

**6:1:** *Dare any of you, having a matter against his neighbor, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?*

Some have asked how chapters 5 and 6 relate to each other. In the preceding chapter Paul spoke of a man who was having sexual relations with his father's wife. In this chapter the topic is lawsuits. The connection between these two subjects may be that the Corinthians were not dealing with congregational problems. Church members were failing to use good sense and judgment and the result was fornication and lawsuits (moral problems). Just as Israel failed to obey God's laws and found themselves engaged in various problems throughout their history, so such can happen to Christians (leave the path God has given and negative consequences follow). The Expositor's Greek Testament (2:813) makes the point especially clear: "You treat the Church, the seat of the Holy Spirit (iii.16 f.), as though it were without authority or wisdom; you take your case from the highest court to the lowest!" Gromacki (p. 73) observed how chapters 5 and 6 are linked in another way: "Paul inserted the litigation matter between the sections on sexual abuse (5:1-13; cf. 6:12-20; followed by the chapter on marriage). Fornication and covetousness, though, are grouped together in this context as similar sins (5:10-11; 6:9-10). Both stem from false, evil desires – one for financial satisfaction and the other for physical pleasure." Today many congregations can avoid many small and large problems by following God's plan for elders.

The lawsuits at Corinth probably came from converted Gentiles. Jews surely deduced from the Old Testament (Ex. 21:1 and Deut. 32:31) that suing a fellow Hebrew was wrong. They must have understood that going to a pagan judge implied pagan courts offered a recourse that was better than their own religion. If it were not better, why use it? Even though Christians from a Jewish background would have realized the Old Testament has been replaced by the New Testament (Heb. 8:13), it seems very unlikely their understanding of the Old Testament law would have left them with a strong interest in suing others. Gentiles, however, came from a culture in which lawsuits were viewed and treated as a sport.

In this opening verse there are several present tense verbs. Verse 8 in this chapter also proves lawsuits at Corinth were common and ongoing. Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 234) noted how the Greek text of the first verse expresses "reciprocity." The word "*against*" means one person established their claim and a second person set up a counterclaim. If the legal issue were simply one-sided, Paul would have used a different preposition ("*kata*"). Barclay (First Corinthians, p. 56) said, "It is plain to see that in a Greek city every man was more or less a lawyer and spent a very great part of his time either deciding or listening to law cases. The Greeks were in fact famous, or notorious, for their love of going to law. Not unnaturally, certain of the Greeks had brought their litigious tendencies into the Christian Church; and Paul was shocked."

Warren Wiersbe (First Corinthians, p. 587) noted how the "Greeks in general, and the Athenians in particular, were known for their involvement in the courts. The Greek playwright Aristophanes has one of his characters 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! However the United States is rapidly getting a similar reputation: over 200,000 civil suits were filed in the federal courts in one recent twelve-month period. Nearly 1 million lawyers (their number is increasing) are handling them. In one year, more than 12 million suits were filed in the state courts."

This chapter raises several interesting questions about Christians and their use of the legal system. Based on what Paul wrote, is it ever right to sue someone, especially if that person is a Christian? If we sell a car to a Christian but the brother doesn't pay for it, can and should we sue him? Perhaps he pays only part of the bill, or he writes a bad check and refuses to make it good. What should we do? What if we rent a house to a brother, but he leaves the residence with unpaid rent and damages the house beyond what his deposit will cover? Would it be wrong to sue him? What about a Christian heating and air contractor who is paid to install a new furnace at our home or a church building and the furnace doesn't work? If a Christian contractor refuses to complete a contract, are we entitled to legal recourse? What if false teachers attempt to take over a local congregation and seize church assets? Could the legal system be rightly used to stop them? These and other situations are very real and a careful study of this chapter helps explain some of the choices available to us. At this point we may say there are times when Christians are

entitled to and must use the legal system. If a will is probated, a Christian becomes acquainted with the legal process. In the case of a divorce, people must turn to and use the court system. If a Christian is being robbed and the police are called, they have called upon their local government for help. If the robber is caught and prosecuted, the Christian may be asked or subpoenaed to serve as a witness in the case. Even if a Christian is not comfortable with lawsuits, it is nearly impossible to live the Christian life and be completely free from some level of government interaction, including use of the legal system.

Paul introduced the subject of lawsuits with the word “*dare*” (*tolmao*), a word that sometimes described acts requiring courage. Here the meaning is the Corinthian lawsuits were so blatantly sinful (this suggests the litigation was silly and insignificant) that it took courage for Christians to bring these cases to court (this is further proven by verse 2 where Paul speaks of “*the smallest matters*”). At the present time stupid lawsuits are also often seen in America. About the time this material was being written a judge sued a local dry cleaner for losing the pants of his suit. Rather than working out some type of concession with the dry cleaner, the judge sued the dry cleaner for \$67 million dollars (later he reduced the lawsuit to \$54 million). Although this man lost his case, it shows that people have not changed—cases that make a mockery out of the judicial system are not hard to find. A carpet salesman once told me about a homeowner who purchased some new and very expensive carpeting. After her dog defecated on the new floor covering, the homeowner demanded the carpet company give her new carpet. Although the homeowner did not sue the carpet manufacturer, she was bold enough to file a silly and unjust claim. Prisoners have launched lawsuits because they received a piece of cake smaller than what they wanted. Similar silly lawsuits were taking place at Corinth and Paul said they were wrong.

The Corinthians had “*matters*” (a word for litigation) against each other. Paul used several technical words in this chapter and *matters* (*pragma*) is one of these special words. Here *matters* means “*grievance, legal dispute*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:144). Brown (3:1158) described it as “*judicial proceedings.*” A different term is used in verse 2 and translators indicate this difference by rendering the text “*smallest matters.*” These legal disputes were “*against another*” (KJV). The ASV says “*against his neighbor.*” Christians were suing fellow Christians (going to court against one another) about things that were not serious, and this had to stop.

Another small but important detail is found in the description of the judges. Instead of using *apistos* (the term translated *unbelievers* in verse 6), Paul used an adjective (*adikos*) meaning *those who are not just* (the noun form of this adjective is used to describe Judas in Acts 1:18). In the ASV this is translated “*unrighteous*” and in the KJV it is rendered “*unjust.*” Brown (3:576) said this word “*refers to Gentiles who do not yet recognize righteousness through faith and as a result have fallen victims to their adikia and God’s wrath. They do not inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9).*” Thus, the thought is: “*You go to the unjust to get justice.*” Surely the Corinthians understood the play on words and understood this was a stinging rebuke. It would have been especially hurtful to the members of this congregation because they saw themselves as “*wise*” (3:18). Six times in this chapter Paul criticized the Corinthians for acting ignorantly (6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19).

Paul’s word for *unrighteous* or *unjust* is also used in verse 9. Court cases were being tried before people who would not be in heaven! Though some of the Corinthian judges were surely fair, they did not have the standard of morality and the ethical system used by Christians. Thus, the justices could not make judgments compatible with the Christian faith. Even today non-Christian justices or secular laws often approach things in ways that are completely foreign to the Scriptures. When judges are asked to make judgments on religious matters, their conclusions can be very wrong because they are skilled in the things of this world, not matters of faith (compare Acts 18:14-15). Another problem in the first century judicial system was idolatry. Many court cases in America have been loosely associated with Christianity (people were sworn to tell the truth by invoking the name of God or by putting a hand on the Bible). In ancient times pagans used a similar process—court witnesses would be asked to swear by pagan deities to tell the truth. Christians could not swear by false gods in pagan courts! Compare 1Cor. 8:5-6.

The phrase “*and not before the saints*” told the Corinthians what they should have done. If brethren believed they had been wronged and a matter needed to be settled by a legal proceeding, the matter should have been brought to and before brethren. This phrase also makes it clear Paul had in mind *civil*

suits. This chapter does not deal with and does not have any bearing on *criminal matters*. Paul specifically said civil government (Rom. 13:1, “higher powers”) is to be a “terror to those who do evil” (Rom. 13:3). Civil government is God’s “avenger for wrath to those who do evil” (Rom. 13:4). If we see a Christian commit a crime and we are asked to go to court and testify either for or against him, we are obligated to comply with the request. Testifying in such a case would not be a violation of what is said in this chapter or any other passage in the Bible. The book of Acts (25:11) also shows that Christians are allowed to use the legal system. Christians are not, however, allowed to make silly and frivolous legal claims. If a person kills one of our family members and we refuse to cooperate with law enforcement, we *aid a killer* and are actually putting fellow members of our community at risk because we do not cooperate with law enforcement officials. For the sake of peace and safety there are times when we must cooperate with and use the legal system!

When a Christian wrongs a fellow Christian in a civil matter, there are several choices—some of them are Biblical and some are not. When such a circumstance arises we should ask if the legal system is our best option. After all, suing someone is often time consuming and expensive. Too, a judge may render a civil judgment in our favor, but the person may not pay it. We must also examine our motive when considering legal action. Are we being directed by covetousness (Lk. 12:13-15)? Are we suing to defend our pride? There may be circumstances where we are entitled to legal action and taking a person to court is the right choice.

In 1 Tim. 5:8 Paul said a Christian must “provide for his own.” What if a man is the sole provider for his household, is injured through no fault of his own, and an insurance company does not want pay the claim? Since the Christian is unable to temporarily or permanently take care of his family’s needs, does not 1 Tim. 5:8 entitle him to take the insurance company to court? Imagine another situation – a Christian family believes it must file for bankruptcy. Creditors begin to lay claim to the family assets. If Christian business owners are among the creditors seeking to recover part of what they are owed, are they forbidden from taking legal action to reclaim part of their loss? Must a Christian business absorb 100% of the debt owed by a Christian who files bankruptcy? What if a Christian family rents a residence to another family and they stop paying the rent? Must a Christian let brethren “do what they want” and take no action?

Love and “turning the other cheek” are certainly taught in the Scriptures, but as noted in the commentary on Mt. 5:40-42, “there are limitations.” Augustine said, “The Lord does not say, Give everything that is asked, but Give to *everyone* who asks.” What if someone asks for our house and car? Would we simply turn them over to a Christian who requests them?

If we do take someone to civil court, frivolous litigation must be avoided. In cases where both disputants are Christians, the matter should be arbitrated by fellow Christians. Paul did demonstrate (Acts 16:37) that Christians abused by non-Christians are entitled to appeal to legal authorities for help and justice. Other Christians may choose to deprive themselves of legal action and allow themselves to be defrauded (this alternative is more fully discussed in the following verses). A good summary of this first verse is: “family disputes should be settled within the family.” Every possible effort should be expended to privately settle disputes between church members.

**6:2:** *Or know ye not that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world is judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?*

The expression “*know ye not*” (“*do ye not know*,” KJV) is used six times in this chapter (the other places are verses 3, 9, 15-16, 19) and it is found a total of ten times in this letter. For the other places in the letter where the expression occurs see 3:6; 5:6; 9:13, 24. It is very ironic that Paul said this because the Corinthians prided themselves on knowledge (see the commentary on 1:5 and 4:8). In the book of Romans Paul used the *do ye not know* expression three times (Rom. 6:3, 16; 11:2). Here the phrase is used to say Christians will judge the world. The verb translated “*shall judge*” (*krino*) is future and seems to refer to Christ’s second coming. At a future time God’s people will judge the world.

The explanation for this *judgment* is difficult. Many believe it is related to Christians and their earthly lives. If this is the correct interpretation, Paul meant there will be a contrast on the day of judgment. The

lives of the saved will be contrasted with the lives of the unsaved. Support for this view is found in the fact that Paul spoke of judgment taking place right now (“*the world is judged by you*”). Not only is this judgment expressed with the present tense (the unsaved are being judged by the saved day by day even now), it is also expressed with the *passive voice* (i.e. Christians are not actively involved in this process). Even more evidence for this view is found in Lk. 11:31-32 (see these verses explained in section 16 of the Gospels commentary). In order for people to be judged by the lives of Christians, the people of God must be good examples. At Corinth this was not happening. God’s people were seeking petty judgments from the very ones who would one day be condemned by the lives of faithful Christians. If this information is the correct explanation of the thought, we can see why Paul was shocked and upset.

