

## Backwards Living from a Worldly Church

1 Corinthians 6:1-11

### Introduction

**Useless Knowledge:** I have this weird kind of knowledge I call “Jeopardy” knowledge. Want to talk about something (e.g., movies, sports, cars)? I know just enough to sound smart but not be that useful.

- But if you need me to win you a basketball game or change your brakes, you might want to call someone else. Someone doesn’t just talk about it but *is* about it.

“<sup>1</sup> But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. <sup>2</sup> For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, <sup>3</sup> heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, <sup>4</sup> treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, <sup>5</sup> having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.” (2 Tim 3:1-5).

- Plenty of vague “God-speak” and spiritual platitudes but no Holy Spirit empowered resilience against sin. No commitment to pursue the lost. No passion to pray. A few gospel songs on their Spotify playlist but no abiding fruit from the Spirit.
  - Just as worried as the world. Just as lustful as the world. Just as greedy as the world.
  - The world should be able to come to the church to experience the power of God. But, too often, the church itself won’t even go to the church, they go to the world for solutions to their problems. Self-help books rather than Bible. Unsaved coworker before a member of your church.

<sup>1</sup> When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? <sup>2</sup> Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! <sup>4</sup> So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? <sup>5</sup> I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, <sup>6</sup> but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? <sup>7</sup> To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? <sup>8</sup> But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers! <sup>9</sup> Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

### 1. A Legal Problem (vv. 1-6)

<sup>1</sup> When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?

**Litigious:** You've seen the commercials. "If you or someone you know has been harmed by X, call our legal firm right now! You may be entitled to compensation." X could be anything from asbestos to baby powder and glyphosate. This mass recruitment of victims (both real and imagined) is a key weapon deployed by the activist-legal complex in its attempt to shake down companies for money. And they can get away with it because America is a uniquely litigious society. The U.S. has more lawsuits, lawyers, and judges per capita than similar countries (the UK, Japan, France, Canada, and Australia).

- For some lawyers and some persons, lawsuits are not a way to pursue justice but a way to make money (this is not about legal reform).
- "I think this passage has something to say about the proper Christian attitude toward civil litigation... I think we are too ready today to seek vindication or vengeance through adversary proceedings rather than peace through mediation... Good Christians, just as they are slow to anger, should be slow to sue" (Scalia).
- **We are grateful for our legal system.**
  - Today's passage talks about trivial civil matters rather than criminal matters.
  - If you commit a crime, we call the police.
  - This passage is not meant to shield you from legal consequences.
- Despite the good it is designed to do, we no that even good things (like the courts) can (and often are) be abused for personal gain.

**Is It Really So Serious?:** Is this really as serious as incest (last week)? Maybe, in some sense "no," but in another sense "yes" because it is a symptom of the same problem.

- The way the Corinthian church is acting unholy (like the world), divided (like the world), and powerless (like the world).
  - Last week (5:1-13) we saw that their internal health and external witness were compromised because of their failure (inability) to deal with sin in their midst. Rather than judge a sinner for the sake of his soul, they tolerated his sin.
  - This week we see that these Christians are divided by frivolous lawsuits against each other.
- It's a failure of the church to act as a united community and to take care of each other. It's a failure of the church to be the church. **If we can't take care of our own problems then how can we expect to help the world with theirs?**
- "How dare you." Paul takes it seriously!
  - We should take seriously the things that God takes seriously (too often we don't).
  - I know of a prominent pastor who preached on this very passage and then later in life sued another brother in Christ over something trivial. He loved to talk about it but wasn't ready to be about it.

**Judge:** <sup>2</sup> Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial (ἐλαχίστων) cases? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life (βιωτικά)! Elevating the calling of saints. Eschatological participation in God's judgment. Our future with God is one

of reigning with him: “If we endure, we will also reign with him” (2 Tim 2:12a). “Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years” (Rev 20:6). Because Christ is over all and we’re in Christ, we even will be, in some sense, in judgment over **angels!**

- “Revelation’s fifth of seven ‘blessings’ describes when the wicked are returned to bodily existence and condemned for evil deeds, cast eternally into the lake of fire. But the victors, who maintain their testimony of Jesus and resist the beast, worship as priests and reign as kings with Christ.”

This is the true destiny and the final calling of all believers. You *will reign with Christ*, yet you can’t even handle “trivial” or “ordinary” matters in your congregation.

- **How can we handle the “keys of the kingdom” if we can’t even handle the trash in our pews?** (that’s a metaphor).

**Be Who You Are:** What would happen if we lived more in line with our eternal identity than our temporary situation? What if we conform our lives to God’s purposes rather than the fallen culture around us?

