

A Study of First Corinthians

Week Four

1 Corinthians 4:14-6:6

Day One

14 I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. 15 Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 16 Therefore I urge you to imitate me. 17 For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

v. 14 – Paul wrote about his hardships not to shame the reader or to make them feel less like a Christian than he was. About what was Paul warning the readers? In the context, it seems that he was warning them against arrogance, against the feeling of superiority that some had. Paul was reminding them of the price he had paid and was paying to be used of God. Could they expect to pay any less to be used of God? Some were acting like they had arrived, like they had a superior spirituality to others. Paul was cataloging his own spiritual journey so they could keep theirs in proper perspective.

That is the highest price that any leader can pay: to allow God to put you through difficult times so that you can teach and comfort others out of your own experience. I wish leadership were learning and reading, and not the trials and tribulations from which we often derive our lessons.

v. 15 – Paul reminded them of his unique position in their lives and the life of the church in Corinth. Many have taken this verse to teach about fatherhood, applying the principle to local pastors. I think it is weak to derive lessons of fatherhood from this one verse, when there are so many more verses about the Fatherhood of God. Paul's position to Corinth was unique. There are men and women who founded works and who are referred to as a "father of the house." I am uncomfortable with this designation:

And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted (Matthew 23:9-12).

Am I being too hard here? Am I being too legalistic? This verse is the only reference that Paul made to his position as a "father."

v. 16 – Why did Paul even mention the father issue? So that he could encourage the readers to be more like him as he was like Jesus. He wanted them to not take their positions of leadership for granted or to use them to lord it over the sheep of God's flock.

v. 17 – Paul decided to send Timothy, who would remind them of the way of life that Paul expected of Jesus’ followers who had come to Jesus through Paul’s ministry. Paul didn’t want them to be like him so much as he wanted them to be like him as he followed and imitated Jesus. Paul knew that they needed a model to follow, but he was always careful to point them past him to Jesus.

Can you urge others to follow you because you are confident that you are following Jesus? If not, why not? If so, how can you increase and spread your influence?

Day Two

18 Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. 19 But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. 20 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. 21 What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit?

v. 18 – It is easy to stand up to someone who isn’t there, and that is what some of the Corinthians were doing. It is cowardly not to confront someone with whom you disagree, especially if you are working closely with them. We are to speak the truth to one another, even if it’s painful—and even if we’re wrong. The only way the person will be helped or the only way we will see if we are wrong in what we think or see is to be honest with one another! That goes for marriage, work, ministry or friendship.

Is there anyone with whom you need to have a meeting so that you can enter into what one many called “the arena of truth”? If so, when will you do this? How will do you do it? What will you say? If you can’t or won’t meet, then you need to keep your concerns to yourself.

v. 19 – Perhaps you have heard that someone has something against you, as Paul did in this situation. Then you need to go to that person if they won’t come to you. I heard recently from a third party that someone had a problem with what I had shared in the context of my message at a church. I immediately emailed that person and copied the assistant. I wanted to make sure that they got the email. They never responded, but I initiated the contact. Is there someone who you are waiting to come to you? Then I suggest that you don’t wait any longer. Go to them.

v. 20 – If we could only learn and apply this lesson in the Church. Our world is words; in fact, it is the Word. We can get so used to words that we can begin to think that words will solve any problem—that speaking to a problem is the same as solving a problem. Sometimes words can solve a problem, for there is power in words. But at other times, talk is cheap. Paul made a statement here that is profound. The Kingdom isn’t about words, but about those with the power to back up those words. There were some Corinthians who talked a lot, but had nothing with which to back up what they were saying.

These Corinthians sounded good, but Paul was coming to see what else they had except talk against him. Paul was going to show them that God endorsed his work through the Spirit power that he brought to his work.

v. 21 – Paul asked them to choose the atmosphere in which he would work the next time he came—confrontation or gentleness? In some sense, we also determine the atmosphere and conditions in which we meet with the Lord:

The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight. To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd (Psalm 18:24-26).

Is it safe to say then that in some sense we determine how God responds and reacts to us?

Day Three

5:1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. 2 And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? 3 Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present.

v. 1 – Now Paul raised the issues with which the Corinthians should have been concerned. Instead of judging his ministry and how he performed it, they should have been dealing with the issues that were right before them. That is what arrogance does to you. It clouds your judgment and causes you to miss the real issues. And it causes you to be harsh when you should be gentle.

A poor man pleads for mercy, but a rich man answers harshly (Proverbs 18:23).

The Corinthians saw themselves as having it all together, therefore they were harsh with Paul. Yet they had serious sin in their midst which should have caused them to see their poverty in spiritual things. **Into which category do you fall: the poor who is humble or the rich who is harsh and legalistic?**

What's more, the situation that existed was worse than what Paul found in the Gentile world. A man was living with his stepmother!

v. 2 – Paul in angered that his disciples are trying to “deal with” him when they should have been dealing with their own problems. Jesus spoke to this tendency:

"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take

the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye” (Matthew 7:3-5).

