



As we move into chapter 6, what’s intriguing is that the situation here is that the Corinthians actually do exercise some judgment towards one another in their midst, but they go to the world to settle their disputes – and these disputes are what Paul calls trivial matters. So, they judge the world, and they don’t judge sin in their midst. But if there’s a minor issue, they go to the world for its judgment. In this text, I think Paul presses the following point: **The church is to display cross-centered judgment towards each other.**

As we study the verses today, you might be tempted to think you really don’t have anything to apply from these verses. I mean, Paul’s saying to not take a Christian to court, right? Well, I’m not wanting to take a Christian to court – and even if I did, I won’t do it. So, I’m good. Sermon’s over, right? Wrong. Before studying the text, I need to give a background to the context of Roman courts. It will help us in understanding Paul’s point.

In the Roman, and Corinthian court system, there are records after records in history that reveal that the judicial system was warped – the wealthy always won. So, what was the point of sending someone to trial in a court? As one person put it: **People in the ancient world contended for honor in the law courts, and one gained honor by beating a rival down** (Garland, p. 200). How does this apply to us? I am sure people act this way in court systems in America today. We want to be vindicated and proved right, so we take someone to court. But, whether or not we take someone to court, how often do we live this way, in general? To put another way, how often do we take fellow Christians to our mental courtroom? In the midst of the shelter-at-home decisions, COVID criterion, election year, protests (whether violent or non-violent), and a host of other viewpoints, how have you communicated to those within our own church family? Or, how have you communicated about them? Whether it’s your judgment of the leadership or judgment of fellow church members, have you posted to social media with the intention of magnifying Christ or simply to make your viewpoint known to elevate yourself? Have you spoken to crush an opponent – not realizing that maybe you’re treating fellow Christians as an enemy?

A month ago, I interviewed a pastor in Holland about his viewpoint of how things are going in Holland from a spiritual perspective, and this is what he said to me. I find this sobering. He said that the world is so divided, taking opposite sides and treating others accordingly. Then he said, “I think that mindset has come in the church.” Christians are committing the same sins as Corinth. They judge the world, treating them as enemies instead of loving their enemies. And as they judge the world, they also elevate themselves at the expense of putting down fellow believers. How is this gospel-focused?

Now, you could say, “But these are important matters!” Certainly. There are *many* important matters, but what’s most important? The gospel or your view of wearing masks? Someone learning the gospel or someone knowing your political viewpoint? I believe if the gospel is preached and lived, then the Spirit works to enact change and will move people’s hearts to God’s heart on all issues. But, if Jesus is relegated to the corner, then the church will be no different from the world. Like Corinth, we must be on alert and not suffer from gospel amnesia. Is this you today? I’m asking you individually and corporately.

You're not the witness looking at others in the church and evaluating them. The Scriptures come to our individual hearts. Are you determining in *everything* and every situation to determine to know Jesus Christ and him crucified? Are you determining to live out the gospel's implications of dying to self and serving others?

Let's look in this text and see how to apply it to our own lives. What does it mean to display cross-centered judgment towards each other? What does it mean to live differently from the world towards each other within the church? I believe it means to apply grace in the midst of grievances. But what does that even mean? Let's dive into the text and see.

### **1. Christians are competent to judge any dispute (vv. 1-6).**

We're going to read the first six verses together again, and as we read, I want you to notice how Paul describes the Corinthian Christians and also how he describes those who are not a part of the church.

Let's read together: When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? <sup>2</sup>Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? <sup>3</sup>Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! <sup>4</sup>So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? <sup>5</sup>I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, <sup>6</sup>but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?<sup>1</sup>

While the Corinthians are acting like the unsaved people, Paul actually reveals to them that they are competent to make the right judgments by stating to them their new identity in Christ. This reminds me of what Cody said last week. Paul is calling the Corinthians to live out who they actually are in Christ. They've been living on the basis of themselves alone and on the basis of the world. They're trying to raise themselves up in the human court system and also through their self-centered evaluations. But if they knew their identity in Christ, they wouldn't even seek to live this way. So, what is the identity of the Corinthians? And, by extension, what's our identity as Christians?

