WHO WE ARE IN CHRIST

1 Corinthians 6:1–20

Key Verse: 6:11

“And that is what some of you were. 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.”

“Who are you?” Sometimes we ask this question to somebody we know. Why? Because what they’re doing seems so different from the person we thought we knew. Identity has always been a big issue for human beings. In life there are many things to deal with, but the deeper issue is who we believe ourselves to be. Why? Because who we think we are has a big impact on our behavior. In today’s passage Apostle Paul takes this approach to help the Corinthian Christians fix some pretty serious problems: lawsuits among believers, and sexual immorality. In fact, we all should ask ourselves: Who am I in Christ? How does this affect the way I view myself, and, the way I actually live? May God open our hearts and speak to us through his living word today.

At the end of chapter 5 Apostle Paul taught that we are not to judge those outside the church, but to judge those inside, meaning we need to correct fellow believers when they err in some matter of doctrine or lifestyle. But as he thinks about this issue of judgment among believers, Paul is reminded of a disturbing practice in the Corinthian church. Look at verse 1. Christians were taking their fellow Christians to court. Of course Paul didn’t expect that Christians will never have conflicts with each other. Conflicts between Christians do happen, sometimes because of differing points of view, but mostly due to our fallen nature that we still struggle with. We’re a “new batch” of dough through Christ our Passover Lamb, but we still have to get rid of our old yeast, the bread of malice and wickedness, so that we can live with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (5:7,8). The issue Paul has here is not conflict itself, but that Christians are going before non-Christians to settle their disputes.

Why is that so bad? We might think those outside the church might be more objective. But Paul doesn’t think so. In verse 1 he calls non-Christian judges “ungodly.” In verse 4 he says that their “way of life is scorned in the church.” Non-Christians are not qualified to judge between Christians mainly because they don’t know God and they don’t live according to his word, so though they may be very intelligent or experienced, they lack spiritual discernment. They are not fit to judge between believers because they do not have the Spirit of God. In contrast, Paul says that any Christian is competent to judge a conflict between believers. Why? In verses 1 and 2 he calls believers “the Lord’s people.” It suggests that they know the Lord. In Greek the literal word is “saints” or “holy people.” It means they are set apart from the world. Now they have a different worldview and a different value system. Now they see people and events in light of God and who he is. Starting our thinking with God may not seem so necessary, but it makes everything and everyone look different.

In verse 2 Paul goes on to say that God’s people, his holy saints, will one day “judge the world.” He means when Jesus comes again. We’ll get to share his glory, his rule, his reign. In verse 3 Paul even adds that we’re going to judge angels, meaning those who fell and joined the rebellion against God. This is who we really are in Christ. We don’t often think about it, but Paul wants us to here. One day, if we persevere in our faith in Jesus, we’re going to be given the privilege of judging along with our Lord Jesus Christ the Righteous Judge (cf. Mt19:28; Jude14,15; Rev2:26,27; 3:21; 20:4). Really? Me? Why? It’s because we’ve lived for him, we’ve suffered for him. Along with the indwelling Spirit, this makes us wise in God’s sight, wise enough to help our fellow believers. Paul says in verse 2b that it makes us competent to judge “trivial cases.” In the big scheme of things, conflicts between Christians, though they may seem very serious at the time, are really quite trivial. The final reason Paul gives for why we shouldn’t try to resolve our conflicts outside the church is in verse 6. It’s shameful for Christians to be suing each other before unbelievers. Why? Because we profess to follow Jesus, who taught us to love and forgive.

In verse 7 Paul says that such lawsuits of Christians against each other make us “completely defeated already.” The devil loves the old strategy of “divide and conquer.” This is how he got Adam and Eve to sin against God in the first place, by doubting God’s love. And he loves to sow seeds of mistrust, hatred and conflict among believers. Our spiritual battle is to be one in Christ. How can we make spiritual unity a reality? Paul says in this verse, “Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?” It reminds us of our Lord Jesus’ teaching, “But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles” (Mt5:39–41). If we’re practicing such humility and love, it’s likely that most conflicts among us will melt away. We do these things because, as Paul said earlier, we’ve been given “the mind of Christ” (2:16). Though we may lose humanly, we win spiritually.

In verse 8 Paul rebukes them: “Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers and sisters.” They may have been blinded, thinking they were the victims and the opposing parties were the bad ones, but Paul is exposing their own motives to cheat and do wrong to others. Then in verses 9 and 10 he goes on to an intense list of wrongdoings and their consequences. These verses describe the final judgment, when all kinds of wrongdoers will be excluded from God’s kingdom. But it’s also a warning to the Corinthian Christians, and, to us. Of course it doesn’t mean that anyone who’s ever committed any of these sins will never be able to enter God’s kingdom, but that those who persist in these sins won’t be able to. We shouldn’t think we can live in any of these sins and still get to enter God’s kingdom. Paul says in verse 9, “Do not be deceived.” Literally it says, “Stop being deceived.” In light of God’s judgment, we should apply these verses not to others but to ourselves, very soberly, before we start fighting against our fellow believers.