Do you have any planks to remove before you attempt to remove any specks? Yet this doesn't mean we can never confront the problems that we see. Paul wondered why they did not put the offending sinner out of the church, especially since the Corinthians claimed such superior wisdom and insight.

v. 3 – Paul determined what should be done even though he wasn't there. He was involved with this city and church even though he wasn't there. I heard a comment made once concerning John that he was more in touch with the churches in Revelation while he was on Patmos than those who were actually in those churches. How could this be? It's because John was “in the Spirit” (Revelation 4:2). Paul was also in the Spirit, thus he could determine the prescription for a situation even though he wasn't physically present.

Of course, it helped that Paul had those he trusted reporting to him concerning the situation there. We should listen to our “trusted lieutenants.” That's why they're our trusted lieutenants! Don't shoot the messenger if you don't like the message.

Day Four

4 When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, 5 hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. 6 Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? 7 Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast — as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

v. 4 – Paul was with the Corinthian church in spirit when they assembled. How could this be? Only that the Spirit of God, who worked to found the church and worked through Paul's apostolic ministry, would work as if Paul were there. Paul had confidence in the Spirit's ability to preserve the church when it was assembled to do His will. That does mean that the local church cannot make a mistake, but it does mean that the Spirit has been preserving the Church from itself for 2,000 years, and He's not about to stop now. I can put my confidence in God to preserve the same Church that He started. So can you.

v. 5—Yet the Church must strive against sin, wickedness and the devil. Yet here Paul employed the devil in the work of the Lord and the Church! What a seeming contradiction! One man once said, “The devil is God's devil. The devil isn't free to do as he would like. He is still under God's authority.” So Paul recommended that this offending brother be turned over to Satan, who would do what only he could do—steal, kill and destroy (see John 10:10).

A remarkable picture of Satan and his relationship to the Lord is found in Job:

One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD (Job 1:6-12).

We don't have time or space to discuss this amazing passage, but what does it tell you about Satan and his ability to work and move on the earth? By the way, I don't think Paul's directive here gives the Church today the authority to do the same. We don't understand this or its implications. It is the only time it is mentioned in the Bible, so best to leave it alone.

v. 6 – Paul likened sin to yeast, of which a little could leaven a much larger lump of dough. A little sin can affect a much larger group of people, which is why Paul urged them to deal with it quickly and completely, lest the ramifications spread to others who could say, "They're doing it so it must be alright for us as well."

While the church was dividing up the membership among various leadership "camps," the church was suffering a major sinful scandal. That is how arrogance works—it blinds us to the real issues and causes us to major in minors.

v. 7 – During Passover the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Jews were not to use any yeast. This was symbolic of the sinless nature of our Passover Lamb, whose death justified us before God. I read once that justified means "just-as-if-I'd-never-sinned." So the sacrifice of the sinless Lamb was to take away our sin in God's presence. The lack of leaven in the house was a type of this sinless justification made possible by the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb.

Day Five

8 Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth. 9 I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— 10 not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. 11 But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

v. 8 – We are to keep the Festival of Unleavened Bread and the Passover without “sinful” yeast such as malice and pride. It is interesting that sin is compared to yeast. It only takes a little yeast to affect dough, so I suppose this tells us that there are no little sins. It also tells us that sin isn’t private; it affects the others around us who are part of the same lump of dough. Yeast has implications for everyone who is part of the body of Christ.

vs. 9&10 – Obviously Paul wrote a letter previous to this one, a letter which has been lost. And I would think that Paul is writing this letter we are studying in response to a letter that he got back from Corinth. The Corinthians must have misunderstood what he wrote, for they must have raised the issue of who they could have contact with if they weren’t to have anything to do with sexually immoral people. Remember that Corinth was a place of moral depravity. In the Greek world, to corinthianize was to indulge in sexual immorality.

Paul made an interesting distinction here and that was to avoid those in the church who were known to be involved in sexual sins, but to not avoid those outside the church who were doing so. At times, the church has reversed this and avoided those outside sinners to avoid contamination, so to speak. **Are there certain sinners with whom you won’t have any contact? Homosexuals? Child molesters? Spouse abusers? If that is the case, how can they know God’s love and mercy if not from you? Are there certain categories of sinners you avoid? Are there certain ethnic groups with which you aren’t comfortable?**

v. 11 – Paul was harder on the sinner who knew Jesus than the ones who did not. And in this verse Paul expanded the list of those in the church who were to be avoided. Those involved in any kind of open sin were subject to being avoided by the church.

Mennonite and Amish believers took this verse to heart and made it a habit to shun any who were involved in sin. The problem was that their list of sins expanded to anyone who was doing anything they didn’t like, much often involved new expressions of culture like television and fashion.

