

Some of Paul's thoughts on being a Congregation

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Corinthians Explained

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 6; 1 Corinthians 6:1-12

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Congregation, a few weeks ago I preached on 1 Corinthians 5 so let's continue this morning and preach on 1 Corinthians 6, the first part, the first 12 verses. Let me only read verse 11, very impressive verse, impressive verse 11.

11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

So far.

Some of Paul's thoughts on being a congregation. So in 1 Corinthians 6 some of Paul's thoughts on being a congregation. In the first place, disagreements in the congregation, verses 1 through 8. Secondly, the holiness of the congregation in verses 9 through 11. And in the third place, peace in the congregation, verse 12. Some of Paul's thoughts on being a congregation: disagreements in the congregation, lawsuits and people suing each other and detention and how do you deal with that; secondly, holiness of the congregation, they were in the past they were adulterers and fornicators and effeminate and abusers and you name it, and now the Lord has washed them and changed them so the holiness of the congregation; and in the third place, peace in the congregation, verse 12, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient." So there are things that are not wrong but in love and for the peace in the congregation you won't do them. They're not wrong but you won't do them. They are not unlawful but they are not expedient.

Congregation, as you know, the Lord has his people on earth, his church, his congregation, his bride. He is the vine and they are the branches, the people of God, the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. You know, the church as a church as a whole has responsibilities. We don't only have individual responsibilities but also as a church. The church of God needs to be a shining light in this world so that it draws people's attention and say, "That's a church. They love each other. There is a unity that's genuine. It's fantastic. It's something that appeals to me." You know the Lord Jesus spoke about that in the Sermon on the Mount, "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid." So the church should not be hiding, "neither do men light a candle and put it

under a bushel but on a candlestick and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men." Why? "That they may see your good works." Why, what for? "And glorify your Father which art in heaven."

So that's what the church should be, a shining light so people see it and glorify God. That's the purpose of being a church, and yet not only in the world but also in the church there can be tension and people disagreeing, conflicts, hard feelings. People say things they should not say and do things they should not have done, and they break their promises and they lie to one another, and they break contracts in business, unfair in trade and how can that be? So that was also the case in Corinth, in Corinth there were conflicts in the congregation, financial conflicts also and they sued people. They said, "You know, I sue you. That was not fair what you did. I'll go to court," and they brought the court case to the authorities. And in the marketplace, in the corner of the marketplace was the judge for small things and bigger things, and people were standing around the judge in the area and just witnessed it and listened and they loved that. People love going to hear court cases. It was entertaining. There was an art to find the right arguments and to twist things around and to influence the judge, and people laughed and cheered and sometimes not, of course, if it was not to their benefit.

So for example, a contractor did his best to finish the job on time and in his opinion it was to the T, he was doing it very well. And now the customer, a member of the congregation, is not happy and says, "I'm not going to pay." So why not? I did what you asked, I was on time. "No, I don't like it." But you should have told me all the things. I exactly did what you wanted done. "No, you didn't." And they talk a couple weeks and it doesn't work and the emotions run high and one says, "I'll sue you!" And they find a lawyer and you go to court, small claims court maybe.

So that's what happened. You can see that in verse 1, "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?" So the judge is an atheist. The judge is an idolater. The judge is not a Christian at all. Now two Christians from the same congregation stand before him and they just didn't agree. That's so sad, right? That's not to God's honor, is it, that a secular judge has to deal with God's people, God's people fighting?

Now just for your information, the Lord Jesus has also been challenged to be a judge and he didn't do that. I read in Luke 12, "And one of the company said unto [the Lord Jesus], Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?" So what we are not saying is that we have to invoke the church and be office-bearers in business so that the minister has to come. No. No, that's not what it says. "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?" They should go to the saints.

Go to the saints. Where are the saints? Who are the saints? There are no saints on earth, are there? And it doesn't mean that we need to talk to the Roman Catholics saints, does it? So saints, who are the saints? I'll tell you who the saints are and I'll mention to you four

verses from the Bible. Psalm 34, "O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him." That fear him, the saints, a God-fearing people. They are the saints. Psalm 89, "And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O LORD: thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints." The congregation is the congregation of saints. Romans 1:7, "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." And the last verse, 1 Corinthians 1:2, "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints." So God's children, God's children, something has changed, right? And verse 11, "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified," you have become saints. You have received forgiveness. You have received a new heart. So go to God's people, not the consistory per se but just to some wise people in church with common sense and tenderness and honesty and fear of the Lord, people you respect, maybe the least regarded but yet people of God.

