



1 Corinthians - Chapter Six

III. 1 Corinthians 5:1-6:20 - A Report of Sexual Immorality and Legal Wrangling (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Six

Paul states that some members of the church were bringing shame on themselves by taking other believers before the local courts instead of bringing their grievance before suitable church leaders. He reminds them that one day believers will be called upon to judge angels, so surely they could seek suitable arbitration between one another. Paul clearly believed that even this muddled church community were people of God and therefore could be entrusted to deal with matters between its members.

He also states that sinners will not inherit the Kingdom of God, reminding them that it is what they once were before becoming justified by faith. This is a pointer to the fact that they should indeed exercise more tolerance and even be prepared to be wronged for the sake of Christ.

Paul states that the body of a believer is a temple to the Lord and belongs to God. Therefore, they are to honour their bodies in the sight of God with what they eat and by proper sexual conduct, something that should have been between man and wife, and certainly not with prostitutes! It is a passage about identifying what the body was created for and using it according to its purpose.

III.b 1 Corinthians 6:1-11 - Lawsuits among Believers

Some of the Corinthians had wronged each other in various ways, including fraud. Instead of addressing these problems within the church, however, they had taken each other before the local magistrates. The wrongs themselves, and this way of handling them, are both shameful for Christians.

¹ When any of you has a grievance against another, do you dare to take it to court before the unrighteous, instead of taking it before the saints?

1 Corinthians 6:1

When any of you. Paul's teaching applies to all members of the church and not just the leaders.

A grievance against another. Although some have argued that Paul is prohibiting Christians from ever going to court against another Christian, he seems in these verses only to be addressing disputes related to property or money, <<**Why not rather be defrauded?**>> (v.7), rather than criminal cases, which fall under the jurisdiction of the state. This can be seen in: <<**Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience**>> (Romans 13:1-5), where Paul shows that God has established civil government for the protection and good of all people. It is doubtful, therefore, that Paul's intention is that this specific example should be applied in every situation, since not every situation today matches the circumstances of this specific case in Corinth, where the two parties are in the same local church, i.e. <<**among you**>> (v.5), and where the dispute is specifically related to property or money (v.7).

Whatever the circumstances, it is clear from Scripture that disputes between believers need to be handled with the utmost care (vv.1-8), in a wise and godly manner before the watching world; wherever possible under the disciplinary authority of the church; and with the counsel of spiritually mature Christians, i.e. taking it before the saints, who have no stake in the matter and who can give objective, biblical advice.

Refer also to **Matthew 18:15-20** regarding the steps that Christians need to take when one believer sins against another believer, and the authoritative role of the church in such cases.

The unrighteous. Paul probably is referring to magistrates who are both unbelievers (v.4 and v.6), and who are at times unjust in their judgments. However, Paul was himself acquitted before such a court in Corinth, although it was not fellow saints that had brought him before it: <<**But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal. They said, 'This man is persuading people to worship God in ways that are contrary to the law.'** Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to the Jews, 'If it were a matter of crime or serious villainy, I would be justified in accepting the complaint of you Jews; but since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves; I do not wish to be a judge of these matters'>> (Acts 18:12-15).

² 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? ³ Do you not know that we are to judge angels – to say nothing of ordinary matters?

1 Corinthians 6:2-3

Saints will judge the world, we are to judge angels. The people of God will participate with Christ in the final Day of Judgment: <<As I looked, this horn made war with the holy ones and was prevailing over them, until the Ancient One came; then judgement was given for the holy ones of the Most High, and the time arrived when the holy ones gained possession of the kingdom>> (Daniel 7:21-22), in which the holy ones has the same meaning as saints. Jesus confirms his disciples will sit in judgement with him: <<Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel>> (Matthew 19:28), <<You are those who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel>> (Luke 22:30), and: <<To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne>> (Revelation 3:21). It is also alluded to by his brother: <<And the angels who did not keep their own position, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgement of the great day>> (Jude 6).

Are you incompetent to try trivial cases? If those in church truly believe the teaching of Scripture then they must realise they should be able to work through the differences that may arise within their own community of faith.

Tom Wright concludes: Paul will allow nothing to shake his basic faith: if Jesus rose from the dead, then he is the Christ; if he is the Christ, those who belong to him are God's true people; and God's true people will judge the world. If God's true people at the moment look a very unlikely crew to be judging anyone or anything, well then, they must shape up and come into line. They must become, through moral reflection and discipline in the present time, the people they actually are 'in Christ' and in the purposes of God. That is what a good deal of this letter is about.

