

Chapter Six

THE PROBLEM OF BASENESS AND BROTHERHOOD (6:1-20)

IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. What kind of "grievances" would Christian brethren have against one another? 6:1
2. Why does Paul insist that they not sue one another in civil court? 6:1ff.
3. How could Paul advise Christians to accept being defrauded? 6:7
4. What has the list of depraved sinners to do with this context? 6:9-10
5. If a man joins himself to a prostitute is he married to her? 6:16

SECTION 1

Defrauders Are Not Brothers (6:1-8)

6 When one of you has a grievance against a brother, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the the saints? ²Do 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? ³Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, matters pertaining to this life! ⁴If then you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who are least esteemed by the church? ⁵I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no man among you wise enough to decide between members of the brotherhood, ⁶but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?

⁷To have lawsuits at all with one another is defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? ⁸But you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that even your own brethren.

6:1 Squabbles: Chapter six is very evidently continuing the train of thought from chapter five. The apostle had just dealt with judging and settling disputes which must be done *within* the kingdom of God. In chapter five the problem is sexual immorality; Christians are commanded to judge and take action to solve the problem. In chapter six the problem is Christians suing one another in pagan law-courts.

FIRST CORINTHIANS

And again, Christians are commanded to judge themselves and take the action necessary to bring about a solution.

The word *grievance* (RSV), or *matter* (KJV), is *pragma* in the Greek text. *Pragma* is the word from which we get the English words *pragmatic* and *pragmatism*. Its generic meaning is, work, deed, event, or occurrence. The word *pragma* is used frequently, however, in ancient Greek writings (Xenophon, Josephus, the payri) to denote a civil law-suit with someone. *Pragma* was the technical term for a litigation.

It is unfortunate that an arbitrary division of this context has been made by those who, centuries ago, numbered chapters and verses. Such division tends to divert attention away from the fact that Paul is still talking about the same fundamental problem. That problem is the irresponsibility of the ancient Corinthian congregation of Christians to maintain scriptural standards of righteousness, justice and mercy.

We do not know with certainty what the "grievances" were between the brethren. They were probably disputes over properties. It is doubtful that they would have taken the case of the incestuous man to the civil courts for settlement. We do know that by the middle of the first century, A.D., Rome had saturated all her subjected provinces (which included Greece) with Roman law and its procedures. Of all ancient peoples the Romans were the most prone to litigation. Any man could make himself a prosecutor in a Roman court. Each party to a litigation deposited with the magistrate a sum of money (called *sacramentum*), which was forfeited by the losing party to the state religion. The defendant also had to give bail (*vadimonium*) as security for his subsequent appearances. The magistrate then turned over the dispute to a person qualified to act as a judge. If the defendant lost, his property—sometimes his person—could be seized by the plaintiff until the judgment was satisfied. Problems of ownership, obligation, exchange, contract, and debt took up by far the largest part of Roman law. Material possession was the very life of the Roman empire, and its provinces. This would be especially true in cosmopolitan and commercial Corinth. Ownership of property came by inheritance or acquisition. The making of valid wills was complicated with hundreds of legal restrictions. No heir might take any part of an estate without assuming all the debts and other legal obligations of the deceased. Acquisition came by transfer, or by legal conveyance resulting from a suit at law. Transfer (*mancipatio*, "Taking in hand") was a formal gift or sale before witnesses and with scales struck by a copper ingot as token of a sale; without this ancient ritual no exchange had the

sanction or protection of the law. Obligation was any compulsion by law to the performance of an act. It could arise by delict or by contract. Delicts or torts—noncontractual wrongs committed against a person or his property—were in many cases punished by an obligation to pay the injured person a sum of money in compensation. Obviously, there would be *many* “grievances” which might arise between Christian brethren engaged in the multiple vocations and businesses which would be present in the huge, sophisticated metropolis called Corinth.

6:1-6 Shamefulness: There are a number of reasons the apostle shames the Corinthians in this matter: (a) in verse one he uses the Greek word *tolma* which means presumptuous, audacious, bold (see its use in II Peter 2:10). They have *presumed against* the power of Christ to settle these disputes and have taken them to heathen judges; (b) Christians are to judge the heathen world, not vice versa—they are showing their unworthiness to be Christians by declaring their incompetence to judge their own disputes. Just how are the saints to judge the world (v. 2)? Christians living by faith in Jesus Christ in this present world are judging this world (declaring it to be condemned) by their obedience to God’s Word (see Heb. 11:7). Every Christian who preaches or teaches the gospel pronounces judgment upon those who do not. There is no other way to deliver the gospel (see Rev. 14:6-7). But in a real sense, also, the resurrected saints will have some part in the eternal judgment of the lost world. Perhaps that judgment will be simply a vindication of Christian choices made on earth (cf. Luke 11:32), or maybe it will be some form of active participation with Christ as Christians *rule* with Him (see Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21) in eternity; perhaps both. Peter indicates that the godly behavior of the Christians, before their heathen contemporaries, will provide a vindication for the Christians should there be any charges made against them at the day of judgment (I Peter 2:11-12, 15). Now, if these Corinthian Christians are incapable of acting like Christians toward one another and producing justice, are they not declaring themselves to be incompetent to fulfill their destiny to judge the world with justice? Shame upon them! (c) Christians are to judge angels; Paul does not say how or when; we would speculate this refers to the angels who “left their first estate” (rebelled against God in heaven) and are being held temporarily in the “pits of nether gloom” (II Peter 2:4; Jude 6); Paul does say the manifold wisdom of God will be made known to the “principalities and powers in the heavenly places” through the church (Eph. 3:10); it may be, as T. R. Applebury wrote: “. . . the church is God’s means of demonstrating to the angels that rebelled . . . that some men will serve Him out of their love for Him. The church

