See You at Fellowship… Not in Court

1 Cor. 6:1-8

Dare any of you, having a matter against his neighbor, go to court before the unrighteous, and not before the holy ones?

Or do you not know that the holy ones will judge and administer the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you incompetent to judge the trivial cases?

Do you not know that we will judge and administer angels? How much more, then, things that pertain to this life?

If then you have to judge things pertaining to this life, do you set them to judge who have no standing in the church?

I say this to move you to shame. What, is there not able to be found among you one wise person who will be able to decide between his brothers and sisters?

But brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers!

Actually, then, it is in general a loss for you that you have lawsuits among yourselves. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?

But to the contrary, you yourselves do wrong and defraud, and that to your brothers and sisters!

The Corinthians had several sinful fleshly habits from their past revisit their new Christian lives besides the sexual immorality discussed last chapter. Here’s another one, swindling. A swindler is defined as someone who cheats or defrauds others, typically by using deception to obtain money or property. Swindling takes many forms. One is like the email I received lately from a past client asking me to send them a $200 gift card. The fact is their email address list was stolen, and a swindler emailed their contacts ‘fishing’ for someone to swindle while hiding behind someone trusted. Bernie Madoff built a $65 billion fraud scheme as a supposed “money manager” before it was discovered. He was imprisoned and died in jail. Another fraud that works too often is the phony lawsuit. A person sues a wealthy person or organization for a lot of money, seeking a sympathetic judge and jury. Those sued sometime settle out of court for a lot of money to escape the expense of a trial and the possible threat of losing more. This technique isn’t new. It’s been used since there were courts and greed. Look at how courts were abused when Paul was in Corinth.

Acts 18:12-17

While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews rose up with one accord against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat,

saying, “This man is persuading the people to worship God contrary to the law.”

But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If indeed it were a matter of injury or evil crime, O you Jews, reason would dictate that I should put up with you,

but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves. I do not intend to be a judge of these matters.”

And he drove them from the judgment seat.

And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. Yet none of these things were a concern for Gallio.

Here was one phony court case that didn’t work. The judge threw it out. And the guy who probably hatched the idea paid the price. (By the way, Sosthenes, the man publicly beaten, later converted and served as a Christian minister!) What were the Jews trying to do? They were trying to get the state to prohibit Paul from preaching, claiming he was doing something illegal, when he wasn’t.

Let me point out an important cultural point. Acts 18 shows the Jewish (not Gentile) religious leaders beating up someone in court, right in front of the governor! If that was done in court, what do you think everyday life was like on the street? It was crazy! The Gentile world – and Corinth in particular – was like the wild, wild west, except much worse. When people put their arms around you, you might have thought they were hugging you only to realize they were reaching for your wallet! People would “hustle” each other anyway they could. And one way was using the courts as they attempted with Paul.

Surprisingly, some of the saints were suing some of the others in the fellowship! Was it for legitimate reasons? We don’t know exactly except verse 8 says ‘you yourselves do wrong and defraud”. Could it have been like the phony lawsuits today? Could one of them have drank a ‘Corinthian Coffee’ after going through a ‘ride through’ (drive-throughs were not yet invented) and got seriously burned or faked it, hoping to squeeze some shekels out of someone they thought had more than them? What does God say about this situation?

Ex. 20:15

Do not steal.

Words used to describe stealing – like swindle, hustle, scam, thieve, rob, embezzle, pilfer, swipe, etc., are all simply distinctions describing different ways to steal. Stealing is still stealing despite what it’s called. It was an industry in Corinth and followed the converts into the church. What does God say about this to the Church of grace?

Eph 4: 28

The one who steals must stop stealing, and instead he must labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to give to the one who has need.

It couldn’t be clearer to us today, but remember, Ephesians had not yet been written, the same as most of the New Testament. All the saints had at that time was the Old Testament and the spoken words of the Church leadership. This made God’s word to the church easy to misunderstand, ignore or forget. This is why God had Paul write and patiently instruct them on godly and ungodly practices of the gospel. The new Gentile saints had been surrounded by swindling all their lives – perhaps for generations. Working with their hands was probably considered slave work. Perhaps it was thought that making six figures (over $100,000 a year) “bending some rules” was smarter and better than working like a common slave and making $30K. That makes sense **IF** you are ignoring the new creation within and your new Father. That was really the cause of the problem. They were thinking and acting like unsaved Corinthians Gentiles, not like new creations in Christ.