⁴ If you have ordinary cases, then, do you appoint as judges those who have no standing in the church? ⁵ I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to decide between one believer and another, ⁶ but a believer goes to court against a believer – and before unbelievers at that?

1 Corinthians 6:4-6

If you have ordinary cases. Paul is not thinking of serious matters that should clearly be tried in a criminal court. It would be wrong not to comply with civil law!

Do you appoint as judges those who have no standing in the church? Corinth came under the Roman judicial system, which many of them respected. Paul has already stated that their judges were 'unjust'. This is not because they were in any way corrupt, or not competent to hear civil or criminal cases, but because they were not justified by God and therefore should not be the ones to bring judgement in cases between members of the body of Christ. God had chosen human judges of his people and instructed them to provide justice: **<<I charged your judges at that time: 'Give the members of your community a fair hearing, and judge rightly between one person and another, whether citizen or resident alien>>** (Deuteronomy 1:16). The church, through its anointed leadership, is now required to do the same. They are called upon to judge the actions of people within their church, but to do so in a non-judgemental way.

I say this to your shame. Plagued by arrogance: **<<So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours>>** (1 Corinthians 3:21), **<<I have applied all this to Apollos and myself for your benefit, brothers and sisters, so that you may learn through us the meaning of the saying, 'Nothing beyond what is written', so that none of you will be puffed up in favour of one against another. For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift? Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Quite apart from us you have become kings! Indeed, I wish that you had become kings, so that we might be kings with you!>>** (1 Corinthians 4:6-8), and: **<<But some of you, thinking that I am not coming to you, have become arrogant. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power>>** (1 Corinthians 4:18-19), the Corinthians should have been ashamed of their behaviour: **<<Let all those who rejoice at my calamity be put to shame and confusion; let those who exalt themselves against me be clothed with shame and dishonour>>** (Psalm 35:26), **<<If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church>>** (1 Corinthians 14:35), **<<Come to a sober and right mind, and sin no more; for some people have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame>>** (1 Corinthians 15:34), and: **<<Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things>>** (Philippians 3:19), for they were not even wise enough to settle a dispute between those in their own congregation. Although they thought themselves to be wise: **<<Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise>>** (1 Corinthians 3:18), **<<We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honour, but we in disrepute>>** (1 Corinthians 4:10), and: **<<For you gladly put up with fools, being wise yourselves!>>** (2 Corinthians 11:19), their actions belied this self-estimation, resulting in their shame: **<<But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong>>** (1 Corinthians 1:27).

Before unbelievers at that. The surprise is that they would rather have a brother or sister tried in a pagan court than in the presence of their church elders. It is unclear whether Paul was astonished or had more of a mocking tone when he writes a believer goes to court against a believer. Surely, Paul reasons, there

must be someone among you wise enough to decide. That is, someone with church authority and biblical knowledge to deal with the dispute constructively.

⁷ In fact, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?

⁸ But you yourselves wrong and defraud – and believers at that.

1 Corinthians 6:7-8

Is already a defeat for you. By taking the inappropriate action to have lawsuits taken out against other church members without referring the matter to the leadership indicates that damage has been caused, both to the individual in terms of their own spiritual and moral health, and to the reputation of the church.

Why not rather be wronged? These terms translate the Greek verb *adikeō*. Paul used the adjectival form of this verb, *adikos*, in v.1 to describe the ‘unrighteous’ magistrates that the Corinthians were using to adjudicate their cases. This implies that the Corinthians were acting like unbelievers rather than like the saints, i.e. the sanctified or holy people that God had called them to be: <<***To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours***>> (1 Corinthians 1:2), <<***He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption***>> (1 Corinthians 1:30), and: <<***If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple***>> (1 Corinthians 3:17). Refer also to the comments made on 3:1-3 and 5:1.

The challenge that Paul is setting here is that Christians should rather be wronged by other believers than resort to taking legal proceedings against them. However, this does not require people to be foolish in accepting any behaviour against them by others who profess the faith but are themselves not acting it out in love. Believers are not to judge but they are required to show good judgement.

A key point that should not be missed is that the world loves to see disputes within the church, for it shows that Christians are no different to anyone else. Yet they are called to be different and should take the public image of the church into consideration before taking any action against a brother or sister.

Why not rather be defrauded? Paul is saying it is better for believers to let go of their possessions than run the risk of bringing the church or the Gospel into disrepute. This is in line with the teaching of Jesus who advised the rich young ruler to give everything away in order to follow him: <<***Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me’***>> (Mark 10:21). It does not seem to make any difference as to whether one gives their possessions away or allows them to be taken: <<***If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt***>> (Luke 6:29).