FIRST CORINTHIANS

is made up of those who deliberately choose to do God's will and refuse to do the bidding of Satan. If men can do this, angels certainly could have done so. The character and conduct of the saints then become a means of judging angels that sinned." (*op cit* pg. 105); if Christians are to judge these cosmic, spiritual and eternal matters, how much more are they obligated to discipline themselves to make proper judgments between themselves in this life! (d) They lay their brotherhood disputes before heathen judges who have no place in the church; Paul uses the Greek participle *exouthenemenous* which is translated by the RSV as *those who are least esteemed* but would be more properly translated as *those who are rejected or condemned by the church*—in other words the Corinthian Christians are asking judges who are alienated and opposed to the church to judge matters that would require a mentality and spirituality completely foreign to them; Shame upon them! (e) In so doing these Corinthian Christians are declaring to the world that the wisdom Christians are supposed to have is not as good as that of heathen judges; they cannot seem to find one of their own brethren wise enough to settle disputes between themselves; even brothers by natural birth are often able to settle disputes between themselves without recourse to civil law courts; but in Corinth it was *Christian* brother against *Christian* brother, and that in courts where unbelieving judges sat!

Christians should obey all the laws (which do not demand direct and certain disobedience *against* God) of their governments. All transactions requiring legal sanction by a civil government should be submitted to such sanction. And Christians are not prohibited from recourse to civil court when it is necessary to defend themselves against heathen accusers. At Philippi, Paul demanded his rights as a Roman citizen against ungodly and unjust treatment (Acts 16:37); he did the same before Festus (Acts 25:10). But Christian brethren should not have to bring civil suit against one another to obtain justice when there is a grievance. Let Christian brethren first do what is fair and honest and just; let them settle any dispute between themselves, then, if civil law requires it, let it be legally sanctioned in civil court. The law is for the ungodly—not for the godly (I Tim. 1:8). Christians should never have to resort to civil law to arrive at what is fair, honest and just between themselves. Civil law should be resorted to only as a secondary sanction of the justice already accomplished between Christian brethren! And this is to apply in every area of Christian life—transfers of property, accidental harm done, services performed, etc. In every circumstance the Christian's first concern is *not* "What will it cost me?—Will I make a profit?—Shall I accept responsibility

for my error?" but, "Have I been fair, honest, and just—Have I given what my brother rightly deserves?"

6:7-8 Solutions: The apostle has already suggested (v. 5) that since it appears they cannot settle these disputes between themselves, they should select a "man among you wise enough" to decide between members of the brotherhood. That would be the first suggestion to bring a solution to their incompetency. But who, among them, would be wise enough? He should be well-trained in what the Word of God says in the areas of ethical absolutes and principles. He should know what the Scriptures say about brotherly relationships. He should be old enough to have had much practical experience in the circumstances of life and interpersonal relationships. Ordinarily, it would be the responsibility of elders and/or evangelists (see epistles to Timothy and Titus) to arbitrate and bring about reconciliation between disputing Christian brethren. But any wise Christian should be able to function in this capacity.

The second solution Paul offers is that a Christian would be much better off to allow himself to be defrauded by a brother than to quarrel over grievances to the point of bringing suit in a pagan civil court. When Christians take one another to a heathen judge, rather than being able to settle between themselves, it smacks of some underlying greed or spirit of retaliation. Whether that be the case or not, two Christians suing one another in civil court is taken by the world to mean that Christians are no different than greedy and spiteful heathen. Paul clearly states that for Christians to sue one another in pagan court is *defeating* (Gr. *hettema*, loss, detriment, overthrow)—it brings discredit on the church and the gospel. When Christians cannot settle a grievance between themselves, one of them should be willing to suffer personal abuse, injury or loss rather than let the church be defeated in its mission to bring men to Christ! That is not easy—but that is what Christ, Himself, did! Nowhere does the New Testament say the Christian cannot appeal to the civil courts for redress and justice when he is wrongfully sued by an unbeliever. In fact, a number of scriptures (the clearest being Rom. 12:14—13:7) tells the Christian that when he has done all he can to be at peace with all men. If an unbeliever persists in an unjust action, the Christian is to leave the wrath of God up to the civil authorities for execution.

But all members of the kingdom of God are expected to think and act as regenerated, reborn people. They should act toward *one another* as Jesus taught in the Sermon on The Mount. While force and law is for the ungodly, the Sermon on The Mount characterizes the citizens of God's kingdom. The kind of brotherly love that would rather accept

FIRST CORINTHIANS

being defrauded by a Christian brother than to sue him in civil court is taught in a number of New Testament passages (see Col. 3:12-13; Rom. 15:1-2; I Peter 2:20; 3:8-15; Phil. 2:3-4). This is as relevant today as it was when Paul wrote it. The word of God abides forever!

SECTION 2

Debauched Are Not Brothers (6:9-11)

9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

6:9-10 Reprobation: Clearly, Paul is classifying those who are taking brotherhood grievances to civil courts as some of the “unrighteous” who shall not inherit the kingdom of God! The Greek word *adikoi* may be translated either *unrighteous* or *unjust*—the two English words mean the same. It is frightening to contemplate that those who would rather defraud a brother than be defrauded are categorized with the debauched but that is precisely what Paul is doing here.

