similarly, the younger men must be blameless in all things; they should be concerned about purity above all, reining themselves away from all evil. For it is good to be cut off from the sinful desires in the world, because every sinful desire wages war against the spirit, and neither fornicators nor men who have sex with men (whether as the passive or as the active partner) will inherit the kingdom of God, nor will those who do perverse things.”
      - a. (Source: Polycarp, *Polycarp’s Letter to the Philippians*, chapter 5.3; in *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Michael Holmes, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Baker Publishing, p. 287)
    - 2. Don’t let anyone lead you astray on this!
- c. Flee means “run away from it”.
- d. Two passages of Scripture especially illustrate this concept of “fleeing” to me (and use the same Greek word).
  - i. Read **Wisdom of Sirach 21:1-3**.

1. “My son, have you sinned? No longer add to them, but pray about your former sins. Flee from sin as from the presence of a snake, for if you approach it, it will bite you; its teeth are like a lion’s teeth, destroying the souls of men. All lawlessness is like a two-edged sword, for there is no healing from its wound.” (**Wisdom of Sirach 21:1-3**, LXX, OSB)
  2. Flee from sin as from the presence of a snake!
    - a. I am extremely wary of snakes when I encounter them. Even when I know they are non-poisonous. I would never willingly go anywhere near a dangerous, poisonous snake. I want to keep far from them. We should have the same healthy fear of serious sin and temptation, certainly including those involving sexual immorality.
  3. Sirach says of sin, that its teeth are *like the teeth of a lion!*
- ii. Read **Genesis 39:7-12**.
1. This story provides the picture that I have in my mind of someone who flees from sexual immorality.
    - a. Note that the same Greek word that Paul uses in **1 Corinthians 6:18** that is translated “*flee*” is found here in the LXX in this story about Joseph.
  2. Joseph is a hero and sets the great example of fleeing from the presence of Potiphar’s wife, in the face of extreme temptation.
- e. **Closing Challenges:**
- i. Flee sexual immorality as from a poisonous, deadly serpent.
  - ii. Follow the advice in **Proverbs 5-7**, to stay far away from sexual temptation.
  - iii. Imitate the example of Joseph. Run for your life!
  - iv. Pray every day the daily prayer given by Jesus Himself, “...lead us not into temptation” (**Matthew 6:9-13**).
    1. Then, throughout that day, stay away from temptation!
  - v. Meditate on the Word, study passages to strengthen your convictions. (**Psalm 1:1-3, Psalm 119:1-11**)

1. Recently I asked a brother who was struggling with temptation and sin in this area, "How has it been going in your devotion to reading and studying the Word of God?". You probably will not be surprised that his answer was, "Not good!".
  2. I am reminded of an old saying: "Sin will keep you out of the Bible, and the Bible will keep you out of sin."
  3. I have strong convictions about the importance of being in the Word of God every day.
- vi. Foster close relationships in the church with mature, trustworthy Christians you can confess your sins to (brothers with other brothers; sisters with other sisters), who will call you to a life of purity.
1. Confess your sins to others who can help you to walk in the light. (**James 5:16, Proverbs 28:13, 1 John 1:5-10**)