

CCLEB SERMON NOTES



SUNDAY JUNE 23, 2024
1 CORINTHIANS 5:12-6:8

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BIBLICAL SEXUAL ETHICS - A LEGAL MESS, PRIDE, AND 7 QUESTIONS



I "pride" myself on being an amateur "mycologist"—one who studies and learns about mushrooms. My primary interest in mushrooms is not necessarily the science behind fungi; rather, I just love to eat them, and looking for them is fun. I feel I can speak with some authority on mushrooms related to edibility or not... conversely, "poisonous or not." I'm very comfortable identifying several edible species of wild mushrooms locally. Most of the edible mushrooms I eat don't have close look-alikes, which makes it easier and safer. Not too long ago, I was humbled in my knowledge and practice of identifying edible mushrooms when I met another amateur mycologist. When she asked me which mushrooms I forage for, I gladly shared my impressive list of choice edible mushrooms, only to find out that in comparison to the list of mushrooms she forages, my list was not all that impressive. What further humbled me was that she could rattle off the visible differences between species and use their Latin scientific names. In her eloquent discourse about mushrooms, she would pause and ask, "Do you know what I mean?" or "Have you seen those?" "Have you tried those?" To which I could only shake my head "no" or hide my lack of knowledge and experience behind an answer like, "Hmm, maybe," as if I had some clue, but actually didn't. Everybody has room to grow, right?



What is of interest for our lesson today from that dialogue is that her questions to me revealed what I actually didn't know. The questions she asked deflated my "puffed up" pride. Each question was like letting a little more air out of my pride, one question at a time. Pffff... pffff... pffff... pffff... As humbling as that was, it was a gift. You see, when it comes to foraging for wild mushrooms, if you are not humble in your knowledge and identification, you can get really, really messed up, and sick, or die.

See, the difference between someone who is proud and thinks they know what they are doing and someone who actually knows what they are doing because they follow God's principles is often the difference between creating a mess or living a blessed and healthy life. "Pride" and "hot mess" go hand in hand. Pride blinds us from seeing and taking the right path.



-GO HAND & HAND-

So while Paul was in Ephesus, he received a report from the Corinthian church that they had created a "mess." Ever get a text or email from someone you love that things are not going well? You get that sinking feeling, that immediate concern. Paul is like that with the Corinthian church; he's like the dad who gets a call from the school saying his kids did something dangerous. Because Paul is 300+ miles away in Ephesus, he writes the church a letter of instruction on how to clean this up, fix it, learn from it, and prevent the mess from happening again.

Paul knows that for students to be taught, they have to be teachable—willing to learn. And what stands in the way of teachability? Pride. Paul doesn't get very far in his letter before he starts pointing out the Corinthian church's "pride." Before chapter six in this letter, Paul had already mentioned "boasting and pride" nine times. Paul continues addressing "pride" after chapter six two more times, even going so far as to indicate later in his letter that "pride" is a failure to love. So we know pride is an issue in the Corinthian church. Thus, in that light, is there any surprise that they, as a church, were in some ways "messed up?"

So, in **chapters 6:1-8**, Paul really goes after this pride, full steam ahead, and asks them seven questions. These questions are meant to reveal that in some areas, they really don't know what they are doing as a church. The seven questions are intended to deflate their pride and humble them, which in turn will create space for God to work and get them back on the "right path." The right path is the path of righteous living and righteous responding as a church, which will result in the "fruitfulness" that God intended in and for His church.



Let's do a brief review of the narrative in this section of the letter from last week. Paul is writing to real people in Corinth—believers, the church—that he had mentored, disciplined, instructed, and loved for 18 months. He is writing this letter in response to reports he received, and some of those reports indicate that there was sexual immorality happening within the church (**1 Cor 5:1**), specifically that a man was in sin with his father's wife, and yet the Corinthian church was paradoxically "spiritually proud." Paul refers to the actions of this man in **5:13** as "evil." We learned last week from an Old Testament understanding of the word "evil" that "evil" within God's community has many consequences.



And that "evil" is. Paul doesn't want that "pride and evil" in the Corinthian church community because, like "a little yeast put into a new batch of dough that permeates all the dough," various manifestations of pride and evil could "spread through the whole church."

“Evil” is that which seeks to drag back into chaos what God has created – ordered, blessed and called “good”.



So Paul then confronts the Corinthian church, asserting that instead of being proud and puffed up, the church should be in “mourning and sorrow” in response to this sin. Paul then gives them instructions for removing this man from the church community as a “redemptive act” to restore the man should he repent. By reinforcing the boundaries of holy living that reflect Jesus and His kingdom, the church as a whole would be much “healthier,” functioning better, and accomplishing what it was designed to do. The Corinthian church then, using a Genesis 1 understanding, would be “good.” Holy living is what God expects from His followers regarding sexual conduct.

