

Text: I Corinthians 6:1-11

Title: “Moral Matters ... Integrity”

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles today to I Corinthians 6. Let's pray before we approach the Scriptures.

1 Corinthians 6:1 (NIV) - If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints?

From the first words we get an idea of what is on the mind of the apostle, and the Holy Spirit, in this section of God's Word. Church members were taking one another to court. Now this falls in a section of the letter where Paul is exhorting the Corinthian church about moral matters.

Morals matter for the people of God. Sometimes Christians are tempted to think, “Well, I have my fire insurance from hell. I know I'm going to heaven, so I can live any way I want to live.” If that is your thinking, then something is desperately wrong.

In I Corinthians 5 Paul talks about our accountability to and for one another in the way we conduct ourselves. Remember the Corinthian church was just ignoring the fact that a man in their congregation was living in open sexual immorality. It was known widely in the church and in the community, but no one in the church took this matter of accountability seriously enough to deal with the man.

And that wasn't the only moral matter that Paul had been told about. There was the matter of INTEGRITY. There were also members of the church who had no problem with taking one another into the pagan courts to settle their personal disputes.

As a matter of fact, lawsuits were a common part of the life of the Greeks. And Corinth, being a Greek city, was no exception. Historians tell us that for the Greeks law courts were one of their chief forms of entertainment. Maybe on CBS (the Corinthian Broadcasting Company) Judge Judy was the most popular TV show. Just down the road from Corinth was the great city of Athens, the lawsuit capital of the world of that day. No doubt that litigious spirit spilled over into Corinth ... and, sadly, into the church.

The same thing can be said of our own nation. We are a litigious nation. It's getting downright humorous:

ILLUSTRATION – Earlier this year in Lodi, California, a city dump truck backed into Curtis Gokey's car. The car was damaged badly, so Gokey sued the city of Lodi for \$3,600. There is a catch to the story: Curtis Gokey was driving the city dump truck that crunched his own personal car. And he admitted it was his fault. But he decided to sue the city anyway.

January 2000: Kathleen Robertson of Austin, Texas, was awarded \$780,000 by a jury of her peers after breaking her ankle tripping over a toddler who was running amuck inside a

furniture store. The owners of the store were understandably surprised at the verdict, considering the misbehaving little boy was Ms. Robertson's own son.

June 1998: A 19-year-old Carl Truman of Los Angeles won \$74,000 and medical expenses when his neighbor ran over his hand with a Honda Accord. Mr. Truman apparently didn't notice there was someone at the wheel of the car, when he was trying to steal his neighbor's hubcaps.

Well, as we think about Christian morals in general, and integrity in particular, the Bible has light to guide us.

1. AN OUTRAGEOUS PROBLEM (vv.1,6-8)

The problem is that the Corinthian church members were bringing disgrace on the name of Christ by suing each other in courts of law ... before the pagans. What a sad witness!

1 Corinthians 6:1 (NIV) - If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints?

Note: I think it's important to point out here that we are not talking about criminal matters. Criminal matters belong in the courts. And God has ordained government to punish evildoers. And we're not talking about business disputes that often require legal action.

What we're talking about is personal matters between Christians. In this case there may have been a dispute over property. Maybe it was for something that had been said.

1 Corinthians 6:6-7 (NIV) - But instead, one brother goes to law against another—and this in front of unbelievers! The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?

Two things make it outrageous to Paul:

- **And you do it in front of non-believers.** Non-believers must have been amazed to see Christians treating each other in this manner ... hurling accusations at one another in front of non-believers in court. Outrageous!
- **You do this to a “brother.”** “One brother goes to law against another...” We are to treat one another in the Body of Christ with the highest level of respect.

1 Corinthians 6:8 - Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.

If fellow Christians offend or slander us, why not rather be wronged, rather than to bring reproach on the Name of Christ and the Body of Christ by taking one another to court?

ILLUSTRATION - Leonard Sweet tells the story of flying to Arizona for a speaking engagement. He was met at the airport by a Christian brother who drove Leonard to his speaking engagement in a brand new Ford pickup. Listen as Leonard tells the story:

“Since I was still mourning the trade-in of my Dodge truck, we immediately bonded, sharing truck stories and laughing at the bumper-sticker truism: ‘Nothing is more beautiful than a man and his truck.’

“As I climbed into his 2002 Ranger for the ride back to the airport a day later, I noticed two big scrapes by the passenger door. ‘What happened here?’ I asked.