Others believe saved people will somehow participate in the final judgment at the second coming of Christ. Support for this view is usually based on passages like Rom. 8:16-17 and Rev. 3:21 (Christians “reign with Christ,” they will somehow share in the final judgments made by Jesus). It is then concluded that since Christians will actually have a part in the final judgment, they can certainly judge matters within the church. One significant problem with this view is Mt. 25:31-32—saved and unsaved people will both appear before the judgment seat of Christ and a judgment will occur. Jesus is pictured as the *sole judge* and man simply awaits His sentencing.

Albert Barnes (First Corinthians, p. 97) tried to defend what I believe is an incorrect view of *judging the world*. While I believe he is wrong, his defense for this position is about as good as anyone can offer so it is included here. “If asked *in what way* this is to be done, it may be answered, that it may be meant simply that Christians shall be exalted to the right hand of the Judge, and shall encompass his throne; that they shall assent to, and approve of his judgment, that they shall be elevated to a post of honor and favor, AS IF they were associated with him in the Judgment. They shall then be regarded as his friends, and express their approbation, and that *with a deep sense of its justice*, of the condemnation of the wicked. Perhaps the idea is, not that they shall *pronounce* sentence, which will be done by the Lord Jesus, but that they shall then be qualified to see the justice of the condemnation which shall be passed on the wicked; they shall have a clear and distinct view of the case; they shall even see the propriety of their everlasting punishment, and shall not only approve it, but be qualified to enter into the subject, and to pronounce upon it intelligently. And the argument of the apostle is, that if they would be qualified to pronounce on the eternal doom of men and angels; if they had such views of justice and right, and such integrity as to form an opinion and express it in regard to the everlasting destiny of an immense host of immortal beings, assuredly they ought to be qualified to express their sense of the smaller transactions in this life, and pronounce an opinion between man and man.”

It is hard to understand how Christians could say or do anything on the day of judgment to condemn the unsaved. Will not Jesus’ words be enough? It seems best to understand the point as explained in the first view above (the earthly lives of saved people lived on earth will testify or be a witness against the unsaved). This is precisely what we find in the life of Noah (Heb. 11:7). When people die, their fate is sealed (they have been judged). The time to choose eternal life is now (2 Cor. 6:2). In the case of angels, these creatures have already made their choice and their destiny is sealed (2 Pet. 2:4). What men and angels wait for is a *final sentencing*. This is what Jesus spoke of in Mt. 25:41.

The word “*smallest*” (*elachistos*) in 2b “is applied to things ‘small’ in size (James 3:4) and significance (1 Corinthians 6:2). Commands (Matthew 5:19), people (Matthew 25:40), and apostles (1 Corinthians 15:9) are all described this way. Interestingly enough, Christ put a great deal of positive emphasis upon the ‘small’ things, be they teachings (Matthew 5:19) or people, especially children (Matthew 5:19; 18:4). The ‘small,’ even the ‘least’ in terms of human significance, are of great importance to God” (CBL, GED, 2:370). Here *smallest* means “petty lawsuits” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:427).

**6:3:** *Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more, things that pertain to this life?*

In continuing to show why the Corinthians should avoid the pagan court, Paul appealed to angels. He said “*we*” will somehow “*judge*” angelic beings. Commentators differ on the identification of the *we*.

Does it refer to all Christians or just the apostles? Another question involves the *angels*. Did Paul have in mind all angels, only good angels, just bad angels, or does *angels* have a more general sense (some think it simply means “messenger” and is thus a reference to false teachers).

Since Paul’s argument deals with the Christians at Corinth and their judging various matters, it seems best to understand the *we* as describing all Christians. In other words, what is said here must be related to the previous information in this chapter. Although there are commentators (especially older ones) who believe Paul was sarcastically telling the Corinthians their plans to judge angels was nonsense (i.e. untrue), a better approach seems to be to be based on the information in verse 2 (see the commentary on that verse). Faithful Christian lives will help condemn the unsaved at the end of time (presumably this same tactic will be used for people who lived prior to the New Testament era). If Christians who have never seen God are able to stay faithful during their lives, then the angels who were in God’s presence and chose sin anyway will have no excuse for their rebellion. If Christians who had a limited education were able to read, study and obey the Bible, then no man or spiritual creature will be able to use a lack of education or experience as an excuse. Since God’s people can know, obey and demonstrate the truth of the gospel in their daily lives—and their examples will one day help condemn men and angels—Christians are certainly qualified to judge “*things that pertain to this life.*”

*Things that pertain to this life* is based on a single word (*biotikos*) that occurs only here, verse 4, and Lk. 21:34. In this chapter it means “judicial matters of this life” (CBL, GED, 1:561). Paul indicated these are the “smallest matters of life. Such earthly concerns are, by comparison to heavenly matters, insignificant” (ibid). This sense of the word was also “used by a secular author in the Koine Greek to describe quarrels of *biotikos*, everyday life, which were resolved at home in contrast with more serious offenses which needed to be brought to court” (CBL, GED, 1:561). Here we once again see the key to understanding the lawsuits and Corinth and how this chapter applies to us. We must consider the *nature* of any legal matter (the circumstances and seriousness of a case must be carefully evaluated). Lawsuits over silly and petty things are wrong. Christian love, good judgment, and seeking first the kingdom of God should be used when thinking about taking someone to court.

Some have suggested the word “*judgment*” (*krino*) means *rule* in this verse. In the Old Testament there are places where the word “judged” is used in this way. This fact is used to argue that men will “*rule*” over angels (men will be above and superior to the good angels). Jesus specifically said this idea is false (Lk. 20:36); according to this verse men and angels will be equal to each other in eternity.

**6:4:** *If then ye have to judge things pertaining to this life, do ye set them to judge who are of no account in the church?*

Although the Greek language is very precise, there are times when translators must make judgments about how to translate something. This verse requires interpreters to make a judgment because there are two different ways to understand the text. The translators of the KJV understood the words to be a sentence. According to this translation, the “*least esteemed in the church*” were supposed to be the judges. That is, the Corinthians were to use the lowliest members of the church to make judgments. Unless Paul used irony (and that is hard to argue this in this section of the letter), this translation (which is a legitimate rendering of the text) does not make good sense of the thought.

The ASV treats Paul’s words as a question. It ends the verse by saying, “*of no account in the church.*” This rendering indicates the Corinthians went to those of “*no-account*” (non-Christians), and this translation is consistent with the thought in verse 3. If this is the correct idea, it was one more way of telling the Corinthians to avoid pagan courts to deal with personal and insignificant differences. Paul did not despise the pagan courts (Acts 25:11), but brethren had no need to settle matters between one another in a public courtroom. Taking petty disputes before the unsaved was especially bad. After all, can heathen judges really serve as the best decision makers for Christians? Our problems are best resolved by the process given by Jesus in Mt. 18:15-17.

The word translated “*of no account*” (*exoutheneo*) is rendered “*least esteemed*” in the KJV. It is also used in Mk. 9:12; Lk. 18:9; 23:11; Acts 4:11; Rom. 14:3, 10; 1 Cor. 1:28; here; 16:11; 2 Cor. 10:10; Gal.

4:14; 1 Thess. 5:20. The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (2:9) defined it as: “have a low opinion of, scorn, reject contemptuously.” For information on the expression *things that pertain to this life*, see the preceding commentary on verse 3.

**6:5-6:** *I say (this) to move you to shame. What, cannot there be (found) among you one wise man who shall be able to decide between his brethren, 6 but brother goeth to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?*

The word “*shame*” (*entropē*) only occurs twice in the New Testament (here and 15:34), but it is a significant word. Trench (p. 69) associated it with “wholesome shame.” That is, this quality is designed to bring someone to a point where he or she makes a change in conduct (*ibid*). In the Bible *shame* is described by more than twelve Hebrew words in the Old Testament and a half-dozen words in the New Testament. *Shame* is found more than 100 times, and it is first mentioned in Gen. 2:25. “Shame is a godly motivator. A virtuous life shames the ungodly, providing a context for evangelism (Tit. 2:8; 1 Peter 3:16). A believer’s shame for past sin is a spur to forsake sinning (Rom. 6:21), to renounce disobedience (2 Thess. 3:14), and to minister the gospel (2 Cor. 4:2). The prospect of shame at Christ’s return is sometimes a necessary inducement to godliness (Rev. 3:18; 16:15). Paul uses the concept of shame most frequently with the immature Corinthian believers, urging them not to shame themselves (1 Cor. 4:14; 6:5; 15:34; 2 Cor. 9:4) or him (2 Cor. 7:14; 10:8)” (Baker’s Theological Dictionary of the Bible, p. 735).

“Shameless people flaunt their unholiness, calloused to God (Zeph. 3:5) and glorying in their shame (Phil. 3:19). Yet no one is shameless ultimately. ‘Shameless acts’ receive the judgment inherent in the act (Rom. 1:27). Also, at the final judgment the nakedness of those not clothed with Christ’s righteousness will be exposed (Rev. 3:18; 16:15)” (Baker’s Theological Dictionary of the Bible, p. 735). Paul believed in shame, and as the references just cited show, he sometimes used it. At other times he chose not to use it (1 Cor. 4:14). Here he used it to *arouse* these Christians to shame (Thayer, p. 219). The Corinthian lawsuits were so out of place Paul wanted his brethren to be embarrassed and humiliated. The basis for the shame was the Corinthians’ “own bad behavior” (CBL, GED, 2:453). At the present time there are still occasions when we should use shame to stimulate people to do what is right. Shame may be used in the church, in and outside the home. When people in a society cannot be shamed, it is ripe for destruction (Jer. 6:15; 8:12).

Earlier sections of this book show how the Corinthians valued *wisdom* (1 Cor. 1:19, 20, 25, 26, 27; 3:18, 19, 20). Since they believed they were wise, here Paul asked them if just “*one wise man*” was among them. With all the knowledge they had, was there not at least one person endowed with superior knowledge and insight? If there was, who was it? If the Corinthians could not produce anyone to demonstrate their wisdom, their claims about knowledge were clearly false. Also, if there were at least one wise man within this congregation, why didn’t he judge the problems instead of allowing the disagreements to go to pagan judges and courts? In 5b the ASV says “*decide*” and the KJV says “*judge*.” As Gromacki (p. 77) noted, the “infinitive ‘to judge’ means to give a decision, not to conduct a trial.” This term (*diakrino*) is also used in 1 Cor. 11:29 to say Christians *discern* what is being done when partaking of the Lord’s Supper. Another example of how this word occurs in this book is found in 1 Cor. 14:29 (Christians were to *discern* or *judge* information given by prophets). That is, were those claiming to speak for God really inspired?

Additional information about the frivolous lawsuits is in verse 6: Christians were suing one another. Both the ASV and KJV do a good job of bringing out the point with the word “*but*” (this is the first word in the Greek text). By putting this word at the beginning of the sentence, the thought is emphasized; it is like putting it in bold and capital letters. Lawsuits were being waged over the “*things of this life*” (verses 3-4), and this was bad. Fellow members of the church were pitting themselves against each other in the legal system (which was very bad), and they were appearing before *unbelievers* (*apistos*—non-Christians). This made things a lot worse. What Paul said should be related to the information in 1 Cor. 9:23 and 10:31-33. Rather than glorifying God and promoting the gospel, these Christians were bringing public dishonor and disgrace to the faith and church through the lawsuits. Paul felt righteous anger and

expressed it in this chapter. Suing one another, especially over inconsequential matters, epitomized immaturity and sin. Today Christians should still be very concerned about any action that would bring reproach upon the place where we worship, the people with whom we worship, or the Christian faith as a whole.

The word translated “*goeth*” is in the present tense (i.e. the Corinthians were guilty of habitual sin; the court cases were non-stop). One can easily imagine how pagan judges must have said to themselves or others, “Another case of Christians suing each other. I wonder what the gripe is this time?” The Expositor’s Greek Testament (2:816) suggests verse 6 “is an *answer* to the question of verse 5, not a continuation of it. The litigation shows there is no man in the Church wise enough to settle such matters privately; or he would surely have been called in.” What the Corinthians were doing is still being done at the present time—people often sue over the silliest things. On September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2007 Omaha State Senator Ernie Chambers “sued God.” He sued God “to show that anybody can file a lawsuit against anybody.” At least at the present time America is like Corinth—almost anyone can be sued for anything no matter how frivolous it may seem.