Those who *defraud* are as abominable to God as the *immoral*, the *idolater*, the *homosexual*, the *effeminate*, the *thief*, the *greedy*, the *drunkard*, the *reviler*, and the *robber*. All these “unrighteous” ones (except the homosexual and the effeminate) are listed earlier by Paul as alien to the kingdom of God and unacceptable as citizens (5:9-13). The Greek word *arsenokoites* is a combination of *arsen*, male, and *koite* (Eng. *coitus*), sexual intercourse, and is translated *homosexual*. The Greek text here includes the word *malakoi*, literally meaning, “soft to the touch,” but used metaphorically in the New Testament to mean male effeminacy in a practicing homosexual. The word *malakoi* was used by classical Greek writers near the first century A.D. to denote *catamites* (men and boys who allowed themselves to be misused homosexually). Homosexual behavior is not sickness—it is sin! Why would the act of suing a Christian brother in a heathen court be counted such a serious crime by the apostle? Because it is a deliberate rejection of the very essence of God’s kingdom. It is a refusal of the

principle of self-denial. Anyone who refuses to put self to death, allowing Christ to live in him, is not worthy of the kingdom (see Luke 12:13-31; 14:25-33; 16:10-15; John 12:20-25; 15:12-14; Gal. 2:20; 5:13; 5:24-26, etc.). It is the love of Christ which is to control every Christian. Christians are *never* to consider one another from the world's point of view (II Cor. 5:14-21). When Christians are unwilling to settle any grievance they have with one another, even if it means being defrauded, it means they are unwilling to surrender to the sovereign will of Christ and are not fit to inherit His kingdom. Paul told these Corinthian brethren they were being *led astray* (Gr. *planasthe*, wandering stars, planets), in their unmerciful, non-Christian actions of suing one another in heathen courts.

6:11 Regeneration: These straying Christians, in their present shameful, defeating, unrighteous behavior unfit for the kingdom, are reminded they do not have to remain disinherited. Some of them were once before living debauched and ungodly lives. Paul is warning them not to continue in this *fallen* condition, lest they be lost. It is possible to fall from grace after having once been "washed, sanctified and justified" (see Gal. 5:1-26). Paul considers them, in their present conditions, as "unrighteous" and not heirs of the kingdom. But he exhorts them (by inference) to repent and return to the state of being sanctified and justified.

It is well to note here that the *order* of the regenerative process harmonizes with what the rest of the New Testament says about it. *First*, the Corinthians believed and were baptized ("washed"), *then* they were pronounced sanctified and justified, (see Acts 2:38; 18:8; 22:16; Rom. 6:5ff.; Gal. 3:26-27; Col. 2:12-13; I Peter 1:22-25). The Greek verb *apelousasthe* is 2nd plural aorist middle, and might be literally translated "you were washed clean." The word is a combination of two Greek words, *apo* ("from") and *louo* ("washed"). The verb *louo* and its various forms are often used metaphorically for baptism (see Acts 22:16; Eph. 5:26; Titus 3:5; Heb. 10:22). The believer's obedience to Christ's command to be baptized (see Matt. 28:18-20) is the initial and fundamental act of faith through which God has chosen to judicially declare a believer both sanctified and justified. It is at this point in the believer's calling upon God that he has his sins washed away (Acts 22:16), is saved (I Peter 3:21; Titus 3:5), is made a member of Christ's church (Eph. 5:26), is joined to Christ and justified (Gal. 3:23-29), is sanctified (Eph. 5:26). Without surrender to the command of Christ and the Holy Spirit (through the apostles) to baptism there is no promise of cleansing, salvation, justification or sanctification.

FIRST CORINTHIANS

While these Corinthian Christians had previously been baptized, sanctified and justified, they were not presently considered in a sanctified and justified state of the apostle. One who is aware that he is sinning, after having been once baptized, must appeal to the grace of God by repentance and prayer (Heb. 10:19-25; I John 1:8—2:6). To be an heir of the kingdom of God *after* initial admittance through belief and baptism, one must *continue* in sanctification and justification, which is done through daily repentance and prayer. *Repentance* is from the Greek word *metanoeo* which means changing the mind and actions. *Sanctification* is from the Greek word *hagiasmos* which means, set apart unto God, or dedicated to God. Justification is from the Greek word *dikaiosis* and means, to declare right, to declare innocent, to acquit of guilt. God is able to declare sinners innocent of guilt because Christ vicariously atoned for all sin upon the cross. This is established as a fact by the historical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. But God cannot declare any sinner innocent who will not accept that declaration of grace. God has decreed that any sinner who wishes this free gift of grace (declaration of innocence from all guilt) must do so by believing Christ's death paid for his sin and by submitting to the ordinance of baptism. When the sinner accepts God's offer, on God's terms, he is set apart to God's will in his life. Of course, a washed, justified, sanctified person may renounce his inheritance and return to the former state of alienation and impenitence (II Peter 2:20-22). That, says Paul, is what these Corinthians were doing by refusing to settle their grievances with one another on Christian principles.

“In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” simply means these Corinthians had been previously washed, justified and sanctified under the *authority* of and by the *agency* of Christ and the Holy Spirit. That authority and that agency is the *word* of Christ in the apostolic message. There is no indication in the New Testament that the Holy Spirit operates or leads in any extra-Biblical manifestation in the matter of salvation, justification and/or sanctification. The Holy Spirit's will in these matters is contained in and operates through His revealed Word. That Word is the Bible—nothing less and nothing more! The oral teachings of Christ and the apostles were the first revelations of the Holy Spirit's will for salvation, justification and sanctification. Later, their spoken doctrines were committed to writing. These apostolic documents have the same authority and power as their oral teachings did. These written words of the apostles (and the Old Testament before them) form the completed, canonized Word of God—the will of the Spirit of Truth. They are all

the world needs for salvation, justification and sanctification. Nothing must be taken away from these writings and nothing must be added to them. *All* things that pertain to life and godliness are in his precious promises (II Peter 1:3-5).

