

**The Village Church – Rancho Santa Fe**  
**Week #7 – Adult Bible Study**

**I Corinthians 6:1-11**

**October 22 & 23, 2024**

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**6:1-6**

1. We first note that this section of I Corinthians continues in the broad theme of Paul's concern for the community of the Corinthian church
2. In the previous section the primary, presenting issue was an inappropriate, almost incestuous relationship
3. In this section, the primary and presenting issue is the legal actions undertaken by some members of the church community against others
4. Important context: Court systems of the Roman Empire
  - a. Overwhelming majority of cases were brought by the wealthy and powerful against people of lesser status and means
  - b. Judges in the system were generally from the upper classes
  - c. Impact was that the upper classes were able successfully to win their cases
  - d. Upper classes could also hire better and more lawyers
5. In other parts of the letter, Paul addresses how the upper class Christians were ill-treating the lower class Christians
6. The kind of cases being brought were everyday and ordinary matters, understood to be civil cases, not criminal
7. In Jewish and Christian apocalyptic thought, one day (at the end of history) the faithful would rule the world
  - a. It was incongruous, then, that these future "judges" would not be able to handle small matters themselves in the present day!
8. Paul asks if there is no one "wise" enough to judge disputes among the Christians – an obvious slap at the Corinthians who considered themselves to be so "wise" that they were divisive and competitive amongst each other, claiming to hold special knowledge or status within the church
9. Such litigation pits "brother against brother" – the family unity is destroyed
  - a. (Note: NRSV "believer" does not sufficiently highlight the familial relationship)
10. For Paul – and for the early Christian community – the community was of paramount importance, especially in light of its status as a new, small, and often beleaguered group
11. Note: the Jews of the Diaspora often established their own court systems, out of this same kind of sense of community and being different from the rest of the world

**6:7-8**

12. The point is pressed further: To have lawsuits at all among the community is a defeat, even the "winners" become losers
13. The Corinthian Christians are acting just like the "unrighteous" – the pagans – and are not fulfilling their purpose and potential as a new kind of community
14. The community is so important that it would be better, Paul posits, for church members to suffer wrong than to pursue lawsuits against each other
15. This principle was even upheld in pagan society: Socrates – "If it were necessary either to do wrong or to suffer it, I should choose to suffer rather than do it."
16. Once again, the supposedly philosophically sophisticated Corinthian Christians fail to live up to even their former pagan philosophical ideals!

**6:9-11**

17. With these sentences, Paul employs a familiar metaphor, that of Christians' spiritual inheritance
18. Such inheritance was about the future glory of life in the perfect presence of God (and others)
19. There is great irony here: those who seek to enrich themselves (increase their inheritance!) in this world – through lawsuits against each other – are actually imperiling their eternal inheritance!
20. Paul next "fills out" his list of the general term "wrongdoers" by employing a familiar catalog of vices/sins
21. He uses two terms previously unused: "male prostitutes and sodomites"
  - a. The first term (malakoi – soft ones) probably refers to young boys in pederastic relationships

- b. The second term (arsenokoitai) is the general term for men who engage in same-sex intercourse
  - c. This is standard Jewish condemnation of homosexual conduct
  - d. In keeping with Jewish practice of Paul's day, the call is for banishment from the community rather than death (which is the original punishment from Leviticus)
22. We need to remember that Paul employs this whole list as he speaks of the larger question: lawsuits between Christians and the damage to the community of faith that results – he does not engage here in a detailed discussion of any of the particular sins from the list
23. Paul further reinforces the sacred nature of the community of the church by calling to mind the baptismal covenant that brings a person into that community: washed, sanctified, justified
24. In sum: Paul's purpose here is to:
- a. Protect the community and further "resocialize" the Corinthian Christians into this new consciousness of their identity in Christ
  - b. Condemn the injustice of the lawsuits perpetrated by Christians against Christians
  - c. Teach about the new life/identity/community precipitated in the act of baptism

### Questions for Your Life Today

- A. What kinds of disputes arise in modern churches today?
- B. How have you seen "battles" in churches resolved?
- C. What kinds of strife have you noted in Christian history?
- D. What can you do to promote Christian unity and community that might tend to promote fewer battles?
- E. How do class differences among Christians tend to hurt or divide the Christian community?

Notes by The Rev. Dr. Jack Baca, Senior Pastor, The Village Church, Rancho Santa Fe, California

#### Resources:

- Interpretation Commentary on First Corinthians, Richard B. Hays, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1997
- Interpretation Commentary on Second Corinthians, Ernest Best, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1987
- The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of I Corinthians – Life in the Local Church, David Prior, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1985
- The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of 2 Corinthians – Power in Weakness, Paul Barnett, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1988
- The Communicator's Commentary, 1, 2 Corinthians, Kenneth L. Chafin, Word Books, Waco, Texas, 1985