

CHAPTER 6

In this chapter the apostle,

I. Reproves them for going to law with one another about small matters, and bringing the cause before heathen judges (v. 1-8).

II. He takes occasion hence to warn them against many gross sins, to which they had been formerly addicted (v. 9-11).

III. And, having cautioned them against the abuse of their liberty, he vehemently dehorts them from fornication, by various arguments (v. 12 to the end).

1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-8

CAUSES OF LITIGATION CENSURED

Here the apostle reproves them for going to law with one another before heathen judges for little matters; and therein blames all *vexatious law-suits*. In the previous chapter he had directed them to punish heinous sins among themselves by church-censures. Here he directs them to determine controversies with one another by church-counsel and advice, concerning which observe,

I. The fault he blames them for: it was going to law. Not but that *the law is good, if a man use it lawfully*. But,

1. *Brother went to law with brother* (v. 6), one member of the church with another. The near relation could not preserve peace and good understanding. The bonds of fraternal love were broken through. *And a brother offended*, as Solomon says, *is harder to be won than a strong city*; their contentions are like the bars of a castle, ~~189~~ Proverbs 18:19. Note, Christians should not contend with one another, for they are brethren. This, duly attended to, would prevent law-suits, and put an end to quarrels and litigations.

2. They brought the matter before the heathen magistrates: *they went to law before the unjust, not before the saints* (v. 1), brought the controversy before unbelievers (v. 6), and did not compose it among themselves,

Christians and saints, at least in profession. This tended much to the reproach of Christianity. It published at once their folly and unpeaceableness; whereas they pretended to be the children of wisdom, and the followers of the Lamb, the meek and lowly Jesus, the *prince of peace*. And therefore, says the apostle, “*Dare any of you, having a controversy with another, go to law, implead him, bring the matter to a hearing before the unjust?*” Note, Christians should not dare to do any thing that tends to the reproach of their Christian name and profession.

3. Here is at least an intimation that they went to law for trivial matters, things of little value; for the apostle blames them that they did not suffer wrong rather than go to law (v. 7), which must be understood of matters not very important. In matters of great damage to ourselves or families, we may use lawful means to right ourselves. We are not bound to sit down and suffer the injury tamely, without stirring for our own relief; but, in matters of small consequence, it is better to put up with the wrong. Christians should be of a forgiving temper. And it is more for their ease and honour to suffer small injuries and inconveniences than seem to be contentious.

II. He lays before them the aggravations of their fault: *Do you not know that the saints shall judge the world* (v. 2), *shall judge angels?* v. 3. And are they unworthy *to judge the smallest matters, the things of this life?* It was a dishonour to their Christian character, a forgetting of their real dignity, as saints, for them to carry little matters, about the things of life, before heathen magistrates. When they were to judge the world, nay, to judge, it is unaccountable that they could not determine little controversies among one another. By judging the world and angels, some think, is to be understood, their being assessors to Christ in the great judgment-day; it being said of our Saviour's disciples that they should at that day *sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*, ^{<408>}Matthew 19:28. And elsewhere we read of our *Lord's coming with ten thousand of his saints to execute judgment on all*, etc., ^{<614>}Jude 1:14, 15. *He will come to judgment with all his saints*, ^{<513>}1 Thessalonians 3:13. They themselves are indeed to be judged (see ^{<423>}Matthew 25:31-41), but they may first be acquitted, and then advanced to the bench, to approve and applaud the righteous judgment of Christ both on men and angels. In no other sense can they be judges. They are not partners in their Lord's commission, but they have the honour to sit by, and see his proceeding against the wicked world, and approve it. Others understand this judging of the world to be meant when