SECTION 3

Defilers Are Not Brothers (6:12-20)

12 "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be enslaved by anything. 13 "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! 16 Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two shall become one flesh." 17 But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. 18 Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. 19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

6:12-14 Perversion of Humanness: Brotherly love acknowledges there is a lawful purpose for all things which God has created, but using the body for immorality (including hatred, greed and unchristian lawsuits) is perverting and downgrading that which God made to be the residence of the Holy Spirit. The last section *does* connect to the beginning admonition concerning unchristian lawsuits. It teaches that Christians who become enslaved to their emotions and feelings and drag one another bodily before heathen tribunals for their ungodly purposes of greed and retaliation are "prostituting" themselves. When God created man and gave him a human body, it was intended that God's Holy Spirit would dwell with each man in that body.

The apostolic principle, "All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful . . ." must be understood in its *context*. When a Christian

FIRST CORINTHIANS

brother defrauds you, it is lawful (you have the right) to sue him in a civil court—but such action is not always helpful (or, edifying). Christians are to live above the plane of law in the kingdom of grace. Christians are not to seek their own good, but the good of their neighbors (I Cor. 10:24); they are not to look only to their own interest, but also to the interests of others (Phil. 2:4); they are to please their neighbors for their good, to edify them (Rom. 15:2). Therefore, the Christian has the responsibility of denying any “right” he has to build people up in Christ rather than perverting these things to destroy people.

Some ancient Greek philosophers (especially the Gnostics) held that mind and thought were spiritual and holy while material things, including the human body, were impersonal and thus amoral. These philosophers taught that the natural, physical and material processes of life had *no* moral significance. Suing one another in court over physical and material things would have no moral implications according to this philosophy. Apparently some of the “wise” Christians of Corinth had decided to practice the philosophy of the Gnostics.

Paul had twice listed ways in which material things, including the human body, might be perverted (I Cor. 5:9-11; 6:7-10) and which would cause the Christian to forfeit his spiritual inheritance. That would include greed and robbery and reviling a brother in the matter of civil law suits. And it would most definitely include sexual promiscuity, which is the first subject in the context of chapters five and six.

So, as Paul wrote about Christians suing one another in heathen courts and assuming, like the Gnostics, that they might do as they pleased with material things without sinning, his thoughts were directed back to the subject of sexual promiscuity. Sexual abandon and all forms of unnatural perversion were the norm for most of first century Greco-Roman society. This is evidenced in ancient art and literature. We quote here from William Barclay:

The Greeks always looked down on the body. . . . That produced one of two attitudes. Either it issued in the most rigorous asceticism in which everything was done to subject and humiliate the desires and instincts of the body. Or—and in Corinth it was this second outlook which was prevalent—it was taken to mean that, since the body was of no importance, you could do what you liked with it; you could let it sate its appetites. What complicated this was the doctrine of Christian freedom which Paul preached. If the Christian man is the freest of all men, then is he not free to do what he likes, especially with this completely unimportant body of his?

So, the Corinthians argued, in a way that they thought very enlightened, let the body have its way. But what is the body's way? The stomach was made for food and food for the stomach, they went on. Food and the stomach naturally and inevitably go together. In precisely the same way the body is made for its instincts; it is made for the sexual act and the sexual act is made for it; therefore let the desires of the body have their way.

Another element in the heathen culture of Greco-Roman society Paul had to deal with was the matter of religion and human behavior. Heathen gods were what men made them. Naturally, when they disavowed the true God's revelation of his infinitely holy character and exchanged that truth for a lie (Rom. 1:18ff.) they supplied their own human characteristics to gods of their own making. Religion, to the heathen, was, and still is, a way to appease, cajole, and prevail against their gods until the gods are won over to the human's desire to do as he pleases. To the heathen, the human was relatively free to behave as he pleased so long as he did not anger the gods or the civil authorities. He could very easily appease the gods by making the right offerings and observing the superstitious rituals. So long as he paid his taxes, and did not participate in treason or revolution he could please the civil authorities. The Christian doctrine of freedom limited by morality and self-sacrifice was in absolute opposition to heathen selfishness.

Thus, Paul sets out to clarify the doctrine of Christian freedom as opposed to the philosophy and practice of heathen permissiveness. It is the teaching of Christ and his apostles that everything God has created is good (Gen. 1:10, 18, 25, 31; Acts 10:15; I Cor. 10:26; I Tim. 4:1-5) if used according to the precepts and principles revealed in God's word. There is a created purpose for the human longing for justice so long as it is not allowed to degenerate into a spirit of exploitation, hatred and retaliation. There is a God-ordained purpose for the physical appetite for food so long as it is controlled and not allowed to degenerate into gluttony. There is a God-ordained purpose for the desire for sexual intercourse as long as the desire is not permitted to deteriorate into adultery, fornication and homosexuality. Sexual intercourse was created by God but he never intended it to be casual, amoral and promiscuous. The longings and desires of the human being created for this earthly life have their limitations. They are for the present world order. They are created by God in order to test, discipline and prepare men during this earthly probation for existence in the next life.

