

## **And Such Were Some of You**

Scripture Text: 1 Corinthians 6:1-11

### **Introduction**

We are continuing our survey of the letter of First Corinthians where the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth to address issues within the church. As we have read so far, the church in Corinth had some good things happening there, but there were also problems that were tearing up the church. There was disunity with some following different leaders of the church. There were issues of sexual immorality. There were abuses of spiritual gifts and disorder in the worship services. Paul writes this letter to the church in Corinth to address these issues.

So far, we have read several things God called the church to be and to do. We can summarize it by saying: *The church is a group of people called out of the world by God, into fellowship with Jesus Christ to be God's holy people.* The church should not be divided, but it should be united in following Jesus Christ, for Jesus is the foundation of the church. The church is God's building, God's field, and God's temple. Last week we looked at Paul's statement of being a spiritual father to the Corinthians and how the church ought to be involved in discipleship. This means we have to get out among our family, friends and church family and intentionally get involved in their lives. Disciple-making is helping people grow in Christ – to become more like Jesus. Discipling is not some program the church has. It is not something that is occasional or out of the ordinary. It is a part of being a Christian.

Today we are looking at a passage in chapter six where Paul addressed the issue of handling conflict in the church. Suppose that another church member wrongs you, what are you suppose to do? If someone stole \$1000 from you, you might take him or her to court. If that person were in the church, what would you do? How would you handle that situation? Would you handle it differently? For most of us, \$1000 is a lot of money and you might be thinking it wouldn't matter if that person was in the church or not – they better pay you back. Well, that is similar to the issue Paul is was addressing.

### **Keeping The House of God in Order**

Paul ends chapter five by calling the Corinthian church to exercise church discipline on a sexually immoral person within the church. There was someone who was committing a sin that Paul says was "not tolerated even among pagans." I think it is interesting that Paul makes that observation, about this sin not being tolerated among pagans, because it underscores the issues we have been studying for the past three weeks – the church should be different. It should not be like those outside the church, in the world. Paul called the Corinthian church to deal with this issue, to discipline the offending member of the church. Willful disobedience to God by certain destructive behaviors can harm the witness of the church.

Sin that impacts the mission of the church and harms the witness of the church must be addressed by the church. The church should handle disputes, disagreements, moral issues, by itself. Our Lord Jesus Christ gave the church a process to discipline members of the church. We see this in Matthew chapter eighteen. The church should follow that process, but the Corinthians were not doing that.

**1 Cor. 6:1** When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?

Paul expressed astonishment that members within the church would take their disputes to the civil courts. Paul wrote, when someone in the church has an issue with another, “does he dare” go to those outside the church. The issue here is similar to the previous one in chapter five where Paul addressed an issue with a church member with unrepentant sin. If the church takes its issues to those outside the church, those whom he calls the unrighteous, then it is like not dealing with sinful behavior within the church. The church’s mission and witness before an unbelieving world will be tarnished. The unrighteous are those outside the church who do not believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. To go to unbelievers with disputes between members of the church raises concerns that there is nothing different between the church and those outside the church.

To put this into perspective, the church is governed by a different set of laws than the unbelieving world, those outside the church. The unrighteous belong to another kingdom, a worldly kingdom; the church belongs to the kingdom of God. The church is a group of believers who have been called out of the world into fellowship with Jesus Christ and into God’s kingdom. For the church to settle its disputes in civil courts would be like two Chinese persons who immigrate to the United States, become citizens of the United States, then have a dispute with one another and decide to sue one another...in a Chinese court. They are no longer citizens of China anymore and they should therefore settle their disputes under their new citizenship. Likewise, believers are citizens of the kingdom of God and ought to settle their disputes within the church.

In fact, Paul stated that it was somewhat silly that the church was dealing with issues like this, like taking one another to court. In verse two, he wrote that the saints, the church, will judge the world and not only the world, but angels, too. It is not clear what type of judgment this will be, but the point is that the church will judge them at some point in the future and you, Corinthians, want to go to them for “trivial” issues. That’s silly. If the church is to judge the world and the angels in a time to come, Paul wrote, “Are you not able to judge trivial cases? Are you not able to handle matters that are insignificant?” Paul was saying in the grand scheme of things, are you not able to handle your own affairs without going to those outside the church to settle these matters? If the church is to judge matters of eternal significance, isn’t it capable of settling matters of very little significance in the grand scheme of things?

One thing I believe this says is that we ought to have an eternal perspective. What I mean by that is the church should not let temporary, less important issues, get us off track of the mission of the church – to preach the good news of Jesus Christ, make disciples, and glorify God as His holy people. Remember, the church should be unified in fellowship with Jesus Christ. The color of the carpet, the size of the pews, is insignificant to the global mission of the church. We ought to stay focused. Put another way, if we are focused on the purpose of the church and unified on the mission of the church, would there be disputes in the church? Would there be division in the church? Paul declared that to take our disputes outside the church is already a defeat. We have failed.

