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1 Corinthians 6:1-11
Courting Sin

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All right. Let's open our Bibles tonight to 1 Corinthians 6 as we continue our study through Paul's letter to the Corinthians. We're going to look at the first eleven verses tonight.

Paul wrote this letter from Ephesus. He was there for three years or so planting a church. This letter that we have, the second one that follows, and a first one that we don't have, were Paul's response to complaints that he received both in written form and in visits from a couple of church elders and a home host about the faltering spiritual condition of the body that was being affected by a terrible city that they lived in. But they were losing their witness, they were.....sin was taking a toll, and the church was not nearly doing what the Lord would want them to do in reaching those around them.

God had begun this work through Paul's life. He had been there for a year and a half. He had seen it well established. When he left, Apollos came and took the church forward. But, really, there were just a lot of problems. And the Corinthian church is probably one of those really weak, kind of struggling, churches certainly, in the New Testament, one that we know a lot about. There was lots of side-taking and immorality and pride and neglect of even how you have communion; lots of questions about the resurrection. The people were just turned against each other. The world had not really been put out, if you will, in many ways. And so Paul had begun his letter writing to them the first nine verses or so with tremendous hope. He just recalled how God had moved, how people's lives were changed; how he saw that new believers come and the wisdom of God begin to fill the hearts of the people. But this had been several years ago. And Paul, because he loved them, wanted to deal with the problems that the church was suffering. And most of these two letters are corrective. They're not blind to the reality of the difficulties the church was facing. Paul was pretty straightforward, had great hopes, trusted the Lord tremendously but really wanted to see things get better.

He began in chapter 1:10 and all the way through chapter 4 dealing with them about how foolish the division amongst them had become. For a while they divided based on the teacher that they had. They liked Paul, they liked his simplicity; or they liked Apollos, he was very articulate. It seemed like Apollos was a good looking guy; Paul was kind of a bent over old guy, and nobody seemed to be moved much with him. And so there were sides being taken, and Paul, using himself as an example, said, "Look, because we relied on God's Word preached very simply, the church exists. All of you came to the Lord through the simplicity of the gospel, and we all came to Jesus in the same manner. And so it is a pretty good indicator of a lack of wisdom that you would now be taking sides against one another when Jesus is the One who keeps us together and brought us in, in common, and He used the foolishness of preaching to bring us to know Him. We should be singing His praises."

Paul went on in those chapters, and he talked to them about how the Lord would one day come, and we would stand before His judgment seat and then, really, His judgment about us would matter, not whose side were we on, who was better than the next. He knew the heart. He knows what we're all about, and one day we will receive a reward from Him after our methods and our motives are tested, and under His analysis, we'll get rewards commensurate with what He finds there.

So Paul said, "Quit taking sides. Let's worship the Lord together because He saved us. Paul didn't, Peter didn't, Apollos didn't."

Beginning in chapter 3 towards the end there through the first part of chapter 4, Paul gave them a lesson about viewpoints. How should we view ourselves, and how should we view one another, and what kind of view should we have of the God that we serve? And he talked to them about the foolishness of the wisdom of men. And then, at the end of chapter 4, it almost sounds like he got taken to the woodshed. Paul talks to them and lays down the law about the cost of serving the Lord, and he says to them, "You guys are all trying to be better than each other. How 'bout you come live my life or come live the life of the other apostles who've been beaten down and thrown in prison and suffered greatly and had too little to eat? You want to be great? You want this kind of life to be great? Thank the Lord for whom He uses, but rejoice in the source not the vessel."

Last week, in chapter 5, we looked at an issue that had come up in the church of allowing in the body an immoral lifestyle of a fellow. He had come to church with his step-mother, if you will. They were having a relationship. The church, rather than addressing it, had kind of given each other high fives about being so open-minded and tolerant. But Paul talked about church discipline and the value of it and how sin pollutes not only the church but it pollutes our witness to the world as well. Nobody's listening. If we're living like the world, it's....nobody's noticing. And so it hurt the witness. It hurt them in terms of sinfulness. It hurt the heart of God. And so he gave them counsel about judging the immorality, pursuing purity in the church, and helping each other to do the right thing.