**6:7-8:** *Nay, already it is altogether a defect in you, that ye have lawsuits one with another. Why not rather take wrong? why not rather be defrauded? 8 Nay, but ye yourselves do wrong, and defraud, and that (your) brethren.*

Christians suing each other is described as a “*defect*” (the KJV has “*fault*”). *Defect (hettema)* described a defeat in court. In other words, going to non-Christian judges and bringing a case against a fellow Christian was actually a *defeat*. No matter what the judge decided, the case was lost! Suing a Christian is a lose-lose proposition! Notice, too, the present tense (“*is*” a defect—this was happening again and again). Thayer (p. 281) says in this verse *defect* means the loss of salvation, though this conclusion seems too drastic (in 1 Cor. 1:2 these Christians are still addressed as “the church of God”). Gingrich and Danker (p. 349) defined *defect* as “*an utter loss*.” In the Greek text the point is especially forceful. While it may be difficult to see in English translations, Paul began with an adverb (the English equivalent would be “*already*”), then used a conjunction (“*indeed*” would be the English equivalent), then used a second conjunction (the English equivalent would be “*therefore*”), and then inserted another adverb (“*altogether*” would be the English equivalent).

Instead of taking fellow Christians to court (7b), Paul proposed that brethren allow themselves to be wronged and even defrauded (this echoes the words of Jesus in Matt. 5:38-42). The word rendered “*take wrong*” (*adieko*) is used in Mt. 20:13 to describe wrongs between employees and their employers. Here *take wrong* means “to suffer one’s self to be wronged, take wrong” (Thayer, p. 12). In the Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (1:31) the definition is “do wrong, commit injustice.” This is similar to Paul’s instructions in Rom. 12:19-20. Since *take wrong* is a passive voice verb (the person described is the receiver of the action), and it is also in the present tense (continuous action), the point is very strong.

A basis for accepting wrong is found a little later in this letter (1 Cor. 13). Today people need to hear what is said in 1 Cor. 6 and 1 Cor. 13. “Man’s preoccupation with his rights, which leads to his suing his neighbour and hating him and fighting him, is shattered by a love of his neighbour and his enemy” (Brown, 3:576). Christians should expect to face times when they are wronged; they choose to let God dispense justice on His timetable because it is the right and best thing to do (compare 1 Pet. 2:19). Though Americans are often taught to insist on their rights, this is not God’s plan for Christians as they deal with others.

At the end of verse 7 Paul asked a second question: why did the Corinthians refuse to be “*defrauded*”? *Defrauded*, just as “take wrong,” is a passive voice verb (Christians were to accept losses and damages). It also in the present tense. The sense is: “Why didn’t the Corinthians allow wrongs against themselves again and again?” A definition for *defraud* is found below in the commentary for verse 8. Here we may simply say Paul used two different verbs to make his point in verse 7 and then *repeated these same two verbs in the next verse*. It may appear that Paul simply repeated himself, but there is a subtle difference. While the words for *take wrong* and *defraud* are the same in verses 7-8, Paul changed these two verbs to

the active voice in verse 8 (i.e. Paul said the Corinthians were committing these sins). In verse 7 he said the Corinthians should allow themselves to suffer wrongs. In verse 8 he said these Christians were doing wrong and defrauding others. For other verses on accepting wrongs, see Rom. 12:17, 19; Col. 3:13-14; 1 Pet. 2:23.

There is a story (whether true or not I do not know) of a truck driver who stopped at an all-night restaurant in Broken Bow, Nebraska. The waitress had just finished serving the semi driver when three swaggering, leather-jacketed motorcyclists (rough and mouthy) entered the establishment. They rushed up to the trucker, perhaps hoping he would fight. One of the bikers grabbed the hamburger off his plate; another took a handful of his french fries; the third picked up his coffee and began to drink it. The trucker did not visibly respond to what was being done. He calmly rose from his seat, picked up his check, walked to the front of the diner, placed the check and his money on the cash register, and went to his rig. After putting the money into the register the waitress watched him leave. One of the cyclists said to her, "Well, he's not much of a man, is he?" She replied, "I can't answer as to that, but he's not much of a truck driver. He just ran over the three motorcycles in the parking lot." As people we are naturally inclined to take vengeance. We want our rights. When threatened or hurt, we want to retaliate. The Corinthians had these same desires and they often acted on them. Paul said these desires had to be overcome. For more information on love and how it is to prevent revenge, see the commentary on 1 Cor. 13:5 ("love takes no account of evil").

Paul's conclusion about being defrauded and cheated does not mean Christians allow themselves to be abused. For an illustration, consider this scenario. A Christian family has a gathering in their home and many members of their local congregation attend. An injury occurs and the Christian hosts are held responsible for the accident. The insurance company determines that it will pay for the hospital bills resulting from the accident but nothing more. The injured party, who is a member of the church, wants compensation for his pain and suffering. He refuses arbitration by members of the church, chooses to sue the Christian family for pain and suffering, and the amount of the lawsuit is nearly equivalent to the Christian's house and total possessions. Does *turning the other cheek* (Mt. 5:39) mean the Christian family who hosted the event must give up his house and goods to satisfy the covetous brother? No. Jesus once said we are not to "cast pearls before swine" (Mt. 7:6). He meant we have no obligation to share the good news of the gospel to those who show repeated contempt and hate for it. We are told to "turn away" from people in certain circumstances (Rom. 16:17; 2 Tim. 3:5). These principles also apply to the subject matter in 1 Cor. 6. In most cases we should choose to do exactly what 7b says because love is to conquer evil (Rom 12:20-21). There are other cases, however, where legal proceedings are not only right, they may actually be required. We must use common sense when we deal with Bible principles and this applies to the legal issues.

Verse 8 contains another key to understanding what was taking place at Corinth. Paul said these Christians were "*defrauding*" (*apostereo*) one another (in addition to being used in verse 7, this term is also found in 7:5). Here it is a present tense verb (on-going action). Thayer (p. 68) defined it as "*to defraud; rob; despoil.*" Gingrich and Danker (p. 99) understand the thought as: "*you defraud (people), even your own brothers.*" "To say then that the wronged man goes to law before wrongdoers is nothing else than to say that he desires to retaliate and wishes to do wrong to the second in return, which is likewise to do wrong also himself" (Brown, 3:380). This information further illustrates how the Corinthians *were not after justice*. They were in the habit of going to court for personal gain, even if this gain came through fraudulent or barely legal activities. This type of behavior, from members of the church, was appalling. Thus, Paul rightly *shamed* these brethren for their sin (verse 5). An excellent final comment is found in The Church's Bible (p. 95): "But someone will say, 'It is a terrible thing to suffer wrong and be maltreated.' No, my friend, it is not terrible, not at all. How long will you be distressed about present things? God would not have commanded that if it were terrible. Consider this: the one who has committed injustice leaves the court with money but with a bad conscience, but the one who has suffered injustice, even if he is deprived of his money, has confidence before God, a possession more precious than countless treasures."



**6:9-10:** *Or 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 men, 10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.*

“Unrighteous” (*adikos*) is related to the word “defraud” (*adikeo*) in verse 8. *Unrighteous* describes someone who “breaks God’s laws” (Thayer, p. 12)—a person who is “unrighteous, sinful” (ibid). Gingrich and Danker (p. 18) said *unrighteous* describes one who is “doing contrary to what is right.” Paul used this same term in 6:1 to describe non-Christians. Many choose to live in this manner and verse 9 affirms that all who make this choice *will not inherit the kingdom of God*. If the Corinthians chose this lifestyle, the end result would be spiritual destruction (hell). Christians cannot live as the unsaved live and be in a right relationship with God. Christians can fall from grace and lose their salvation (see this point discussed in the commentary on 2:14).

Lest someone think the Corinthians did not know the right way or had misunderstood some part of the faith, Paul reminded them about their past instruction. He used a rhetorical question with the verb “*know*.” Since *know* is a perfect tense verb, Paul meant these Christians had been made aware of this information in the past and they were still aware of this information when they received this letter. What the Corinthians were told is in stark contrast to many American funeral services. Many preachers have stood before mourners and reminded everyone of how the deceased was “not a religious person,” but “God is a good and merciful God” (family and friends are comforted by the implication that a person who did not serve God will still be saved). Paul never preached this type of message. When people die they are either righteous because they were a faithful and dedicated Christian or they are unrighteous. Jesus will only save those who “obey Him” (Heb. 5:9).

Heaven is described as the “*kingdom of God*.” Many times in the New Testament *kingdom* means *church*. Since we do not *inherit* the church (Jesus adds people to it, Acts 2:47, KJV), the kingdom mentioned here is heaven itself. The word translated “*inherit*” (*kleronomeo*) is used in verses 9, 10, and 15:50. Jesus used this word in Mt. 5:5; 19:29; 25:34. In the Galatian letter Paul used this term to describe heaven in Gal. 5:21. The term is used in Heb. 6:12 (“*inheriting the promises*”), and Peter used it (1 Pet. 3:9) to say Christians “*inherit a blessing*.” It is also found in Rev. 21:7 and a few other places in the New Testament. The CBL (GED, 3:354) noted how “The object of inheritance in the New Testament is no longer ‘the land’ but something spiritual: eternal life.” “The promise was given once to Abraham and his descendants and is now realized in Christ (Gal. 3:16; cf. Mark 12:7)” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:298). Of course, to receive any portion of this inheritance we must be *in Christ* and “*seek first the kingdom*” (Mt. 6:33). If we are not in Christ and we do not live faithful lives, our eternal fate will be with the *unrighteous*.

In the middle of verse 9 Paul warned the Corinthians about being “*deceived*” (this is a present tense verb and may be defined as *led astray; deluded; caused to wander*). Paul used a special sentence construction that stops an action in progress. The idea is “do not continue” to be deceived (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 402). *Deceived* (*planao*) has several senses in the New Testament. In some places it is used to portray people as straying sheep (1 Pet. 2:25). In most passages it describes the deliberate deception from Satan and false teachers (Mt. 24:4, 5, 11; Rev. 12:9). Here, 1 Cor. 15:33, and in Gal. 6:7 *deceived* describes “Christians who are carelessly inattentive to sound doctrine and so let themselves be deceived” (CBL, GED, 5:198). Christians at Corinth had somehow become confused about sin and were being led astray. “The verb shows that ‘seductive arguments are in circulation by which the vicious succeeded in quieting their consciences’” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:363). In the list of sins that follows, Paul set forth transgressions, which if unforgiven, will keep people out of heaven. Four of the ten listed sins are of a sexual nature.

The first sin is a sexual sin and it is translated *fornicators* in the ASV and KJV. This term (*pornos*) was a broad (general) word for all sexual sin. It included incest, adultery, sodomy, bestiality, unmarried people having sexual relations with others, etc. In the next chapter of this letter (7:2) Paul said marriage is to meet the sexual needs of men and women (marriage is one means to avoid fornication). Sometimes fornication has a figurative or symbolic meaning and describes apostasy (Rev. 17:2; 19:2). Here the

meaning of the word is literal and it includes every form of sexual sin. A good cross-reference is Heb. 13:4: “(Let) marriage (be) had in honor among all, and (let) the bed (be) undefiled: for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.” For more information on *fornication* see the commentary on 1 Cor. 5:9-10.

An *idolater* (*eidololatres*) worshipped or served idols. Paul first used this term in 5:10. Jackson (p. 85) gives a summary of this word: “Idolatry is the worship of any being or object other than the true God, and the worship of supposed images of Jehovah himself (Ex. 20:3-6). A more subtle form of idolatry is the slavish yielding to one’s passions (Phil. 3:19; Col. 3:5). Idolatry is strongly condemned, and, if persisted in, will lead to eternal ruin (1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:20-21).” In some cases idol worship was directly related to fornication (worshippers engaged in sexual acts with pagan temple priests and priestesses). For more information about this word see the commentary on 1 Cor. 5:10.