FIRST CORINTHIANS

One of the principles under which these human longings are to be controlled is that while all things created by God are lawful, all things are not, in certain circumstances, helpful. Some things created by God, under some circumstances, are harmful. And, as Paul clearly says, whatever would enslave a person, under any circumstances, would be harmful. Food, drugs, sexuality, emotions, material possessions—all are lawful, good and helpful if controlled and limited by the revealed principles of God's word. But even these good and helpful things become harmful if man allows himself to be enslaved, possessed and obsessed by them, or when he abuses them beyond the limitations of God's directions. Paul uses the Greek word *exousias-thesomai* which is translated *enslaved* and means, more precisely, *ruled over by*. For the apostle it is Christ who rules over him—not his emotions, not food, not sexuality, and not material possessions. He is a slave to the will of Christ.

These Christians of Corinth, attempting to be sophisticated and follow popular Gnosticism, were apparently teaching that the appetite for sexual intercourse was merely a physical thing like the appetite for food. Paul makes it very clear that these two human functions do not belong in the same category. The statement, "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food" is correct, so long as man is not enslaved by food and becomes a glutton. What a man eats, so long as he is not obsessed with food, has no spiritual significance. Jesus and his apostles made that clear: (a) food has no spiritual significance even if it has been sacrificed to an idol, because an idol is not god (see I Cor. 8:1—10:33); (b) food has no power in and of itself to make a man spiritually clean or unclean—it is the attitude of the heart that makes clean or unclean (cf. Matt. 15:1-20; Mark 7:14-23); (c) human opinions as to which foods may be eaten and which may not is of no spiritual significance (Rom. 14:1-4; I Tim. 4:1-4; Col. 2:20-23) until someone attempts to make abstinence or indulgence a test of Christian fellowship. It is clear a man cannot be spiritually defiled by what he eats or what he does not eat, so long as it does no physical harm to the human body. There may be one exception to this in the Christian dispensation (see Acts 15:19-20; 21:25). The human function of eating and digesting food is purely a physical process and has no spiritual significance. It is for this life only. When this life is over neither food or the human stomach, as we know them now, will continue to exist. But the "body" is different!

It must be clear that Paul is using the word *body* (Gr. *soma*) in a sense intended to mean *more* than flesh and bone and blood. The Greek word in the New Testament which most often means *flesh and*

bone is *sarx*. *Vine's Expository Dictionary* says of the New Testament usage of the word *soma*, or *body*:

SOMA . . . is the body as a whole, the instrument of life, whether of man living, e.g., Matt. 6:22, or dead, Matt. 27:52; or in resurrection, I Cor. 15:44; or of beasts, Heb. 13:11; of grain, I Cor. 15:37, 38; of the heavenly hosts, I Cor. 15:40. In Rev. 18:13 it is translated "slaves." In its figurative uses the essential idea is preserved.

Sometimes the word stands, by *synecdoche*, for the complete man, Matt. 5:29; 6:22; Rom. 12:1; James 3:6; Rev. 18:13. Sometimes the person is identified with his or her body, Acts 9:37; 13:36, and this is so even of the Lord Jesus, John 19:40 with 42. The body is not the man, for he himself can exist apart from his body, 2 Cor. 12:2, 3. The body is an essential part of the man and therefore the redeemed are not perfected till the resurrection, Heb. 11:40; no man in his final state will be without his body, John 5:28, 29; Rev. 20:13.

Soma as Paul used it here means man in his total existence in this world. Man is more than body, but he *is* body. It is through the body that the personality, the spiritual man, functions and operates in relationship to God and his fellow man. It is difficult for people of western culture to think of the body as the person. We tend to think of the body as a group of fleshly organs that will die and decompose in the grave. It is true, Paul spoke this way of the stomach, but to the Oriental (eastern) mind (including the Hebrew) the term *body* most often was associated with the *self*. So, in this section, we might correctly paraphrase the apostle by using either the word "self" or "man." Man is both body and soul (or spirit). In the New Testament *soul* describes man in his thinking, feeling, willing capacities; *body* describes man as an acting, functioning, personality living in this world in relationship to his Creator and other creatures. The body is the extension of and instrument through which the soul is expressed.

Man was not made for immorality. Man in his totality was made for the Lord. God made man to function and express self or soul in this existence through his body. Thus, the human body has, as it were, a spiritual purpose. In and through our bodies we are to serve and glorify Christ. Man, in his totality—body and soul—was made to serve and exhibit truth, purity, holiness, and goodness (the character of God). Man was *not* made with a body to abuse it in selfish, hurtful, degrading and false practices. The stomach was made for good, but man in his totality was made for God. Paul is

FIRST CORINTHIANS

certainly aware that some men may make their bellies their gods (Rom. 16:18; Phil. 3:19) so he is *not* saying in this text that there is no possibility of sinful abuse of the stomach and food. He *is* saying the Gnostic philosophy which says the sexual appetite is just like the appetite for food, a totally natural function, is *false*. He is saying man is *not* as free to satisfy the sexual desire as he is the desire for food.

The apostle had undoubtedly taught the Corinthians in his earlier visits that the Old Testament legislation about "sinful" foods had been fulfilled in the Gospel and they were "free" to eat anything that was not physically harmful. It is certain that he had previously taught them they were free in Christ from all opinions and superstitions of paganism. But now he sets out upon a five-chapter dissertation (ch. 6-10) concerning the limitations of Christian freedom. Clearly, the Corinthians had been twisting his earlier teaching about liberty to mean they were free to be totally abandoned to whatever fleshly appetite they might feel urged. Paul seeks to correct that by a concise and clear statement of the divine purpose for the human body.