Now, chapter six seems to indicate that someone in Corinth had brought or was threatening to bring this case of sexual immorality, this case of incest that was happening in the Corinthian church community, to the Roman court system. In a shame/honor culture common in the ancient Near East, it would make sense that this could have been the woman’s father, brothers, or husband seeking financial reward and restoration of their honor in the community. In such a culture, not responding strongly to something that brings shame to your family or community is considered “weakness.” Hence, “honor killings” still happen today. Now, we don’t know specifically that this was the case from the text. What I just suggested is a “historical reconstruction” of the occasion to which Paul is responding in chapters 5 and 6.

Whatever the occasion is, Paul responded to real incidents involving real people he knew and loved in Corinth by teaching them how to apply the gospel to real-life scenarios. It is clear that Paul wanted the Corinthian church community to avoid the Roman legal system if at all possible. Or, if this case had already had its day in court, then to prevent a repeat of the church being dragged into the Roman court system again.

To have a “mess” like this resolved outside of the church was spiritually bad for the Corinthian church community for two major reasons, which will become clear as we progress through the lesson.

The first reason why this was bad for the church has to do with the Roman legal system. Let me start by giving you some background on the Roman legal system of Paul’s day.

According to commentator Keener, Roman society was extremely litigious, much like our Western culture today. Legal disputes often revolved around money.

Most civil-type court cases in Roman society were very public and held in the center of the marketplace, the seat of the local magistrate. So, envision lots of crowds and bystanders gathered around. An appointed judge from the higher societal casts would sit on a “bema” seat and hear the case. Because this was a public venue, those arguing on either side sought to persuade the judge and sway public opinion. It was also a form of entertainment for the Roman community. Cases would typically begin to be heard at dawn and could be argued until sunset.



Paul was intimately familiar with how public the Corinthian court system was, as he had his own day in a Corinthian court early in his stay there. In Acts 18, Paul was brought before the Corinthian public court before the proconsul, accused by the Jews of something he didn't do. The judge ruled in Paul's favor, threw the case out, and it ended very badly for the Jews publicly. Paul knows firsthand how public and potentially damaging the Corinthian courts could be. He doesn't want the church to be entangled in such public and potentially damaging disputes.

Specifically concerning court cases related to sexual immorality, we know from extrabiblical sources that Roman society defined sleeping with your father's wife as "incest" and abhorred this practice. This is why Paul defines this behavior in **1 Corinthians 5:1** as "something even the pagans don't do." Additionally, we know that this behavior was punishable by law; conviction meant being sent to a penal colony on an island.

Paul's desire for the Corinthian church was for it not to be put on public display in a negative light. He wanted the church to be known publicly for sacrificial love, compassion, and inclusivity—welcoming people from all races, societal levels, education levels, and stations in life. This reflects the Kingdom of Jesus. However, being put on public display for the whole Corinthian city to be entertained by and talking about because of some act of evil within the church community would completely misrepresent Jesus' intentions for His holy people, His church, and His kingdom.

In Roman provinces, minority religions faced significant scrutiny and persecution. As we recall from **Acts 18**, Paul met fellow Jewish tentmakers Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth because they, along with other Jews, had recently been expelled from Rome by Caesar. Minority religions were viewed unfavorably, scrutinized, and often persecuted. Paul did not want to draw unnecessary attention to the new Christian community of Jesus, especially if it cast a negative light on Jesus himself.

Now, again, we don't know for certain the specific legal circumstances Paul was responding to, but his desire was clear: he preferred that any issues be handled internally within the church community. This is evident in **1 Corinthians 5:12b**, where he states, "...it certainly is your responsibility to judge those inside the church who are sinning."

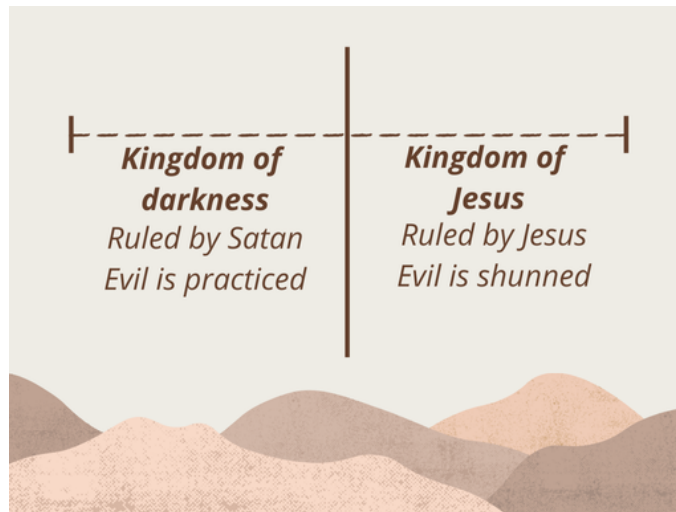
The second reason why it was bad for the Corinthian church to take this problem outside to the secular court system to resolve was because God had a better way for it to be handled within His Church in Corinth. God had a better path forward based on the gospel, His principles, and His character, which could result in true and lasting change for the kingdom and redeem this situation in the individual and in the church, bringing glory to God. That is the main point of Paul's seven questions.