- If this life is all there is, then you better get rich, get even, and get yours (YOLO).
- But this is not all there is. This is a “pit stop.” There is a greater judgment, a greater reality, and a permanent home.
  - Funeral for Bubba (living for what really matters; he was just a steward of what God gave him; “he’ll never have anything because he’ll give it all away” and yet he had everything). He is more alive now than he ever was on earth.
  - “There’s nothing worth keeping if it keeps you from Jesus.” There’s nothing worth pursuing if it pulls you away from Jesus.

**Lack:** <sup>4</sup> So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? <sup>5</sup> I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers,

- The Corinthian church is foolish and powerless. They don’t even have the ability to deal with their own issues, how can they help with the issues in the world? If you’re so wise, why can’t you handle this yourself?

Again, this is to their shame. Instead, they arrogantly flaunted themselves as examples of godliness. They should have mourned sin, yet they tolerated it. They should have pursued unity, yet they were divided.

- RadioLab story about media and emotion. Facebook received so many reports of harmful photos (more in 1 week of 2012 than all of Flickr for all time). They asked people to say how the photo made them feel (embarrassed). Though adding “it” meant that the photo was at fault more than one’s own self or feelings. Anyway, when Facebook opened a blank message to contact the person who posted the photo (which is all Facebook can do since posting an embarrassing photo is not illegal), only 20% would do it. When the message was written for them, the numbers went up. People want Facebook to take care of it rather than deal with it themselves.
- They are so weak that they have to take their problems to unbelievers to solve.

- How would you feel if you took your car to a mechanic and they had to take it to another mechanic to fix it? Or a doctor and they had to get another doctor?
- The church should be comprised of **children of God**, yet they are going to those outside of it for solutions.
  - It's not that Paul is shaming them as much as it is shameful, they should be embarrassed.

**Unhealthy Body, Polluted Witness:** <sup>6</sup> but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? It weakens the body by pitting brother against brother and it ruins the testimony of the church before the watching world.

- Brother against brother.
- Infighting weakens our foundation, is contrary to Jesus' prayer for us, pushes people away from the church, and distracts us from our mission.
  - Soldiers distracted by smartphones, are easy targets. Looking down instead of looking around.
  - Satan would love nothing more than we fight each other than fight him.

## 2. A Gospel Misunderstanding (vv. 7-8)

**Already Lost:** <sup>7</sup> To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. It's already too late. You've already lost. *-Either-* someone is suing another over something unimportant *-or-* someone sinned badly enough to require a lawsuit *-or-* the church is unable to resolve an internal dispute.

**Gospel Suffering:** Why not rather suffer wrong (ἀδικεῖσθε)? Why not rather be defrauded (ἀποστερεῖσθε)?

- But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well (Matt 5:39-40). Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them...Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom 12:14, 19, 21).
- Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all (Phil 2:17).
- For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come (2 Tim 4:6).
- Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh, I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church (Col 1:24)

The forgiveness the gospel offers involves loss. Grace is free but it's not cheap because it cost Christ his life: "Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace... Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross... Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl for which the merchant will sell all his goods to buy. It is the kingly rule

of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him... Such grace is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. **Above all, it is costly** because it cost God the life of his Son and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. **Above all, it is grace** because God did not consider his Son too dear a price to pay for our life but delivered him up for us" (Bonhoeffer).

- If we are going to demonstrate the gospel, then it is going to cost us something (e.g., \$100 not paid back; do I get even or take the L?). Too often we want to be right, we want to be vindicated, and we want to be repaid. We care more about our reputation than the gospel.
  - The story of the gospel is not about people who are entitled to something, who deserve something, but people who give their lives away for others because Christ gave his life away for them.
  - The Bible doesn't talk about your "rights" as a Christian because you don't have any rights, you belong to God! He is your master and Lord.

The gospel calls us to suffer so others can live, not to earn our salvation but because we "walk in love, as Christ loved us" (Eph 5:2).

- Paul to the Ephesian elders: I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by **working hard in this way we must help the weak** and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, '**It is more blessed to give than to receive**' (Acts 20:33-35).
- Are you trying to get or to give? Are you trying to hoard or distribute? Are you trying to accumulate wealth for yourself or alleviate suffering for others? Are you trying to get even or give grace?

**Defraud:** <sup>8</sup> But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers! It's even worse than it seems. Not only are they unwilling to suffer for the gospel they are actively harming other Christians.

- The word for defraud (ἀποστερέω) is used here to describe unethical business practices by wealthy people.
  - In Rome, there was a systemic bias in favor of higher-status litigants (e.g., judges were of the same class). We see this now, as blind as we want justice to be, money talks. It is possible that some were using the courts to bully others around. That's bad enough in society, but in the church it's **shameful**.
- This is proof that some are trying to use Jesus to bless them rather than embody and internalize the gospel. **Use rather than live the gospel.**

### 3. A New Way of Living (vv. 9-11)

**Unrighteous:** <sup>9</sup> Or do you not know that the unrighteous (ἄδικοι) will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do you not know is tinged with quite a bit of sarcasm, because they certainly know this.