Well tonight, in the first eleven verses of chapter 6, we're going to turn from moral sin to material sin. And Paul addresses something that's, I think, very up to date, if you will, although it's many years old. He talks to these saints about the civil suits that they were bringing to one another, if you will, or against one another for the financial gain, for settling a score, but doing so in the eyes of and before the judges of the world, acting much like the world. And then Paul will kind of sum up these two chapters before we get to chapter 7 in a couple weeks, where I think there are more advice and comments and directions for marriage and remarriage and divorce than any place in the Scriptures. And so I'm looking forward to that. But tonight just "Courting Sin," really, is the topic – the way of the world found in the life of the church.

So verse 1, chapter 6 of 1 Corinthians, Paul writes, “Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?” So here’s the application. It is specifically to saints dealing with other saints as it relates to fraud and damages and compensation and civil matters. You know, we live in a pretty sue-happy society. It has almost become a part of our social fabric. You’ve probably read some of the most ridiculous suits: suing a fast food restaurant for making you fat – that happened last year; suing McDonald’s for the coffee being too hot – that happened a few years ago. Many of the advertisements on television are from lawyers who will advertise what many potential situations you can be involved in that you can sue somebody else. “We’re here to help.” Paul’s concern in writing to these immature saints was not whether or not they were going to get a fair trial or fair compensation or get their problems worked out. In fact, he will say, “The church should have enough wisdom to deal righteously amongst other saints.” But rather they were looking to the wisdom and to the justice they believed they could find in the world amongst those who were unrighteous, that didn’t have God’s Spirit, that were living in the darkness of sin and death. “That’s where you’re going. That’s the kind of witness you’re being in this whole process.” And he wanted these carnal saints to place greater value on spiritual wisdom – the kind you find amongst saints – and on spiritual living rather than the physical benefit, financial income, emotional justification, I guess, that you might be able to exact at the expense of sacrificing your witness to get what you want.

Paul’s interest in looking at the church, like God’s interest in you tonight, is that there is no greater calling for all of us than to get Jesus’ name out there. Look, we’re living in an election year. People would love to get you on board to whatever you’re into and whatever you want to support. The Lord would like to have you on board as well because the world definitely needs to know Him. And whatever politician or political position you take, those are going to fail man, they’re not going to save anyone. But the gospel will.

So these are Paul’s words to saints dealing with other saints in civil matters. Quite different, by the way, from what the Bible teaches about criminal trials. In fact, criminal trials, at least from God’s standpoint, were to be brought before the state (Romans 13). They would decide what is right and wrong, arbitrary. You were not allowed to really figure that out amongst your own. But these are saints getting along with saints in places that you feel like you’ve been defrauded somehow, or you’ve lost, or you’re owed something.

Paul spent two years as a political prisoner under Felix, under Festus and others. He finally had to invoke his Roman citizenship to appeal to Caesar, there towards the end of Acts 24 and 25. Paul had showed up in this town in Corinth, terrified over all of the beatings he’d taken and how short-lived the fruit of the gospel had been every place he’d stopped. But when the Lord appeared to him in providence and protection, the Lord protected Paul. For the next year and a half, he was really not dealt with. One group of people tried to haul him into a courtroom before a fellow named Gallio, who was a judge, but Paul didn’t even have to open his mouth. The thing got taken care of, there in Acts 18.

So what do we do when saints trouble us in their behavior, and how do we handle internal disputes in civil matters? Paul says, verse 1, "Dare any of you." Now that's not a nice way to say anything, right? Paul's upset, and he's challenging. He will later on use the words "Don't you know," and he'll use them three or four times just in this chapter, as if, "You know better! Come on! How many times have I told you?" Maybe you've said that to your kids. "Dare any of you handle the conflict with a brother by turning to the worldly courts for somehow a resolution." And Paul was shocked that they would consider washing their dirty laundry in public before the eyes of the world to whom they were sent to reach them with the gospel. "Dare any of you go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints." Paul seems to me to be exasperated, you know, kind of like, "You've got to be kidding me. This is unconscionable. We are God's people, living in the light, filled with God's Spirit. What benefit is there for us in dealing with each other by taking our problems to a worldly judge or arbitrator instead of just dealing with it in-house, with the saints?"