the empire should become Christian. But it does not appear that the Corinthians had knowledge of the empire's becoming Christian; and, if they had, in what sense could Christian emperors be said to judge angels? Others understand it of their condemning the world by their faith and practice, and casting out evil angels by miraculous power, which was not confined to the first ages, nor to the apostles. The first sense seems to be most natural; and at the same time it gives the utmost force to the argument. "Shall Christians have the honour to sit with the sovereign Judge at the last day, whilst he passes judgment on sinful men and evil angels, and are they not worthy to judge of the trifles about which you contend before heathen magistrates? Cannot they make up your mutual differences? Why must you bring them before heathen judges? When you are to judge them, as it fit to appeal to their judicature? Must you, about *the affairs of this life*, set those to judge who are of no esteem in the church?" (so some read, and perhaps most properly, v. 4), *heathen magistrates*, *exouthenemenous*, the things that are not, ⁴¹¹⁸1 Corinthians 1:28. "Must those be called in to judge in your controversies of whom you ought to entertain so low an opinion? Is this not shameful?" v. 5. Some who read it as our translators make it an ironical speech: "If you have such controversies depending, set those to judge who are of least esteem among yourselves. The meanest of your own members are able surely to determine these disputes. Refer the matters in variance to any, rather than go to law about them before heathen judges. They are trifles not worth contending about, and may easily be decided, if you have first conquered your own spirits, and brought them into a truly Christian temper. *Bear and forbear*, and the men of meanest skill among you may end your quarrels. *I speak it to your shame*," v. 5. Note, It is a shame that little quarrels should grow to such a head among Christians, that they cannot be determined by arbitration of the brethren.

III. He puts them on a method to remedy this fault. And this twofold: —
 1. By referring it to some to make it up: "*Is it so that there is no wise man among you, no one able to judge between his brethren?*" v. 5. You who value yourselves so much upon your wisdom and knowledge, who are so puffed up upon your extraordinary gifts and endowments, is there none among you fit for this office, none that has wisdom enough to judge in these differences? Must brethren quarrel, and the heathen magistrate judge, in a church so famous as yours for knowledge and wisdom? It is a reproach to you that quarrels should run so high, and none of your wise

men interpose to prevent them.” Note, Christians should never engage in law-suits till all other remedies have been tried in vain. Prudent Christians should prevent, if possible, their disputes, and not courts of judicature decide them, especially in matters of no great importance.

2. By suffering wrong rather than taking this method to right themselves: *It is utterly a fault among you to go to law in this matter:* it is always a fault of one side to go to law, except in a case where the title is indeed dubious, and there is a friendly agreement of both parties to refer it to the judgment of those learned in the law to decide it. And this is referring it, rather than contending about it, which is the thing the apostle here seems chiefly to condemn: *Should you not rather take wrong, rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?* Note, A Christian should rather put up with a little injury than tease himself, and provoke others, by a litigious contest. The peace of his own mind, and the calm of his neighbourhood, are more worth than victory in such a contest, or reclaiming his own right, especially when the quarrel must be decided by those who are enemies to religion. But the apostle tells them they were so far from bearing injuries *that they actually did wrong, and defrauded, and that their brethren.* Note, It is utterly a fault to wrong and defraud any; but it is an aggravation of this fault to defraud our Christian brethren. The ties of mutual love ought to be stronger between them than between others. And *love worketh no ill to his neighbour,* ^{<610>}Romans 13:10. Those who love the brotherhood can never, under the influence of this principle, hurt or injure them.

~~<609>~~ 1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-11

SOLEMN WARNINGS

Here he takes occasion to warn them against many heinous evils, to which they had been formerly addicted.

I. He puts it to them as a plain truth, of which they could not be ignorant, that such sinners should not inherit the kingdom of God. The meanest among them must know thus much, that *the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God* (v. 9), shall not be owned as true members of his church on earth, nor admitted as glorious members of the church in heaven. All unrighteousness is sin; and all reigning sin, nay, every actual sin committed deliberately, and not repented of, shuts out of the kingdom

of heaven. He specifies several sorts of sins: against the first and second commandments, as *idolaters*; against the seventh, as *adulterers*, *fornicators*, *effeminate*, and *Sodomites*; against the eighth, as *thieves* and *extortioners*, that by force or fraud wrong their neighbours; against the ninth, as *revilers*; and against the tenth, as *covetous and drunkards*, as those who are in a fair way to break all the rest. Those who knew any thing of religion must know that heaven could never be intended for these. The scum of the earth are no ways fit to fill the heavenly mansions. Those who do the devil's work can never receive God's wages, at least no other than *death, the just wages of sin*, ~~412~~ Romans 6:23.