1 Cor. 6:2

Or do you not know that the holy ones will judge and administer the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you incompetent to judge the trivial cases?

What God has called us to takes a while to even apprehend. We will “judge angels and the world”. We are now “sons pf God”. We are “more than conquerors”. We are “lovey and acceptable before Him in love”. It’s literally mind numbing when you consider these realities as you come out of pre-Christ, Gentile life.

We are so used to considering the things we experience as worthy to be trusted and acted on that it takes a while for us to consider the spiritual words that speak of spiritual things as preeminent. Look and think about the above verse. It says that you and I will judge the world. Now, it’s either a lie or the truth – either or - there is no middle ground. Something so preposterous is either the greatest revelation you’ve ever heard or it’s a fantasy. If it’s a lie, then what are we doing? Reading a 2000-year-old book full of lies? But if it’s true (and it’s been proven true repeatedly and you and I can speak a language we were never taught!) then we have some mind renewing to do! The Corinthian Christians sure did! They had the highest calling yet they were acting like the lowest scum. Sorry to say it, but that was the case. Suing the guy you pray with every week to get money?! How low!

What should they have done? Instead of figuring out ways to steal from others, they should have spent some time using their access to God that Jesus purchased and ask God what to do to make money. God has cattle on a thousand hills. He can spare a few for each of His kids. Remember, God made the universe for the earth, the earth for man, and man to… scam people in court? No. He made man to fellowship with Him. He WANTS to be involved in our lives. It why He had Jesus redeem us. Instead of fraudulently suing Corinthian Coffee, God could give them the inspiration of “Corinthian Corndogs”, a booth in the marketplace, that eventually develops franchises all over. God loves to give us ideas and walk with us to their fruition. It’s called… fellowship!

Besides, stealing is unwise. You steal from a guy this week and he steals from you the next. Before long you’re spending more time and money protecting what you stole than if you did what God says. When we do the wisdom that God gives each of us, we not only make enough for ourselves, but more to give to someone who needs… and also enough that when we are defrauded, we can continue to live and seek reconciliation, not revenge.

Let’s see the big picture, OK? God has chosen us to be His children. Will He abandon us after the boundless effort He went through to save us? Of course not! He wants to bless us but His hands are tied until we look to Him and ask for His involvement. Remember this?

1 Cor. 3:21b-22

For everything is yours—

whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come—everything is yours,

The Corinthian’s thinking - that they didn’t have enough so they ‘had to’ steal - was wrong. The spiritual perspective is that if everything is ours then we should petition God to make it available to us. How can we not have enough if God says we have everything? We must think spiritually. We are not just stupid people wandering aimlessly through life trying to get as much as we can, as the common worldly slogan says, “He who dies with the most stuff, wins!” God says, “How who dies with a little or a lot of stuff, just dies. If you need stuff, ask me. You have not because you ask not.”

1 Cor. 6-8

I say this to move you to shame. What, is there not able to be found among you one wise person who will be able to decide between his brothers and sisters?

But brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers!

Actually, then, it is in general a loss for you that you have lawsuits among yourselves. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?

But to the contrary, you yourselves do wrong and defraud, and that to your brothers and sisters!

Would you sue your brother or sister? If the answer is yes, then you are a sick puppy! Most of us shudder at the thought. Well, our brother and sisters according to the flesh retain that status as long as the flesh lasts, right? Our brothers and sisters in the spirit last as long as the spirit lasts – and that’s forever! Besides our spiritual siblings, they’re also God’s children. Robbing them is nuts! Of course we shouldn’t sue them. We should work it out as a family and if we’re having a hard time, find an elder who has proven impartial and spiritual, and let them mediate the dispute. Then acquiesce to the decision because family love and peace is more important than my bank account. God can and will make me whole.

2 Thes. 1:6,7a

since it is righteous for God to repay with affliction those who are afflicting you

and to give relief to you who are being afflicted

I can’t lose more than God can give me. When we go to Him, he’ll show us what we should do in every situation. Suing family is nuts. As the saying goes, “Don’t push people away who love you. If you do, one day they won’t come back.”