By the way, the Jews, from a civil position (in the 1st century), handled all of their legal affairs in the synagogue. They ran their own show. They took care of their own people. All reason and truth and wisdom and justice and love and mercy and kindness you ought to be able to find amongst the people of God. If there's any place that we should find resolution issues amongst ourselves, it should be here. Not somewhere else. Yet the Corinthians didn't see the body that way, or they didn't even view this as God's best for them. They just figured they're in the world, they've got to fight like a dog and play the game the way that they wanted. Instead, driven by their old life, they go off to the court in vengeance, they look for the last laugh, they do it at the expense of the church's witness. That's really what the cost is. The cost was, "Look at the church, and look at the message that they're bringing to us." They act like the world, they displease the Lord in the process. And more than just the action was the lack of value they placed, first in God's wisdom among God's people, but then in the life that they were living where they weren't really willing to trust that judgment, if you will, to work out either for them or not.

I've been involved with a couple of big-deal church arbitrations that were actually churches against churches, both of them believing churches. I didn't like it, and they didn't like it. You know, it's kind of like everyone was nice until they didn't win the deal or they didn't get it the way they wanted. And then, "I don't like this process, I didn't think this was going to work." It only works if it works out for you, right? Rather than trying to seek the Lord's heart, they end up going somewhere else.

Well, "Dare any of you?" That's Paul's question to this very carnal fellowship, stuck in a very difficult place. Then he says this, "Do you not know?" Another very.....I like sarcasm. To me, this is very sarcastic. "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know" (okay, Paul) "that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?" It's a harsh question that I think makes Paul's frustration clearer and, like I said, one that he will be using again and again throughout the

chapter. And he makes a good point: you and I, as God's people, are going to one day judge the world. We're going to sit with Jesus to judge. We're going to judge the fallen angels. We're going to offer righteous judgment. We're going to know the Lord, we're going to know His ways, and we're going to have the opportunity to sit with the Lord in His Kingdom Age. I mean, He wrote to the Thyatira church, there in Revelation 2:26, "If you overcome and you keep My works, in the end I'll give you power over the nations. You'll rule over them. You'll have a place of judgment." And Paul's point is pretty clear here. Jesus wrote the same thing to the Laodicean church in Revelation 3:21 that, "If you overcome, I'll grant you to sit with Me on the throne. You're going to rule with Me and reign. That's your future."

And Paul's point is, "Well, that's your future. Can't you just figure out who owes \$50 for the fence that was torn down or the dent in your car or the fact that you ripped me off? You weren't honest with the price, or you said you'd get the work done, and you didn't." "Oh, man, I don't know how to fix this! But bring on the fallen angels. I got this!" Do you? Do you? With such responsibilities that are so great awaiting us, can we not deal with....here's Paul's words, "smaller matters of right and wrong, payment and cost and restitution." At best, they're temporal things. Right? But in the body, there is the wisdom of the Lord, and there's the love of God and the heart of God. These were acting as if they were unworthy to handle all of those. They can't solve the problem within themselves because they want to safeguard their witness. Safeguard their testimony. Safeguard what the impression of the world is that watches the church. The worst thing that the world can see in us is that we don't look any different than they do, don't act differently, don't respond in any different manner. For folks headed for glory and for the throne, these saints were sure slow to step up and act in the wisdom of God.

Verse 3, one day we're going to sit with God and judge angels, those who had fallen. Jude says they're currently in chains, awaiting judgment; others running wild but one day will be gathered together and cast into Gehenna.

If we're to judge things that take place in the spiritual realm - the rebellion of Satan and his dominions - you don't think we could solve temporary conflicts? Trying to keep it in the church so that we could be a witness to the world? I think we need to do that. But here's the deal - the whole purpose of this letter to the church was all about self and pride and not witness and being a light in a dark place. They'd been overcome with the very world that they lived in.

