

Paul moves to another area of concern in the Corinthian church involving believers who were settling their differences publicly in a court of law rather than having them judged within the church by fellow believers. He points out that their fellow believers were more qualified to judge such matters under the authority of Christ than unbelievers in a secular court.

1 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?

“Dare [to be bold] any of you, having a matter against another” – On the heels of insisting that the Corinthians do their duty and judge the actions of their incestuous brother (1 Cor. 5:1-13), Paul now asks how any of them could be bold enough to take another Christian to court rather than settling their differences within the church. The daring aspect seems to be that they were appealing to an unbelieving judge to settle difference between Christians, which did not reflect well on God and His people.

“go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?” – The word “unjust” refers to unbelievers – those who have not been justified by Jesus Christ. Paul’s point is that the Corinthians were seeking to have their disagreements with fellow believers settled in a secular court of law, presumably standing before an unbelieving judge and/or other similar government officials. Why do they not allow their fellow saints make such judgments instead?

2 Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? 3 Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?

“Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?” – Most likely Paul is referring to the idea that Christ will employ His saints to be judges over the mortal population of the earth during His millennial kingdom.

“and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?” – If the Corinthians are qualified to be judges in Christ’s kingdom, why wouldn’t they be qualified to judge the “smallest matters” of this life? These “smallest matters” were likely the temporal differences between the Corinthian believers that had no eternal importance.

“Know ye not that we shall judge angels?” – Even more incredible than the idea that we will judge the world is the idea that we will judge angels. The Greek word translated “judge” here can mean “to rule or govern.” Since God Himself will judge fallen angels (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6), so it seems likely that the angels referred to here are the holy angels who are “ministering spirits” who serve for the benefit of the saints (**Heb. 1:14** “*Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?*”).

“how much more things that pertain to this life?” – If God has given us the authority to judge the weighty matters of His kingdom and angels, then the temporal matters of this life ought to be trivial in comparison.

4 If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church. 5 I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?

“If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church” – Since all believers are more qualified to be judges of the temporal matters of this life than secular, unbelieving judges then the Corinthians should enlist the aid of those who are “least esteemed” (least qualified to judge) anytime they have a matter within the church that needs to be judged. Paul seems to be using a touch of sarcasm to make his point.

“I speak to your shame” – Earlier in this letter, Paul had made some sarcastic remarks to show that the spirituality of the Corinthians was not as superior as they believed (1 Cor. 4:8-13). He then stated that he had not said these things in order to shame them but to warn them like a father warns his sons (1 Cor. 4:14). Paul states that his intent now is indeed to shame them for their actions because of the way they were shaming God before the unbelieving world. It did not glorify God when Christians appeared before a secular court in order to settle the differences between themselves.

“Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?” – Paul, rhetorically and somewhat sarcastically, asks if they did not have a single man in their number who was wise enough to serve as a judge between church members. The question was obviously intended to shame the Corinthians for what they were doing. They believed themselves to be wise and yet they were going to the secular courts for judgment as if none of them were wise enough to act as a judge.

6 But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers.

Paul states the two sins the Corinthians were committing by going to a secular court instead of judging their matters within the church.

“But brother goeth to law with brother” – Brothers in Christ were going to law against one another instead of resolving the matter themselves by showing love and forgiveness for one another (**Prov. 10:12** “*Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins*”). Jesus taught that love for one another was one of the chief characteristics that distinguished His disciples from the world (**John 13:35** “*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another*”). He also taught that we should forgive others (**Mark 11:25** “*And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses*”).

“and that before the unbelievers” – By taking another believer to court, they were demonstrating to the unbelieving world that there was a lack of love between Christians, a situation which did not glorify God and was contrary to His will. Paul was speaking to their shame because they were shaming God before the world (v. 5).

7 Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather *suffer yourselves to be defrauded*? 8 Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that *your brethren*.

