

1 Corinthians 6:1-8 "You Will Know Them By Their Love"

Chapter six seems to be a total departure from what Paul has been dealing with in chapter five where he rebuked the Corinthian church for not dealing with an individual who had his father's wife. He instructed the church to put him out of the assembly where his judgment would take place at the hand of God who would use Satan as a tool to accomplish Christ's will in the matter.

The reasons for this action were varied; from separating this person out, so as to no longer affect the rest of the body with his leavening influence, to separating him out to give him a sense of isolation from the body so as to ultimately draw him back into the fellowship after his repentance before the Lord and the church.

It's amazing that this type of behavior was actually boasted in by the church at Corinth as though they thought of themselves as enlightened and tolerant Christians who were above judging anyone for any reason.

But the Scriptures make it clear that there are to be certain types of judgments made in the church toward those who would make sin the pattern of their lives at the expense of hurting or dividing the body of Christ. And we noted the way in which such judgments are to be made biblically in the last couple of studies.

But now Paul shifts gears to address another problem, as though these Corinthians don't have enough.

1CO 6:1 "If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints?"

Now, disputes have come up before between these people. Remember, early on in this letter, Paul addressed the divisions and disputes they had when considering men they highly esteemed by placing one man over another.

1CO 1:10, 12-13 "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. 12 What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?"

These people are a mess, spiritually speaking. It's amazing they stayed together at all. And yet, Paul doesn't give up on them, and neither does Christ. But the remedy is to be found in Christ and not in the selfish motives of these people.

Once "self" becomes center stage then the desires of "self" push the objective truth of God's word to the side, along with the love of Christ, and there is no unity of the Spirit, and it's only a matter of time before the church reflects more of the nature of the old man instead of the new creation we are in Christ.

This was a real danger in Corinth and Paul knew that drastic measures needed to be taken before the church found itself dishonoring Christ and bringing disgrace on our Lord and Savior.

And so, now you've got a church naming the name of Christ which is taking sides over different men and causing divisions, allowing and even boasting that one of their members is having their father's wife, and as if that isn't enough they're suing each other in the process by taking each other to court. One big happy family.

1CO 6:1 "If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints?"

The type of dispute Paul is referring probably has to do more with matters over property or possessions. The phrase "has a dispute", that the NIV uses, is translated "has a case" in the NASB, and "having a matter" in the KJV.

The Greek word is *pragma* and means a number of things, including a business, or commercial transaction.

And so, part of what was taking place among these Corinthian believers is that they were in such a distrustful attitude toward one another that they weren't willing to deal with these types of things among themselves in the love of Christ, but were willing to take it before the courts in Corinth, which suggests an attitude of reprisal.

Paul is enraged that they would have the audacity to lay their little pet peeves before unbelievers. By way, the word "dare" that Paul uses in verse one is actually at the beginning of this sentence in the Greek for emphasis. In fact, the KJV begins this verse, "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust..."

In other words, what Paul is saying is, 'how dare you be so bold as to neglect the love and truth of Christ in such petty matters that

you would be willing to bring disgrace upon Christ and His church by demanding that the world solve your problems when you could take care of such matters “in-house”.’

But we don’t want to lose the sense of the context here. Remember, that Paul has been dealing with sexual sin in the previous chapter and how in such cases the church is to judge members of the body in such matters to keep itself pure.

And now, with these litigation’s among each other being brought to secular courts, they are continuing the same pattern. One commentator makes the point that "fornication and covetousness are grouped together in the context of 1Co.5:10-11 and 1Co.6:9-10. They are similar in that they both stem from false, evil desires -- one for financial satisfaction and the other for physical pleasure." (Robert G. Gromacki)

It all comes back to self-satisfaction. But, again we need to keep in mind that Paul makes it clear that the church is to biblically judge each other in these types of things, but has no business judging the world in these types of matters.

1CO 5:12 "What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?"

And the irony here that Paul brings out is that if believers are not to be judging those outside of the church in these kind of matters, why in the world would you allow the world to judge you in these non-criminal matters which the church should be taking care of itself?

In fact, Paul goes so far as to put into perspective for these Christians what authority they will be given in the future and how they ought to be considering their future role in the Kingdom of God by putting to the test their ability to deal with small matters such as these in their present situation.

1CO 6:2-4 "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! 4 Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church!"