Verse 4 says this, "If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge?" The New American Standard writes, "If then you have law courts dealing with these matters of this life, do you appoint judges that are of no account amongst the church?" Paul is saying that though you all have these capabilities in the Lord, we have an obligation to at least seek one another's wisdom rather than run to the lost, to the least qualified, to the least esteemed, to the least in terms of sitting in light (they're sitting in darkness), and we look to the world rather than look to the Lord. If you look at the judgments, just from a political standpoint, that are coming out of our court system today, I think that

you would say to yourself, "Yeah, probably not the best place to go find wisdom." The liberal views, the leniency towards and the approval of sin, the little morality that is left, the measure of standards just so horrible.

When Moses sought to manage, oversee, the two million-plus folks that he was leading out of Egypt, there were tremendous needs and disputes among the people. I mean, they weren't all walking with the LORD, and it grew overwhelming. And Moses was ready.....in fact, he said to the LORD one time, "If you love me, kill me," in direct line to taking care of the people and their problems (Numbers 11:14-15). "If you love me, kill me." It's not a memory verse, but there it is. It was right there in the Scriptures. (Laughing) The LORD sent Moses his father-in-law, Jethro, and he said, "You know, what you're doing is killing you all right, and it's wiping out the people. Here's what you should do: choose from among you those who have a reputation that is spiritual. Choose some men that are known among the people to help make decisions that are binding, and reserve the extremely difficult things for yourself. Let them bring them to you so that you might have a hand in those. But other than that, pick some guys that'll make good judgments, and let's deal with it honestly together." You can read in Exodus 18 that advice that Jethro gave to Moses, about eight or nine verses long, and, "You'll be able to endure. This is what God commands. And you can also go in peace." And it says, "Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law in all that he said." And that's kind of the last comment until you get to the book of Deuteronomy, where Moses sits down the people to give them what amounts to a 30-day review of their history before the LORD takes him to die, and Moses hands the people off to Joshua. But in chapter 1, as he's going over their history, he said, "Do you remember that time when I said I can't bear the people alone? The LORD has multiplied you as the stars of the heavens for multitude and I pray that the LORD will make you a thousand times more than you are. But I can't handle it. It's just too much to bear. I can't bear your problems and your burdens and your complaints. My father-in-law came and talked to me that day and said, 'Here's what you need to do. Here's what I believe the LORD would want you to do.' And he told me to choose wise and understanding and knowledgeable men that are known amongst the tribes, that people respected and knew. I'll make them heads, and you'll watch over them, and some can deal with the thousand, some can deal with the hundreds, some can handle the tens. But let them handle the decision making in a biblical and a godly fashion, and if it gets more difficult, then they can come to you, and you can talk to them, and you can judge between them." And he said, "The LORD blessed that, and we were at peace." It worked in the sense that it brought peace within the multitude of God's people. He listened. He found folks that could be good judges, if you will, and would carry the judgment forward. But the key was there was this unity amongst the church or, at that time, the people of God, if you will. There was wisdom to be found. There was a submitting to authority of those over them and a willingness to work with whatever decision came whether it was favorable or not. Get a wise man, deal with arbitration.

And, like I said, at least for me, the things that I've been asked to be involved with where people were actually biblical enough to say, "We should fix this in the church, not go to court," it seems to me that it is only valuable if both parties believe that that's

correct, if they really feel like that's the right thing to do. We should find resolution. And here's one argument for me for you: it's a good reason to belong to a local church. Plug yourself in. No church is perfect, by the way. You know the old line – if you find one, don't join it; you'll ruin it. You know, no church is perfect. However, the accountability that comes with a local body involvement also brings you the benefit, not only of (last week) encouraging to be holy and watching over you and protecting you and carrying you along when need be, but it also provides a place where you can deal with your frustrations and difficulties and find a home where the body works together for the sake of God's glory so the world can be reached. It really is the way God would have us to work.

It wasn't happening here. These guys were just in court lining up, "My brother in Christ," and they were yelling at each other, and everybody's got a lawyer. And Paul just goes, "You dare do that? Don't you know?" Sounds like my dad every time I read it. "Don't you know? Don't you know?"