“Now therefore there is utterly a fault [failure; defeat] among you, because ye go to law one with another” – Paul is saying that when a Christian takes another Christian to a secular court, they have both already lost regardless of the judge’s decision. God will hold them accountable for the bad testimony they are exhibiting and for the fact that they are shaming Him.

“Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather *suffer yourselves to be defrauded* [robbed]?” – Why not trust God to take care of you when another Christian has wronged you? Apparently the Corinthians were more interested in preventing their own financial losses than preserving God’s reputation in front of unbelievers.

“Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud [rob], and that *your brethren*” – Instead of themselves being the injured party, Paul says that the Corinthians are the ones in the wrong and that they are doing the robbing when they take their brothers in Christ to court. They are cheating their brothers of the love that they are owed (**Rom. 13:8** “Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law”), as well as depriving their brothers of seeing the example of that love being demonstrated.

9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, 10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?” – Paul is warning the Corinthians that when they take their brother to court, they are acting like the unrighteous of the world who will not inherit the king of God.

“Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind” – Paul begins a list of sinful behaviors that, while not exhaustive, describe the major types of moral sin that characterize the unbelieving world. He lists fornicators (those guilty of sexual immorality), idolaters, adulterers, effeminate (male prostitutes), and “abusers of themselves with mankind” (single Greek word meaning a homosexual).

“Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God” – Paul’s list continues with thieves, the covetous (the greedy), drunkards, revilers (the verbally abusive), and extortioners (robbers). Paul ends the list with the statement that people whose lives are characterized by these sins will never inherit the kingdom of God. The fact that their lives are characterized by such behavior is evidence that they have not been saved. Christians are capable of committing such sins but their lives should not be characterized by them.

11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

“And such were some of you” – Paul reminds the Corinthians that they used to be unbelievers that were guilty of these same sins, but that is no longer the case. They are different now and should no longer be acting like the unbelievers.

“but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified [purified; consecrated to God], but ye are justified [to declare righteous]” – Paul points out that the reason that they are different from what they used to be is because they have been washed from their sins, purified and set apart for God’s use. They have also been declared righteous and no longer guilty of the types of sins that Paul listed in vs. 9-10.

“in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” – What brought about the change in the Corinthians so that they are no longer characterized by the same sins committed by the unbelievers who will not inherit the kingdom of God? They have been born again by “by the Spirit of our God” under the authority and approval of Jesus Christ (“in the name of the Lord Jesus”). Thus, the Corinthian believers should no longer be engaging in the sinful behaviors that characterized them before salvation.

12 All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

Verse 12 seems to serve as a bridge to vs. 13-20, where Paul transitions to dealing with another problem in the Corinthian church where some believed it was acceptable or even necessary to satisfy their sexual needs through the use of prostitutes.

“All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient [helpful; profitable]” – A commentator suggests that the phrase “all things are lawful unto me” may have been a slogan that some in the Corinthian church had adopted. That attitude represented an abuse of the grace of God that is still prevalent today. Although God is willing to forgive the sin of a Christian, that does not give Christians a license to sin. Paul recites the Corinthian slogan but contrasts it with the statement that just because you can be forgiven of a sin does not mean that committing that sin can be helpful or beneficial. In fact, the opposite is true.

“all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power [to be mastered or controlled] of any” – Paul repeats the slogan again and adds contrasting fact that the ability to be forgiven of a sin is no reason to allow it to control us. The sin of fornication, which Paul addresses in vs. 13-20, can have a very controlling influence over people due to its appeal to the flesh.

Verses 13-20: Apparently some of the Corinthians were committing fornication by making use of prostitutes. Paul warns them that God gave us our bodies to serve Him, not to commit fornication. Since our bodies are a temple in which the Spirit of Christ lives, to engage the services of a prostitute is to involve Christ in the act of fornication. We are bought with a price, the blood of Christ, and therefore we no longer belong to ourselves to do as we want. We are to obey and glorify God with our bodies.