Then Paul goes on. Read verse 11. Paul their shepherd knew these people well. Earlier he had described their past lives as foolish, weak, lowly and despised (1:27,28). Now he says they’d been downright sinful, in so many embarrassing ways. They in no way deserved to be included in the kingdom of God. Actually, Paul himself had been the same kind of terrible sinner (1Ti1:13–15). But God saved Paul and these Corinthian Christians by his one-sided grace. It says we all were “washed,” “sanctified” and “justified.” God cleansed us of all our dirty sins. God called us to a holy life. God justified us from all their wrongdoings. How? It says, “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” It means with his authority. By the authority of Jesus who died for our sins and rose again, we are forgiven and cleansed. It really happened. Through our faith in Jesus God now sees us very differently. God sees us not as guilt-ridden, rotten people to be destroyed, but as his lovely children. God welcomes us to himself as his own sons and daughters. It also says here “by the Spirit of our God.” When we repent and believe in Jesus who died for us and rose again, God gives us the Holy Spirit, who changes us from within. It’s the power of the Holy Spirit who enables us to truly change from incorrigible sinners to God’s precious and holy people.

In reminding us of God’s grace to us in Jesus, Paul’s point is to help us see who we really are in Christ. We are those God has called out of this messed up, sin-sick world. God the Father, through his Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit, has made us different persons. If we see ourselves as chronic sinners doomed to fail, then that’s what we’ll do. But if we see ourselves as those God has washed, sanctified and justified, then we can renew our struggle against our old sinful tendencies and the pull and temptations of this world. We shouldn’t regard ourselves or others from a worldly point of view; we need to hold onto the truth that both we and our Christian brothers and sisters are new creations in Christ (2Co5:17). If we believe this, we’ll treat others differently, the way Jesus would.

In the second half of this chapter Paul turns to another disturbing issue in this church. Some of these Christian men were going to prostitutes. And it wasn’t just a shameful moral lapse—they were justifying it. How? Look at verses 12,13a. Some were claiming that, now that they believed in Jesus and received his grace, they had the right to do anything. Mixed with a twisted view of grace was a wrong view of the body. Some Greek philosophers had taught the ancient world that the human body is inherently evil and will eventually be destroyed. Along these lines, they also taught that indulging in all our bodily desires for food or sex is no big deal. But the Bible teaches something very different. Our bodies, though weak and sinful, were made by God. And God did not make our bodies for sin, but for himself. It tells us that knowing who we are in Christ actually affects our view of our own bodies.

How should we view our bodies? In verse 13b Paul says our bodies were meant not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. What does that mean? Verse 14 says that by his power God will raise our bodies from the dead, just as he did our Lord Jesus. God wants us, including our bodies, to be with him forever. Verses 19 and 20 also tell us that our bodies were bought at the price of the precious blood of Jesus and have become temples of the Holy Spirit who is in us and whom we have received from God. Verse 15 says that our bodies have become members of Christ himself. To help Christians with the temptation to fall into sexual sin, Paul reminds us of how we should view our bodies in Christ. Our culture puts a lot of emphasis on the body. People eat certain foods and work out to have the best body possible. Some even have cosmetic surgeries on their bodies. They look for just the right clothes to highlight their bodies. The human body is seen as an object of pleasure. For those who can’t measure up, they develop self-hatred with many body image issues. It causes so much pain. But it’s so beautiful to see that God created and redeemed our bodies to belong to Christ and be a temple of his Spirit. We need to reflect deeply on how God sees our bodies and how he wants us to use our bodies. Romans 6 says we should not offer our bodies as sin, as instruments of wickedness, but to God, as instruments of righteousness. Romans 12:1 says that in view of God’s mercy we should offer our bodies as living sacrifices, as our true and proper worship.

Look at verse 18. With a Christian view of our bodies, we can begin to see that indulging in sexual sin is actually sinning against our own bodies. Verse 20 says that, instead, we should “honor God” with our bodies. This right view of our bodies in Christ will help us in our struggle against the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes so prevalent in us and around us (1Jn2:16).

Read verse 11 again. May God help us see who we really are in Christ. We are those who will one day judge the world. We have been washed, sanctified and justified. Our bodies belong to God as temples of his Spirit. May God help us see ourselves rightly so that we can live practically as his people.