

1 CORINTHIANS 6-7 BRETHREN SUING EACH OTHER; MARRIAGE ISSUES



In 1 Cor. 6, Paul begins by focusing on a second mistake some in the congregation had made in his absence (the first was member's tolerance of an ongoing fornication in chapter 5).

He asks them, "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?" (1 Cor. 6:1). In fact, the Greeks were famous for going to the law courts and suing others mostly over petty disputes, whereas the Jews dealt with their differences only before the elders of the congregation.

Barclay notes, "Paul is dealing with a problem which specially affected the Greeks. The Jews did not ordinarily go to law in the public law courts at all; they settled things before the elders of the village or the synagogue. To them justice was far more a thing to be settled in a family spirit than in a legal spirit. In fact, the Jewish law expressly forbade a Jew to go to law at all in a non-Jewish court; to do so was considered blasphemy against the divine law of God. It was far otherwise with the Greeks; they were characteristically a litigious people. The law courts were one of their chief entertainments" (*Daily Study Bible*, 1 Cor. 6:1.)

Wiersbe's Commentary gives a case in point, "The Greek playwright Aristophanes (400 B.C.) has one of his characters [in a play] look at a map and ask where Greece is located. When it is pointed out to him, he replies that there must be some mistake—because *he cannot see any lawsuits going on!*"

Paul explains the gravity of the issue to the brethren, for they are preparing to be future judges in God's kingdom and must apply biblical principles to resolve their own problems. He asks them, "Do you not know that *the saints will judge the world*? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?" (1 Cor. 6:2). Notice Paul taught that one day the members would judge and govern the world when Christ returns. This is described of the saints in Rev. 20:4, "And I saw thrones, and *they sat on them*, and *judgment* was committed to them...And they lived and *reigned* with Christ for a thousand years."

Paul then says something even more surprising, "Do you not know that *we shall judge angels*? How much more, things that pertain to this life?" (1 Cor. 6:3). When will this happen? In Rev. 5:9-10 it says about God's people, "Then they [the angels] sang a

new song, 'You are worthy to receive the scroll and open its seals, because you were killed. And with your own blood you bought for God *people from every tribe, language, nation, and race*. You let them *become kings and serve God as priests, and they will rule on earth*' (CEV).

From Paul's statement, this judgeship will likely *not be limited* to the Millennium, but will also cover the people raised and judged during the Second Resurrection period and afterward, the time of judgement of the incorrigibly wicked and when Satan and his demons will be judged (Mt. 19:28, Lk. 19:11-26; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 1:6).

With these principles in mind, Paul then asks them: "If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? *But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!* Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? No, you yourselves *do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!*" (1 Cor. 6:3-8).

Here we see a situation in which a member had either lent money to another member and had not been repaid or he was partnered in a business that had gone badly and had sued the member in a civil court to get restitution.

Yet, Paul mentions the solution is to resolve things within the Church (as Christ mentioned the steps in Mt. 18) and first go to your brother privately. If not resolved, then use a wise member to act as an arbitrator. If not resolved, then go to the minister. Paul also tells the member who has defrauded the other he must fulfill his duty of paying back the money, otherwise he is breaking the Eighth Commandment that prohibits stealing.

Paul then points out: "Or 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 effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. *Such were some of you; but you*

were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:9-11, NAS).

Here we see all the sins that occur when some of God's Ten Commandments are broken, and some in the congregation had committed these in the past:

1. Fornicators (7th Commandment)
2. Idolaters (2nd Commandment)
3. Adulterers (7th Commandment)
4. Effeminate (7th Commandment)
5. Homosexuals (7th Commandment)
6. Thieves (8th Commandment)
7. Covetous (8th Commandment)
8. Drunkards (10th Commandment)
9. Revilers (3rd Commandment)
10. Swindlers (8th Commandment)

For example, one of these sins is homosexuality (Gk. *arsenokoites* – Thayer's defines it as "one who lies with a male as with a female--sodomite, homosexual). Barclay notes, "This sin had swept like a cancer through Greek life and from Greece, invaded Rome. We can scarcely realize how riddled the ancient world was with it. Even so great a man as Socrates practiced it; Plato's dialogue, *The Symposium* is always said to be one of the greatest works on love in the world, but its subject is not natural but *unnatural love*. Fourteen out of the first fifteen Roman Emperors practiced this unnatural vice. At this very time Nero was emperor. He had taken a boy called Sporus and had him castrated. He then married him with a full marriage ceremony and took him home in procession to his palace and lived with him as wife...When Nero was eliminated and Otho came to the throne one of the first things he did was to take possession of Sporus. Much later, the Emperor Hadrian's name was associated with a Bithynian youth called Antinous. He lived with him inseparably, when he died, he deified him...In this particular vice, in the time of the Early Church, the world was *lost to shame*; and there can be little doubt that this was *one of the main causes* of [the Roman Empire's] degeneracy and the final collapse of its civilization.