II. Yet he warns them against deceiving themselves: *Be not deceived*. Those who cannot but know the fore-mentioned truth are but too apt not to attend to it. Men are very much inclined to flatter themselves that *God is such a one as themselves*, and that they may live in sin and yet die in Christ, may lead the life of the devil's children and yet go to heaven with the children of God. But this is all a gross cheat. Note, It is very much the concern of mankind that they do not cheat themselves in the matters of their souls. We cannot hope to sow to the flesh and yet reap everlasting life.

III. He puts them in mind what a change the gospel and grace of God had made in them: *Such were some of you* (v. 11), such notorious sinners as he had been reckoning up. The Greek word is *tauta* — *such things* were some of you, very monsters rather than men. Note, Some that are eminently good after their conversion have been as remarkably wicked before. *Quantum mutatus ab illo! How glorious a change does grace make!* It changes the vilest of men into saints and the children of God. Such were some of you, but you are not what you were. *You are washed, you are sanctified, you are justified in the name of Christ, and by the Spirit of our God*. Note, The wickedness of men before conversion is no bar to their regeneration and reconciliation to God. The blood of Christ, and *the washing of regeneration*, can purge away all guilt and defilement. Here is a rhetorical change of the natural order: *You are sanctified, you are justified*. Sanctification is mentioned before justification: and yet the name of Christ, by which we are justified, is placed before the Spirit of God, by whom we are sanctified. Our justification is owing to the merit of Christ; our sanctification to the operation of the Spirit: but both go together. Note, None are cleansed from the guilt of sin, and reconciled to God through

Christ, but those who are also sanctified by his Spirit. All who are made righteous in the sight of God are made holy by the grace of God.

1 CORINTHIANS 6:12-20

AGAINST FORNICATION

The twelfth verse and former part of the thirteenth seem to relate to that early dispute among Christians about the distinction of meats, and yet to be prefatory to the caution that follows against fornication. The connection seems plain enough if we attend to the famous determination of the apostles, Acts 15, where the prohibition of certain foods was joined with that of fornication. Now some among the Corinthians seem to have imagined that they were as much at liberty in the point of fornication as of meats, especially because it was not a sin condemned by the laws of their country. They were ready to say, even in the case of fornication, *All things are lawful for me*. This pernicious conceit Paul here sets himself to oppose: he tells them that many things lawful in themselves were not expedient at certain times, and under particular circumstances; and Christians should not barely consider what is in itself lawful to be done, but what is fit for them to do, considering their profession, character, relations, and hopes: they should be very careful that by carrying this maxim too far they be not brought into bondage, either to a crafty deceiver or a carnal inclination. *All things are lawful for me*, says he, *but I will not be brought under the power of any*, v. 12. Even in lawful things, he would not be subject to the impositions of a usurped authority: so far was he from apprehending that in the things of God it was lawful for any power on earth to impose its own sentiments. Note, There is a liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, in which we must stand fast. But surely he would never carry this liberty so far as to put himself into the power of any bodily appetite. Though all meats were supposed lawful, he would not become a glutton nor a drunkard. And much less would he abuse the maxim of lawful liberty to countenance the sin of fornication, which, though it might be allowed by the Corinthian laws, was a trespass upon the law of nature, and utterly unbecoming a Christian. He would not abuse this maxim about eating and drinking to encourage any intemperance, nor indulge a carnal appetite: *Though meats are for the belly and the belly for meats* (v. 13), though the belly was made to receive food, and food was originally