Defraud. This word, Greek *apostereō*, would be particularly appropriate for unethical business practices among wealthy people. In: <<***Behold, the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts***>> (James 5:4 ESV), it is used in this way. Although not many of the Corinthians were powerful or of high social status: <<***Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth***>> (1 Corinthians 1:26), some were wealthy enough to humiliate those who have nothing at the Lord's Supper: <<***What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you!***>> (1 Corinthians 11:22).

Paul is not advocating fraud, theft or any other transgression between believers. He is simply stating that it should be a matter to be resolved through strong internal church discipline. Elsewhere, he makes it even clearer that the church is supposed to be a beacon for the world; such teaching should be seen and received as timeless and cross-cultural: <<***Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world. It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labour in vain***>> (Philippians 2:14-16).

You yourselves wrong and defraud. Paul brings a home truth upon them. Their actions as believers in taking other members of the church to court is wrong in the sight of God and defrauding him of his grace, love and mercy, which he has so lavishly applied to them since they received his Word.

⁹ Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, ¹⁰ thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers – none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Paul is not indicating that sinners cannot be forgiven, otherwise there would be no one that could be saved, and deservedly so: <<***But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord***>> (Romans 6:22-23). What Paul is saying is that those who remain unrepentant of their sins will not come into the Kingdom. There are certain aspects of human behaviour and lifestyle choices that just will not fit the requirements for being in the Kingdom of God, whether that is here on earth or following final judgement.

People should not misunderstand this as being a set of rules and regulations that either God or his church has laid down as an entry requirement. Rather, it

is that the creator God has unveiled his genuine model for humanity in Jesus, his Christ, and there are certain ways of behaving which just will not fit. If someone wants to be a truly, fully human being, those ways of behaving have to be left behind. Coming on board into God's Kingdom, while still being that sort of person, is a liability both for the individual themselves and for everybody else.

Paul's use of the word wrongdoers or unrighteous, Greek *adikos* again, refer to the comments on vv.7-8, implies that those whose behaviour is indistinguishable from the unbelieving world may not be among the saints at all. This is further noted in: <<**Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realise that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless, indeed, you fail to pass the test!**>> (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Do not be deceived. Paul realised how easy it would be for the church to follow the cultural norm rather than acting out the will of God, something that often calls them to be countercultural and which may require personal sacrifice to achieve.

Male prostitutes, sodomites. The Greek words *malakos* and *arsenokoitēs* refer specifically to male homosexuals. However, in: <<**For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error**>> (Romans 1:26-27), Paul also refers to female homosexuals, and to homosexual desires or passions. Both passages, as well as: <<**You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination**>> (Leviticus 18:22), <<**If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them**>> (Leviticus 20:13), and: <<**This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, fornicators, sodomites, slave-traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching**>> (1 Timothy 1:9-10), refer to homosexuality in general.

Such passages clearly refer to those who commit homosexual acts and never seek the forgiveness that the Cross promises to all sinners who later repent through the name of Jesus. People must never be judged by the church for their sexual orientation, although leaders will need to teach the biblical principles of correct lifestyle choices to them, just as they must in all other areas of sin.

People need to be clear that Paul is not saying that sexual sin is any worse than other sin. Neither is he saying the homosexual sin is worse than heterosexual sin. Sexual desire is a key part of the human nature. Humans are so designed, in the fascinating interplay of body, mind, emotions and imagination, that what they are and do as sexual beings affects every other aspect of their lives. There is no such thing as 'casual sex'; sex is far more important than that. To trivialise sex is to trivialise the God-given humanness of people.

¹¹ And this is what some of you used to be. 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.

1 Corinthians 6:11

And this is what some of you used to be. Paul reminds the Corinthians, and all other believers, of where they were and still would be without the sanctification that came through God's gracious gift of his Son.

You were washed refers to the spiritual cleansing from the guilt and dominating power of sin that occurs at regeneration: <<*But when the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit*>> (Titus 3:5), and that is symbolised in the washing of baptism: <<*And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptised, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name*>> (Acts 22:16).

You were sanctified. This is a similar concept, in this instance meaning that an initial break with the love of sin, and with the power and practice of sin, occurs at regeneration: <<*And now I commend you to God and to the message of his grace, a message that is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all who are sanctified*>> (Acts 20:32), <<*So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus*>> (Romans 6:11), and: <<*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!*>> (2 Corinthians 5:17). However, in another sense sanctification is also an ongoing process in the Christian life: <<*I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification*>> (Romans 6:19), <<*Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus*>> (Philippians 3:13-14), <<*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us*>> (Hebrews 12:1), and: <<*Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord*>> (Hebrews 12:14). Refer also to comments made on 1 Corinthians 1:2.