6:15-20 Purpose of Humanness: The stomach was meant for food, but not for complete dietary abandon. Eating must be controlled. Gluttony is a perversion of the body and a sin. But in eating there is no intimate spiritual involvement with another person. Human sexual organs were meant for sexual intercourse. But they were not made to be given over to complete sexual abandon. Sexuality must be controlled. Sexual promiscuity is a perversion of the body and a sin. But there is more than mere physical function involved in sexual intercourse. In sexual intercourse two beings are spiritually or psychologically *joined* or united in a mutual purpose.

Paul begins his explanation of the purpose of humanness by declaring that Christians are supposed to have given their bodies (selves, persons) to be united in mutuality with Christ. Christians are to be joined, spirit, soul and body (in totality) to Jesus Christ. They are married to him (Eph. 5:21-33). For the Christian to engage in sexual intercourse with someone to whom he or she is not married is not only unfaithfulness to the human spouse but is also unfaithfulness to Christ.

The person who joins with a prostitute (male or female) in sexual intercourse does more than perform a physical function. Two people who join in sexual intimacy undeniably unite psychologically or spiritually in a mutual purpose. Those who do so as married people are fulfilling a good spiritual purpose—the will of God. Those who do so outside the marriage bonds are fulfilling a mutual, spiritual purpose

of rebellion against the will of God. If we translate (or paraphrase) Paul's use of the word *body* by using the word *person* or *self*, he would be saying, "Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one *person* with her?" Sexual intercourse is the point in human relations at which two *persons* (not just fleshly bodies) are united in the *ultimate* human intimacy. There can be no other intimacy in human relations as deeply spiritual or as psychologically binding. Two thus joined become one! Legally, of course, there is more to marriage than the act of sexual intercourse. Spiritually and psychologically there is more to marriage than sexual intercourse. But both legally and spiritually, sexual intercourse is the act that *consummates* a marriage. A person who unites sexually with a prostitute (or in an act of adultery or fornication) is not legally married to the prostitute. Paul is *not* setting forth some technical law by which a person who joins in sexual intercourse to a harlot must forever after consider himself legally married to her. In fact, there are any number of persons, legally "married" having also consummated their marriage sexually, who are not "one" in other areas of marriage. Paul *is* saying here, with all the emphasis possible, that sexual intercourse is more than a physical function. Certain physical functions of the human body are instinctive and amoral. That is, when these functions operate they are neither good nor bad—man has no moral control over them one way or another. They operate whether he chooses for them to do so or not. Digestion is such an amoral physical function. With sexual intercourse that is not so. Man has been given moral choice and control over sexual intimacy. The Greek word *de* (translated "but" in verse 17) is a conjunctive particle "marking the superaddition of a clause, whether in opposition or in continuation, to what has preceded, and it may be variously rendered *but, on the other hand, and, also, now, etc.*" We think verse 17 is a clause in *continuation* of what has preceded and not in opposition. Therefore, Paul is *likening* the intimateness of the Christian's relationship to Christ to that of two persons engaged in sexual intercourse. The Christian joins himself intimately to Christ by choice. So the person who joins himself intimately (sexually) to another person does so morally—by choice. A Christian who joins intimately (sexually) with a prostitute has taken the body (person) purchased by the sinless blood of Christ, which has been intimately joined to Christ and made a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, and joined it in rebellion against the will of Christ and the desecration of his glory. God created man to glorify his Son. Man was not given a human body to use as an instrument of rebellion. So Paul exhorts these Christians to make deliberate choice and take

FIRST CORINTHIANS

deliberate action to keep from sinning with their bodies. Because of modern connotations, the RSV translation "Shun" for the Greek word *pheugete* in verse 18 is not strong enough. The KJV and the ASV give it the more emphatic translation, "Flee" fornication. The Greek word *porneia*, translated "fornication," may also be used generically for all immorality. No human being can begin to fulfill God's purpose for having created him until he is willing to flee from all immorality.

The statement "Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against his own body" must be interpreted in this context. Paul is clearly teaching these Corinthians that sexual intercourse is *more* than a mere physical action. Divine revelation teaches that sexual intercourse is an intimate, spiritual and psychological union of personalities, much like the spiritual union of a Christian to Christ (it is, indeed, a *marriage*). He is *not* saying that other sins have no spiritual causes or consequences. He is simply saying that other sins do not unite one person with another in such a life-affecting way as fornication. The student should immediately read Proverbs 5:8-11; 6:24-32; 7:24-27. The spiritual intimacy of the sexual relationship, when perverted contrary to the will of God, results in the destruction of the personality; especially is the person inhibited from the spiritual goals for which God created him. This may be documented today from the experiences and files of counseling psychiatrists and clergymen.

A physical function of the body is temporary. It is of the flesh and will perish with the flesh. The *use* of some physical functions, however, is a spiritual matter. The *use* of most physical functions is a matter of moral choice. To use any physical function contrary to the revealed will of its Creator is immoral. All sins abusing the physical organs are "outside" the most intimate part of our personality *except* sexual abuse. Sexual sin is against the deepest recesses of the person *inside*! This is a solemn warning to those sophisticates of the world today who would seduce mankind with the ancient Gnostic philosophy that sexual intercourse is merely a physical function and may be practiced without obedience to the word of God.