"After this dreadful catalogue of vices, natural and unnatural, comes Paul's shout of triumph 'and such were some of you.' The proof of Christianity lay in its power. It could take the dregs of humanity

and make them into men. It could take men lost to shame and make them sons of God. There were in Corinth, and all over the world, men who were living proofs of the re-creating power of Christ."

So, Paul has to refute the Greek proverb that sexual appetite should be satisfied just like the appetite for food. He says, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. *Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods*, but God will destroy both it and them. *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" (1 Cor. 6:12-14).

Paul says satisfying the appetite for food is normal, but that the body is not created for sexual immorality. Sexual relations are only accepted by God *within the marriage*.

As he explains to them: "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. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. 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? For you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:15-20).

So, if one is consecrated to God and His way of life, one cannot selfishly satisfy sinful desires and break God's commandments. Few realize the tremendous harm they do to themselves by engaging in illicit sex through fornication or adultery. In contrast, if one steals, it is taking *externally* something with one's hands. Yet, sexual immorality *internally* damages the mind and spirit. Such images and emotions remain etched for a long time and it's not easy to break free from the experience, which produces a feeling of defilement and of violating one's own conscience.

It will take much prayer, tears, and repentance for God to cleanse that sin. David, guilty of adultery and deeply repentant, pleaded with God, "Wash me

thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You...have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight...Purge me with hyssop, and *I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow*" (Psalm 51:2-4, 7).

Forgiveness is always available, but only to those who are truly repentant and demonstrate it through actions, not just words (1 Jn. 1:8-10; 3:18). Christ paid for our sins with his sacrifice, and therefore, we must serve Him, not the world and its desires. As our body is the temple of God's spirit, we must take good care of it. Hence, it is necessary to exercise, eat healthy, get enough rest and sleep, maintain a positive attitude toward life and avoid being filled with negative and sinful thoughts. We must also take care of our spirit, which Paul calls "our inner being" (2 Cor. 4:16). We do this by praying daily, studying the Bible and other literature, supporting God's work, meditating, and fasting occasionally to draw closer to God and combat the sin that easily ensnares us (Heb. 12:1). That is what it means to be a spiritual soldier of Christ, and each day we have a battle to fight and win so that one day we may enter His glorious kingdom as overcomers – by overcoming sin.

Now, in chapter 7, Paul continues to deal with the subject of sexuality, but now in relation to marriage. He says, "Now, I will discuss the things you wrote me about. You asked if it is better for a man not to have any sexual relations at all. But sexual sin is a danger, so each man should enjoy his own wife, and each woman should enjoy her own husband. The husband should give his wife what she deserves as his wife. And the wife should give her husband what he deserves as her husband. The wife does not have power over her own body. Her husband has the power over her body. And the husband does not have power over his own body. His wife has the power over his body. Don't refuse to give your bodies to each other. But you might both agree to stay away from sex for a while so that you can give your time to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not be able to tempt you in your weakness" (1 Cor. 7:1-2, ERV).

To understand what Paul said, we must first remember the society surrounding the Corinthians.

As Barclay points out, "Paul reminds them where they lived, in Corinth, a place where they could not

even walk down the street without being beset by great temptations. They should consider their natural inclination to marry, for it would be better to marry than to fall into sin. Therefore, they should examine themselves and choose the state that best serves them in fulfilling the Christian life and not try to establish a lifestyle that goes against their nature...Paul declares a supremely great principle. Marriage is a partnership. The husband cannot act independently of the wife, nor the wife of the husband. They must always act together. The husband must never regard the wife simply as a means of self-gratification. The whole marriage relationship, both in its physical and spiritual sides, is something in which both are to find their gratification and the highest satisfaction of all their desires. In a time of special discipline, in a time of long and earnest prayer, it might be right to set aside all bodily things; but it must be by mutual agreement and only for a time, or it simply begets a situation which gives temptation an easy chance."

As *Wiersbe's Commentary* adds, "One man married to one woman has been God's pattern from the first [Gen. 2:24]. However, the husband and wife must not abuse the privilege of sexual love that is a normal part of marriage. The wife's body belongs to the husband, and the husband's body to the wife; and each must be *considerate* of the other. Sexual love is a beautiful tool *to build with*, not *a weapon to fight with* [or get revenge on the partner]. To refuse each other is to commit robbery (see 1Thes.4:1-7) and to invite Satan to tempt the partners to seek their satisfaction elsewhere."

We thus see that marriage before God is a partnership, in which each one respects and cherishes the other with agape love (see 1 Cor. 13).

As Paul sums up, "Marriage should be honored by everyone. And every marriage should be kept pure between husband and wife. God will judge guilty those who commit sexual sins and adultery" (Heb. 13:4, ERV).

Here we have powerful principles about sexuality and marriage that we should apply.