**Christians are saints (v. 1).** At the beginning of the letter, Paul says they were called to be saints, and Paul reiterates the point here. A saint is a "holy one." They are a set apart one. Set apart for what or whom? Set apart unto God for God's purposes. If you have turned from your sins and turned to God for forgiveness and reconciliation on the basis of Jesus and his sacrifice, then that was part of God's work in setting you apart for himself! Your identity then is to be for God's glory!

As a result, saints should then treat saints in a way to lead them to God's glory. And, if saints live for God's glory, then their judgments ought to be just and true. To try to get the world to raise us up is simply foolish because the world isn't set apart for God's glory! What are you doing but going to lesser things? Being a saint means we're in the highest position imaginable. God has set us apart for his glory!

**Saints will judge the world and angels (vv. 2, 3).** Paul says that saints will judge the world and angels. Therefore, why would we go to the world for its judgment of us? And, since we'll even judge angels, should we be able to judge matters pertaining to this life? Paul anchors the Corinthians not only in their past assurance in salvation, but in their future destiny. They will judge the world and angels. Now, you could ask, "What does that mean?" Good question. And, Paul doesn't tell us. While I can speculate what

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 6:1-6.

I think that means, I hesitate to give too much information. What I do know clearly from Scripture is that all who have turned to Jesus for forgiveness of sins will be rulers in the Kingdom to come. We will justly rule under God's rule in a perfect world. Under him, judgment obviously takes place. What that looks like, I have no idea, but the fact that I will judge ought to then compel me to learn to live justly in this world and give a picture to this present world of the world to come where all will be just and right.

I do want to qualify something here, too. Some have taken this passage to mean that Christians should never go to court, and that's not what Paul says here. The phrase "trivial cases" refers to civil disputes. In Romans, Paul talks about the authority God has given to judge with the sword. It is wrong when Christians do not take crimes like murder, sexual abuse, physical abuse, etc, to the physical courts. They have that role. But when we come to issues of personal matters between believers, our goal ought to always be reconciliation.

We shouldn't following in the Corinthians' footsteps of just wanting to be right or vindicated. Let the gospel inform our thinking. As a saint, and someone who will judge under God, the King and Judge, we should want Jesus to be seen as right and Jesus and the gospel to be emphasized in our words and actions. Therefore, Ventura, are you living faithfully today to reveal to one another, and the world, the glories of that future reality?

Christians *are* saints. Saints will judge the world and angels. Then, in verse 6, Paul shares another reality that should affect the Corinthians: **Christians are family (v. 6)**. Brother goes to law against brother. By a show of hands, when you were a child (or, if you're a child) have you ever heard your parents say something like, "You need to get along?" Maybe you heard, "Hug now." Or, maybe "Shake hands." Or, "You need to say sorry." But one of the greatest goals of a parent is to have their children love each other. Why? We're family! Isn't this Jesus' prayer in John 17? He prays for our unity. It's not a bare unity for unity's sake. It's a unity that has come to us because Jesus shed his blood to make us part of God's family. Therefore, whether or not you treat me always with love and respect, you're still my brother and sister. Just like my kids didn't choose their siblings, I didn't choose you to be my spiritual sibling. And God has commanded that we love each other – not use each other to elevate our own opinions.

The reality is that since we are saints, and we will judge in the future, and we are family, we ought always to pursue unity with one another. And, we should never go to the world. Why? Paul shares some things about the world that should deter us from trusting in the world's assessment of things. In verse 1, Paul calls the judges "unrighteous." He could mean that in two ways. There was major injustice in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman court system. For a Christian to be vindicated by an unjust judge means nothing. Why would you not rather be vindicated by the Just Judge, God himself? Or, this could also mean that the world is simply unrighteous. No matter how good the judge in this world, if he is not centered on Christ, he's unjust. Do you have that attitude, Ventura? We cannot trust in any judge in this world, if they're simply working within a worldly framework – no matter how moral they are! Paul then calls those outside the church the world, in verse 2. This isn't him simply saying they're an orb in space. "World" refers to anything that is under the fallenness of this world. Therefore, it's contrary to the gospel. Secular judgments won't magnify the gospel. Paul then moves to verse 4 and says that these judges have no standing in the church. The church is to be an embassy of the Kingdom of Jesus on this earth. Earthly Judges are part of their embassies in the world. No embassy would allow another country to make judgments in their embassy. Why would Christians do this in these interpersonal issues? Finally, in verse 6, Paul calls them unbelievers. That means that these judges reject King Jesus. If they reject King Jesus, they don't have the same priorities of Jesus. They aren't concerned about the unity of the

believers. They're concerned about weighing a decision and making one right and one wrong. They won't help with reconciliation.

