



AN IMPERFECT LOCAL CHURCH
A Study in 1 Corinthians
CLASS – Lesson 9

GENERAL OUTLINE

1 Corinthians 5:1-6:20, Reported Problems

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1 Corinthians 6:1-11, Litigation

- 6:1-6 Rebuke for civil suits
- 6:7-8 Honesty & turning the other cheek
- 6:9-11 Power in the blood

Paul turns, in chapter 6, to a second problem that had been reported to him: the Corinthian Christians were defrauding each other in business dealings and were seeking redress through the civil courts. Paul disapproves of both actions. The whole matter was in total contradiction to their calling as Christians. Of what value was the crucifixion of Christ if his followers pursued the same material gains as the world, used the same sinful methods to achieve those goals, and couldn't resolve their problems without calling on the justice of civil courts rather than calling on the name of the Lord (cf. 1 Cor 1:2)?

Paul broached the problem on three fronts. 1. Dishonesty in business was wrong in itself; 2. Pleading their grievances in civil courts showed more esteem for the foolishness of the world than the wisdom of God; 3. The church was once again (cf. 1 Cor. 5) abdicating its responsibility to hold members to a higher, God-given standard of values and behavior.

The problem and Paul's response are, at first glance, fairly straightforward, but a closer look reveals a challenging complexity. Modern-day churches generally overlook the implications suggested in the practical application of Paul's teachings. In our discussion, we will look at the basic problem as well as the connection with the teachings of Christ and the example of the early Jerusalem church.

DISCUSSION

1 Corinthians 6:1-6, Rebuke for civil suits

1. Identify and discuss how this topic flows naturally from the last couple verses of chapter 5.

2. **No one, not even Christians are fully “righteous.” Still, Paul distinguishes between the “unrighteous” (NIV: ungodly) and the “saints.” To whom does Paul refer with each term? Cite precedent in 1 Corinthians to support your answers.**

3. **What two examples does Paul cite to support his suggestion that Christians should be able to judge between members in cases such as the dishonest business dealings that form the background to this discussion? How do these examples show the upside-down thinking and behavior of the Corinthians in the current situation?**

4. **No less than six times in 1 Corinthians 6 Paul asks the rhetorical question, “Do you not know.” What are the things that Paul expected them to know?**

5. **If judgment there must be, describe the process that Paul says they should implement instead of taking their grievances with each other to civil courts. Note that Paul gives a basic idea, but doesn’t elaborate on the practical logistics of such an action.**

6. **Who are the “least esteemed” (NIV: “of little account”)? Discuss the different meanings implied by these different translations of the second half of verse 4.
NKJV (v.4b): “do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge?”
NIV: “appoint even men of little account in the church!”**

7. **If cases such as dubious business dealings should be handled “internally” by the church, what should a modern-day church do in cases where the incriminating behavior is criminal, creates a danger to others (if repeated), or falls under mandatory reporting laws?**

- 8. The case of sexual immorality treated in chapter 5 was clearly an isolated case involving only one member of the church. Do you think the dishonesty in business dealings of chapter 6 involved only one instance, or might there have been several similar cases? What statements and language in the passage lead you to this conclusion?**
- 9. Do you see anything in the problem-solving process in Acts 6:1-7 that is similar to, and could provide some precedent for, Paul's treatment of conflict resolution in the Corinthian church?**

Though not a fraudulent or criminal act, there was a problem that the church dealt with internally. Church leaders (the apostles) appointed competent men (7 deacons), and charged them with addressing the problem.

1 Corinthians 6:7-8, Honesty & turning the other cheek

Failure, by some definitions, would mean suing (or being sued) and having the court find against you. For Paul, the mere act of suing a brother in civil court was a failure. Of course, cheating your brother in a business deal wasn't a winner either.

- 10. By what principles and priorities, and in what situations, can Paul say that it would be better to accept the wrong than to seek redress through civil courts? What are the 4 options available to the Corinthians, and place them in the order by degree of Paul's preference.**
- 11. Paul imagines the possibility of good-faith efforts by the defrauded brother reaching an impasse. In this case, he should "accept the wrong." What similarities and guidance can you see when comparing the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 18:15-20 with 1 Corinthians 6:1-11?**
- 12. In what ways do Matthew 18:15-17, Acts 6:1-7; 1 Corinthians 5:4-5 and 1 Corinthians 6:1-6 reveal a Christian subculture that was to be distinct from the world around it.**

1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Power in the blood

Paul concludes his treatment of this particular problem by returning to a key theme of the letter. In Christ, Christians have been made into something they weren't before – sanctified and forgiven children of God. This change brought more than mere blessings. It brought a new identity, and people so identified shouldn't live as they had under the old identity. Paul will return to this theme in 2 Corinthians 5:12-21 with his discussion of Christians being “a new creation.”

13. In what ways might the Corinthians deceive themselves in such matters?

14. Much of Paul's discussion deals with how the defrauded brother and the church should deal with such situations. What does Paul say that is addressed more to the dishonest brother? Does anything in this passage relate to the doctrine of “once saved – always saved”?

15. What fundamental and theological truth underlies Paul's treatment of this situation? How does it build on the affirmations with which Paul opens the letter?

16. In summary, should a Christian be so disinterested in material things that he remains passive when wronged?