This is a very interesting portion of Scripture concerning part of our roles in Christ’s kingdom at a future time as verse 2 and the beginning of verse 3 makes clear by placing the judging of the

world and angels in that future time frame. They are then juxtaposed with the end of verse 3 and all of 4 which deals with “the things of this life” which is a present reality.

The question is what kind of judging is going on here in verses 2 and 3? Is this more in line with reigning with Christ in light of judgment, since there is a sense in which reigning with Christ involves judgment as a couple of other places in Scripture point out?

MAT 19:28 "Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, *judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*"

Here both reigning and judging are implied together and it all takes place at the “renewal of all things”, which is the renewal of the entire universe at the final judgment resulting in new heavens and a new earth.

This is also alluded to at a time in conjunction with the second coming of Christ.

Revelation 20:4 ⁴ Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, *and judgment was given to them.* And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

So, there does seem to be a connection between reigning with Christ in the sense that this reigning involves some sort of judgment that the saints share with Christ.

Therefore, this future aspect of judging in our text must include the idea of being in conjunction with Christ’s judgment of all things and is therefore at the consummation of redemptive history which ultimately finds its expression with the judgment on the last day.

John 12:48 ⁴⁸ "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what *will judge him at the last day.*

Acts 17:31 ³¹ because *He has fixed a day* in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

^{NAU} **2 Peter 3:7** But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for *the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.*

Matthew 25:31-33 ³¹ "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. ³² "*All the nations will be gathered before Him*; and *He will separate them from one another*, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; ³³ and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

Of course, as all of these passages indicate that there is only one judge. And other portions of God's word makes this abundantly clear.

John 5:22-23 ²² "For not even the Father judges anyone, but *He has given all judgment to the Son*, ²³ so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

^{NAU} **Psalm 96:13** Before the LORD, for He is coming, For *He is coming to judge the earth*. He will judge the world in righteousness And the peoples in His faithfulness.

So, when we talk about participating in judging the world and angels, (and by this it seems to infer the ungodly world and ungodly angels), it must be understood as secondary to the main role of the "The Judge" that we share in. Therefore, whatever else our passage may be teaching about Christ's people judging the world and angels, it must conform to the clearer truth that only One is the true judge.

Having said that, it may be true that since we are in Christ and He is the ultimate judge we may play a role, either through bearing witness to the righteousness of His judgment, or by being active participants to the extent that He has delegated a certain aspect of our reigning with Him as including some form of judgment of both the world and angels on that day.

Matthew 12:41-42 ⁴¹ "The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. ⁴² "*The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.*

So, what is the point of drawing our attention to a future judgment in which we participate and the judgment that should be going on with the church at Corinth?

Obviously, Paul is saying that since God has endowed His people with His Spirit, so as to join in God's judgment on a grand scale at a future time, how much more should we be able to presently address much lesser issues with the same Spirit who indwells every believer.

1 Corinthians 6:2 If the world is judged by you, are you not competent *to constitute* the smallest law courts?

The smallest law courts that Paul addresses must be placed in the light of other law courts that I suppose could be deemed largest law courts in man's system of justice on this present earth and in particular, Corinth.

And here it must be inferred to as courts that are appropriate within the body of Christ, which would be those courts set up by Christ Himself whose authority is found in the elders of the church whose job it is to rule well so as to promote the peace and purity of the church.

We see an instance in the early church where both the apostles and the elders came together to rule on a matter of significance that was directly related to theology that affected the behavior of the church when certain Jews demanded that the Gentile believers be circumcised.

Acts 15:1 ^{NAU} Some men came down from Judea and *began* teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

This was first and foremost a theological issue in that some Jews were making what they believed was a biblical case for forcing the Gentiles to adopt an Old Testament practice according to the Law of Moses.

It then became a behavioral problem within the church in that discrimination was being employed on the basis of unbiblical teaching according to the New Covenant teaching of faith in Christ alone for one's salvation with nothing added to it, including circumcision.

Here the apostles and elders convened to rule on the matter. And after they looked into the matter they made a judgment and Peter

stood up to administer that judgment in a lengthy discourse at the end of which time the rest of the elders gave their Amen.

Acts 15:19-22 ¹⁹ "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, ²⁰ but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. ²¹ "For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath." ²² Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church,....

The church, through appointed elders, is given the authority to take the word of God and to make judgments according to that same word and Paul in our text is simply saying that in certain matters that involve the personal workings of people within the church where judgments need to be made you don't necessarily have to go outside of yourselves to solve personal problems.

