

**“And So Were You”**  
**1 Corinthians 6:1-11**  
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**Rev. Dr. Robert S. Rayburn**

**Text Comment**

In the previous chapter, as we saw, Paul commanded the church to pass judgment on the behavior of one of her members. There is no need for Christians to judge those outside the church, he says in 5:12, but there is a responsibility for the church to judge her own. But these Corinthians have everything upside down. Not only are they failing to judge their members who should be judged, they are going outside, to the world, to handle disputes between themselves.

- v.1     Knowing what we know about Roman courts and the practice of law in those days, those who availed themselves of lawsuits were almost certainly upper-class and well-to-do folk in the church. Justice was not blind in the Greco-Roman world, status and money gave great advantage to those who filed suits. What is more, as today, the better one's lawyer, which is to say, the more one paid for a lawyer, the better one's chances to prevail. Trials were often attended by crowds of people there to hear great orators argue a case.

As we read on it will become clear that the particular case Paul has heard of involves one member defrauding another. To redress the grievance, the one Christian took the other to court. As in chapter 5, Paul is not only concerned with the original offense but with the fact that the church has failed to act.

- v.2     As so often in the Bible, and in Paul, the character of the church as a community pointed to the future determines her life in the present. Future realities determine present obligations! As to the saints someday judging the world, while the fact is stated it is not explained here or anywhere else in the NT. But they will someday judge the entire anti-God system as part of the final, the ultimate judgment of unbelieving human beings. If the saints are to have that immense responsibility, surely they can handle the sort of comparatively trivial cases that are brought to trial in this world.

- v.4     There is a question about the correct translation of this verse. The NIV takes it as a statement that amounts to saying that if you have to mediate disputes between Christians, it is better to have the lowliest and most ignorant Christian sit in judgment rather than the wisest unbeliever. But, grammatically, it is more likely that it should be translated, “if you have such disputes, do you appoint as judges those who have no standing in the church?” In this case, in the form of another rhetorical question, the thought of v. 4 repeats the thought of the previous two verses, viz. that it is utterly incongruous for a society that will judge the world to subject itself to the judgment of worldly men.

- v.5     Paul's statement drips with sarcasm. Remember, this is the church that has been boasting about its wisdom!

- v.6 Paul speaks several times in his letters of the importance of not behaving before the world in a way that brings discredit to the gospel and, instead, of making the teaching about Christ attractive to the world by the Christians' way of life.
- v.7 They have been completely defeated, both plaintiff and defendant, both individual disputants and the church, because they have not lived a distinctively Christian life when it mattered, they have not lived in the spirit of Christ, and they have shown worldly people that Christians are no different when it comes to asserting themselves over against other people. This was, of course, the Lord's own teaching and emphasis. Even pagans are nice to those who are nice to them. But, to love an enemy, to do good to someone who has harmed you, that is something else again and that is a display of a distinctly Christian spirit. If v. 7 is specifically a reference to the person who was defrauded, then v. 8 now turns to the one who did the defrauding.
- v.10 Vv. 9-10 probably sum up matters in both chapters 5 and 6. A great error of the Corinthians and of all Christians since was their tendency to divorce religion from morality. They were zealous to maintain religious performances and their profession of faith, but were content to live a life that was very worldly. They wanted to be Christians, but not at the expense of sexual gratification or financial gain or other pleasures; so they professed their faith and lived like pagans.

In this list Paul repeats the six sins listed in 5:10-11 and adds four more. The additional four are three classes of sexual sin (following chapter 5 and anticipating the remainder of chapter 6) and "thieves," obviously relevant to the immediate question in 6:1-11. The two words the NIV renders *male prostitute* and *homosexual offender* are perhaps best taken as the passive and active partners in a homosexual tryst.

- v.11 Once again, as in 5:7, Paul expresses his confidence that these Corinthians really have been renewed in Christ. In Christ they are different; now they have to start living like it! We have also in this verse, once again, the pervasive Trinitarianism of Paul's thought: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together in the salvation of sinners.