ordained to fill the belly, yet if it be not convenient for me, and much more if it be inconvenient, and likely to enslave me, if I am in danger of being subjected to my belly and appetite, I will abstain. *But God shall destroy both it and them*, at least as to their mutual relation. There is a time coming when the human body will need no further recruits of food.” Some of the ancients suppose that this is to be understood of abolishing the belly as well as the food; and that though the same body will be raised at the great day, yet not with all the same members, some being utterly unnecessary in a future state, as the belly for instance, when the man is never to hunger, nor thirst, nor eat, nor drink more. But, whether this be true or no, there is a time coming when the need and use of food shall be abolished. Note, The expectation we have of being without bodily appetites in a future life is a very good argument against being under their power in the present life. This seems to me the sense of the apostle's argument; and that this passage is plainly to be connected with his caution against fornication, though some make it a part of the former argument against litigious law-suits, especially before heathen magistrates and the enemies of true religion. These suppose that the apostle argues that though it may be lawful to claim our rights yet it is not always expedient, and it is utterly unfit for Christians to put themselves into the power of infidel judges, lawyers, and solicitors, on these accounts. But this connection seems not so natural. The transition to his arguments against fornication, as I have laid it, seems very natural: *But the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body*, v. 13. Meats and the belly are for one another; not so fornication and the body.

I. The body is not for fornication, but for the Lord. This is the first argument he uses against this sin, for which the heathen inhabitants of Corinth were infamous, and the converts to Christianity retained too favourable an opinion of it. It is making things to cross their intention and use. The *body is not for fornication*; it was never formed for any such purpose, *but for the Lord*, for the service and honour of God. It is to be an instrument of righteousness to holiness (⁴¹⁶Romans 6:19), and therefore is never to be made an instrument of uncleanness. It is to be a member of Christ, and therefore must not be made the member of a harlot, v. 15. And *the Lord is for the body*, that is, as some think, Christ is to be Lord of the body, to have property in it and dominion over it, having assumed a body and been made to partake of our nature, that he might be head of his church, and head over all things, ⁴¹⁵Hebrews 2:5, 18. Note, We must take

care that we do not use what belongs to Christ as if it were our own, and much less to his dishonour.

II. Some understand this last passage, *The Lord is for the body*, thus: He is for its resurrection and glorification, according to what follows, v. 14, which is a second argument against this sin, the honour intended to be put on our bodies: *God hath both raised up our Lord, and will raise us up by his power* (v. 14), by the power of him who *shall change our vile body, and make it like to his glorious body by that power whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself*, ^{<102>}Philippians 3:21. It is an honour done to the body that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead: and it will be an honour to our bodies that they will be raised. Let us not abuse those bodies by sin, and make them vile, which, if they be kept pure, shall, notwithstanding their present vileness, be made like to *Christ's glorious body*. Note, The hopes of a resurrection to glory should restrain Christians from dishonouring their bodies by fleshly lusts.

III. A third argument is the honour already put on them: *Know you not that your bodies are the members of Christ?* v. 15. If the soul be united to Christ by faith, the whole man is become a member of his mystical body. The body is in union with Christ as well as the soul. How honourable is this to the Christian! His very flesh is a part of the mystical body of Christ. Note, It is good to know in what honourable relations we stand, that we may endeavour to become them. *But now*, says the apostle, *shall I take the members of Christ, and make them the members of a harlot? God forbid.* Or, *take away* the members of Christ? Would not this be a gross abuse, and the most notorious injury? Would it not be dishonouring Christ, and dishonouring ourselves to the very last degree? What, make a Christ's members the members of a harlot, prostitute them to so vile a purpose! The thought is to be abhorred. God forbid. *Know you not that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with hers? For two*, says he, *shall be one flesh.* *But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit*, v. 16, 17. Nothing can stand in greater opposition to the honourable relations and alliances of a Christian man than this sin. He is joined to the Lord in union with Christ, and made partaker by faith of his Spirit. One spirit lives and breathes and moves in the head and members. Christ and his faithful disciples are one, ^{<102>}John 17:21, 22. *But he that is joined to a harlot is one body, for two shall be one flesh*, by carnal conjunction, which was ordained of God only to be in a married state. Now shall one in so close a union with Christ as to