Paul says, in verse 5, "I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!" Verse 5, "I'm ashamed of you." Oh, man. You don't want to hear that if that's your pastor. "I'm ashamed of you. Is this your reason that you're doing this? You just don't have anyone in the whole church that's wise enough to make a decision? Not in the whole church, who will step up to help with disputes, to lead spiritually or to give direction?" At the end of the letter, in chapter 16, Paul will name some men in the church there who he finds not only reputable but honorable, and he will give them some exposure as well as saying of them, "Those are the guys that you might want to look to. Submit to them. They're righteous, faithful men. I know them to be so."

Paul goes on here, in verse 6, and he says, "I'm ashamed that you are acting this way. I assume you don't have a man to make a decision because what I'm seeing is you're going to court against each other. You're going to law before the unbeliever. The one living in darkness is now being sought for a favorable result so that you can be financially ahead of the game, you can get your pound of flesh. And meanwhile, the reason for your existence – at least in that context – is, you want to reach these folks with the gospel. But the way you're behaving is....your mission is done now. They heard you in court. They saw your wickedness. They saw your avarice. It's ruined your ability to reach the lost."

So Paul goes on in verse 7 and verse 8, and he says, "Once that you go, regardless of the outcome, you've lost already. So you win, you still lose. And those words 'utter failure' is because you've placed your own personal gain over being a witness. Now you've defiled your witness." Jesus, when He prayed for the disciples, there in John 17, on the way over to the Garden of Gethsemane, one of the things He prayed for – in fact almost the only thing He prayed for – was, "Father, that they might be one even as We

are one, and that as I am in You that You may be in them; that we may be One, so that the world believes that You sent Me.” In other words, that unity or that ability to work together stands so apart from a world that can’t do that. And the Lord would want that from us.

And then Paul says what I think most people would just....I think you bristle at.... you know, you’re on board until verse 7..... “What?!” and verse 8. Paul says, “Why would you go to court before the lost regardless of the outcome? Why don’t you rather accept the wrong and allow yourself to be cheated?” And your answer was probably going to be, “Why should I?!” Paul suggests it was because the souls of men are of more value than any temporal judgment that is in your favor. In fact, Paul said, “If you continue to live like the world, you’re bringing this on yourself because many of you are just wronging each other and cheating one another, and you’ve created this to begin with.”

For a long time in ministry, when I was in a position to do the business side of the church in many ways, I loathed hiring Christian businessmen or Christian service groups because you almost invite problems. You’ll hear this when the job isn’t done, “Hey, we’re brothers, right?” “Yeah, but shouldn’t that be on the wall there? It’s on the floor.” “Bro, come on. We gotta love each other.” “Yeah, we’ll I’ll pay you as soon as you’re done.” “Oh, you ain’t paying me now.” It almost doesn’t work out well. At least with the world, you expect to get ripped off. That’s good. At least you get what you pay for. But when you hire believers, you’re expecting Christians. And, man, it’s hard when you’re dealing with Christians. Now, I should tell you we have let many folks in the church here that are in business and that have services that are so faithful, so faithful. But unfortunately there are a lot of folks who use that as cover almost, and they’ve been disappointing. If we truly, as believers, are walking with the Lord and desiring to honor Jesus, then much of the reason we might be tempted to get even will be removed because we’re serving the Lord. God takes care of us. And if I live an honest life, work hard, my word can be trusted, a handshake obligates, then the church should not really find itself in the world with litigation, demanding our rights or, as Paul says, simply trying to win when, in reality, we’re just losing. So there’s an obligation on both sides. We should never be the kind of people that need to be sued, and we should never be the suer kind of people. Because once you get to court, you’ve already spiritually lost the battle. Even if you win the lawsuit, the battle that ensues between brethren has brought darkness to the message of the gospel. People just say, “Well, they’re just like everyone else.”