An *adulterer* (*moichos*) violates his or her marriage vows or someone else’s by extra-marital intercourse (if a married person has a “one night stand” or a “fling,” this is adultery). A single person who has a “one night stand” or a “fling” would be guilty of fornication. Kittel’s comments (4:733-734) on this word are also insightful. “The right of a man to sexual freedom is denied. Like the wife, the husband is under an obligation of fidelity” (4:733). “From the religious standpoint adultery does not consist merely in physical intercourse with a strange woman; it is present already in the desire which negates fidelity (Mt. 5:28)” (4:733-734). Sexual lust is the “moral equivalency” of adultery. In 1 Cor. 6 and many other passages, *adultery* is a physical act. In Mt. 5:28, adultery is largely an attitude. The physical act allows for divorce; lustful thoughts are also wrong, but they are not *adultery* in the normal sense and do not entitle a mate to a scriptural divorce.

Adultery is also committed when someone violates God’s laws concerning marriage and divorce (Mt. 19:9). A person may marry someone according to the laws of their country, but the marriage may violate the terms expressed in Mt. 19:9. Scores of people have “promised before God” to take their spouse “for richer and poorer, in sickness in health,” and “till death do us part.” Yet, after a few months or years, the vows are broken. Many do not realize (or perhaps care) that marriage is a God-ordained union and God has regulated this institution. When a person violates God’s marriage laws, a person can be guilty of adultery—a “violator of the marriage bond” (CBL, GED, 4:215). Unless a person has gotten a divorce because their mate was guilty of sexual sin (Mt. 19:9), or their mate has died (Rom. 7:1-4), he or she is not entitled to enter into a second marriage.

It has been asked why we do not have an illustration of someone terminating a marriage in Bible if this is really what God requires. As noted below in the commentary on verse 11, we have an Old Testament example of marriages being terminated (this example involves children). Paul said we are to learn from the Old Testament (Rom. 15:4). If there is a lesson in Ezra 10, what is it?

Another Old Testament example of this is found in the preaching of John the Baptist (Mk. 6:18). Herod had a wife, but John said it was not a “lawful” relationship. Was the relationship unlawful due to the “law of the land” or the law of God? Since a preacher was the one doing the condemning, it was the law of God. Herod had joined himself to a woman in marriage, but God said the relationship was wrong.

The Corinthians lived under the new covenant; Paul said some of them had formerly been guilty of adultery. Since adultery is a sin only committed by married people, there are only two ways for it to occur: (1) being unfaithful to a spouse, (2) marrying someone who is an unlawful partner in the eyes of God. We must ask which of these explanations is correct for the Corinthians. Did married people cheat on their spouses, or had some of them married an unlawful partner? If the latter point is true, what was required? If thieves could no longer keep stealing, idol worshippers had to stop worshipping false gods, and drunkards had to abandon their way of life, could adultery in any form continue? If a marriage was creating an adulterous situation, it had to be ended. If the adultery in this chapter describes even one instance of someone having to leave a marriage, we have an illustration of people giving up an unlawful mate.

Since Paul used the words *fornicator* and *adulterer* in this list of sins, we must conclude there is a difference in these two terms. All adultery (sexual sin on the part of a married person) is fornication (a general word for sexual sin), but not all fornication (the general word for sexual sin) is adultery (involves a married person). If Paul had only wanted to say sexual sin is wrong, he could have used the word

“fornication.” Something caused him to use two distinct words.

Some are “*deceived*” about sin (9a), and this is certainly true of adultery and fornication. Because many are led astray about sin and especially sexual wrongdoing, a warning was given: *do not be deceived* (led astray). Ignorance of God’s laws is no excuse. Being led astray cannot remove the guilt of sin (Lk. 12:48). God’s laws about marriage and sexual activity may sound strict, but they are unholy acts and a holy God cannot tolerate them. Too, it is from fornication and adultery that many problems flow. Some of the consequences in today’s world are sexually transmitted diseases, self-hatred, suicide, unplanned (and unwanted) pregnancies, broken families, and ultimately the downfall of a nation (see this last point developed in the commentary on 1 Cor. 7:2).

For those who think God’s rules about human behavior are harsh or restrictive, consider these observations from Mastering the New Testament (10:156-157): “Is it narrowness of God or is it the structure of reality? If somebody steals from you, what happens to the relationship between you and that person? If your spouse has an affair with another person, what does that do to your relationship? If someone falsely accuses you before others, lying, defaming your character, and bringing about your professional demise, what happens to that relationship? If someone denies you the justice and liberty assured you in this land, because of your race or ethnic background, so that your children go hungry and velvet-covered doors slam in your face with every attempt you make to find a job, what does that do to the relationship? Aren’t anger, alienation, and hostility the usual results? If you were the one on the receiving end of any of these injustices, would you share the emotions just mentioned? Yes, you say? That’s part of the structure of reality, isn’t it?” God’s rules honor His character as well as provide man with the best way to live.

Another sin in 1 Cor. 6:9 is being *effeminate* (*malakos*); some versions may have “*catamite*” in a footnote. *Effeminate* occurs only four times in the New Testament and these passages illustrate what the term means. Aside from here *effeminate* occurs twice in Mt. 11:8 and once in Lk. 7:25. In these other passages the word is translated “*soft*.” *Softness* is also the image in 1 Cor. 6, but it takes on a special sense (i.e. it describes the passive partner in a homosexual relationship). In the NIV the term is translated “male prostitutes.” Although this is how standard Greek lexicons define the word, there have been attempts to give the word a much different (and incorrect) meaning. One new definition is this: homosexual men who *exhibited feminine characteristics*. By redefining the word writers attempt to neutralize Paul’s universal condemnation of homosexuality. Heaven surely knew such claims would be made so Paul added just a little more information at the end of verse 9. He associated *effeminate* with ***abusers of themselves with men*** (*arsenokoites*).

This term is found only here and 1 Tim. 1:10, and it is a compound word. It is composed of the Greek word for “male” and the Greek word for “bed” (in this case “bed” stands for sexual activity). It is a word describing homosexuality—the “active” partner in a homosexual relationship act. In the NIV it is translated “homosexual offenders.” Paul previously used the word *fornicators* in verse 9, a general term for all sexual sin. *Fornication* is so broad it includes all involved in homosexuality, no matter what their role. Then the apostle specifically spoke of the *effeminate* (passive homosexual partners). Now he mentions the active homosexual partner. He used both general and specific words to describe sexual wrongdoing. Thus, heaven has left no maneuvering room for those who try to redefine what the words mean or what was being condemned. In view of the apostle’s clear teaching, what can be said about religious groups that appoint or somehow sanction “openly gay” (homosexual) ministers? Unsaved people can scream “homophobic” at Christians (the word means God’s people are afraid of, discriminate against, and have an aversion to homosexuality). If the truth be told, homosexuality is just one of many sins (it is in the same class as drunkenness) that will keep people from heaven. Christians cannot approve of any behavior God condemns.

Barclay (First Corinthians, p. 60) noted how homosexuality “was the sin which had swept like a cancer through Greek life and which, 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.... Fourteen out of the first fifteen Roman Emperors practised unnatural vice (homosexuality, BP). At this very time Nero was emperor. He had taken a boy called Sporus and had had him castrated. He had then married him with a

full marriage ceremony and took him home in procession to his palace and lived with him as wife. With an incredible viciousness Nero had himself married a man called Pythagoras and called him his husband. 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 than this Emperor Hadrian's name is forever associated with a Bithynian youth called Antinous. He lived with him inseparably, and when he died he deified him and covered the world with his statues and immortalized his sin by calling a star after 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 that was one of the main causes of its degeneracy and the final collapse of its civilization." The passive partners for the emperors were among the *effeminate*. For additional information on the subject of homosexuality, see the commentary on Rom. 1:26-27.

In more recent history (the year 2000), homosexuality had become an often debated topic in American political and religious circles. Supporters of homosexuality often claimed opposing homosexuality was an "extreme" position and everyone should have "their own right" to do as they wanted. It was also argued that homosexuality had a "genetic basis" and people could not choose their sexual orientation. Several efforts were made to enact "hate-crime" legislation (crimes against homosexuals would be treated more severely). During this period homosexual activists sometimes made an interesting argument. It was claimed that Bible believing people objected to homosexuality but did not show this same type of opposition to things like theft, murder, gangs, and lying. This was a clever ploy, but it was a bad argument. Bible believing people were more vocal about homosexuality because homosexual activists were attempting to change or at least modify laws so men could marry men and women could marry women. Had there been an organized effort to legitimize theft, murder or lying, Bible believing people would have surely voiced and mounted opposition efforts to these practices too. As this material was being readied for publication (2009), America seemed destined for the same path that Barclay said was one of the main factors in destroying ancient Rome.

The word translated *thief* (*kleptes*) involved secrecy and the art of robbery. Property or goods were stolen using the cover of night, or even by embezzlement (see how this same term is used in Matt. 6:19-20; 24:43; Jn. 10:1; 1 Thess. 5:2, 4; 1 Pet. 4:15). Theft "is an offence against God's will, and in terms of human relationships, an activity which is loveless: it betrays fellowship (Jn. 12:6)" (Brown, 3:377-378). A thief "must stop stealing and instead do honest work, so that he can serve not his own selfish ends but the needs of those who lack (Eph. 4:28)" (ibid). Those who do not repent of this or any other sin will be lost (Lk. 13:3)!

The word *covetous* (*pleonektes*) is described in the commentary on 5:10. Anyone guilty of this sin never has enough; he always want more and more. A person desires so much that material wealth is their god. This sin is "a mark of life which lacks knowledge of God (Rom. 1:29; 1 Cor. 6:10f.), faith and obedience (1 Cor. 5:10f.; Eph. 5:3)...The man who no longer has his goal and fulfillment in God seeks fulfillment in himself, his possessions and acquisitiveness. Ultimately he makes himself into an idol that strives to subject everything to itself. For that reason Col. 3:5 identifies covetousness with idolatry" (Brown, 3:138).

**Drunkards** (*methusos*) are those addicted to alcohol. "The excessive drinking of intoxicants was a common vice among the ancient Jews and other early peoples. But since intoxicants were so expensive, it was particularly a practice of the rich (Amos 6:6; 4:1; 2:8)" (Baker's Dictionary of Theology, p. 174). "While the Bible does not prohibit the use of certain drugs for medicinal purposes (cf. 1 Tim. 5:23), e.g., codeine or morphine for extreme pain, the dulling of one's mind as an escape from problems that ought to be addressed with spiritual solutions, or for a recreational 'high' is not sanctioned in Scripture. It also should be borne in mind that 'drunkenness' is a matter of degree. The alteration of one's mental faculties commences almost immediately as one ingests the distilled spirits of our modern world" (Jackson, Bible Words and Theological Terms Made Easy, p. 48).

**Revilers** (*loidoros*), only used here and 1 Cor. 5:11, described people who used abusive language. Brown (3:347) describes the word as "conduct not becoming to the Christian." Among the Greeks one of the "arts of life" was to know how to insult others (there were even "insult duels" in the ancient world, Spicq, 2:408). Christians need to remember that "Words lead to blows; insults provoke fights, and blood

flows” (Spicq, 2:407-408). We must remember that the Bible denounces the sins of speech that people enjoy. An ancient believer (Polycarp) lived approximately 69-155 A.D. This was a time of great persecution and he was arrested for his faith. He seemed to be a “gentle old man” and a Roman proconsul took pity on him. The proconsul asked him to “revile” Jesus (the same word used in 1 Cor. 6—Kittel, 4:294). Polycarp refused. He said he would not “blaspheme” (a different word) God by calling Caesar Lord. He said, “Eighty and six years have I served Him and He hath done me no wrong. How then can I speak evil of my King who saved me?” Because he refused to comply with the authorities he was burned at the stake.

**Extortioners** (*harpax*) snatch away the goods of others any way that they can get them—swindling, extortion, embezzlement, etc. (for more information on this word see the commentary on 5:10). One is reminded of people who try to take unfair legal advantage of others. This sin sounds like “white collar” crime. Our world may wink at some things, but God does not. Some of the grossest sins we can imagine are listed in this section of the Corinthians letter, and swindling is part of the list.