You were justified. The Greek term is *dikaioō* and is the positive counterpart to the terms 'unrighteous', 'suffer wrong', and 'wrong' in v.1, vv.7-8, and v.9 respectively, and is commented on in those verses. Here, Paul uses *dikaioō* not in its ethical sense, i.e. 'be seen to be righteous', but in its judicial sense, that is, 'declare righteous'. God has already declared the Corinthian Christians to be righteous: <<*Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*>> (Romans 5:1), <<*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*>> (Romans 8:1), and: <<*Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies*>> (Romans 8:33). God was able to do this because the righteousness that belongs to Christ,

due to his perfect life, has become the 'righteousness' of believers in 1 Corinthians 1:30; refer also to 2 Corinthians 5:21. Paul's point in vv.1-11 is that the Corinthians need to live in a way that is consistent with this verdict and status.

What this verse goes on to indicate is that there is a way for all sinners to gain entry into the Kingdom of God. It is not by ability, personality or work. It is simply by accepting God's gracious gift of life through his Son and then living a life that reflects the values of God that Jesus represents.

III.c 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 - Glorify God in Body and Spirit

Some of the Corinthian Christians were using prostitutes, theorising that bodily appetites were matters of indifference for Christians just as they apparently were for everyone else. Paul reminds them that the bodies of Christians are one with the resurrected Christ and, in risen form, the Christian's body will be eternal. What they do with them now, therefore, is important.

¹² 'All things are lawful for me', but not all things are beneficial. 'All things are lawful for me', but I will not be dominated 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 meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

1 Corinthians 6:12-13

'All things are lawful'. The quotation marks around this phrase, both here and in 1 Corinthians 10:23, have been supplied to indicate that it was probably a commonly used slogan among the Corinthians. It basically means 'I can do whatever I want'.

Not all things are beneficial. There are all sorts of things that people can legally and rightfully do in their lives. However, they need to realise there are always consequences with regard to the choices they make, and some of the consequences are not at all helpful! True faith and trust in Jesus is what will provide real freedom in life. Paul explains further: <<***All these regulations refer to things that perish with use; they are simply human commands and teachings***>> (Colossians 2:22).

I will not be dominated by anything. Paul clearly indicates that individual believers are not compelled to do things just because they can. They need to do what they know to be right for God and for his church.

'Food is meant for the stomach' is probably another Corinthian slogan. The Corinthians had adopted from the culture around them the idea that the body is permitted to have everything that it craves. Paul knows that human desires are tainted with sin, which uses these desires to master the person for its own evil purposes. Paul uses similar arguments in Romans chapters 6 and 7.

The body is meant not for fornication. God designed sexual pleasure to be experienced between a husband and wife, and for no other purpose: <<***Therefore***>>

a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh>> (Genesis 2:24).

What is the body meant for? For the Lord Paul answers triumphantly. This is a surprise. Somehow Paul envisages the Christian's relationship with the Lord Jesus not simply as a spiritual one, but also a physical one: not of course in the sexual sense, but in the sense that Jesus wants to know each person and work through them as fully physical human beings, both now and in the age to come. In fact, Paul sees the body as a human sacrifice to God: *<<I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship>>* (Romans 12:1).

In his book Purpose Driven Life, Rick Warren writes, 'the problem with a living sacrifice is that it has a tendency to crawl off the altar'. Paul is warning them against such a representation of themselves.

In fact, people face all sorts of desires and cultural influences, some of them very subtle that can lead them off the path they should be following. Paul is clearly indicating that it is a matter of individual choice and responsibility to ensure that the right way is chosen.

¹⁴ And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power.

1 Corinthians 6:14

Raise us by his power. Jesus' resurrection, God raised the Lord, was only the first step in the general resurrection of God's people that will occur on the last day: *<<But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died>>* (1 Corinthians 15:20). Jesus' body and the believer's body, therefore, are eternal: *<<So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven>>* (1 Corinthians 15:42-49), for God will also raise all believers up: *<<And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day'>>* (John 6:39-40). The eternal nature of the believer's body should affect his or her present behaviour. This is reflected in: *<<And why are we putting ourselves in danger every hour? I die every day! That is as certain, brothers and sisters, as my boasting of you – a boast that I make in Christ Jesus our Lord. If with merely human hopes I fought with wild animals at Ephesus, what would I have gained by it? If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for*

tomorrow we die.’ Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’ Come to a sober and right mind, and sin no more; for some people have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame>> (1 Corinthians 15:30-34).