What was Paul trying to establish in these verses? How can we carry out the spirit of what he was teaching? I think Paul was teaching the Corinthians to be sensitive to sin. Remember, these were Greeks who had no history of holiness or right living prior to salvation. He was trying to establish a Christian community that was different than others in more ways than just worship and teaching. They had to be different in attitude and moral behavior than those around them. **Would you agree with this? Why do you think that we aren’t as “hard” on known sinners in our midst today? Or has your experience been that the church is very hard on sin and sinners to the point of being self-righteous and aloof? What is your own philosophy concerning sinners in and out of the church?**

Day Six

12 What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? 13 God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you." 6:1 If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? 2 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?

v. 12 – Paul was further establishing that the local church had to exercise some sort of discipline. I don't think he was authorizing spiritual police or vigilantes who were to actively seek sinners and punish them. If any church did that, who could remain as members-in-good-standing? But he was pointing out that in the case of the man living with his stepmother, the church had an obligation to discipline the man because the sin was open, public and probably well-known to many. In that case, the church had to "deal with it" as well as deal with anyone who publicly engaged in any other kind of sinful or immoral behavior. **Does this make sense? Do you agree?**

I had a man in the church I pastored who was beating his wife. At first, the entire family hid the problem so we could not do anything. Yet when it became known, I went to them and asked their forgiveness that I had not properly read the signs that this problem existed. I met with the children and explained that I had not known and wasn't silent to condone the problem. Then I met with the wife to assess where she was. The finally I met with the man.

To make a long story short, I had to ask him to leave the church after he refused counseling and help. Eventually he and his wife divorced and I lost track of where they were. In my mind, my actions were consistent with what Paul taught in these verses. I did not hide from the problem once it became public knowledge and I dealt with it even though this family had been in the church for a while.

v. 1 – I'm not sure how well we could apply this today. There are so many legalities, technicalities and nuances of law that most saints could not handle. There was a business problem I was involved in, however, and the parties submitted to binding Christian arbitration. We submitted the problem to Christian lawyers who listened and then rendered their decision, which was supposed to be binding on both parties. When the other party did not like the decision, they went to court anyway, which was disappointing.

I think we can make attempts to follow Paul's directives here, but we must also realize that this may not be possible in every case. I suppose that statement is the bottom line here. Can we follow the spirit of what Paul was saying without worrying about how this should look or how it will turn out? Before I go to court, can I at least make an effort to deal with the problem in church? Before I ignore or judge a problem, can I at least sit with someone and listen to the issues from both sides? Is church leadership willing to get involved, knowing that the case or situation may be beyond their scope of wisdom or expertise?

v. 2 – Is Paul implying that all believers will judge the world at some point? This is beyond what I know, but I do think that we will participate in the judgment at least as witnesses. And when we see God judging sin and sinners, we will agree with His wisdom as one's who are familiar with God's ways and edicts. I can see a righteous judgment today and nod in approval. I did not have the wisdom to help render the correct judgment but I witness that justice prevailed and in that sense I did indeed participate. **Does that make sense? Do you agree or disagree with this possible interpretation?**

Day Seven

3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! 4 Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! 5 I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? 6 But instead, one brother goes to law against another — and this in front of unbelievers!

v. 3 – It's hard for me to imagine that an angel will stand before me and I will judge them. But I have no problem imagining the body of saints standing and participating in the Last Judgment as witnesses and those who give testimony to God's justice and righteousness. I am thinking of some who hear the verdict of a jury and protest the judge's sentence. We will participate as those who applaud God and His righteous ways.

v. 4 – For this to happen, we must have those who are willing to judge and those who are willing to accept the judgments. It cannot be one-sided. I cannot force someone to submit their problems to the judgment of the church, nor can I force anyone to sit and render judgment. This is a tough situation to replicate in modern church. Do you agree?

v. 5 – I have prayed for many years to have wisdom. I have also studied the book of Proverbs, which I believe is a source of wisdom for every age. And I have had people tell me that I have a certain measure of wisdom that I have applied for the good of God's people from time to time. **How about you? Are you willing to pursue wisdom? Are you willing to apply that wisdom for the good of God's people and His church? Are you willing to do that even if you don't get paid?**

I am a church person. I have been hurt in church by church people and I'm sure I've done my share of hurting. The church is a tough place to be sometimes, but it is what Jesus gave His life to build. **Can I give any less? Can you?**

v. 6 – A brother wronged me once and it hurt my business. Some people close to the situation told me that I should sue for damages. I refused to do so, using this verse and those following as my reasons for not going to court. I figured that Jesus' church gets enough bad publicity. I didn't have to add to it by airing my grievances for the world to see.

Are you willing to be wronged for some higher good? Are you willing to endure hardship or misunderstanding for Jesus' sake or the sake of His reputation or people? I have determined that I am willing and I have proved it. How about you?