And this is precisely what Paul is saying as he tries to put into perspective the role of government in civil matters and the role of the church in personal matters to where he says the respective authorities of both church and government are not intended to judge each other.

1 Corinthians 6:4-6 ⁴ So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? ⁵ I say *this* to your shame. *Is it so, that* there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, ⁶ but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?

Don't hang your dirty laundry out for the world to judge. It's none of their business any more than it's the business of the church to be judging murder cases in civil courts.

In fact, Paul actually calls to their attention what shame they should feel for not being able to find one person with wisdom who can intervene in such cases as he has stated.

However, having said all of this it's important to keep in mind that Paul is not saying that believers can't use the civil courts at all. There are legitimate uses for such courts. But the courts are not to be used to destroy another person, even an unbeliever.

There could actually be cases among believers where it is out of the hands of the body of Christ to be able to settle real problems, especially as it relates to criminal behavior.

I mean, what happens if a believer steals something from a department store and is caught by the authorities? What happens when a believer is found abusing his wife? And let's say another believer discovers this and approaches the guilty party and they're not willing to submit to the authority of the church which might be brought in to help correct such behavior?

That individual may actually have to be put out of the church, but it may be prudent to protect the other spouse to contact the authorities and have them deal with it in a court of law. Again, this goes beyond simple disputes and into the realm of criminal behavior, but it may not always be black and white.

The point is we must pray for wisdom and discernment using God's word as the final authority. But the bottom line is we all need to be willing to love each other enough not to want to harm anyone in any way.

And when it comes to these matters, as is the case in Corinth, believers should be able to deal with even possible volatile problems in a spirit of calmness and love as they solve them to the glory of God.

But, once we take such problems to court, instead of solving them in the body, as Paul says, we've already lost.

1 Corinthians 6:7-8 ⁷ Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? ⁸ On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. *You do* this even to *your* brethren.

Even if such a person were to win the case in the courtroom he and the church have been completely defeated already. Why?

Because the name and cause of Christ has been dragged through the mud for no reason. The cause of Christ is bigger than any self-satisfaction. The world is always looking for an excuse to belittle the church. Paul is saying don't give it a reason to do that by your unwillingness to settle problems between yourselves in the love of Christ. It is the love of Christ which is to characterize the church. You will know them by their love for one another.

1JO 3:11 "This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another."

If we have to lose the legal battle for money or possessions, then it is better to do so, then to give the world the impression that we're no different from the world who puts its confidence in the things of this world.

I'm not suggesting that there is not a natural reaction to someone who wants to take advantage of us, especially when they're believers. I'm just trying to teach us God's perspective on such matters. And if we can honor God in the process than that is infinitely better to do.

But the only way we can ever accomplish such things is to love others the way Christ loved us. Will we ever be tempted to want to get revenge on another brother or sister who hurts us? Will we ever be tempted to want to get our pound of flesh from someone who has taken advantage of us, especially another believer?

I suspect so. But before we're tempted to carve up someone, we might want to consider what the apostle John had to say on such matters.

1JO 3:16-18 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

1JO 4:10-11 "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

1JO 4:20-21 "If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. 21 And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother."

Easier said than done? Only if we're not willing to live in the love we've been given in Christ and not willing to consider one another as more important than ourselves. It's hard to swallow our pride and even harder to be taken advantage of by another person, but in the final analysis we have to answer to our Savior.

And in those times where we're tempted not to love as Christ loved, then we need to ask God for the grace to extend grace and love to others; not that they might take advantage of us, but that through our love for them, they might even repent of their own sin and seek to love us back in the love of Christ themselves.

We're not called to be door-mats, but we're not called to be gun powder either, to be ignited at the least spark of dissension. Loving like Christ involves every area of our lives and it does take work.

But it's a good work we should work hard at, because it's a work which glorifies our Father in heaven. And if we can understand that that's the reason we're here then it will help in our dealings with other people in this world who need to see Jesus in us, even other believers.

Just remember where such strength comes from for the believer.

1 Peter 4:11 ¹¹ Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is *serving by the strength which God supplies*; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

And in the final analysis the ability to serve others with the strength that God supplies comes from a love that only God can give who in turn expects us to love Him above all.

Mark 12:30-31 ³⁰ AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' ³¹ "The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these."