Years ago I visited India for a month. I taught a class in a theological seminary that was then located in the city of Roorkee. One thing I remember about my time there was the great unhappiness of the missionaries with the local church, a church that sat right beside the seminary property. The missionaries that were involved with the seminary did their best to keep the seminarians as far from the congregation as they could. The congregation was an embarrassment to the gospel. They were always at one another's throats, always in contention with the missionaries, there were lawsuits being filed right and left, and, understandably, the church had a terrible reputation in the town. Instead of representing Christ's love and selflessness and humility, they were as petty, as greedy, and as implacable as the rest of society, and some would say they were worse!

But, then, I have seen the same thing many times here in the United States. Christians are, alas, sometimes the worst possible recommendation for Christianity and unbelievers can be forgiven for thinking that the gospel of Jesus Christ is a myth or irrelevant precisely because people who

believe it don't live any differently than people who do not. I know that is not the case – Christians can also be the very best recommendation for the gospel of Christ – but it is definitely sometimes the case. And it was the case here.

A Christian man had defrauded another Christian man and the latter had taken the former to court. He was going to get his money back! Being a Christian was all well and good, but he wasn't going to let anybody make a monkey of him! And he certainly wasn't going to let this fellow church member abscond with his hard-earned money if he didn't have to. And the congregation sat by and watched this happen.

Generosity is one thing. There are quite a few people who are generous to some degree – Christians and non-Christians alike. But turning the other cheek is another. There is but one cheek-turner for every thousand folk who give money to some worthy cause. That was the Lord Jesus' point. Pagans give to the United Way and they can be good friends to their friends. You don't have to be a Christian to be kind and friendly. We've all met kind and friendly unbelievers.

But Christ has called us to something more than mere kindness and friendliness. He has called us to a selfless, sacrificial life, lived in imitation of his own, for the sake of eternal truth that the world does not know, does not understand, and is unlikely ever to understand it if it does not see it demonstrated in Christian behavior.

But, what is more, Christians know that there is nothing irrational about such living, nothing foolhardy about it at all. It is entirely rational, sensible, wise. It is exactly the way anyone would live who knew what Christians know and have before them the future that Christ has promised his people.

"Listen," Paul says to these Christian people, "I'm not just saying that you should handle these disputes among yourselves. Obviously that is what you should have done. But, what I'm saying is that your behavior has completely lost touch with reality, with what you know to be true." You are living as if you believed what pagans believe and not what Christians know to be true.

*I. Take, first, he says, the matter of your future rank as judges of this unbelieving world and consider what bearing that has on your behavior.*

Paul's general point is clear enough. In the consummation of the ages, Christians will sit in judgment of the lives of worldly men. In the great day, they will pass judgment over the affairs and the conduct of the world. How unfitting, then, for believers now to behave as if the world were competent to judge them or that they needed the world to make their judgments for them.

That Christians will exercise judgment and authority over the nations at the end of the age is taught in a variety of places and a variety of ways in the Bible. To the church in Thyatira, in Rev. 2:26-27, the Lord says,

"To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give

authority over the nations – ‘he will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery’ – just as I have received authority from my Father.”

We will reign and exercise authority and execute judgment in partnership with the Lord Christ. They will even *judge angels* (no doubt the fallen angels are meant). What this means and how this will happen I am sure I don’t know. But such is the promise of God and these people knew it! So Paul stares in wonder at the impropriety of their behavior. It is exactly like parents who are squabbling and ask their little children to settle the matter for them; or like two judges who disagree and submit their case to some inmates to settle. It is a reversal of roles so inappropriate and so unreasonable that we naturally wonder *what is wrong* with these people!

Obviously we have more right to judge than the world does, for we alone know the true meaning and measure of things. So what in the world are we doing submitting our disputes to the world to judge? What is more, our status and stature as the children of God should be reflected in our public behavior. But these people, Christians though they were, were behaving as if money were as important to them as it was to everyone else; they were behaving as if they made their decisions for the same reasons downright pagans made their decisions. And they were not behaving in a princely way. Princes, who are kings and rulers-to-be, do not live and do not behave like everyone else. They are treated differently, they behave differently, *precisely because one day they will be kings!* Well, so with us.