The Corinthians had tried to separate morality from religion just as people had done in the days of Amos (8:5-6). This had to be corrected because the *unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God* (9a). Paul used “plain talk” about sin, and this same type of plain Bible teaching is needed today. We are told to “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15), but also be bold (Acts 4:13, 29). Many want to be so nice to others they never speak the truth. All need to hear that God exists, He has a perfect law (Jas. 1:25) and all men are accountable to this law. If people do not obey the information in the New Testament, they will be lost (condemned for eternity).

**6:11:** *And such were some of you: but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.*

“Some” tells us at least a few of the Corinthians had been previously involved with the sins listed in verses 9-10. “Paul narrows the picture to some, not all” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 402). Some may have committed every wrong listed by Paul while others only engaged in one or two of the listed sins. Still others may not have committed any of the sins in the preceding two verses. Just as with people today, Christians have different backgrounds and different degrees of involvement with sin before becoming Christians. People often pursue sin because it seems attractive and it can provide pleasure (Heb. 11:25). When a person is exposed to the gospel of Christ, they learn about the “abundant life” (Jn. 10:10) and realize there is a better way. When people “come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4), they can then repent (Acts 17:30). This means turning from a life of sin and embracing the life described in the New Testament (this is what the Corinthians had done, 11a).

Paul’s use of the past tense (“were”) in verse 11 (see the ASV, NKJV, NASB, and NIV) shows that God wants people to forsake sin. The past tense also helps answer some common questions. It has been asked if God would really require someone involved in fornication or adultery to abandon a relationship. If two people are truly in love, would God require them to separate? What if children are part of a sinful relationship? Would God require a “family breakup”? Questions such as these cannot be answered apart from the fact that God has a “pattern” (2 Tim. 1:13). If a set of circumstances is inconsistent with God’s pattern, it is wrong. This is vividly illustrated in verse 11 with the conjunction “*but*” (notice how it is used *three times*). Paul strongly emphasized that people cannot continue in sin.

If two men or two women have been legally joined together by a local or state government, their friends and associates may well regard them as “married.” Two men or two women may eventually become parents. Although the household might be one in which everyone is happy and the two men or two women believe they are bound together by an undying love, a same-sex relationship is a violation of God’s divine pattern (Mt. 19:5-6). Continuing in this type of relationship will prevent people from inheriting the kingdom of God (10b). Just as an alcoholic is not allowed to keep drinking or a user of illegal drugs is prohibited from continuing to abuse his body and break the law, repentance calls people to a new way of life. Giving up any sin or improper relationship is difficult, but it is not impossible (Ezra 10:2, 10-19, 44).

Willis (p. 157) noted how Koine Greek (the language of the New Testament) sometimes uses the neuter gender to show contempt for things. Verse 11 is an example of this technique. The pronoun *tauta* (“such”) is in the *neuter* gender while the antecedents for this pronoun (i.e. the sins in verses 9 and 10) are in the *masculine* gender. This grammatical formation means Paul showed his disgust for the sins formerly practiced by Corinthians. He hated the sins but loved the sinners (compare Jude 23). The Expositor’s Greek Testament (2:817) also took note of this special grammatical point and said Paul viewed these sins as “contemptuous—‘such abominations!’”

Two other useful points are taught in these verses. First, God can literally save every type of sinner (compare 1 Tim. 1:15). Second, people can forsake any sin. Contrary to some modern theories (one of which is homosexuals are born with a desire for same sex relations and this desire cannot be changed), people can abandon this way of life and any other sin. Many men and women who became involved in same sex relationships have left that lifestyle just as some of the Corinthians left it. It may be difficult (leaving behind any sin will be hard), but lives were changed in the first century and are still being changed today.

The verbs in verse 11 are in the past tense (this is reflected in the ASV but not the KJV). The KJV uses the *perfect tense* (“are washed; are sanctified; are justified”). The ASV rightly translates the thought as past: “were washed; were sanctified; were justified.” All these actions had happened to the Corinthians in the past (i.e. at the time of conversion).

**Washed** (*apolouo*) is a verb, and it is used only used here and Acts 22:16. “The Greeks used it to describe a ritual washing of an idol” (CBL, GED, 1:386). Here it means “to wash thoroughly” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 402). *Washed* “points to the complete washing away” of sin (ibid, 402-403). Gingrich and Danker (p. 96) said the word’s use in Acts 22:16 means “wash away one’s sins.” The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament offer a similar comment about Acts 22:16: “wash away your sins’ (through baptism).” Thayer’s definition (p. 65) for 1 Cor. 6:11 is also insightful: “the sinner is unclean, polluted as it were by the filth of the flesh of his sins. Whoever obtains remission of sins has his sins put, so to speak, out of God’s sight,—is cleansed from them in the sight of God. Remission is [represented as] obtained by undergoing baptism; hence those who have gone into the baptismal bath.” The Corinthians were *washed* when they were baptized (at least some of their baptisms are referred to in Acts 18:8). Paul had this same experience (the Corinthians were converted in the same way). It had to be the same for him and the Corinthians because Jude described salvation as “common” (Jude 3).

It is not accidental that the apostle put *washed* before *justification* and *sanctification* because baptism *precedes* (comes before) salvation. Jesus also affirmed this in Mk. 16:16: He that **believes and is baptized shall be saved**. By using the word *washed* Paul shows the effect (consequence) of baptism. Since *washing* is an effect (consequence of baptism), one is inclined to suspect that it may be associated with other things in the New Testament. This is indeed what we find and this information is easily illustrated in chart form.

Bible text	Reference to baptism	The effect of baptism
Mt. 28:19	“Be baptized”	Brought “into the name” of the Godhead
Mk. 16:16	“Is baptized”	“Shall be saved”
Jn. 3:5	“Born of water”	“Enter the kingdom of God”
Acts 2:38	“Be baptized”	“Forgiveness of sins and gift of Holy Spirit”
Acts 2:41	“Were baptized”	“Christ added to the church” (verse 47, KJV)
Acts 8:38-39	“He baptized him”	“Went away rejoicing”
Acts 16:14-15	“She was baptized”	Showed hospitality
Acts 16:33-34	“Was baptized”	“Rejoiced greatly”
Acts 22:16	“Be baptized”	“Wash away sins”
Rom. 6:3	“Were baptized”	Came “into Christ” and “shared in His death”
Rom. 6:4a	“Through baptism”	“Buried with Christ”
Rom. 6:4b	“Through baptism”	“Newness of life”
1 Cor. 1:13	“Baptized into”	“The name of a person”
1 Cor. 12:13	“Baptized”	“Into one body”
Gal. 3:27	“Baptized”	“Into Christ”
Eph. 5:26	“Washing of water”	“Cleansed”
Col. 2:12	“In baptism”	“Buried with Him”
Heb. 10:22	“Pure water”	The “body is washed”
1 Pet. 3:21	“Baptism”	“Now saves us”

When Paul described the first part of the Corinthian’s experience (they were *washed*) he used the *middle* voice. The middle voice means both God and the Corinthians had a part in the salvation process. If Paul had used the *passive* voice, he would have meant only one party (God) was involved in saving the Corinthians. The middle voice shows that both God and the Corinthians did something. This is consistent with Rom. 1:5 and Jas. 2:26 (a person’s faith before and after conversion must be active. No one is saved by a dead or inactive faith. Faith alone—Jas. 2:24—does not save). The middle voice also reveals how the Corinthians *accepted the washing* (i.e. they wanted to be baptized and they allowed it to occur). Those who became Christians at Corinth were not immersed against their will or somehow forced into converting. Their experience was similar to the one described in Acts 8:36. By using the middle voice of *washed*, Paul left us with a powerful argument against the erroneous practice of “infant baptism.” Since infants cannot willingly participate in the decision making process, they are not suitable candidates for baptism.

The Corinthians were first baptized (*washed*) and then received “*sanctification*” (notice that sanctification came *after* the baptism). **Sanctification** (*hagiazō*) meant “*set apart*.” Because Paul described the *washing* and the *sanctification* with the aorist tense (a tense that describes action at a specific point in time), these acts occurred at a definite time in the past. These two actions occurred the moment they were saved. Sanctification is rightly pictured as a “one time event” because when people become Christians they enter into Christ and have all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3).

Paul used the *middle* voice to describe the *washing*, but described the Corinthians' *sanctification* with the *passive* voice (this means they did *not* participate in their sanctification). God alone *set them apart* when they obeyed Jesus (Heb. 5:9). Sanctification comes after men and women comply with His conditions for salvation. This word may be viewed negatively (it is the cleansing and purifying from sin) as well as positively (it is the growth in righteous attitudes and behavior). Sanctification allows us to have peace with God (Rom. 5:1).

The other act mentioned in verse 11 is being "**justified**" (*dikaioo*). *Justified* is a verb and it is in the *passive* voice (i.e. God alone justified the Corinthians). The book of Romans reveals how this term usually means "*to declare someone righteous or just*" (this is the meaning of the word in this passage). We are "justified 'by his grace' (Rom. 3:24), 'by his blood' (Rom. 5:9), 'in the name of the Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 6:11), and 'in Christ' (Gal. 2:17), which are all ways of saying that it is the saving work of Jesus that brings about the justification of sinners" (Baker's Theological Dictionary of the Bible, p. 443). Like the *washing* and *sanctification*, *justified* is in the aorist tense (i.e. a specific act that occurred at a specific time—the moment of salvation). Justified can be understood as *JUST AS IF I'D never sinned*.

At the very end of verse 11 Paul claimed the "*Spirit*" of God is involved in the justification process. The Holy Spirit is a member of the Godhead; He was responsible for revealing the gospel to the apostles and preserving that word through the centuries (Eph. 6:17). His work in converting people is described in several passages. As the following chart shows, a person cannot become a Christian without the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's work is not supernatural; He converts people through His word (Eph. 5:25-26). James said, "*Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls*" (we are saved "by the word"). Peter said, "*having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which liveth and abideth.*"

Passage	The Spirit's work through the word	Our cleansing	The blessing
John 3:5	Born of the Spirit	Born of water	Kingdom of God
1 Cor. 6:11	In the Spirit	Washed	Justified
1 Cor. 12:13	One Spirit	Baptized	Into one body
Eph. 5:25-26	With the word	Washing of water	Cleansed and sanctified
Tit. 3:5	Renewing of Spirit	Washing of regeneration	He saved us
Heb. 10:22	Hearts sprinkled	Body washed	Evil conscience gone
1 Pet. 3:21	Good conscience toward God	Baptism	We are saved
Acts 2:37, 38, 41	Heard the word	Be baptized	Added to church

When Paul described God, He referred to "our" God. This is an "emphatic distinction from the gods in whose service the Corinthians had been defiled" (Expositor's Greek Testament, 2:818).

In addition to the Father and Holy Spirit being involved in our redemption, Jesus is also involved (the ASV says "Jesus Christ" and the KJV says "Jesus" because of a manuscript variation). In verse 11 we find all three members of the Godhead mentioned, and all three members having a part in man's salvation



(it is especially interesting to compare this to Mt. 28:19). Jesus' part is expressed as: "*in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.*" It is in the name of Jesus that people find salvation (Acts 4:12). It is only after someone believes in the name of Jesus that he or she has the "right" to become a child of God (Jn.1:12). It is only through the name of Christ that people can have the forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43; 1 Jn. 2:12). "The whole content of the saving truth revealed in Jesus is comprised in his name (Acts 4:12; 1 Cor. 6:11)" (Brown, 2:654). After becoming Christians people are to "do all in Jesus name" (i.e. use His authority, Col. 3:17) and "give thanks" in Jesus' name (Eph. 5:20).

About midway through this book (chapters 8-10) there is information about individual liberties (freedoms) and matters of personal judgment. Paul provides a small introduction to this subject in verse 12, and this accomplished two things. First, it opened up the subject for discussion at a later time. Second, the subject of freedom is related to some of the previous material. Some of the Corinthian Christians were guilty of sexual sin. Members engaged in fornication (various types of sexual wrongdoing) and some of the Christians said the sexual escapades were *morally neutral!* That is, sexual activity fell into the area of liberty and personal judgment; people could "do what they wanted."