Ventura, where are you today? Do you seek worldly, unbelieving, unrighteous means to elevate yourself above other believers? Do you turn to unbelieving counsel and then put down fellow believers? Where is King Jesus in all your thinking? Are you being diligent to pursue the unity of the faith in the bond of peace? Or, are you even unknowingly creating divisions within the church family? Has the mindset of the world come into Ventura?

Based on all of these realities, Paul is righteously angry. In verse 1, we read, “. . . does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?”<sup>2</sup> In the Greek, when someone wanted to emphasize a word, they'd move it to the beginning of the sentence. You want to know the first word in this Greek sentence? The word is “dare.” It's like Paul is saying, “How dare you!” It is angering to Paul that they would abuse their glorious identity in Christ and submit to the world. Ventura, it should disgust us if we are using the world to create factions within the body of Christ over interpersonal issues and differences. And I know, we could say, “But there are issues that we need to divide over.” Yes, there are. Yet, I think we are all too quick to believe it's one of those situations. Love believes all things and hopes all things. But when we divide Christ's church, it's like we are lashing Jesus' body on the cross. Think of it. The church is called the body of Christ. To divide Christ's body is like crucifying him again instead of living in the beauty and grace of what the crucifixion gave to us.

Therefore, Paul says, “I say this to your shame.” Meaning, in modern terms, “Shame on you!” How dare you! Shame on you! You may think that doesn't sound very Christian. But it's very Christian. To neglect so great a salvation, to degrade Jesus when you've been given everything is sinning with full knowledge – no ignorance. Now, Paul doesn't want them to live in shame, but how can they repent of things they don't feel shame over? How dare you deny the gospel when the gospel is what gave you eternal hope and life with God.

So, Paul then sarcastically adds in verse 5, “. . . Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers. . . .”<sup>3</sup> The Corinthians who thought they were wise only had worldly wisdom. Do you remember what Paul defines as wisdom? The answer is Christ and him crucified. He says Jesus has become for us wisdom from God. So, Paul is asking them, and us, “Isn't there anybody in your midst who determines to apply the gospel to every aspect of life?”

Ventura, think of the power of this statement. In your communication with co-workers, your children, your social media, your interactions with neighbors and friends, do you *determine* to focus your mind on Christ and him crucified? Good question to always ask yourself is this, “**Are my words and actions putting Jesus and the cross on display?**” Meditate on Jesus, Ventura. Jesus, who deserved glory, didn't seek it. Jesus, who deserved to be worshiped, silenced himself in the face of his enemies. Jesus, didn't come to condemn the world, but save those who despised him. Jesus was murdered by the moral and the immoral people so that people could be godly. How? Because he took the punishment on himself that we deserved. And, in taking that punishment, God gifts Jesus' righteousness to all who stop trying to gain approval from the world and look to Jesus alone for restoration and hope in God. This is how we ought to live. Yet, Corinth wasn't living this way.

## 2. Christians who make lawsuits against their church family strips the gospel's witness (vv. 7-8).

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<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 6:1.

<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 6:5.

Read verses 7-8 with me: <sup>7</sup>To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? <sup>8</sup>But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers! <sup>4</sup>

The world would rather wrong and defraud people. I would much rather be right and win an argument than to have someone take advantage of me. But what does Paul say is the gospel ethic? What does determining to know Jesus Christ and him crucified mean when another church member hurts you? It means suffering the wrong and being defrauded.

Wait! I'm supposed to just let fellow church members step on me and hurt me? Ok, clarification time. If there is a criminal sin, we address in the court systems, but other than that Paul says "yes." Even in those criminal situations, God gives grace to forgive. Yet, how opposite from many people's experiences. Recently I was thinking about how I've joked about church splits over carpet color or changing a service time. Then I thought about our time period. What about church splits over asking people to wear facemasks or requesting they take a certain service time? Are we portraying to the world that we are no different than they are? What are we portraying to our children who we hope will endure persecution if it comes to them? To quote another commentator, instead of slandering, **"A united community in which love dominates is the existential affirmation of the truth of the gospel. A community which contains within itself the divisions which characterize the 'world' has no power to transform its environment, because the contradiction between theory and practice is too evident. . ."** (Garland, p. 210).