The future determines the present for us. We have no need to be wound up about money, or get red in the face because someone has cheated us out of some of it. In a few years whatever money we have we leave behind in this world. Only our good works follow us into the world to come! And, in Christ, in that next world, we will be wealthy beyond our wildest dreams. It is just utterly inappropriate for Christians to be grasping after money. For the few years they have to live in this world, they should be grasping instead after opportunities to show their disregard for it and their far greater interest in being like Jesus Christ who forsook seeking after money in order to love God and man.

When we hear that Brother Juniper had his cloak stolen and that St. Francis of Assisi ordered him to run after the thief, but only to beg him to take his gown also, if we are Christians, we recognize the beautiful, clear, bell-like tone of the teaching of Jesus Christ. [Chesterton, *St. Francis*, 120] It is not enough to be an evangelical churchgoer. It isn’t enough to give your money as a tithe faithfully to the church. No, what is wanted is the nobility and grandeur and other-worldly character of the true Christian life. What is wanted is the stunningly rare and unusual sacrifice of what is rightfully yours, *precisely because you are a Christian, precisely because Christ made a great sacrifice for you and you wish to imitate him, precisely because you know that nothing is a more striking adornment of the gospel than just Christians who live in happy unconcern about what worldly people care so much about, and who live that way precisely because they are so sure of the future Christ has promised them that they live every day in the expectation of it.*

Brothers and sisters, surely you feel something within you when you hear Paul chastise these Christians for living like the pagans around them, for coming to the enemies of God with cap in hand! You know, your conscience tells you, that Christ has called you to much more than that,

that your life must be different, obviously, wonderfully different. And nothing will look more different to an unbeliever than a person who loves an enemy, who suffers loss cheerfully if only he or she might give glory to God who is about to lavish on us a status, a rank, an honor, a wealthy that takes the breath away. Even if they don't believe what we say about Jesus Christ and salvation, let us live so that *they know that we believe it*.

John Bunyan said, that Agur's prayer in Prov. 30:7-9: "Give me not riches," is "scarce the prayer of one in ten thousand." Well, if that is the prayer of one in ten thousand, "Lord, let someone defraud me that I might honor you with my cheerful unconcern and love my enemy as Christ loved me when I was his enemy," must be the prayer of one in ten million. Might there not be some here who would pray that prayer?

But there is another way in which these saints lost touch with reality.

*II. If they had forgotten their future glory as the judges of the earth, they had also forgotten about the last judgment and God's published standards for that judgment.*

As can so easily happen, these Corinthians, having learned that in Christ their sins were forgiven, had become self-indulgent and careless of their lives. They were not vigilant to live godly lives. They had come to suppose, even if they had never quite said as much to themselves, that being forgiven and righteous before God, they could live as they pleased by and large and indulge the same passions they had indulged before they became Christians.

Paul's response to that is much the same as before, but now in the negative. You are forgetting the future again. But now it is not your exaltation, your enthronement, your being set above other men in the great day that you are forgetting, but the judgment of the wicked that will take place when Christ comes again.

You are forgetting that multitudes will be banished from the banquet of God *precisely because they behaved in this world* as some of you are now behaving! If you would just exercise your faith and see them being banished, banished for those very same sins, even see their Christian judges banishing them, you would very definitely think twice about committing those same sins!

In other words, Paul is saying, Christians may be profoundly sinful, they may have many, many sins to be forgiven, but once they become Christians there is and must be a very definite break with the past. The sins cannot continue. And even if, in this life, Christians cannot entirely eradicate every last vestige of their sins, or even come close to that, it must be obvious in their behavior that they have and are putting such sinful behavior to death. Notwithstanding a Christian's continuing sinfulness, it remains possible to say that the sexually immoral, adulterers, idolaters, drunkards, and the greedy will not enter the kingdom of God. Real Christians aren't like that. John can put this point still more daringly: "Christians don't sin," he says; not in the way the world does, not in the way many of them used to before they were Christians.

