
The Christian as Saint

I Corinthians 6: 1-11

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Introduction

A. Review of Context

As you may recall, we stated this morning that our current series, “Christ and the Christian,” we are tying together the concept of finding our identity from Christ. We are linking the various themes and texts that emphasize this idea. We also pointed out that for the most part (not every Sunday morning will have a Sunday evening counterpart) each morning and evening sermon pair is intended to be heard as a unit. We will be using the morning presentation to focus on a aspect of Christ’s person and work, and then in the evening we will examine a text that relates that same theme more specifically to the life of the believer. To make the most of this study of God’s word you will not want to miss either part, and then during the week we will in flocks discuss them together as well. The manuscripts will be available through the website and can be heard or downloaded to hear later.

B. Progress of Corinthian discussion

This morning we remarked that the city of Corinth had a culture that was cutting edge and quite contemporary. The church in the city naturally reflected these same characteristics. But the church did not possess the discernment to recognize where their culture and the gospel were at conflict. The Apostle Paul’s ministry to these believers challenged them on many of these issues. Especially where those issues collided with the primacy of the Gospel, he challenged them to consider the gospel, its message and impact as the organizing principle of their lives. It should not even be just an important **part** of who we are it **is** who we are!

The Corinthian correspondence (our two documents that we have in our Bibles that are addressed to the Corinthians and maybe even two more) challenged those believers (and us) to focus on the gospel as we work through various issues and problems. Leadership divisions, fiscal integrity, worship liturgy, and the like all fall into place when examined in light of the content and effect of the gospel. Therefore both letters to the Corinthians are loaded with response to challenges as to the true meaning of the gospel and its impact in our lives.

This evening we are fast-forwarding to chapter six in the book we know as First Corinthians. This morning we asserted that, from the beginning of the letter, Paul is demonstrating the importance of the Gospel by contrasting it with any competing wisdom that the “world” might offer. In fact, in verse 30 of the first chapter, we saw the big picture, the “so what.” It was that Christ has been “*made our wisdom, and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.*” This is the answer to their conflicts. The conflict was not primarily over worship styles or evangelistic schemes, Paul saw their lack of unity as indicating that many in the Corinthian community were indeed **outside** of the

power of the gospel. Lifting any of their issues to the level of ultimacy is to negate the true value and intent of the gospel. Our life, indeed our wisdom, that has broken in at this end of the age is Christ. He is our only hope and life. All of our wisdom, schemes and plans will come to naught. And because Christ is our wisdom, he also is our righteousness, sanctification and redemption. He is our righteousness. Because of his death, resurrection and ascension he now is our access to God from our sin and death. Christ now stands in my stead. Isaiah's Holy One of Israel, has made himself to be sin for us so that his righteousness could stand for us. This is what is involved in the theological idea of justification. My sin needs an answer, not just a superficial cover-up.

This intrusion of the gospel wisdom will then of necessity have implications in our lives. It must begin with the correct attitude, but will have visible, observable fruit in the way we live, act and respond. In chapter 2, Paul expressed the power of God's wisdom as the anchor of this new life (verses 5, 12 and 13). In chapter 3 he corrects the problem of division by demonstrating the God and gospel centeredness of this work, closing with "you are Christ's and Christ is God's" in verse 23. The purpose and value of apostolic ministry and leadership is defended in chapter 4 as a book end to chapter 3, then he attacks their apparent disregard to sexual immorality in chapter 5. He is surprised that this immorality is present among them; even among the progressive Corinthians this type of immorality is shameful. But what was even more the problem was their lack of ability to understand why their lives should be different. They had some sort of misperception that somehow this behavior demonstrated the power of grace even better and they should not worry about what God could or would do. This brings us to tonight's text in chapter 6. He will link this problem with the answer he as already made on why we should live a certain way. Help us to grasp the significance of this passage to live out Paul and God's intent correctly.

The Purpose of Saints vs. 1-8

First of all, let me say that this passage is full of details that are debated extensively by commentators and scholars. Our remarks will be over the most general circumstance and will not require us to make decisions over some of these issues. I will refer you to commentaries by Witherington, Fee and Thiselton if you want a more detailed analysis of this passage. But in our context Paul is following on with the Corinthian's lack of response to the sin in question in chapter 5. His resolution includes the concept that the community of believers is to be engaged in making judgments with respect to the morality and ethics of each others lives. One of the purposes of the saints is to be engaged in judgment.

A. The problem (1)

In verse 1 we read the inverse of the **problem** in chapter 5. There, they avoided, indeed even gloated in their lack of "judging," while at the same time...

"When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?"

The Corinthians would not take a stand against immorality but seemed to find it easy to settle their conflicts in the city court system. Exactly what the problem was that Paul is addressing here is one area of debate. Some say the issue is that of the socially powerful defrauding the weak, some say it is any legal engagement with civil authorities. There are some scholars who think this only refers to legal action in relation to the immorality mentioned previously, some think the vagueness of this challenge is because this attitude of immorality is generally so in their midst. However we look at the specifics, Paul is appalled (note his use of “does he dare”) that they are involving the “unrighteous” to settle their disputes rather than themselves, the “saints.”