Now, here’s the test – could you say out loud with conviction, “For me, it is far better to lose financially than to lose spiritually”? That’s ahhhhh.... In fact, even when there’s a clear case to be made, there’s no spiritual basis to insist upon it. It’s really interesting to me that we all believe the Bible until it hurts our pocket books or our pride. “But you don’t know what they did to me! You don’t know.....I tried!” Good for you. “I did everything I.....” Yeah, I get it. “We’re suin’!” If everything you have belongs to the Lord, who are you really angry about? Because God has a way of getting His stuff back. I even had a guy one time I was trying to counsel out of that and to follow this. He said to me, “Well, they said they were saved, but no Christian acts this way. So I

have to sue him.” So I said, “You know whether he’s a Christian or not? You see his heart? You’ve taken God’s role from Him.” He said, “I thought you were on my side.” “Well, I’m on your side.” Everything we have belongs to Him. I’m just a steward. He can take it back whenever He wants. He’ll take it and add to it as He sees fit. Besides, with everything I’ve been forgiven for and cleared up and given a fresh start over, I think I’m almost obligated to take that role when people offend me. Now, look, I’m just teaching the right thing. I’m not telling you I’m going to be doing this. (Laughing) It’ll be as hard for me as it is for you, but it’s the right thing to do. It is the right thing to do. Every time.

“How many times should I forgive?” Peter goes, “Oh, seven” (Matthew 7:21-2). “Yeah, your arithmetic is a little off. Seventy times seven.” “Oh, that’s a lot.” How do you handle, as a believer, being handed the short end of the stick from somebody that sits next to you in church? Paul’s advice is it is far better to suffer loss than blow a witness. Because your primary responsibility – primary – is not to safeguard your possessions but to protect your relationship with the Lord and your witness to the lost. That’s our primary job. You never want to be the person that turns someone away from the Lord. “Well, I watched what he did or how he did it or what he said, how he said it.” His people who are the pride and joy of His life, His inheritance is the saints. If a brother defrauds you and you let it go, you haven’t lost the case. It’s just kind of been kicked up to a higher court. And God is able to make all things right. You never lose putting Him first. Does that make sense? You never do. And Paul is very concerned that this Corinthian church, stuck in this cesspool of life, could not even distinguish itself from (as bad as it was) the behavior that you find there.

So he says, in verse 9, “Do you not know” (oh, my) “that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” Paul literally says, from both chapter 5 and chapter 6, “All of these problems stem from the same cause. It is this sinfulness in the life of the saints who aren’t living the life that God has given them but have reverted back or are tempted to revert back to the old life; or worse, making bogus claims about being saved.” “Do you not know?” Verse 2, verse 3, verse 9, “Do you not know?” Verse 15, verse 16, verse 19, “Do you not know?” These Corinthians certainly did know that the unrighteous would not inherit the kingdom, and the word “unrighteous” is the typical New Testament word for the unsaved. Don’t you know that those that are not saved will not enter into God’s kingdom? He cannot claim to know God, live as though he doesn’t know Him, hope for eternal life promised to everyone that believes in Him. And Paul said, “That’s a deception. That’s how you fool yourself.”

No one, including you and me, could have any assurance that we’re saved if this is the kind of lifestyle we choose to live. Does that mean you can’t fall into any of these sins? It’s not at all what I said. But Christian lives are ones that are going towards the things of God. Pick up, go that way again. We’re remorseful, we confess, we turn away from

the sins that so easily beset us. Paul says, in verse 11, that God has far higher hopes for us than the life that we used to live. You deceive yourself if you're going to try to do both. In many ways, Paul applies it to chapter 5 and to chapter 6 here. It's all about self and serving the self. And in this list of folks who aren't going to make it, so to speak, are covetous folks, and this whole chapter is about being covetous, right? Trying to get what you want, what you think you deserve.

The word "deceived," by the way, is the Greek word "planao." "Planao" is a word that means a planet that – they didn't know about orbits necessarily - so there goes a planet wandering through the sky, and that's the word that they use to describe it. Aimless and lost. We should be careful in what we allow that God does not for we can be led astray. The safest place for you and me – right where God wants us to be. It's an easy place to live. No, I take that back. It wasn't easy. It's smart. It's the right place for you and me to stand.