In the first sentence of **verse 1**, Paul asks "how dare you?" or in Greek, "do you dare...?" In my experience of being on the receiving end of questions that begin with "how dare you?", there is usually a lot of emotion within the person asking it, related to something foolish I said or did that was strongly disapproved of and usually caused hurt. That's the case here—there's lots of emotion behind the question.



Paul's question in **verse 1** reveals to us that he perceives the Corinthian church as not fully understanding their identity in Christ and their potential in His kingdom. Consequently, they were practicing weak kingdom boundaries. In the context of the word "gospel," which meant a public proclamation of the good news of a new King and new Kingdom replacing the old, those in Jesus' new kingdom were to adopt new practices, new ways of life, new ways of handling situations, and new ways of interacting that were taught and modeled by their new King.

With the Spirit of Christ dwelling in Jesus' followers, they had the resources they needed to address relationships within the church, even those involving pride, sin, and messy situations. The Corinthians' action of seeking resolution outside the church for these ugly relational issues revealed that they didn't fully grasp who they were in Christ, nor did they understand their potential in His Kingdom with His Spirit empowering them. Consequently, they disrespected and undervalued the distinction between the Kingdom of darkness and the Kingdom of Jesus, and the boundary between the church community and what Paul refers to as "outsiders."



If one does not know who they are in Christ and their potential in Christ, then this distinction will not be clear. The Corinthian believers looked "outside" the kingdom, "outside the church" to resolve this problem instead of, as Paul says at the end of verse 1, "instead of taking it to God's holy people." This indicates weak kingdom boundaries. "Holy people" is traditionally translated as "saints," meaning ordinary people like you and me who are "set apart for God by Jesus' work on the cross for His Kingdom."

So, the end of **verse 1**, starting with the word "instead," could be understood as Paul saying, "...instead of taking it to God's people whom God had set apart from the Kingdom of darkness and whom God equipped to handle these situations." To highlight the Corinthians' weak practice of kingdom boundaries and their weak identity in Christ, including their potential, Paul asks the tough question "how dare you...?"

And Paul follows it up with more tough questions that further clarify the Corinthian believers' true identity and potential in Christ: in **verse 2a**, "Don't you realize...?" and in **verse 3a**, "Don't you realize...?" These questions also serve as teaching moments, as the questions themselves instruct.

Addressing the aspect of identity, "Don't you realize that someday we believers, the holy ones of God..." highlights our identity. Everything we say and do as "the holy ones of God" is to be grounded in our belief and relationship with Jesus Christ.

Regarding our potential in Christ, "Don't you realize that someday we believers will judge the world, and even judge angels?" This statement reveals our potential and future in Christ. In Corinthian culture, only people from higher societal classes could be judges; it was a position reserved for those born into a certain station in life.

Moreover, higher classes received preferential treatment in court, and lower classes were often unable to bring legal actions against the upper class. Therefore, when Paul declares that every believer will be a judge, it challenges societal norms and underscores a radical message about both identity and potential based on the gospel.

Imagine being a servant, coming from generations of servants, where no one in your family has ever risen above their station in life, and then hearing that "in Christ" you will be a judge. "Judge" is just one application of our identity and potential in Christ. This revelation prompts reflection on our own identity and potential in Christ, encouraging deeper meditation on these profound truths.

So what did Paul mean by "judge the world"? John's later writing in **Revelation 20:4** supports this phrase, indicating that saints will participate with Christ in that judgment. The general understanding is that saints will be involved in a significant judgment event alongside Christ. However, the details of when and how this will occur are not clear from Paul's text in Corinthians, nor are they his primary focus.

Regarding "saints judging angels," **2 Peter 2:4** provides additional context, suggesting that fallen angels await judgment, which could be what Paul is referencing. However, Paul's main point in these questions is to contrast the Corinthians' ability to handle "little things" and "ordinary disputes," as he refers to them in the latter part of **verses 2 and 3**, in light of the grand responsibilities of judging the world and angels.

Paul's intent is to emphasize that if saints are destined to participate in such profound acts of judgment in the future, the Corinthian believers—whom he addresses—are more than capable of resolving their current interpersonal conflicts and disputes within the church.