Who **are** the unrighteous? Even the meaning of “unrighteous” is debated. Some soften it to refer to the corruptness of the Corinthian judicial system and translate it as “dare one seek judgment at a court where there is questionable justice?” There is much to say about the social context and perhaps a subtle double meaning. But the letter’s context from chapter one and the word’s repetition later in the chapter cause us to read this in an absolute sense, as referring to those who do not have the righteousness of Christ.

This then helps us read the meaning of the word “saint” as well. He is not merely referring to God’s people, though indeed they are. But his idea of “holy,” the root of the word for saint, is used in opposition to the idea of “unrighteous.” The saints are those who stand in Christ as their wisdom, their righteousness, sanctification and redemption. They are assumed to corporately embody the wisdom from above, the wisdom of Christ. Can we better see the ‘disconnect’ in their thinking now. They should have the discerning wisdom that comes from God and they have ignored or outright abdicated its use.

The question from Paul is then, whatever the specific circumstances he has in mind, why would you take your grievances to those who are unbelievers to allow them to make these decisions?

B. The challenge (2,3)

So what does Paul go on to say about this? In a series of rhetorical questions (i.e. questions with implied obvious answers) that includes some irony and satire he first of all **challenges** them to the fact that they are indeed, because of their position competent to hear and answer in such cases.

“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? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!”

Paul may be referring to Moses delegating judgment to the elders or perhaps Daniel in chapter 7, where a court will give the kingdom to the “saints.” Turn with me to that chapter and let’s read from verse 23 onward. (Read Daniel 7:23-28)

Because of the Spiritual implications of judging the world and angels, it is no doubt that the “*matters pertaining to this life*” does involve spiritual and moral issues. Paul clearly claims that the Corinthian believers have the resources to answer these problems. But as we go along in the passage he does not limit the concerns to just those involving ethics, he demonstrates that they really don’t understand who they are and what they are actually to be doing.

C. The reality (4-8)

So then, as we continue to read on in verses 4-8, Paul points them toward this **reality** with two assertions. The first is seen in verses 4-6 where we read:

“So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? 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, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?”

They are challenged to think of who they are in the realm of wisdom. He finds it unimaginable that someone cannot assist in these areas.

The second assertion involves their attitude in these disputes as well. The very fact that they are having these issues belies their lack of humility and desire to live in community. An area in Paul’s thinking that we recently heard much about both from Pastor Dan’s series from Colossians and from Pastor Mark’s series “The Fellowship of the King.” Paul reminds them of the strength of their relationship as believers; that it should be thought of in family terms. The passage states:

“To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!”

The Past of Saints vs. 9-11a

In working through this problem, Paul has pointed out that one of their true purposes in community is to assist one another in the recognition of their moral failures and the restitution in repentance. They also are to be engaged as a strongly knit family to solve problems and reconcile differences. The flip side of the problem though was that in not pursuing this way of thinking they were at risk of demonstrating that they too were among the “unrighteous.”

A. The failing (9a)

In the beginning of verse 9 we read:

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?”

In Paul’s understanding of the world see two classes of individuals, the righteous and the unrighteous. Those who are to be “judged” by the righteous have no standing in the reception of God’s inheritance. The unrighteous will fail to achieve a position in God’s kingdom. This bold statement of the ultimacy of the failing is to be viewed somewhat as a warning to those in the Corinthian fellowship. Its starkness is felt when we see where he goes in the next sentence. There he bares the facts of the matter for all to see.

B. The facts (9b-10)

The section reads:

“Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

The idea that this is a warning, a challenge that they were at risk of being counted as “unrighteous,” stems from the phrase, “do not be deceived.” Literally stop being or allowing themselves to be deceived. Stop something that is already occurring. He is reminding them of what unrighteousness looks like. It has as its fruit the behaviors and practices that they know all too well. The daily life of Corinth was full of these types of people and they were not relegated to the “dregs” of society. They were the important and socially prominent. None the less, they were emphatically not inheriting God’s kingdom.

C. The focus (11a)

And then he places it all in sharp focus:

“And such were some of you.”

He reminds them quite vividly that they were these people. The contrast is that they are no longer these kinds of people. To continue in these practices and to approve of these practices is to mark one as “unrighteous.” The unrighteous one does not and will not inherit the promise of God’s kingdom.

Who are they really?

The Position of Saints vs. 11b

In the next sentence he tells them who they are:

“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.”

In a sentence that echoes what we read this morning in 1:30 where we found that Christ is our wisdom by being our “righteousness and sanctification and redemption,” we find another three pictures of salvation that indicate a connection between our position and our condition. In the name of the Lord Jesus, whom we now understand as our true righteousness, we too are cleansed from sin and its contamination, we are set apart to bring God glory, and counted righteous to stand before him in eternity. This has great repercussions as to how our lives are to be lived. We are no longer unrighteous and therefore our lives should not look “unrighteous.” In doing so, we are giving evidence that that change, the washing, sanctifying, and justifying are not true of us.

The Corinthians had no doubt taken what they wanted Paul to be saying and stretched it into an idea like this: God doesn’t care what kind of people we are as long as we have ... You can fill in the blank with “the right teacher or baptizer,” “the right set of gifts,” “the right social ranking (indicating God’s blessing)” and many other issues Paul addresses in the books. But Paul says they once were “unrighteous” and now are in Christ, you must live in the fruit of Christ’s righteousness or you are not truly in His righteousness.