The resurrection of the body remains a mystery and human language is inadequate to express what this might truly mean or look like when it occurs.

¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!

1 Corinthians 6:15

Your bodies are members of Christ. Already in 1 Corinthians 1:13, Paul has hinted that the church is Christ’s body and that divisions in the church are incompatible with this truth. Refer also to 1 Corinthians 12:12, and 12:27; Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:13-16, and 5:23; and Colossians 1:18.

Make them members of a prostitute? Never! This is something the people of God had been accused of doing by the prophets, including: <<*You played the whore with the Egyptians, your lustful neighbours, multiplying your whoring, to provoke me to anger*>> (Ezekiel 16:26), and: <<*Because of the countless debaucheries of the prostitute, gracefully alluring, mistress of sorcery, who enslaves nations through her debaucheries, and peoples through her sorcery, I am against you, says the Lord of hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will let nations look on your nakedness and kingdoms on your shame*>> (Nahum 3:4-5). Paul clearly states this must not happen with the new family of God.

¹⁶ Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, ‘The two shall be one flesh.’ ¹⁷ But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. ¹⁸ Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself.

1 Corinthians 6:16-18

United to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Unity with Christ is incompatible with all sin: <<*We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin*>> (Romans 6:6), but particularly with sexual sin. Because sexual union has a spiritual component, sexual activity outside of marriage is a unique sin both against Christ (v.15), and one’s own body, sins against the body itself. This is reflected in the words of King Solomon: <<*for a prostitute’s fee is only a loaf of bread, but the wife of another stalks a man’s very life*>> (Proverbs 6:26), and: <<*But he who commits adultery has no sense; he who does it destroys himself*>> (Proverbs 6:32). Within marriage, sexual union is not only allowed but has positive spiritual significance: <<*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one*

flesh.” So they are no longer two, but one flesh>> (Mark 10:7-8), something Paul gives deeper thought to in Ephesians 5:22-33.

Shun fornication or flee from sexual immorality. Paul also tells the Corinthians to: <<*flee from the worship of idols*>> in 1 Corinthians 10:14. Idolatry and sexual immorality were closely connected in Israel’s history: <<*They rose early the next day, and offered burnt-offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel*>> (Exodus 32:6), and: <<*While Israel was staying at Shittim, the people began to have sexual relations with the women of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods*>> (Numbers 25:1-2), as well as in Paul’s thinking regarding the problems in Corinth: <<*Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play.’ We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day*>> (1 Corinthians 10:7-8).

Human beings have free will and Paul, rather than laying down rules, is advising the Corinthians to think through the consequences of their actions, such as choosing to sleep with a prostitute. People may follow rules for a short time. Others may reject them immediately because they are impositions. Paul recognises that if people think things through genuinely from a Christian perspective they are more likely to come up with the right choices and abide by them. A good biblical example was Joseph fleeing from Potiphar’s wife when she made advances towards him. Refer to Genesis 39:6-12.

¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?

1 Corinthians 6:19

A temple of the Holy Spirit within you. This is an argument that goes back to foundational Christian beliefs. The Spirit of the Lord lives within individual Christians (v.17), making each believer’s body a temple just as the church, corporately conceived, is also a temple where God’s Spirit dwells: <<*Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple*>> (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

You are not your own. As with other gifts from God: <<*For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?*>> (1 Corinthians 4:7), Christians are to exercise responsible stewardship over their bodies. Since it is inadvisable to grieve the Holy Spirit: <<*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption*>> (Ephesians 4:30), one should not consider asking him to leave for a while in order to do something inappropriate.

²⁰ For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

1 Corinthians 6:20

Bought with a price. The image is borrowed from the slave market: <<*You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters*>> (1 Corinthians 7:23), as well as in: <<*But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness*>> (Romans 6:17-18), with Christ's blood being the purchase price: <<*Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son*>> (Acts 20:28), <<*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace*>> (Ephesians 1:7), <<*You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish*>> (1 Peter 1:18-19), and: <<*They sing a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation*>> (Revelation 5:9).

No one should ever forget just how precious they are in God's sight that he would purchase their redemption at such a high cost to himself.

Glorify God in your body. Every action, and indeed every thought, should be an act of worship, which will in turn bring glory to God. This is what he truly desires from his people.