Some of the sinning Corinthians here were probably going to court in front of unbelievers because they sought an unrighteous judgement, not a righteous one. They were looking to “game the system” and steal from others, not seeking to right a wrong. Thus, the reproof.

1 Cor. 6:9-11

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor passive homosexual partners, nor homosexuals,

nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor the verbally abusive, nor swindlers, will inherit the Kingdom of God.

And such were some of you, but you were washed, but you were made holy, but you were declared righteous in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the spirit of our God.

God tacks on four more Corinthian sins to the six mentioned previously - adulterers, passive homosexual partners, homosexuals, and thieves. Adultery was touched on briefly last chapter regarding the incestuous, adulterous couple. Let’s discuss the next two. “Passive homosexuality” and “homosexuality” are different is that one is the non-dominant partner, and the other is the dominant one. In ancient Roman culture that made a difference. The passive participant faced social ostracization while the dominant partaker didn’t. The crowd today that says the Bible is silent on homosexuality are wrong. God has spoken consistently on this forever. And He should know - He made us. And feelings are no substitute for faith, as we’ve seen. Rationalizations get you nowhere except stuck in sin and swamped in consequences. Can homosexuals change? Of course! “Some of you” in Corinth did! And this was in some ways so much darker than what we experience today.

Some in their culture were raised to be male prostitutes from a young age. Some never knew heterosexuality. They were passed around as passive homosexual “partners” (as much as children can be truly called “partners”). They were sex slaves. And then one day, they heard the gospel, believed and God accepted them into His family! They confessed their sins and began life as new creations. How awesome!

God is making the point that He “washed and declared righteous” the Corinthian saints from their unrighteousness, giving them the spirit. These sins will not be tolerated and accepted in the kingdom of God. We shouldn’t get tricked into that fleshly insanity again. We should think and act spiritually, not like those who don’t and are headed for oblivion.

1 Cor. 6:12

“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be mastered by anything.

The phrase “All things are lawful for me” was probably something Paul taught when he was in Corinth. It might have been the slogan for the Corinthian church and even quoted by the incestuous couple and the ‘sue happy’ saints, intending to justify whatever they had pre-determined to do. But, is that what the phrase means?

God gave the law to Israel for a few reasons. One reason was to help them live righteously as they did the law and not allow Satan to kill them until the coming Promised Seed came.

Duet. 6:24,25

Yahweh commanded us to obey all these statutes, to fear Yahweh our God for our well-being always, and so that he can keep us alive, even as it is this day.

And it will be our righteousness if we are careful to obey every one of these commandments before Yahweh our God, as he has commanded us.’”

When Christ came, the need for the law expired, and with that, the need to keep it.

Rom. 3:32,22

But now a righteousness from God has been revealed apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets testify to it,

namely, the righteousness from God that comes through trust in Jesus Christ to all those who believe, since there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles.

When we are redeemed, we are free from the Mosaic law. Therefore, “all things are lawful for me”, in other words, I no longer need to do the commandments of the law to achieve righteousness, because Christ achieved it and gave it to me when I believed on him. If I ate a pork chop before Christ came, it was unrighteousness to me. Now I can eat it because “all things are lawful to me”. Once you have been reckoned righteous by Christ’s work and God’s grace, pork chops make no difference. It neither adds nor subtracts from what I was given. In that sense, “all things are lawful to me”.

The next phrase is “but not all things are beneficial”. That is an understated way of saying “but some things are detrimental”. So, even though I can do anything and not lose righteousness, there are some things I can do that are legal, but destructive. In context, the ‘beneficial’ aspect is thinking and acting spiritually, while the ‘destructive’ means greater flesh emphasis, thinking, and acting. So, it’s lawful for a man to have an inappropriate relationship with his stepmother, but it is detrimental to himself, God, and everyone else. It is also lawful to sue a brother in Christ, but it is also destructive to everyone in many ways. Likewise, it is lawful to declare yourself a member of Apollo’s group, but when you do, you put yourself under him as your master, and neither Jesus nor Apollos want that. We are set free from sin. Why would we allow ourselves to be mastered by anyone or thing? Why would we want to exalt the flesh and minimize the spirit? Why eat moldy baby food (walk by the flesh) when you can have steak and sautéed mushrooms (walk by the spirit)?