And the question in **verse 4** restates his overarching concern.

Now in **verse 5**, Paul begins by indicating his intent to shame them with what he is about to ask next, further emphasizing his point about identity and potential in Christ. He asks in **verse 5**:

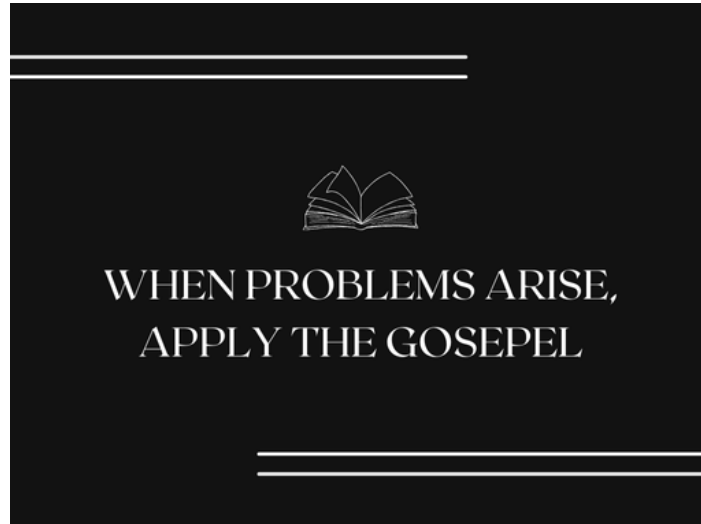
"So by going to the outsiders to resolve this issue, they are admitting there is no one wise enough to handle this within the church. If you are not 'wise', what are you?... A 'fool'."

This contrasts the Hebrew pairing of words "wise and fool". If you recall from **1 Corinthians 1:10-31**, the Corinthians were focused on worldly wisdom rather than the wisdom of Christ. Ps. Thom taught that passage on May 19th; it's available on our app and website. Paul's point in chapter 6 is that the wisdom of Christ resides in His followers, enabling them to resolve these "little things" and "ordinary disputes". The wisdom needed is not of this world, but of Christ.



Paul goes on in **verse 6**, indicating that because they didn't seek the wisdom of Christ, they ended up taking fellow believers to court and fighting "in front of unbelievers."

Paul criticizes the Corinthian Christians for fighting each other in public courts before unbelievers. He questions where the power, wisdom, love, and forgiveness of the cross are in such actions. Paul emphasizes that the resolution of their conflicts should be grounded in the gospel: "When problems arise, apply the gospel."



Paul calls the actions of the Corinthians going to secular courts and putting their disputes on public display a "defeat" in **verse 7**. In light of the cross, this characterization becomes clearer. We can add "defeat" to our list of consequences of evil from last week that start with the letter D.



Paul calls the actions of the Corinthians going to secular courts and putting their disputes on public display a "defeat" in **verse 7**. In light of the cross, this characterization becomes clearer. We can add "defeat" to our list of consequences of evil from last week that start with the letter D.

Paul then asks them two final questions that challenge and reveal earthly values versus kingdom values in **verse 7b**. Kingdom thinking would suggest that instead of acting on your sense of injustice or being wronged in a secular way, you would simply let it go.

Paul seems to be conveying that in light of the cross and eternity, when disputes arise among believers that can be resolved through wise counsel, the choice to resort to secular courts should be avoided. Such actions are too damaging to the kingdom of God. It's important to note here that Paul is not advocating for ignoring or hiding problems. Instead, he asserts that as the church, we possess the wisdom of Christ and the mind of Christ to handle these issues in a redemptive, restorative manner that reflects the cross and honors God. Even when faced with evil, we are equipped with God's wisdom to address it with love and enforce clear boundaries.

Paul's series of questions in **Chapter 6** to the Corinthians reminded me of Job 38, where God finally speaks from the whirlwind after Job and his friends debated about good, evil, righteousness, and sin for an extended period. Job, initially blessed by God with material wealth and many children, lost everything due to Satan's challenge. In their discussions, Job and his friends questioned God and His providence, even accusing Him of being indifferent. When God responded, He did so with a barrage of questions in **Job 38:1-3**.

I love **Job 38:2** in the New Living Translation: "Why do you talk without knowing what you're talking about?" God's questions to Job totaled 77, and after hearing them, Job responded humbly in **Job 40:4-5**, acknowledging his ignorance. This encounter led to Job's repentance, bringing glory to God and resulting in his restoration (**Job 42:2-6**).

Pride obstructs God's work through us individually and collectively as His church. It serves as a fertile breeding ground for evil. Evil must be confronted, and God provides the wisdom and a plan for addressing it.

It is only through humility that we fully grasp and experience our identity and potential in Christ.