"Fetch the judgment day to yourself," says Paul and see if that scene, see if the anticipation of that day and that outcome, will not suck the attraction out of those sins of yours and convince you that it is better to lose money to a cheat, to be taken advantage of, than to sin against God.

See if the prospect of the judgment day does not convince you that as a Christian nothing will ever justify cheating someone out of his money. Swindlers don't go to heaven!

When Chrysostom was unjustly treated and threatened with punishments of various kinds that he did not deserve, he replied, "I fear nothing except sin!" That's the spirit! That's the hair on the chest Paul is looking for! He is looking for Christians who think serious thoughts about the judgment day and live accordingly!

But there is one other way in which these Christians have lost touch with reality and in which their behavior seems to reflect unbelieving convictions instead of Christian ones.

*III. God has accomplished a great, a wonderful change in is people. He has demonstrated in their very lives and living not only the power of his grace but the goodness and beauty of his will.*

The fact is, all those things that Paul just said Christians must not be and do, in vv. 9-10, were the very things that these Gentile Christians in Corinth had not so long before been and done. "And that is what some of you were..." Paul says. The Corinthian church was full of people who had defrauded others in business, who had worshipped idols, who had given themselves over to drink, and who had participated in a sexually impure life in a variety of ways, including homosexual sex. And then came the call of God and the knowledge of Jesus Christ and the new birth and the forgiveness of their sins and a new way of living.

These folk knew very well that when Christ came into their lives, their former life was revealed for what it was, sinful rebellion against God. They had not admitted this before, but the change that came over them when they became Christians left it in no doubt. The world's way of sex, of business, of religion, of pleasure was wrong, was bad, and God's way was a very different way. *They could not now, therefore, go back to the world's way as if it had not been exposed for what it was.*

They had been given new life, true life, eternal life, and that life was pure and holy and clean. That was the life they had now to live and no other. The world takes great offense at this. The world can see perfectly clearly that the entire Christian claim – that Christ transforms lives and that those who are transformed forsake the world's way of life – amounts to the assertion that their way of life is all wrong. It amounts to the assertion that their way of life is an offense to God and must be changed. It amounts to an assertion that they are in such bondage to sin that only God can deliver them from it and that *if he does deliver them* one consequence is that they will leave behind the way of life they are now pursuing. Worldly people are clever enough to realize what Christians are saying about them and about their way of life. When Christians say that before they became Christians they were living in a way that would have got them condemned on the judgment day, they are obviously saying that people who still live that way are bad people! Put it how you want to, that is the inexorable logic of the Christian position.

That is why the world is so offended by the notion that homosexual sex or fornication itself is evil and why it is so offended by the idea that people who once were homosexuals claim not to be any longer when they become Christians. Not necessarily that they don't still struggle with

the desire, but that they have forsaken the practice as sinful and wrong. That means, that must mean that the people who are still indulging those practices are sinful and wrong.

But that is the Christian claim and the Bible's teaching. Becoming a Christian means leaving behind a way of life the world approves but which Christians know is displeasing to God. And that is the fact of Christian life in the world. All sorts of people, including many in this church, left behind the very sins listed here in vv. 9-10 when they became Christians.

I read just the other day of a man who had been a fellow student of C.S. Lewis when both were in prep school. He said he had been "staggered" years later when he learned that the C.S. Lewis who wrote *The Screwtape Letters* was the same "foul mouthed" Jack Lewis he had known as a teenager. [Downing, *The Most Reluctant Convert*, 49]

Well, says Paul to these believers, you've been changed in that remarkable, definitive way. Now I expect you to live like it; to live in consistency with that great change that God has worked in you and to show the world the reality of it. Just as I expect you to live in the light of the knowledge of your coming glory and of the reality of the judgment of sin.

You have been living as if these things were not true. They are and you know they are. Clear your heads and get back to living the Christian life!