be one spirit with him yet be so united to a harlot as to become one flesh with her? Were not this a vile attempt to make a union between Christ and harlots? And can a greater indignity be offered to him or ourselves? Can any thing be more inconsistent with our profession or relation? Note, The sin of fornication is a great injury in a Christian to his head and lord, and a great reproach and blot on his profession. It is no wonder therefore that the apostle should say, "*Flee fornication* (v. 18), avoid it, keep out of the reach of temptations to it, of provoking objects. Direct the eyes and mind to other things and thoughts." *Alia vitia pugnando, sola libido fugiendo vincitur* — *Other vices may be conquered in fight, this only by flight*; so speak many of the fathers.

IV. A fourth argument is that it is a sin against our own bodies. *Every sin that a man does is without the body; he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body* (v. 18); every sin, that is, every other sin, every external act of sin besides, is without the body. It is not so much an abuse of the body as of somewhat else, as of wine by the drunkard, food by the glutton, etc. Nor does it give the power of the body to another person. Nor does it so much tend to the reproach of the body and render it vile. This sin is in a peculiar manner styled uncleanness, pollution, because no sin has so much external turpitude in it, especially in a Christian. He sins against his own body; he defiles it, he degrades it, making it one with the body of that vile creature with whom he sins. He casts vile reproach on what he Redeemer has dignified to the last degree by taking it into union with himself. Note, We should not make our present vile bodies more vile by sinning against them.

V. The fifth argument against this sin is that the bodies of Christians are *the temples of the Holy Ghost which is in them, and which they have of God*, v. 19. He that is joined to Christ is one spirit. He is yielded up to him, is consecrated thereby, and set apart for his use, and is hereupon possessed, and occupied, and inhabited, by his Holy Spirit. This is the proper notion of a temple — a place where God dwells, and sacred to his use, by his own claim and his creature's surrender. Such temples real Christians are of the Holy Ghost. Must he not therefore be God? But the inference is plain that hence we are not our own. We are yielded up to God, and possessed by and for God; nay, and this is virtue of a purchase made of us: *You are bought with a price*. In short, our bodies were made for God, they were purchased for him. If we are Christians indeed they are

yielded to him, and he inhabits and occupies them by his Spirit: so that our bodies are not our own, but his. And shall we desecrate his temple, defile it, prostitute it, and offer it up to the use and service of a harlot? Horrid sacrilege! This is robbing God in the worst sense. Note, The temple of the Holy Ghost must be kept holy. Our bodies must be kept as his whose they are, and fit for his use and residence.

VI. The apostle argues from the obligation we are under *to glorify God both with our body and spirit, which are his*, v. 20. He made both, he bought both, and therefore both belong to him and should be used and employed for him, and therefore should not be defiled, alienated from him, and prostituted by us. No, they must be kept as vessels fitted for our Master's use. We must look upon our whole selves as holy to the Lord, and must use our bodies as property which belongs to him and is sacred to his use and service. We are to honour *him with our bodies and spirits, which are his*; and therefore, surely, must abstain from fornication; and not only from the outward act, but from the *adultery of the heart*, as our Lord calls it, ~~4058~~ Matthew 5:28. Body and spirit are to be kept clean, that God may be honoured by both. But God is dishonoured when either is defiled by so beastly a sin. Therefore flee fornication, nay, and every sin. Use your bodies for the glory and service of their Lord and Maker. Note, We are not proprietors of ourselves, nor have power over ourselves, and therefore should not use ourselves according to our own pleasure, but according to his will, and for his glory, *whose we are, and whom we should serve*, ~~4073~~ Acts 27:23.