In some way, when a human being gives his body to sexual intimacy with another being, he gives it as a *residence* to the personality of that other person. When sexual intimacy is given contrary to the will of God the body becomes a residence of the "spirit of harlotry" and prostitution. God wants man to give his or her body for the residence of the Holy Spirit. This is what a person vows to do when becoming a Christian. The *whole* man (which is what Paul means in his use of

the Greek word *soma*, or "body") is not to perish like food and the human stomach. Sexual promiscuity treats the *whole* man as if it were to perish! Sexual promiscuity destroys that which is eternal in man—love, faithfulness, honesty, orderliness, and righteousness. It is no accident that God symbolizes idolatry and unbelief as "harlotry" in the Old Testament. Sexual promiscuity and prostitution are so irresponsible, so exploitative, so degrading and dehumanizing in attitude and action. They treat the human body as a "thing." That is why Paul said every other sin which a man commits is outside the body but the sexually promiscuous person sins against his own body.

Paul's final explanation of and argument for the purpose of humaneness concerns the human self or person (the whole man) as a potential residence of the Holy Spirit of God Almighty. Actually, it is presupposed by the apostle that God's Spirit had already taken residence in the bodies of these Corinthian Christians. Just what does Paul mean by the question, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?" What is the phenomenon known as "the indwelling of the Holy Spirit"?

Let us first consider what, according to other New Testament passages, it *cannot* mean; (a) it cannot mean the power to perform miracles; that is specified in the New Testament as "the baptism of the Holy Spirit" and was promised only to apostles—passed on by the apostles to selected Christians of the first century only by the laying on of the hands of the apostles; some (e.g. John the Baptist) who were said to be "full of the Holy Spirit" *never* worked a miracle so far as we know; (b) it cannot mean supernatural illumination that enables those who have it to understand the scriptures; all men are created with the capacity to read human language and understand without divine illumination; the apostles were given, supernaturally, a revelation of the New will of God, but they delivered it to the whole human race in human language (see our comments on I Cor. 2:1ff.) and all sinners are expected to hear and read those apostolic words and believe *before* the Holy Spirit comes to abide with them; faith comes by hearing the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17); there would be no point in preaching, no point in sinners reading the Bible, no point even in printing Bibles if every non-Christian must wait until he is sure he has the Holy Spirit in him before he can understand the revealed will of God.

The coming of the Holy Spirit of God and Christ to take residence in the human being involves *more* than understanding, acknowledging and obeying the revealed will of the Holy Spirit in the scriptures. Apparently, it is a supernatural action on the part of God but mystical

FIRST CORINTHIANS

to man (that is, a spiritual reality neither apparent to the senses nor obvious to the intelligence). The difference between those who will *not* be raised to eternal life with Christ and those who *will* is the indwelling presence of Christ's Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:1-11). The coming of Christ's Spirit to reside in us is not something we earn or merit by our perfect obedience, but it is initiated by God's Spirit because of his grace when we give him welcome by our love and faith.

Having said it is mystical to man, however, does not preclude the fact that we can understand, acknowledge in faith, and obey the directions revealed by the Holy Spirit providing the instrumentality through which God chooses to initiate his supranatural residence in people. God's action may be mystical, but the *directions* through which he promises to act are *not* mystical. The Bible clearly teaches that faithful and loving response to the commandments of God, in any dispensation of time, will be acceptable as an invitation for the Holy Spirit to take up residence within a human being (cf. Ps. 51:10-12; John 14:15-24; 15:1-11; Acts 2:38; 5:32; Rom. 8:5; Eph. 3:17; I John 3:24; 4:12, etc.). So then, the *way* God's Spirit dwells in a person is by a person's intelligent, willing, loving submission to what God says by the Holy Spirit in the revealed Word so that what he thinks, determines, and feels is under the direction of the Spirit through the Word. In other words, the instrument or vehicle or channel through which the Holy Spirit enters and resides in our bodies (or persons) is his revealed and written Word. Apart from that process he will not function residentially in us—not initially and not continually. Clearly, Paul has been teaching from the very first of this epistle that the apostolic gospel is the exclusive matrix within which these Corinthians must be living in order to be assured of the communion (residence) of God's Spirit. God's Spirit does not reside within a person outside the communion of his Word. Christ "stands at the door and knocks"—he will not force his way in to "sup" (reside) with any who are not believing and repenting (cf. Rev. 3:19-20).

The apostle turns metaphorically to the well known practice of slavery to show the emphatic subservience of the purchased one to his purchaser. It would be a familiar experience in the first century. The slave in the Greco-Roman world was chattel, purely and simply. Slaves were bought and sold as property, and masters held total sovereignty over them. Slaves gave total allegiance and obedience to their masters lest they be punished or slain without any appeal to civil courts or magistrates. The only purpose for a slave was to serve his master's will—totally. For slaves who were purchased by good and beneficent masters, this could mean protection, security, dignity and

even happiness (see the letter to Philemon). Paul preached and wrote a great deal about the good and beneficent Master, Jesus Christ. He always considered himself, and all other Christians, as having yielded both soul and body in slavery to Christ (cf. Rom. 6:15-23). Since Christ has purchased all men through his vicarious atonement (cf. Acts 20:28; Heb. 9:12; I Peter 1:18-19; Rev. 5:9), they are expected to yield, by faith, and be his slaves for righteousness. If Christ has paid our ransom, he owns us. He actually owns us twice—first by right of having created us and second by right of having redeemed us.

The person who yields himself to become a slave of Christ has no “rights” of his own. He does not belong to himself but to Christ. The only “rights” a Christian has are those granted him in the revealed will of his Master, Jesus Christ (and that is in the Bible). Any attitude or action *not* found in Christ’s revealed will is *not* permissible for the Christian. See “New Life Through Accepting Jesus’ Death” in *Learning From Jesus*, by Seth Wilson, pgs. 495-503, College Press.