The list, in verses 9 and 10, of this sinfulness is hardly exhaustive, but they are lifestyle sins that characterize the lost. And, in context, these are the kinds of people that you are taking your case in front of in the courts. But the list from sexual immorality and thievery to covetousness – these all went to court, and they had a penchant for lawsuits. And Paul says this, "You might have been like that before you got saved. Such were some of you. Such were some of you. But you're no longer these kind of people. You've been bought with a price." I think if you go read Galatians 5, you'll find this same list, at least many of these same lifestyle sins, if you will.

Fornication is a, right away, very general Greek word for any sexual immorality. Adultery is usually applied to those that are married; fornication to those who are single. Idolatry – you pretty well know what that is, right? – the worship of false gods. Adulterers – violating a marriage covenant; particularly heinous in the Old Testament, it had a death penalty attached to it because it broke a sacred bond where God took two and made them one flesh. Having said that, in the Old Testament, if you read the book of Hosea, the LORD talks about Israel being unfaithful, and rather than killing her, He offers her forgiveness and restoration and a new start and a relationship with Him. The word homosexual is the word "malakos." It means soft or effeminate, even in appearance. A man who puts on women's clothing is an abomination to the LORD (Deuteronomy 22:5). It's very practical today. You can use that. Sodomites. By definition, a sodomite was one who abused himself with mankind. It was strictly forbidden (Leviticus 20:13), and two words there speak of active and passive partners in a homosexual relationship. But again, it was judged by the LORD. Now Paul's not writing – I should put this in context – Paul is not writing from a homophobic culture. Homosexuality was rampant in 1st-century Rome. Fourteen of the first fifteen Roman emperors were either homosexual or bisexual. Nero, as an emperor, married a boy named Sporus after castrating him. He married another man that now began to call Nero his wife. You can find it in history books; it's not hidden. It's just one of the sins among many that you were, but you're no longer needing to be. The word for thief is "kleptos." It sounds like kleptomaniac, doesn't it? Covetousness is one of the horrible words in the Bible because it means someone who's greedy for gain, but that isn't

enough. He wants what you have and then, with even more desire, he doesn't want you to have it. "I want what you have, but I don't want you to have it." Drunkenness – exactly what it says. Reviler – a verbal terrorist, one who destroys with his words. What is that Proverbs 6? These six things does God hate – one who sows discord among the brethren (verses 16-19). And extortioners – those who rob indirectly through pressure.

All of these sins – lifestyle sins – are driven by self. They're oblivious to God. They look for gain in one way or another. They use it for their own benefit. There's no spirituality here, there's no wisdom here. They are moved by the devil, by the flesh, indicative of the world. Anyone can claim to be a Christian, but those living these kinds of lives and claiming to know the Lord are self-deceived. It doesn't fit together. Like I said, this doesn't mean believers don't stumble, but the course of your life should be upward. Right? Away from sin, towards godliness.

I remember as a young Christian I probably spent the first six months of my life wondering if I was really saved. I would look at other guys – they'd worship, be crying, I'm thinkin', "What is he balling for?" I just didn't get it. So I'd go forward every time.....an invitation, I'd raise my hand. And ten years later, I knew I was saved, but then I wondered why. Why would God want me? Some of you I thought He probably would like, but..... (Laughing) I'm, you know.....and then all of the weird outward sins kind of go away. God grooms you, cleanses you. But then there's all those weird things still inside about pride and anger and bitterness and record-keeping, the stuff only God sees. And you find yourself just.....none of it satisfies. You want to go forward. I told somebody the other day, when I was 19 and got saved, I thought by 21 I'd know it all. And now I'm 70, and I don't know anything! (Laughing) And it bothers me that after all these years, you'd think I'd know something. All I know is I don't deserve to be where I am, and God has kept me all of these years. But it's this pressure that drives you forward.