Although some were under the impression Christians could decide what was sexually right and wrong for them and God would not mind their choice, Paul let them know this viewpoint was wrong. In verses 9-11 he plainly said that sexual sin will keep people from the kingdom of God. He was trying to tell his brethren that although they thought they were free, "their actions had brought them under the power of sin" (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 323). Beginning in verse 12 we are introduced to one of the arguments made by the Corinthians. These Christians proposed that *all things are lawful* (*lawful* in verse 12 is a present tense verb). If anyone asked them about a matter of morality (and this certainly included their sexual practices) their response was "All things are lawful." Saying this was a type of "shield for many questionable and even wrong actions" (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 254). Perhaps this error was based on a misunderstanding of information found in Rom. 14:14. In verse 12 Paul states the Corinthians' *all things are lawful* argument two times and offers two reasons why it is untrue. Believing there are no rules usually leads to untold chaos and confusion.

**6:12:** *All things are lawful for me; but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful for me; but I will not be brought under the power of any.*

As noted in the commentary on verse 11, Paul was responding to the Corinthians' belief that *all things are lawful* (a Christian is allowed to do whatever he or she wants). *Lawful* (*exestin*) is a present tense verb and it is used twice in this verse. Brown's definition of the word (2:611) is especially good: "He is free to do anything." This is what the Corinthians believed, and their argument went something like this:

- All things are lawful (the major premise of their argument).
- Sexual pleasure is a thing (this premise is taken from the context).
- Therefore, since all things are lawful (we are free to do whatever we want), and all sexual activity is a thing, we may engage in whatever sexual practices we choose. God has no boundaries or restraints on sexuality or anything else.

The minor premise could have been modified as needed. Instead of arguing that “sex is a thing,” the Corinthians could have said, “lawsuits are a thing,” “cliques are a thing,” “church division is a thing,” etc. Paul understood the faulty logic and attacked the major premise. First, he offered a rebuttal based on verses 9-11—some activities are sinful, and sinful deeds are to be avoided (they are unlawful). He then proceeded to make a point about “*expediency*” (he said, “*not all things are expedient*”). Notice how in responding to the Corinthians’ argument he expressed a strong contrast (“*but*”).

*Expedient* (*sumphero*) described “the ultimate good and not necessarily the good of the present situation” (CBL, GED, 6:167). Gingrich and Danker (p. 780) defined it as “*help, confer a benefit, be advantageous or profitable or useful.*” To “*be useful, advantageous*” are the definitions in the Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (3:289). This is the word Jesus used in Mt. 5:29-30. It is also found in Mt. 18:6; 19:10; Heb. 12:10, etc. Paul’s argument is an example of an ellipsis (a statement where some information is omitted). The full but unexpressed thought is something like this: “*You think Christians may do whatever they want. Let’s say you are right and there are no rules or laws for Christians. Even in cases such as this, not all things are expedient.*” Later in this book (10:23-24) Paul again used this argument, only in this second case he applied it to the Corinthian’s “neighbors.”

If it were true that a Christian is entitled to do anything he or she wants, such an approach to life would be unwise (even the world recognizes that activities may be permitted but being involved them is ill-advised). Such is certainly true concerning sexual behavior. Neither fornication nor adultery is *expedient*. Sexual diseases are rampant and sexual activity outside of marriage ruins relationships. Many who engage in fornication face great guilt, even if the acts were committed prior to marriage. Sexual sin results in children being born outside of wedlock and leaves many unprepared for the responsibilities of parenthood.

Paul’s *expedient argument* temporarily overlooked God’s will about sexuality and the fact that some things are sinful. His sole point was that even if we can do whatever we want, not everything in life is helpful, advantageous, useful, or profitable. His argument is true in every way, and we can make this same argument today about many things. Too, numerous Bible questions can be quickly and easily addressed on the basis of *expediency* (i.e. we simply need to ask if a practice is sensible, wise, and prudent). Even if everything in life were permissible, there are things we should avoid because of expediency. Some things may cost more than we need to spend, may take more time than we should permit, may hinder our spiritual life and development, damage our Christian influence, etc.

I once knew of a situation where Christians had a strong disagreement over tattoos. Are they right or wrong? What about body piercings, another common practice when this commentary was being authored. Such things might be *lawful*, but are they *expedient*? I once spoke with a young man who choose to have several tattoos. He told me that some restaurants would not hire him because of his “body art.” If a practice interferes with our ability to get a job, is it expedient? Many examples can be given, including some that involve life and death. For another illustration let’s say the world proposes ending all human life at age 40. It is argued that limiting life to 40 years reduces health care costs and the need to care for people in their later years. If such a practice were lawful, would it be expedient? The answer is “no.” While people over the age of 40 may have some health issues (and may need long term care later in life), people over 40 can make substantial contributions to society.

From now until the end of time the world will surely continue to see a plethora of technological advancements. Inventions and technology often create many new questions for ethicists and certainly Christians. Questions have been raised about cloning. There have been discussions about creating human beings that would provide “spare parts” (replacement organs) for those who need them. It has been asked

if we could clone soldiers so our loved ones will never again be lost in a war. How can Christians response to these and similar questions? We could search the Bible to find specific answers to these and similar questions. Or, we could provide an answer based upon 1 Cor. 6:12: Is the practice in question *expedient*? Is it a wise and sensible thing to do?

The expediency argument may be related to other matters as well. Some ask about serving wine instead of grape juice during Communion. Is this a sin? Rather than have a heated discussion in a Bible class (which has occurred in some congregations), this question can be dealt with by *expediency*. We can ask, “Is it wise or good to serve wine during the Communion?” In many congregations there are former alcoholics sitting in the pews during worship. Is it wise to give these brethren even a whiff of a substance that used to control them?

There are expositors who believe it was the Corinthians who said, “*Not all things are expedient*,” but this explanation makes little sense of the text. This interpretation also fails to account for the information in 12b. In 12b Paul again attacked the “*all things are lawful*” argument, only he did it from a different perspective. He said, “*I will not be brought under the power of any.*” *Brought under the power of any* comes from a single word (*exousiazō*). This term is found only four times in the New Testament (here, Lk. 22:25, and twice in 1 Cor. 7:4). It meant Paul would not allow his life to be controlled by anything but God’s will and Scripture. Gingrich and Danker (p. 279) said it means Paul would “*not be mastered by anything.*” Even if all things are permitted, being controlled by a force or power other than God’s will and word is wrong. Paul refused to let any source besides God have a controlling force in his life and the Corinthians needed to follow his example. Throughout history we see how many have been controlled by sin. Alcohol, smoking, pornography, illegal (or legal) drugs, sex, food, lying, recreation, laziness, and material wealth have enslaved untold thousands. When a person is mastered by something other than Christ, his life is reduced to an animal like existence—as animals are driven by fleshly desires, such is also true of man. If a person is a slave to anyone or anything but Christ, he needs to repent. Someone may feel like he is truly free while engaging in various sinful habits, but the Bible affirms such a person is a slave to sin. If a Christian is a slave to Jesus, then “all things” are *not* lawful. When faced with an addictive behavior or sin, each Christians must seek to master (overcome) it because a saved person has been “made free from sin” and is a “servant of righteousness” (Rom. 6:18).

**6:13-14:** *Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall bring to nought both it and them. But the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body: 14 and God both raised the Lord, and will raise up us through his power.*

The information in verse 13 further challenged and defeated the Corinthians’ twisted logic. These Christians had still another argument to supposedly justify sin. Paul was aware of this argument (“*meats for the belly, and the belly for meats*”), and he refuted it in 13b. “*Meats*” (*broma*) is the general word for food. Although this additional argument deals with food, it is still related to sexual sin. The Corinthians must have been thinking:

- Food is for the body.
- The body is for food.
- Sex is for the body.
- The body is for sex.
- Since all food is allowed, all forms of sexual activity are allowed.

The Corinthians apparently believed that if one set of organs (the digestive ones) allowed them to have liberty, why did liberty end there? If food is morally neutral and there are no restrictions, how could God restrict sexual activity? The Corinthians refused to acknowledge any difference between food and sex,

and this led them to regard fornication as a harmless activity (“*all things are lawful*,” 12a). Paul responded to this error with two more quick points. He affirmed that the body is going to be destroyed (13b). He also said fornication is *not* a morally neutral act (13c). The body is *for God* instead of *for sex*. The body engages in activities such as eating and sex, but these activities are not why we exist. We have been created *for God* (Rom. 7:4; 12:1; 14:7-8), and there are some guidelines from God as to how our bodily organs are to be used. We may eat all types of food, but God has placed limits upon the sexual organs of men and women (Heb. 13:4). “The Lord Jesus and sensual appetites both attempt to dominate the personality. When their claims are in conflict, to accept one is to reject the other. Christ is to be the Lord over the total being. Though it is sometimes hard to realize, the lordship of Christ is meant for—and best for—the body” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:367).

The 13<sup>th</sup> verse closes with some details about the end of time (more information about the end of the world is available in the commentary on 1 Cor. 15:44, 50, 51). When the end of time comes, the human body will undergo significant changes (1 Cor. 15:44-51). During this time God will *destroy* both “*it*” (the belly) and “*them*” (the *meats, food*). After the resurrection, food will no longer exist. Our digestive system will no longer operate. “The organs of digestion will be changed at the resurrection and the physical constitution of the resurrected body will be different from that of the mortal body” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 403).

The word translated *destroy* (*katargeo*) is the same term that is used in 1:28; 2:6; 13:8, 10, 11; 15:24, 26. Rather than mean “annihilate,” the term seems to have the sense of “render powerless.” Here the Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (2:267) said God will “*reduce* food and drink *to nothing*.” It is the “cessation of function.” It is the *belly* that is made inoperable (no longer be used), not the *body*. Some activities will not occur in heaven, and this includes eating. One might wonder how this information corresponds with Mt. 26:29 (Jesus promised to “drink the cup with the apostles in the kingdom”). Rather than describe a future time in heaven, Jesus referred to having the Lord’s Supper in the church (earthly worship). We should not expect to “eat” in heaven because eating is an earthly activity. People should also not expect to “date” and “get married” in heaven (Mt. 22:30) as these also are earthly actions. It is true that Jesus ate food with His disciples after the resurrection (Lk. 24:42-43), but this was not because He needed it. This was a special case. Jesus ate to calm the disciples (Lk. 24:37-41).

The information in verse 14 shows that even though food and our digestive systems will be deactivated, our bodies will continue to exist in eternity. In the resurrection we will be “*raised*” by God’s “*power*” and our bodies will undergo significant changes (1 Cor. 15:50-52), one of which is no longer needing food for survival. Willis (p. 165) suggests the words “*will raise up by his own power*” indicate Paul knew he would be dead before the return of Jesus. This suggestion is interesting, but it must be rejected because of 1 Thess. 4:15. A better point to consider is found in The Church’s Bible (p. 98): “Do not be contemptuous of the Master as if he were a dead man.” Jesus has been raised and we must obey Him. Because of a future resurrection by a holy God, God’s people are to live holy lives. This means avoiding sins such as fornication.

**6:15:** *Know ye not that your bodies are members of Christ? shall I then take away the members of Christ, and make them members of a harlot? God forbid.*

Anyone who is even remotely familiar with the world knows about sexual immorality. Married people are unfaithful to their spouses, and single people are often sexually involved with those they know. Christians should not be surprised to find non-Christians involved with sexual activities forbidden by God. They should not, however, expect to find sexual activity on the part of God’s people outside the bounds of marriage. God’s people are called to a divine standard of sexual purity (be sure to read 1 Thess. 4:2-7). Thus, this verse reveals part of Paul’s shock about how the Corinthians viewed sexual behavior. At least some of the Corinthians were “sexually loose” (immoral). While it may be tempting to think the Corinthians did not know God’s will, Paul worded his question with a perfect tense verb. In other words, he was asking if the Corinthians had not been taught this in the past and if they were not still recalling it as they read this letter. We know they had been taught about this matter because of verses 9-11 (“and such

were some of you”).