How can we live this way?! Why should I pay for my brother's wrong? Jesus paid for yours. But what if they don't change? Jesus couldn't have said that, too. Why aren't you changing? Yet, he died for you. But my feelings were hurt. Yes, because you loved. And Jesus loved the world and was hurt as well! But I don't want to forgive. You've forgotten Jesus' forgiveness towards you. Jesus said that those who are forgiven much love much. Do you know how much you've been forgiven? Then you'll forgive much. But if you are holding on to grudges and making Christians "pay," you have gospel amnesia. Maybe now you're saying, "Pastor Timothy, I'm feeling guilty and I don't like it!" Well, we shouldn't like it if we are guilty. But here's the amazing hope! Paul presses his challenge by giving a very strong warning and an extremely great hope.

### 3. Christians must live their identity or they will not inherit the Kingdom (vv. 9-11).

"Pastor Timothy, are you saying Christians can lose their salvation?" First off, it's not me saying it. Second, No! But let's read Paul's words in verses 9-11: <sup>9</sup>Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup>nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup>And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. <sup>5</sup>

The unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. Is Paul talking about not going to judges because they're unrighteous and they won't inherit the Kingdom? That may be part of his point, but I think Paul

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<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 6:6–8.

<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 6:9–11.

is looking at the Corinthians because he moves on to say to the Corinthians “such were some of you.” And therefore, he’s calling them to live out their identity again.

The reality is that if you are living as an unrighteous person and there’s no repentance in your life, no fight against that unrighteousness, you will not inherit the Kingdom. So, he’s saying to Corinth that if someone always lives against the Christian’s identity, they are not a Christian. And yes, a Christian’s life is not one of perfection, but it is one of repentance. So, Paul is saying to the Corinthians that they are a walking contradiction. They need to turn back to Christ.

What about you? Do you proclaim the gospel but then in your words and behavior contradict the gospel toward the world and to people within the church? Is there grace and forgiveness in your heart towards fellow believers – even when they wrong you – or are there grudges and anger or even ignoring people and saying, “No big deal” when it is a big deal?

You know, Paul puts this sin list in here of sexual sins and interpersonal sins to show that the point isn’t so much the sin as much as the unrepentance. And Paul then says, “And such were some of you.” This doesn’t mean they no longer sin these sins. In fact, we know they’re committing some of these. But their identity is different in Christ! This is glorious news. God has given you a new identity, and that new identity is a promise of growth in godliness. But, if the church continues in unrepentant sinning, are they even a true church? To be a saint and to not live like a blood-bought saint is to betray the identity, calling your salvation into question.

So here, Paul doesn’t make sin look prettier just because the church is full of Christians. Instead, he wants them to see that their identity means they should see sin more clearly and hate it with greater resolve. But we should hate it with greater resolve because we are new in Christ. Look at the hope that grounds us: **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.** <sup>6</sup>

All of these realities are stated in the past tense, emphasizing the realities we live in. We’re washed. Meaning that we are cleansed from the power and penalty of sin and we are cleansed to serve the Lord in his ways. Now, let’s live as the washed people we are. We were sanctified. Meaning, we were set apart by God. If God has set you apart unto him, is he going to let you wallow in sin? No. God never fails in his salvation. Those whom he has sanctified will grow in godliness! And we were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whoa! To be justified is to be declared righteous. And sometimes, we can tend to think that this is all salvation is: God declares me righteous so I’m good. But again, this is an identity that should shape us. If I am declared righteous with Christ’s righteousness – being *in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ*. That means I’m united with Jesus. If I’m united with him, I’ll begin doing what he does. How? By the Spirit of our God.

Ventura, we have all we need to exemplify gospel-centered relationships to the church family. We don’t need to elevate ourselves above others. We can choose rather even to be hurt by the church family because Christ and his glory is our supreme passion. This truly gives a picture to the world that we are different. **Ventura, we aren’t to be about us. We are all about God’s glory in Jesus by the power of the Spirit. May we as a church display cross-centered judgment towards one another. May we show forth grace in the grievances, living out our identities as saints who are washed, sanctified and justified.**

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<sup>6</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 6:11.

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