- They definitely know better. This is the 5th time in 1 Corinthians Paul uses this phrase: do you not know (οὐκ οἶδατε), he'll end up using it 10x in all.
  - The level of self-deception, justification, and selective amnesia (e.g., hear what I want to hear; I didn't ignore you, because I didn't hear you).
  - We so often care about all the wrong things, and remember all the unimportant things: Comedian (husband) is incensed that his wife doesn't know who Mel Brooks is (famous comedian and director). His wife asks if he knows who Pam Cuizon is. He thinks it must be some Real Housewife or something. "It's your child's first-grade teacher." The point? We know what we care about (Greg Garcia). This is how we often treat the things of God.

**Don't Get Tricked:** Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

- Paul reminds us that unrighteousness has no place in the kingdom of God. He gives a representative sample of sins that prevent us from entering God's kingdom.
  - sexually immoral (πόρνοι)
  - idolaters (εἰδωλολάτραι)
  - adulterers (μοιχοί)
  - Those practicing homosexuality (μαλακοί) + (ἄρσενικοῖται)
  - thieves (κλέπται)
  - greedy (πλεονέκται)
  - drunkards (μέθυσοι)
  - revilers (λοιδοροί) slanderers, etc
  - swindlers (ἄρπαγες) robbers, plunderers
- Some will tell you that you can do what you want and still be a follower of Christ. You can redefine sin and redefine righteousness. But that is not the case. God sets the rules.
- This list is wide-ranging. It's not comprehensive.
- The particulars of this list are also not the point of Paul's message *per se*.
- This is not the homiletical focus *per se* (get the accent on the right syllable).
  - The point is that these former sins no longer define you.

**New Creation:** <sup>11</sup> And such were some of you. But you were washed (ἀπελούσασθε), you were sanctified (ἡγιασθητε), you were justified (ἐδικαιώθητε) in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

- **Life transformation:** you're not that anymore. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2 Cor 5:17).
  - The gospel of Jesus Christ meets us where we are, loves us in the midst of our sin, but doesn't leave us there.

Paul's point is profound: **stop acting like the sinner you no longer are.** You *were* a sinner saved by grace but now you *are* a saint belonging to God.

- You and I should stop and reflect not on what we were but on our new identity in Christ. I am no longer a slave to sin, I am a child of God.

- The challenge of the Christian life is to live in the reality of our new identity in Christ rather than conform to the patterns of the world. We are to become who we already are in Jesus.
  - Never get comfortable in sin. Don't go back to what you *were*. Go forward into who you are in Christ.
  - "If you are a child of God you will never be happy in your sin" (Spurgeon).
  - If you, somehow, can feel completely comfortable in our society, at home in this culture, at peace with this broken world, then you, no doubt, must have edited out or ignored commands of Christ that put us at odds with the world.

**The Gospel:** All of us *were* this. All of us *were* sinners. None of us got into the KoG through good behavior.

- It is only by the righteousness of Christ, the grace of God, that any of us made it in.
- And to be in is to be joyfully welcomed, to be fully known and loved by God. To be given the righteousness of Christ in exchange for our trespasses and sins.
- You see, it's about the lawsuit but it's not really about the lawsuit.
  - **Too many of us are going in reverse. Rather than walking in our identity in Christ we're walking in our old (former), sinful identity.**
  - Christ did not save us in order that we may live any way that we choose. He saved us to live godly lives, and thus to live in a way that is radically different from our lifestyle as unbelievers.
- Our culture believes that the past is the key to the present. What we think and how we act, we are told, is the result of our past. It is only by understanding our past that we can live as we should in the present. In other words, the past controls the present. The Bible reverses this. The past is not unimportant but Paul insists that we refuse to allow our past to control us in the present. Instead, who we are **now**, in Christ, is what should override and overrule our past thinking and behavior. We should put away what we once thought and did as unbelievers. Our past should not be resurrected, dwelled upon, or returned to. It is not who we *were* that matters, but who we *are*.
  - "Painting pictures of Egypt, leaving out what it lacks, and the future feels so hard and I want to go back. But the places that used to fit me cannot hold the things I've learned."
  - Don't go back. You can't go back. There is nothing for you there. Your glorious hope is in your new life in Christ.
- We have been washed clean, holy-fied, justified by our Triune God,.
  - Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable

seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God (1 Peter 1:18-23)

**Conclusion:**

Are you a distinct witness to the gospel or a liability to its advance?

Does your life demonstrate the values of the gospel in the way you live and love rather than the values of the culture around us?

Are you with a full heart and firm conviction walking forward into gospel living rather than backward in your old ways of life?