1 Cor. 6:13-14

“Food for the belly and the belly for food,” but God will bring to nothing both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up through his power.

Here’s another possible repeated saying from Paul’s teachings, “Food for the belly and the belly for food.” The point is, food is not for making or breaking righteousness anymore, it’s just for nutrition because the Mosaic law and its dietary restrictions have expired. Let me add some clarification to highlight the logic God is setting up. “God will bring to nothing both it [the belly and it’s appetite] and them [foods]”. The initial point God makes is that food is not a big deal because its importance will pass away when this life does. Here’s verse 14 with my additions to highlight the logic: “And God raised the Lord [the Lord’s body] and will also raise us up [our bodies also] through his power.” This is the reason that sexual immorality is so destructive – not beneficial – because although appetite and food’s importance will pass away, our bodies will not. Although they will be changed and become spiritually powered, they will still be our bodies, just like Jesus’ resurrected body was still his body. So, our bodies are something that will transcend this life and there are current and future spiritual implications to what we do with it now.

1 Cor. 6:15-18

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? So, should I take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Absolutely not!

Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute is one body? For the two, it says, will become one flesh.

But whoever is joined to the Lord is one spirit.

Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a person does is outside the body, but whoever commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.

There’s lots we don’t know about what’s going on spiritually behind the fleshly scenes. “Our bodies are members of Christ.” How does that work? We have no clue. He’s paid for us to be forgiven and saved and now he waits for us (our bodies and minds) to be changed at his appearance.

Rom. 8:23

And not only that, but we ourselves also, who have the firstfruit of the spirit—we are also groaning within ourselves, eagerly waiting for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

It seems the Lord Jesus takes a claim on our bodies even in this life before he redeems and changes them at the Rapture. So, when a Corinthian saint had sexual intercourse with an idol prostitute, the saint becomes “one flesh” with her, in effect, joining Christ to the prostitute and the idol (and the evil influence behind it). What a disgrace and mess!

In ancient Corinth, I’ll bet you couldn’t walk down the street swinging a dead cat and not hit an “Aphrodite house of love” or whatever euphemism they were called to mask the evil. These places were culturally acceptable and perhaps even encouraged. In effect they were “spirit deployment centers”. What do I mean by that? The Bible teaches us that in touch something is transferred from one person to another. We see this in “laying on of hands” in healing and ordination. We see it the other way spiritually, too. When people have sex and it’s right, great bonds blossom and grow, binding the two together. When it’s wrong, many times something is still transferred (besides fluid). Sometimes a spirit is deployed to a new home. When people have sex there’s not a lot of thinking going on, so a transfer is subtle. Soon afterward subtle changes in thought and feeling can arise. New behaviors are encouraged and they’re not godly. Perhaps a thought about suing the rich guy you pray with. Perhaps another trip to the prostitute. Perhaps entering a drinking competition at the Corinthian Cabernet Cafe. Perhaps… You get the idea. Yes, we are set free from Satan at the new birth … unless we let him back in.

This is why God says, “Flee sexual immorality.” Yes, we have sexual desires. But visiting an Aphrodite hottie is not the way to go. Or the cute wife of the guy at fellowship. Or the pretty girl that makes your Corinthian Coffee. God gives two exhortations: #1. Flee sexual immorality. We have a strong internal drive. The temptations are all promising to satisfy it. We must avoid them all enthusiastically or it will chase us down and tackle us. #2. The next chapter will tell you positively how to avoid fornication and sexual immorality. Here’s a hint: Find the sound of wedding bells and get a Christian of the opposite sex to stand with you in front of the preacher there.

1 Cor. 6:19

Or do you not know that your body is a sanctuary of the holy spirit that is in you, which you have from God, and you are not your own?

Can you imagine if we had the spirit of God in us? Could you imagine if our body and soul was terrific, but nonetheless still broken and limited in life, health and ability? Could you imagine if we were so loved that God gave the greatest gift He could, the life of His only begotten son, to save us and make us whole? Could you imagine if God wanted us to look to Him daily and help us be victorious together? Pinch yourself. Speak in tongues. It’s true.

1 Cor. 6:20

For you were bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body.

Let’s act like Christ owns us and we owe everything to God, because … we do!