**1 Cor. 6:7** "To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you."

Another way to say this is "the very fact that you have lawsuits among yourselves shows that you have failed completely." If the church, God's holy people, cannot settle disputes within the church, then the church has failed. There is a loss of fellowship among the people of God, where we should enjoy together fellowship with Jesus Christ. As mentioned earlier, there is also damage to the church's mission and witness of Jesus Christ before the world. This is not to say that we do not need someone outside the specific congregation to help us, although I think the intent here certainly is for a congregation to settle its own disputes. When we seek help from a third party, it ought to be with like-minded Christian counselors that have the mind of Christ. We also need to be willing to forgive, willing to reconcile, and willing to restore broken relationships. Paul asked this question that probably upsets many of us as it is an affront to our sense of justice:

**1 Cor. 6:7** Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?

Paul basically suggested that rather than seek justice for a wrong, we ought to prefer suffering the wrong. If someone in the church, heaven forbid, wrongs you, why not suffer that wrong doing, or put up with it? Jesus said something similar regarding the law of retaliation, an "eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth:"

**Matt. 5:39–41** <sup>39</sup> But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. <sup>40</sup> And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. <sup>41</sup> And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

I do not think Paul was saying that we should not address times when other members in the church wrong us, as we are told to exercise church discipline; but why bring an issue outside the church. Deal with it within the church and seek reconciliation with the other member.

## And Such Were Some of You

Paul told us to settle church disputes internally, and preferably with grace and forgiveness. He then goes back to discussing the unrighteous. Remember, in verse one Paul was astonished that the church would dare go before the unrighteous to settle matters within the church. He then says:

**1 Cor. 6:9** ...do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Paul wrote that the unrighteous are excluded from the kingdom of God. They are unbelievers. If one does not profess belief in Jesus Christ, he or she is excluded from the kingdom of God. Only those who place their trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are given the right of adoption as children of God and inherit eternal life with Him. I think Paul mentions this for a couple of reasons:

1. Why would members of God's church go to those who have not inherited the kingdom of God, who are not a part of the church, and submit to a different law, to settle disputes between members in the church? The church submits to a higher authority and a different law and should by virtue of being **God's holy people**, settle disputes and conflicts between members within the church.

But notice, Paul doesn't stop with the unbelievers, those outside the church, which should be enough. He elaborates with a list of several types of people who also will not inherit the kingdom of God.

**1 Cor. 6:9-10** <sup>9</sup> 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 men who practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Not only will the unrighteous not inherit the kingdom of God, but neither will fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, greedy people, drunkards, or those who slander. Sometimes, I believe we run the risk of misunderstanding or misapplying a passage when we take it out of context. In fact, I have used these two verses to tell people, "You will not go to heaven if you do any of these things" or "You will not go to heaven if you are one of these types of people." On the surface, that seems correct. In fact, that is exactly what Paul says, right? He wrote, "Do not be deceived, [these people] will not inherit heaven." If we stop there, then we have a list that we can provide to people to say, "Do you want to go to heaven? Then make sure you are not one of these types of people." If we stop at verse ten, I think we miss Paul's point. While Paul said that these people, the ones he just listed, will not go to heaven, he follows up with this statement:

**1 Cor. 6:11** And such were some of you.

And you, the church, were some of these people. Do you hear what Paul is saying? You, the church, were on this list. Some of you were fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, greedy people, drunkards, and slanderers. At some point, the church, those whom God called into fellowship were part of the world, excluded from the kingdom of God – excluded from heaven. But, what about now? Where is the church in this list? Can any of you identify with this list?

2. This brings me to the second point about why Paul mentions who will not inherit eternal life. The church should not take their disputes outside the church because the church submits to a higher authority, but also because believers were once like the world, **but no more**. Some of you were like this...but no more. At least you shouldn't be.

The church is composed of saints, God's holy people. The saints have a varied past with all kinds of sins, but they each have a common destiny – to be in fellowship with Jesus Christ and to inherit the kingdom of God. Paul states this turning point in a believer's life:

**1 Cor. 6:11** And such were some of you. But you were washed...you were sanctified...you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Every believer in Christ, every member of God's church has been washed, has been forgiven of his or her sins and has been filled with the Spirit of God. Every believer in Christ has been sanctified, has been set apart from the world to be holy to God. And every believer in Christ has been justified, has been declared righteous before God, not on account of his or her own merits, but by faith in Jesus Christ. I think Paul's statement serves to remind us, the church, that we are different from the world and should therefore act like God's holy people. There should not be any of these types of people in the church. Those are things from the past. That is not who the church should be, now!

I want to make one final comment. I do not believe Paul is stating that the church is full of perfect, sinless people. I do not think that is what he is saying. At what point do believers stop sinning? They don't, at least not on this side of heaven. While we are on this earth and are believers in Jesus Christ we are in the process of being made holy like Jesus Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit. But believers should have evidence of the Holy Spirit sanctifying them, making them holy to God. Remember, the church should be full of spiritually mature people and should be different from the unrighteous, the unbelievers the world. Therefore, **be the church!**

## Conclusion

There are a few responses I believe we should have to this passage.

1. We should have an eternal perspective on issues in this life. We should not confuse temporary issues in this life with the eternal matters. The church should not get side tracked by “trivial matters.” The church is the people of God. The church has the Spirit of God. The church should be united in following Jesus.
2. When conflict arises, the church should handle it internally. Jesus gave us a process for dealing with issues within the church. The church should discipline itself and settle disputes internally. The church should also be a model of love, peace and forgiveness.
3. Believers should never forget who they “were” or what they are called to be. Though the church is composed of various types of sinners, that is not who we are now. It does matter how the church behaves! We are the church so we should act like the church, God’s holy people. Be the church, not the unrighteous of the world.

May we remain faithful to the One who has called us out of the unrighteous world into fellowship with Him. Thanks be to God. Amen!