You know, if you look at a map of Egypt, for example, the Nile runs north from central Africa to the Mediterranean. But if you look at the map, there's a lot of times the Nile goes south. But it always is working north. I think that's our life. Sometimes you fall on your face, you don't do so well, you get out of line, and God has to slap you around, take you behind the.....whatever He needs to do to keep you straight up. But you're always going north. Just for a minute, you head.....no, that's the overall, I think, lean of a believer. David fell into adultery, David committed murder. Jonah ran from the calling of God. Peter denied the Lord with cursing. Elijah ran in fear from Jezebel, of all people. Abraham lied; so did his boy. But they were all restored through the tears of repentance and a continual heading toward the Lord. The unregenerate don't do that; they just go the other way.

And so you can fall and stumble and be restored. But Paul's point is, look, that's our old life, man. We don't do this kind of stuff anymore. We don't entertain the immoral guy sittin' in the pew and call that good. And we don't go after each other before the world and call that wise. It isn't wise. You know, it's always the work of the devil to broaden

the road. "Oh, this is life. Just come down this road. Everybody's doing it." All kinds of ungodly lifestyles in the family of God. But grace is not given to cover sin. He wants us to strive to enter in at the straight gate (Matthew 7:13-14). And along the road are these prophets in sheep's clothing who tell you, "Oh, everybody's doing it" (Matthew 7:15). Maybe never like today is the church having to face a lot of moral and spiritual decisions based solely on what you see and what you know. There are plenty of so-called reverends preaching abortion rights and gay rights and open marriages and saying they speak for the Lord. I say they don't, and I'll just bring my Bible. The National Council of Churches in America is not (and they are not) God's representatives. Let God's Word dwell in your heart, and know the life He's called you to and live holy.

So, when you get to verse 11, you read, "And such were some of you," you should know that that word "were" is past tense. That's past life. The Corinthian church was filled with ex- something or others, but now they are a new creation; the old has passed away; behold everything is new (2 Corinthians 5:17). New lives demand new living. Paul was not upset that you would find these kinds of people in the world, but he was upset that they shouldn't be living like that in the church. That's all.

Note the words that Paul chooses here towards the end. "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified." You were made clean, you were set apart, and God declared that you were just as if you'd never sinned. He cleansed you completely. The verb tenses speak of a completed transaction. God made you different. Someone once asked me about eternal security, and I totally believe that's true. I'm not the only one, but I'm certainly.....I don't have a bunch of people standing with me either. But you know what would have to happen for you to lose your salvation? The Holy Spirit would have to move out, your name taken out of the Book of Life. You would all of a sudden have to incur the wrath of God. All of your sins would have to be put back into your account. I would rather believe if you go that route you didn't ever know the Lord than God reversed the process. I'm going to.....I can't keep my salvation. I need Him to keep me. You were sanctified, you've been washed, you were justified. The marvelous work of God, when we place our faith in His Son, is that we've been transformed in our lives. And if the old things are not passing away, if there's no evidence of new life, if you're just simply walking on both sides of the street, I just can't assure you that you're all right, and I don't think you can assure yourself either. If no change follows your surrender to Jesus.....look, we all have room to grow and, like I said, weakness is kind of my M.O. But these words in verse 10 you were once, but I'm not any longer.

So, these issues of civil suits before the world or immorality in the church should be overcome in the light of what Jesus has done for us so that the world can watch and see Him. That's all that matters. When you get all done with your life, the greatest thing you're going to accomplish is the witness you've been for Jesus. You may not lead hundreds of people to the Lord, but you can plant seeds everywhere you go. And I'll tell you what....planting seeds is harder than reaping the crop. Reaping's easy. You pick the fruit, stick it in your mouth.... "Oh, this is good!" Planting a seed in the ground and goin', "Well, there it is...." Until the next day, "Nothing there," and six weeks, "This is stupid." Somebody plants, another person waters, somebody reaps. But we're all

called to do just that. And, in the process, we can not only be assured of our own position, we can live a life that is such that we won't turn off the world around us. You know, the world is just looking for you to fall. There's nothing greater for the world than a TV evangelist who goes south. They'll use it against you for years to come. You just live the kind of life that people will want to have what you've been given.

Next week, we will finish this chapter. I'm going to pick up the pace. Look at that. Nine verses. Shall we pray together?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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