Paul used verses 15-19 to remind the Corinthians of God’s will. These Christians were presented with the same basic information found in Rom. 6:5 (when a person is converted, he or she is “*united with Christ*”). The Corinthians’ *unity* (bond) with the Lord is described in the first part of 1 Cor. 6:15, and it is in the form of a question: know ye not *that your bodies are members of Christ*? In other words, Christians are *members of Jesus Christ* (notice that “are” is a present tense verb). Because Christians have been joined to Christ, they are to habitually think as Jesus thought, act as the Lord acted, teach as He taught, and live as He lived. Would Jesus have sexual intercourse with a prostitute? Would He be involved with a “one-night stand”? Would the Savior patronize a brothel? Many similar questions could be asked, and the answer to each one would be “*God forbid*” (15b). *God forbid* is used in other passages such as Rom. 3:4, 6, 31; 6:15; 7:7; Gal. 3:21. It could be translated *may such a thing never occur, away with the thought* (Wuest, 1:92). “This extremely strong denial is a rhetorical device (always used after a question) popular with Paul” (CBL, GED, 1:620). Since the Corinthians had pledged themselves to follow Jesus, they were to live in accordance with Jesus’ earthly example and word. “Paul’s words make it clear that believers are not merely spiritually joined with Christ. Believers are so intimately joined to Christ on every level of their being that even their physical bodies are united to him, being parts of His body on earth” (Holman, 7:100).

There are cases where people join themselves to the Lord (i.e. become Christians) and apostatize (Heb. 10:25). It is certainly possible for a Christian to unattach himself or herself from Jesus and return to the world (2 Pet. 2:20) or to turn from Christianity and join some other type of religion (the Hebrew letter describes Christians who were tempted to return to the religion of Judaism). Christians at Corinth were being tempted to have sexual relationships with (join themselves to) a “*harlot*” (some translations say “*prostitute*”). These sexual acts were outside of marriage (Heb. 13:4) and were an act of apostasy. The Expositor’s Greek Testament (2:820) states, “To devote the body to a harlot, one must first withdraw it from Christ’s possession: to do *that*, and *for such a purpose*—the bare statement shows the infamy of the proposal.” For the Christian, fornication is “high treason” (ibid, 2:821). As one theft makes a person a thief and one murder makes a person a murderer, so the sexual sin discussed by Paul makes a person a fornicator or an adulterer. Fornicators and adulterers cannot be joined to the Lord.

*Harlot* (prostitute) comes from *porne*, a word “used from the time of Aristotle onward. It denotes a woman for sale, especially in reference to slaves bought for the purpose of harlotry. In the New Testament the word is used both literally of people involved in prostitution (Matthew 21:31f.; Luke 15:30; 1 Corinthians 6:15f.; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25) and figuratively of any hostile opponent to God and His people (Revelation 17:1, 5, 15, 16; 19:2). In New Testament Jewish society the prostitutes, together with the tax collectors, ranked as the lowest class of people with regard to morals” (CBL, GED, 5:265). In this passage Gingrich and Danker (p. 693) defined *harlot* as: “*have to do with a prostitute.*”

In this verse we find Paul affirming that a Christian can be severed from Jesus. Stated another way, a Christian can fall from grace and lose his or her salvation. Sexual sin is one means to “fall from grace,” and it has caused many to fall far and hard. If a Christian engages in sexual sin (or any other sin) and refuses to repent (Acts 8:18-24), he is on the “wide road leading to destruction (Mt. 7:13). As baptism weds us to Christ (Rom. 6:3-5), sexual sin forms a bond between those who commit it (verse 16). Only repentance and the blood of Christ can break the bonds created by sexual sin.

One cannot help but contrast what Paul wrote with the common attitudes in the world regarding sexual behavior. It has often been claimed that unmarried couples simply “live together” and in these “live in relationships” no true or lasting bonds are formed. We are told sexual relationships outside of marriage are merely a “brief affair” or a “one night stand.” Secular thinking portrays sexual activity as a regular part of “committed relationships” or even “casual relationships.” A lot of people view sexual sin as a harmless activity. A person’s sexual choices are considered “individual” and people—sometimes very young children—are told they need to do “what they think best.” Certainly schools must see little wrong with it, since at the time this material was being authored, schools offered underage students birth control advice and supplies. Sexual sin has been sanctioned in so many ways prostitution has sometimes been called a “victimless crime” (act). People rejoice over “moving in with someone” (in the past people

rejoiced at the prospect of marriage).

Paul described the statements and actions in the preceding paragraph as wrong. He affirmed that sexual activity actually forms a bond between willing participants. A man might see a prostitute as a “lump of flesh” to be used at will and have no respect for her as a person. God says sexual activity with a harlot creates a *one flesh union* (verse 16). In the ancient world pagan religion taught that ritual intercourse was a way to “get close to the gods.” The gospel of Christ had a very different message: such activity *separates people from the one true God*.

A final point comes from the word translated *members* (*melos*). This term is used extensively in this letter. Readers may wish to study all the places this term is found in the New Testament: Mt. 5:29, 30; Rom. 6:13, 19; 7:5, 23; 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 6:15; 12:12, 14, 18, 19, 20, 22, 25, 26, 27 (many of these verses use the word more than once); Eph. 4:25; 5:30; Col. 3:5; Jas. 3:5, 6; 4:1.

**6:16-17:** *Or know ye not that he that is joined to a harlot is one body? for, The twain, saith he, shall become one flesh. 17 But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.*

The question asked in verse 16 is like the question in verse 15 (it is worded with a perfect tense verb). That is, had the Corinthians not been taught about sexual immorality in the past? Did they not remember what God’s will was and is concerning human sexuality? Paul’s question implied they did know but were failing to obey the will of God. Another key point is the word “*joined*” (*kollao*), a word describing things that were glued together. *Joined* may be defined as “to attach oneself closely to” (this same term occurs in verse 17). In Matt. 19:5 *joined* (the same word) is used to describe marriage. This term is also used in Lk. 10:11 to describe dust clinging to feet. When this word is studied in conjunction with Mt. 19:5, there is no question that sexual activity creates a type of merger or blending between those engaging in sexual relations. Sexual activity is so intimate and personal it creates a kind of oneness. Of all the sins mentioned in the Bible, only sexual sin is portrayed as an act that unites people together.

At the end of verse 16 Paul refers to the Old Testament (Gen. 2:24). He explained the “*one flesh*” relationship described in Genesis 2 (i.e. the “one flesh” involves the sexual joining between a man and a woman). God’s plan is for this fleshly union to occur in marriage (Heb. 13:4). If it occurs outside of marriage, *and both parties consent to the act*, there is a joining. I emphasize *consent* because there can be sexual acts where a person is forced to do something (Deut. 22:28-29). In these cases the person who did not consent is a *victim*, not a participant. Rather than being *joined* to an attacker, a person forced to engage in sexual activity is *violated*. What is described in these verses is *people consenting to sexual sin*. Paul describes people who are willing participants (there is eagerness, anticipation and desire).

Although all sexual activity on the part of consenting people results in a “one flesh” relationship, that one flesh relationship does not mean all who involve themselves in sexual sin are married. If two women become sexually involved with each other, they become “one flesh,” but this act does not mean they are married. Paul’s point is well described in the CBL commentary on First Corinthians (p. 325): “A man ‘joined to a harlot’ descends to her filthiness. A man ‘joined unto the Lord’ becomes one ‘spirit’ and ascends to heavenly places.” On this issue Paul does not debate; “He issues a pronouncement. Whether they believe it or not, accept it or not, know it or not—it is so” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:368).

In verse 17 Paul introduced a new word and it serves as a contrast. Whereas verse 16 deals with sin and the “*flesh*,” here the subject changes to “*spirit*.” Just as sexual activity forms a bond between people, so there can be a *spiritual* union that joins people to the Lord (see the discussion of *joined* above). Just as someone can be closely and intimately joined to a spouse, Christians are to be closely joined to God. It is as if Christians are *married to Jesus*. We are joined to Jesus by becoming Christians and living faithful lives.

Paul used several present tense verbs in verses 16-17. These verbs portray people as regularly engaging in actions that continue to bind them to sin, or continue to demonstrate their union to Jesus. Our spiritual union, if we are faithful to the Lord, will last throughout our lives and into eternity. “If a believer dishonors his vows to Christ, then he has committed not only physical fornication, but also spiritual adultery and/or bigamy” (Gromacki, p. 83). Too, because Christians are joined to Jesus, their *fleshly*

*joining* (sexual activity and marital relationships) must be in accordance with God's laws (Mt. 19:4-10). The remaining verses in this chapter continue to deal with sexual purity.

**6:18:** *Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.*

The word “*flee*” (*pheugo*) is a present tense verb (i.e. it describes habitual or on-going action—keep on fleeing). *Flee* had both a literal and figurative meaning. Literally the word meant “*flee, seek safety in flight*” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 855). In a moral and figurative sense (the meaning here), it meant, “*flee from, avoid, shun*” (ibid). For some of the other places where this same term is used, see Mt. 2:13; Acts 27:30; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22; Jas. 4:7. In addition to using this vivid word, Paul also used a definite article in the Greek text (*the* fornication). Bengel (2:197) described the idea as “Severity with disgust” and “danger is near” (ibid). “The command suggests the danger of thinking, reasoning, or arguing about it” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:369). Readers may wish to compare this command to a story involving Joseph in Gen. 39:6f. The information in Gen. 39, plus the material in 1 Cor. 6:18, tells us some sins are best met by resistance and fighting (see Jas. 3:8) while others such as fornication are best dealt with by fleeing.

Paul provided some excellent instructions, but many in the world and in the church fail to heed what he wrote. Instead of *fleeing* from fornication, many creep or run towards it. Perhaps people think, “We will not get too close. We will not get personally or intimately involved with it; we will stay on the edge and be safe.” Paul said we are to flee. This is an important command to keep and remember, because we live in a society filled with suggestive remarks, sexually explicit materials (pornography), and a carefree attitude towards sex. All these forces encourage people to get closer and closer to sexual sin. Sexual sin is rampant among the unsaved, but we also find cases—far too many cases—of it in the church. We encounter instances where Christian girls become pregnant, “move in with someone,” or are involved with casual sex. Proverbs 7:6-27 shows that sexual sin is a powerful force and great care must be taken to avoid it. Compare, too, 2 Tim. 2:22.

*Fornication* is used twice in this book. In 18a it is used as a noun (*porneia*). This noun is also found in other passages such as Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3; etc. In 18b, *fornication* occurs a second time and it is a verb (*porneuo*). In its verb form, *fornication* occurs very infrequently in the New Testament (in addition to here, see 1 Cor. 10:8; Rev. 2:14, 20; 17:2; 18:3, 9). The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (3:139) defined the verb form of fornication as “practice sexual immorality.” Gingrich and Danker (p. 693) said, “*to prostitute, practice prostitution or sexual immorality.*” Here the verb is in the present tense; the word *sins* in 18b is also in the present tense.

During the first century fornication was practiced in pagan temples. One famous temple was located in Corinth. This temple was dedicated to Aphrodite, the “goddess of love.” Aphrodite’s temple was located on the highest point in the city and it was a place of religious prostitution (worship included sexual intercourse—it was “sacred prostitution”). “Corinth had a sordid history. Strabo claimed the city had one thousand temple prostitutes servicing the temple of Aphrodite on the Acrocorinth. Archaeologists have discovered many clay models of human genitalia offered to Asclepius, the god of healing, presumably to petition him to heal venereal disease” (Holman, 7:13). In view of this information we can only say people at Corinth condoned and encouraged sexual immorality. It was as if much or all the city was a “red light district.”

False religions used sex as a means of consecration and dedication. “In the temple of Aphrodite prostitutes were priestesses, and commerce with them was counted a *consecration*” (Expositor’s Greek Testament, 2:821). Paul said this kind of behavior was the “absolute *desecration* of God’s true temple in the man himself” (ibid). We cannot condone the laxness of the Corinthians, but we can appreciate the temptations they endured because they lived in such a wicked society (compare 2 Pet. 2:7-8). Paul reminded these brethren that their bodies are God’s temple (verse 19), so this sin must be avoided.

