



COMMENTARIES ON "1 CORINTHIANS"

Chapter 6

The Holy Apostle Paul begins 1 Corinthians 6 discussing another deeply scandalous subject: Christians suing other Christians in non-Christian courts. In our highly litigious society this may seem trivial, but it is so serious that St. Paul exclaims, "Dare any of you," meaning "How dare you" (6:1)! This was something that Jews in the ancient world would not have done, and shows the extent of the disunity in the Corinthian church. This is a serious failing, because Christians will judge the world - and even angels - but are showing themselves unable to judge the things pertaining to the life of their community (6:1-5).

I'm sure you are asking: wait, does St. Paul really mean that Christians will judge angels? The sixth century Christian Cassiodorus answers, "Who can conceive of such a miracle? Who can mentally grasp such great glory?...All participate with Christ in judgment who do not oppose his commands, for with the devoted they too will share in his decisions."

In light of such facts, we need to look at the extent of the problem St. Paul is addressing. Not only do the Corinthian Christians fail to be a self-reliant community that can handle its own problems (rather than rely on the judgment of non-Christians), and not only do they fail to accept the wrong that has been done to them (as advocated by Christ in Matthew 5:39; Luke 6:29), but they cheat and defraud each other. The problem for Christians who engage in fraudulent and abusive behavior, through their Christ-rejecting lifestyle, will not inherit the kingdom of God (6:7-10). The problem is that these would-be rulers are in fact ruled by their passions, and thus, even though they were washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of Jesus and by the Holy Spirit (6:11), they still allowed themselves to be controlled by worldly standards.

The Corinthian Christians failed to understand a significant principle: the fact that a person is capable of gratifying a desire does not mean that the person should gratify that desire. St. Paul apparently had an aphorism, "All things are lawful for me," about which Fr. Lawrence Farley says, "Doubtless he uttered the words in connection with the Jewish Law, saying that the merely external restraints of the Law have been transcended in Christ and that all things are allowed for the Christian." The Corinthian Christians took this saying out of context, however, and chose to believe that, since they were Christians, they could engage in any type of behavior they chose. St. Paul therefore responded to this by saying, in essence, that even if you can do anything you choose, it is not good or helpful for you to do anything you choose. The point is to "not be brought under the power" of the things you choose; if you are breaking God's commandments and destroying the unity of the Body of Christ, then you have fallen under the power of the things you've chosen.

Influenced by the larger Corinthian culture, the Corinthian Christians had a particular problem with sexual issues. It is for this reason that St. Paul reminds them that the body is not made for sexual immorality (6:13). Instead, the bodies of Christian believers are members of Christ (6:15). As St. John Chrysostom says, the body "was meant to have Christ as its head, so that it might follow him." Thus, if a

man and woman become one flesh (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:8; Ephesians 5:31), and all Christians are part of the Body of Christ, this would mean that sexual immorality is illicitly joining the members of Christ with one's sexual partners (6:15-16).

As if this isn't enough incentive for remaining sexually pure, St. Paul tells the Corinthians that a person who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him (6:17), and that the Christian's body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (6:19); the Christian therefore belongs to God. Since this is the case, Christians must flee from sexual immorality, because we are called to "glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (6:20). St. Cyprian of Carthage gives a good conclusion to this point:

Let us glorify God and bear him in a pure and spotless body and with more perfect observance. Let those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ submit to the rule of our redeemer with the absolute obedience of servants. Let us take care not to bring anything unclean or defiled into the temple of God, lest he be offended and leave the abode where he dwells.