We who have yielded to the redemption he obtained for us are his “body” here on earth—the channels through which he works. We are “instruments” of his for accomplishing righteousness in the earth. Jesus, instead of being limited to one physical body as when he was here on earth, now acts through the bodies of his people in whom he lives. You will always find in the Bible that God works through a human body in this world. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1-18). The Son came in a human body to offer himself as a perfect sacrifice (Heb. 10:5-10). It was in a body that man sinned; it is in a body that we sin. It was in a body that the Son of man came to earth; it was in a body that he conquered sin which had conquered us. It was in a body that he died and rose again, and now, by his Spirit, he comes to live within the body of his people. Satan always works in this world through a body also. The only way he can thwart God’s purposes is to get a body surrendered to his use, available for his diabolic power and ugly purposes. This is the question of choice in a Christian’s life: shall he take that which has been purchased by Christ and made an instrument of the body of Christ, and give it to some unworthy use?—that body, the means through which God’s will is to be done, and yield it to the rebellious purposes of Satan? If he does, he becomes *one* with the devil. But if he is yielded to the Lord’s Spirit, he is one with the Spirit of Christ. The same Spirit which enabled Jesus Christ to live day by day in a human body and never deviate from the will of God, never yield to all the tremendous temptations of the devil, will live in us and through us as our Strengthener, too. Joined to Christ, we are able to glorify God in the body. Joined to the devil, we glorify sin in our bodies.

FIRST CORINTHIANS

Thus, Paul closes his exhortation (temporarily) against the seductive Gnostic sophistry that since the body is merely physical and every physical hunger (including the sexual hunger) an amoral, uncontrollable animal instinct, there is no moral guilt in sexual promiscuity. The Gnostic sophistry tried to ignore the sins of fornication, adultery and homosexuality by calling them simply physical functions like eating food. Paul replies that the human body was created for the Lord's purpose, its destiny is to be resurrected for the Lord's purpose, therefore, human bodies are members of God's personhood. To prostitute a human body for physical purposes only (especially in sexual promiscuity like animals) would be to take what belongs to God and use it for the devil. The bodies of Christian people belong to Christ even more surely by their having professed to accept Christ's redemption. Christians have been sanctified, body and soul, to glorify Christ by yielding up their bodies (and souls) in service to righteousness.

It is a fundamental doctrine of the New Testament. We cannot go to heaven if we do not yield to it. The old Gnostic sophistry is flooding the earth again today and has even washed over the gunwales of the "ship of Zion"—carnality threatens to sink the church today. Christians must insist on the sacredness of the human body and its sanctification to the will of God, no matter how unpopular the doctrine may be.

APPLICATIONS:

1. The Bible is vitally practical. It deals with the minutiae of human existence. God even expresses his will and wisdom for guidance in the matter of squabbles and grievances.
2. Christians *must* learn to settle grievances between themselves while on earth—there will be no pagan civil courts in heaven.
3. Christians are *called* to allow (suffer) wrong to be done to them rather than cause wrong to be done to another or to Christ's church.
4. One does not have to murder someone to go to hell—just be *greedy*!
5. Homosexuality is not a disease; it is not congenital; it is not mental illness—IT IS SIN!
6. The most perverse sin may be forgiven if the sinner will trust the word of Christ and be washed, sanctified and justified.
7. There is no such thing as absolute freedom—even Christian liberty is limited to God's revealed guidelines for goodness and helpfulness.
8. Any *thing, habit* or *idea* that would rule our conduct or dictate our way of thinking contrary to Christ's will is unlawful for Christians.

9. Sexual intercourse is *not* the same as or even like eating food. It is *not* merely a physical function. It is psychologically intimate and essentially moral. It is spiritual!
10. Human *bodies* were created by God as *instruments* through which human *beings* might express love and adoration for their Creator. Although the flesh will eventually die, while it lives it is to be employed only for loving God.
11. Human *beings*, if they are willing, may have the honor of sharing their human *bodies* with the *Spirit* of Almighty God.
12. The apostle Paul's teaching about the human body and its functions is as up-to-date as today's newspaper!

APPREHENSIONS:

1. What is a "grievance"?
2. Why would Christians be suing one another in court?
3. How will saints be judging the world and angels?
4. Who are the "least esteemed" by the church?
5. Could Christians actually settle disputes with one another over property outside a civil court?
6. Why does having lawsuits with one another as Christians produce defeat?
7. Would you be willing to allow yourself to be defrauded by a Christian brother before taking him to civil court?
8. Sexual misbehavior excludes people from the kingdom of God—does financial misbehavior (thievery, robbery, greed)?
9. Can the sin of homosexuality be repented of and discontinued by accepting Christ?
10. What is meant by saying that some Corinthian homosexuals were "washed, sanctified, justified"?
11. What is meant by saying this was done "in the name of the Lord Jesus"?
12. How could *all* things be lawful for a Christian?
13. What condition is meant by the term, "enslaved"?
14. Why does Paul talk about food being meant for the stomach, etc.?
15. To what extent is a person "joined" to a prostitute when having sexual intercourse with one?
16. For what purpose did God make the human body?
17. How is every sin except sexual immorality *outside* the body?
18. How does the Holy Spirit dwell in the human body?
19. What is the price paid for us?
20. Does belonging to Christ mean we have no say about what we think and do? Who does have the "say-so"?