One might be tempted to think it would be hard or nearly impossible to find anything similar to this in the modern world, and especially in America. Such is not the case. David Berg (1919-1994) was involved

with a religion that was called “Christian.” His group was known by a variety of names, including “Christian and Missionary Alliance,” then “Revolution for Jesus,” and finally “Family of Love” and “Family International.” In the 1970s Berg’s group began a practice called “flirty fishing” (FFing). Members are said to have offered sexual intercourse to “win converts” (evangelize). Sex was also allegedly used to gain friends and influence people. Members of Berg’s group were essentially labeled as “prostitutes for God.” Of course, many women became pregnant from this *evangelism* and the children were called “Jesus babies.” In 1987 the FFing practice was discontinued due to the threat of AIDS.

The remainder of verse 18 (fornication is a sin against a person’s own body) is explained in a variety of ways. It seems best to regard sexual sin as a special type of wrong. Paul said, “every sin but one is committed outside the body.” There is one sin and one sin only where a person “sins against his own body.” This is sexual sin. Sexual sin affects a person in ways that no other sin can. It is so deep, personal and intimate, that it is in a special category. Sexual sin is often a sin against the sinner’s home. It is a sin against a person’s very soul (Prov. 6:32-33). It is a sin that saturates every part of a person’s being (2 Pet. 2:14). The Church’s Bible (p. 101) said, “Only the sexual act makes the soul mingle with the body, fastening the one to the other with a kind of glue.” I also like the comments in the Beacon Bible Commentary (8:369): “Other sins, such as murder or theft, are projections or misuses of the powers of the body. But fornication involves the body as the very center, the motive as well as the seat of sin. All sin is a destructive force, and fornication is no exception. It cripples the entire personality, defies God, degrades others, and corrupts oneself.” Married people who commit this sin insult their spouse, as well as the institution of marriage.

Back in verse 16 Paul affirmed that illicit sexual activity joins willing partners together. It is, therefore, no wonder why Jesus said only fornication allows a man to divorce his spouse and marry someone else (Mt. 19:9). If sexual sin is the only basis for divorce and remarriage, it is one more reason to place it into a special category. Spousal abuse is wrong and can be the basis for leaving a marriage (1 Cor. 7:11), but only sexual sin is the basis for a second marriage after divorce (Mt. 19:1-9). Sexual sin is also distinctive in that it creates unique mental and physical pain. Most who have been involved in adultery quickly affirm “it was not worth it.” Even the unmarried often express regrets—statements like, “I wish I would have waited.” Because so many problems result from this sin, Paul forcefully warned the Corinthians against it. All preachers and teachers must do the same. Warren Wiersbe (First Corinthians, p. 589) added, “There may be excitement and enjoyment in sexual experience outside of marriage, *but there is not enrichment*. Sex outside of marriage is like a man robbing a bank: he gets something, but it is not his and he will one day pay for it. Sex within marriage can be like a person putting money into a bank: there is safety, security, and he will collect dividends. Sex within marriage can build a relationship that brings joys in the future; but sex apart from marriage has a way of weakening future relationships, as every Christian marriage counselor will tell you.” Wiersbe also said (same page) “The harvest of sowing to the flesh is sometimes delayed, but it is certain (Gal. 6:7-8).”

Many small things can help Christians avoid fornication. We must seek to understand our weak points (1 Cor. 10:12) and then respond appropriately. Tips to stay away from sexual sin include keeping reminders of our marriage commitment (pictures of our spouse, children) plus wearing a wedding ring. Married people can and must avoid flirting with others (this includes joking, lingering touches and staring). A related matter is friendship with the opposite sex (treat these with extreme care). Be wary of having people confide in you about marriage problems (many affairs have started from this single act). If going away from home by yourself, be wary of and guard against sexual temptations that might result from your different surroundings.

**6:19:** *Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have from God? and ye are not your own;*

As in some of the preceding verses, Paul asked a question and he used a perfect tense verb. That is, “Have you not known and do you not continue to know this information? Paul was not finished discussing sexual sin, but he did introduce a new illustration—the Holy Spirit. He said the Holy Spirit



dwells in God's people. The Spirit dwells in the saved because Christians (1) have devoted their bodies to the Lord (verse 13), (2) are members of Christ's body (verses 15-17), and (3) share in the one Spirit (verses 15-17). Christians are intimately connected to both Jesus and the Holy Spirit, so it is wrong to be involved with fornication.

How the Holy Spirit dwells in Christians is a matter of disagreement with commentators as well as Christians. Some believe the Spirit's dwelling is figurative. According to this view the Spirit is not literally inside a Christian's body. It has been said that if Christians actually possessed the Spirit they would be deity. Since it is impossible to be God, some believe the Spirit's indwelling is not literal (He dwells in us in the sense that we have His word in our hearts). This explanation is a possibility. A second view understands the passage literally. If the thought is literal, the Holy Spirit is actually "*in us*." He does not speak to us, talk to us, give us special directions, or provide special insight and knowledge. He is, however, present in Christians to serve as a "down payment" (Eph. 1:13-14). As a small amount of money silently but firmly attests to the fact that a person will return for something, so the Spirit's quiet presence affirms that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16-17). This is the view maintained in this commentary and readers may find a fuller discussion of the point in the commentary on Rom. 8:9-11 and Eph. 5:18.

Because the Holy Spirit is said to dwell in the saved, God's people are a "*temple*." In ancient times temples were sacred structures. People cared for, looked after, and respected them. Temples were kept in a state of good repair, and all these points are to be true for our physical bodies. If our body is a temple, it is unfit for the filth of sin (compare 2 Cor. 7:1). Moreover, since a Christian's body is a temple of the Spirit, Christians do not accept the world's argument about a person's body "being their own" and they can "do with it whatever they choose" (this argument is often made when people discuss abortion and euthanasia). God says our bodies are not our own. They belong to Him, and He has placed some restrictions upon what should and should not be done with them. As the CBL (First Corinthians, p. 327) said, "The temple does not draw dignity or purity from itself, but from the God who inhabits it." Paul also used a "temple argument" back in 3:16-17, only there he applied the word to the church. Here *temple* describes individual Christians. "Of course, the believer can be called the temple of God only because Christ himself is the temple and the believer participates in Christ (1 Cor. 3:9-17)" (Baker's Dictionary of Theology, p. 761).

At the end of verse 19 is one more reminder about the need to avoid sexual sin. These Christians were not their own—they were slaves. Jesus had bought them, redeemed them, and they belonged to Him. Since their owner decreed that sexual sin is wrong, fornication had to be avoided. Today this lesson still applies, and it is especially emphatic by considering the present tense in 19b: we *are* (present tense) not our own. Every single minute we live we belong to someone—Jesus. All of life is not worship, but Christians are "under contract" to the Lord every single day. None who has "put his hand to the plow" wants to "look back" (Lk. 9:62). We must be "faithful stewards" (1 Cor. 4:2) and "work while it is day" (Jn. 9:4). We can use our bodies for many things and in many ways. We may pamper it or even idolize it. We can regard it with disgust and shame, use it as a weapon, a tool to make a living, or use it to seek sin. The right choice is explained at the end of this chapter. "*Bought with a price*" describes "a payment which results in a change of the ownership" (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:370).

**6:20:** *for ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body.*

The word translated "*bought*" (*agorazo*) describes things such as the buying of food (Mk. 6:36) and merchandise (Lk. 14:18). In six places (here, 7:23; 2 Pet. 2:1; Rev. 5:9; 14:3, 4) it describes the "purchase" of Christians. Since Paul used the aorist tense (a definite point and time) to describe this *purchase*, he referred to the occasion when the Corinthians were converted. He went back to this occasion to remind them they had been redeemed. Their purchase "reminds us of a custom in Paul's day. A slave could save the price of his freedom, pay it into the temple treasury, and be purchased by the god. He then served that god" (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 327). Because God had *bought* the Corinthians, they had a duty to live as their purchaser said. Their salvation meant they needed to live according to God's will. All Christians need to be taught that there is a lot more to Christianity than owning a Bible and coming to

worship. Our bodies must be used in God's service and we must follow the instructions in the New Testament.

One way we serve our purchaser is "*glorifying*" Him. This term (*doxazo*) is a common New Testament verb, and here it is expressed as a command. Jesus used this word in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:16; 6:2). It may be defined as "ascribe glory to, honor, praise." Jesus healed people and those who saw the miracles "glorified" God (Mt. 9:8; 15:31). Jesus has been "glorified" (Acts 3:13) and all Christians will one day share in this glory (Rom. 8:30). Christians are to "use one mouth to glorify God" (Rom. 15:6). Here Paul affirmed that Christians can and must honor God in their lives. We may even honor God in the way we die (Jn. 21:19).

In the KJV verse 20 has an extra phrase: "*and in your spirit, which are God's.*" This is due to a manuscript variation. If this reading is accepted, it does not change the thought—a Christian is to give himself or herself wholly to the Christian faith. Christians should "search for ways to bring glory to God by using their bodies in the ways God has commanded, and by refraining from using their bodies in ways God has prohibited" (Holman, 7:102). "They are in error, who think that God should be only internally, or only externally worshipped" (Bengel, 2:198).

The material in the next chapter deserves a brief introduction because it is somewhat difficult and because several erroneous conclusions have been drawn from this chapter. Three common but incorrect conclusions are these: (1) Paul hated women and marriage; (2) Paul taught that single people are the best Christians; and (3) Paul was sometimes uninspired when he wrote Scripture.

There is a definite break between the information in chapters 6 and 7. Towards the end of chapter 6, Paul used plain language to condemn sexual activity outside of marriage. This information was necessary for the Corinthian to have and obey, but it did not deal with all their problems. There were also issues with marriage and these difficulties are discussed in chapter 7. Based upon what Paul wrote, it appears some Christian men and women at Corinth were not meeting their spouse's sexual needs and this contributed to the immorality described in chapter six. Much of the material in the seventh chapter is related to 7:26. There was a "*present distress*" at Corinth. That is, there were unusual conditions and events at Corinth that directly relate to what is said in chapter 7. This is a critical fact to consider when studying this material.

Because this chapter closes with information about sexual activity and the next chapter contains related material, it seems appropriate to offer a few thoughts about Christianity and the subject of masturbation. We may begin with one of two conclusions. If Christians are to *flee fornication* (verse 18), and masturbation is fornication, it must be avoided. If masturbation is a legitimate means to flee fornication, then it is permissible in at least some circumstances. This subject, as with some others, is not specifically mentioned by name in the Bible. We can, however, deal with it by using Bible principles and common sense. A definition of masturbation is "self-manipulation of the genitalia." Touching the genitalia is not inherently wrong (these body parts are touched when bathing). Within the bounds of marriage (Heb. 13:4) these body parts will be stimulated. God created these organs partly for pleasure, and under normal circumstances this activity is to occur in marriage (1 Cor. 7:2). In some cases that cannot occur.

As this material was being written the writer was made aware of a woman who had just lost her husband. She became a widow at the approximate age of 40. Does the loss of her husband mean she can find no sexual release until she again marries? The Bible does not teach that. Jesus said lust is wrong (Mt. 5:28). What if this widow chose to stimulate herself while thinking about the times she had with her husband? Would that be sinful? If it is not sinful to think about a mate with the clothes on, can we think about a spouse with the clothes off?

Just a few days after this material was written, I received a call from a Christian—someone who has never been married, but was "burning" with sexual desire (1 Cor. 7:9). The gist of this conversation was: "I am not married, but I feel a need for sexual release. Is masturbation sinful in my case?" The one who asked the question did understand what the Bible teaches about sexual self-control (1 Thess. 4:4-5) and realized lust is wrong. The caller also understood this principle: frequent masturbation will increase a person's appetite for sexual activity (this act can become compulsive). If this happens, a person is being

controlled by it and that is certainly wrong (1 Cor. 6:12b). What the caller really wanted to know if this is an acceptable outlet from time to time.

What really matters (the crucial issue) is not the stimulation of body parts; it is what is in a person's mind (what people think about and see). This is true for single people as well as those who are married. If masturbation is done in conjunction with lust (Mt. 5:28), it is wrong. If it is not, then it falls into the category of personal judgment (see this topic discussed in the commentary on Rom. 14, especially 14:1-2). This writer is aware of Christians who regard masturbation as a sin, some practice it without feeling guilt, and others turn to it once in a while. If lust is not involved, we may use this principle from Rom. 14:5: "Let each man be fully assured in his own mind" about the practice.