“‘My neighbor's basketball post fell and left those dents and white scars,’ Tom replied with a downcast voice.

“‘You're kidding! How awful,’ I commiserated. ‘This truck is so new I can smell it.’

“‘What's even worse is my neighbor doesn't feel responsible for the damage.’

Rising to my newfound friend's defense, I said, ‘Did you contact your insurance company? How are you going to get him to pay for it?’

“‘This has been a real spiritual journey for me,’ Tom replied. ‘After a lot of soul-searching and discussions with my wife about hiring an attorney, it came down to this: I can either be in the right, or I can be in a relationship with my neighbor. Since my neighbor will probably be with me longer than this truck, I decided that I'd rather be in a relationship than be right. Besides, trucks are meant to be banged up, so I got mine initiated into the real world a bit earlier than I expected.’”

That’s integrity ... and that’s the spirit that should have prevailed in Corinth, but it didn’t. So there was an outrageous problem, but Paul also had ...

2. A WORKABLE SOLUTION (vv.2-5)

Now take a look at vv.2-5. If you just scan down through those verses, you eye will likely be caught by a number of question marks. Paul pounds them with questions.

1 Corinthians 6:2 (NIV) - Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases?

The people of God will one day reign with Christ. He’s speaking here of the reign of Christ upon the earth during the Millennium, where we, the people of God, will have special responsibilities. So we have the Holy Spirit indwelling us, and we have discernment by the Spirit. Surely there’s someone who has enough discernment to help these brothers work this out. You don’t have to be legal experts to work out things like this.

1 Corinthians 6:3 (NIV) - Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!

As those who one day will have authority with Christ over heaven and earth, shouldn't believers be able to handle the squabbles of this life without acting like pagans act.

1 Corinthians 6:4 (NIV) - Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church!

You see, non-Christians don't have the spiritual insight that is available to Christians. Why? Because we have the indwelling Spirit of God and the Word of God. Besides, the matter between two brothers cannot simply be looked at as a legal matter. There is a higher law that applies. In the book of James it is called "royal law of love." and it has to be taken into account as brothers and sisters in Christ deal with one another.

1 Corinthians 6:5 (NIV) - I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers?

Surely there is someone in the church who can serve as an arbiter in the matter, rather than taking one another to court.

And so here we come back to the matter of accountability in the church. We are accountable to and for one another. What should happen in instances like this is for the parties involved to call together some of the wise leaders of the church, lay it all out, pray about it, and listen to the counsel given by these leaders.

We should handle things in this way, because our witness as the people of God is at stake. The world is watching. And leads to ...

3. A SERIOUS REMINDER (vv.9-11)

This is a serious reminder that morals do matter for the child of God. Paul fires back yet another question:

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (NIV) - Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Now listen carefully because this is one of the most misunderstood passages in the Bible. Because Christians read this and think, "Will I not go to heaven because I use to be sexually immoral, or I used to steal, or I used to be an addict?"

No, I think you can see from the context what Paul is getting at. Morals do matter for the people of God ... not so that we can be saved, but because we have been saved.

Jesus Christ didn't die on the cross for you to remain sexually immoral, or idolatrous, or in an adulterous relationship. God didn't save you in order for you to remain a prostitute or homosexual. The Holy Spirit didn't come to take up residence in your life for you to remain a thief, or greedy or an addict or a slanderer or a cheat.

Those kinds of morals don't characterize people who are headed for the Kingdom of God. If you claim to be a Christian, and yet this is the way you are living your life, something is terribly wrong. Are you truly saved?

Jesus didn't die for you to live that kind of life.

But the next verse is one of the most victorious verses in the Bible. It begins with the words...

1 Corinthians 6:11a (NIV) - And that is what some of you were.

When we talk about sexual immorality, or homosexuality, or greed, or addiction, or dishonesty, we're talking about some pretty heavy-duty habits. And a person can't just say, "I'll clean my life up and be better." No, those sins sink their ugly claws into the human soul, and they won't let go. We need to be delivered! And that's what happens when a person is saved.

v.11b - 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.

When a person is saved, God washes you clean of every sin ... past, present and future. He sanctifies you. He sets you apart for Himself and you are holy. And he justifies you, declaring you innocent before Him because Christ bore your guilt upon the Cross.

In the words of that great hymn of our faith, "What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought since Jesus came into my heart..."

Now dear child of God, live up to your privilege. Live like person who is inheriting the Kingdom of God!