You would say, "But you know, that's quite a thing to sit with some people, some businessmen in a church around the table and just try to solve it. Who can do that? That's a major undertaking. You have to be really smart and be a lawyer for that." No, you don't. Don't you know that the saints shall judge the world? God's children, they'll judge the world at the end so why can't they deal with such small issues on earth between brothers as they are called to be judges at the end? Or, "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" I thought God will? Yes, but God's people will join him. They are all assessor judges, all help judges. On the great day at the end of this life, the Judge will come and God's people will also be acquitted and take sides with the Lord and help condemning the unjust and completely agree with the Lord that they should be condemned now.

"Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" You know, I see a mother, a God-fearing mother judging her son and saying, "It's your own fault. It's your own fault." And she does not cry anymore. She did on earth but she's not crying anymore. She completely sides with God.

"Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you," if that's true that the world shall be judged by you, "are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?" Of course. If that's your calling at the end times to be judging the unbelievers, then for sure you're capable to judge in the smallest matters.

"Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" You know, some people may say, "I don't qualify to help people figure things out together." But don't you know that the saints shall judge the world and that the saints even shall judge angels? Angels. Of course, in this case, fallen angels, not the angels that kept the word but fallen angels. Let me prove it from the Bible that God's people in the end times will completely agree with God and judge the world and even judge the devil. And the context is, just to remind you, the Apostle Paul is making the point that saints, God's people, should be helping negotiate and finding peace in the congregation. You don't need worldly judges except in serious cases of immorality and abuse. Of course, that's different.

Matthew 19, "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." It's no different but also the apostles will be involved in judgment. Or 2 Peter 2, "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment." So the devils are locked up, reserved unto judgment until the day comes that the saints will judge the world, including angels. "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." But what struck me the most is the example of the people of Nineveh. You know that Jonah went to Nineveh, well, at first he didn't go, he just left for the other side and fled from the face of God, but the Lord forced him, led him, brought him back, and he went to Damascus and preached the word of God. He had to and he did and what happened in Nineveh? Did they reject him? No, they believed him. They listened to him. It was brought to the attention of the king and the whole city repented in sackcloth and ashes, remember? They repented, maybe not savingly but at least outwardly. And I read in Matthew 12 about that, "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here." So the men of Nineveh in the day of judgment will arise and just point fingers and say, "We listened to Jonah. You had the Lord Jesus. You were preached of him, the Savior, and we repented and you did not? How come? Why didn't you repent and seek the Lord?"

"If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church. I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you?" Nobody? "No, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers." It's a shame. What should you do then? Solve it even if it costs some money, even if you don't really benefit from it, even if you think, "You know, I have my rights and I could push it hard," but sometimes you have to just let it go. Why? "It's just not right." Sometimes you yet have to let go even if it's not right for God's glory, for the welfare and the peace of the congregation, for your marriage, for the peace. For God's glory mainly.

So the men of Nineveh will be surprised that so many exposed to the gospel will not hear it and will not repent. "Now therefore," verse 7, "there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?" So when the Lord works grace in the hearts, the Lord also gives humility and that heart knows this, it's taken away, and the Lord makes mellow and breaks the heart. And you see that and that should we also see in business even.

So the first thought was disagreements in the congregation, how to solve them. We go to the second thought: holiness of the congregation. "Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren." Verse 9, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" So is the Apostle Paul changing the subject from verse 8 to 9, just talk about something else? "Know ye not?" There might be a connection. He might say, "You

know, if you are so hard-nosed and defraud one another and just play hardball, then you don't belong to the righteous, you don't belong to the broken ones, to the poor ones, to God's people."

"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" So maybe that's the connection to verse 9. We are not sure but what we know is that the unrighteous, the unbroken ones, those not living a holy life but a selfish life, a greedy life, a life of idolatry and selfishness, they will not inherit the kingdom of God. So there is a threat in here. So there is a threat and the Lord is using threats in the Bible in the preaching even for his people because they need to be kept on their toes. They need that strong hand. They need those verses like, "He that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." That type of language, strong language, God's people need that as well.

So, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit?" So they may expect the door to be open and the door to be closed and they will knock on that door, "Open, do open," and it will remain closed. Awful. Think about that. Think about that at the last time, at the end of your life or at the last time, you stand before the door and they don't let you in because, "I don't know you, ye that work iniquity." So because of people's iniquities they will remain outside.

"Be not deceived." You know, people easily deceive themselves and others, those that deceive themselves. Be not deceived. Don't fool yourself. Don't make a mistake here, "neither fornicators," 10 examples, do you see that, "fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners," they will not, "inherit the kingdom of God." Period. But what is that? Why is he mentioning all this all of a sudden? I'm not so sure but I think he is trying to remind the people of the fact that they lived in sin and have changed and are washed and cleansed and justified and sanctified, and that's why you can't live this way anymore and that's why you cannot sue one another. There's a connection.

Fornicators, them addicted to unlawful intimacy. Do you know what I mean? Addicted to unlawful intimacy. Idolaters. You know what idolaters are, right? Preferring things over God, some certain things you're so excited about, more excited over those things than over God. Adulterers, promiscuous people, go from one to the other. Unfaithful. The effeminate. The word "feminine" is in there. In the original the word "soft" is in there. And I am not 100% sure but I think male prostitutes. Abusers of mankind. I think practicing homosexuals. Thieves in the same category. Thieves. Covetous, people that want money. Drunkards. They can't miss their substance, they can't miss their alcohol, they have to drink. Extortioners. The swindlers, the bribers.

All of those people, don't single one out as more important than the other. It's all the same stuff. Selfishness, pleasing yourself one way or another. Immorality. They that live in those things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But you know, "And such were some of you." I like that. I like the Apostle Paul saying that. You know, that's how many of you in the congregation of Corinth were found by the Lord. The Lord found them in their

sins. He found them in their fornication. He found them in their adulteries. And he found them in practicing homosexuality. And he found them as thieves. And he found them as so covetous. And he found them as abusers of mankind. And he found them as drunkards. Things changed.

"And such were some of you." So it's not so that all the Christians in Corinth lived in all those sins but all of them lived at least in some of those sins. You know, they were immoral. That's who they were raised. They didn't see the problem with that. In those days, immorality was not immorality, it was not a sin. You know, you just left your wife and you left your husband and someone else and the third one, the fourth one, the fifth one like the lady of Samaria. It was not viewed as a sin often, especially not in the antique world.

"And such were some of you." But if people live that way, is that not hopeless? Should we not just say that it's over for you? "Forget about it, you have sinned too much. That's too gross. That's so gross, you have no chance anymore." No. Nothing is too gross. That's what they've got to hear. Nothing is too sinful. Nothing is so bad that it's the end. So just in case some are listening this morning at home or in church thinking, "Minister, if you would know, if you would know what I did when I was younger, I just can't believe that I ever could be saved because of those heinous, gross, ugly sins of whatever abuse of things as this." So some people are sitting in church their whole life kind of, "Not for me. It's not for me. I know that for sure I don't qualify. I can't believe that someone like me can be saved. That's for neat people and obedient people and civil people. You know, nobody is perfect but..."

Do you see this? "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." So he uses three words: washed, sanctified and justified. So I think that washed is a general word so the Lord washes sins away, he cleanses them from their sins and changes their hearts, just a common word for changing, washing, changing, and then subdivided in sanctification and justification.

What's the difference, justification, sanctification? Well, justification is forgiveness but you can forgive someone and nothing changes, right? You can forgive someone doing something but that does not mean that a person is now a different person. So you don't need only forgiveness, you need also a change and that is sanctification. Justification is to take the guilt away and sanctification is to take the pollution away. Justification is between you and God. Sanctification is something in your heart. Justification is always 100%. You can't be forgiven 50% or 90% or 99%. It's everything or nothing. But sanctification is never perfectly here below. Justification is gradual, step after step, hopefully more holy than before but never so holy that they deserve anything.

So the Apostle Paul reminds the congregation, God's people, of being a congregation, being washed, being cleansed, being justified, being sanctified by such a great God, in the name of the Lord Jesus, because of him, because he paid the price, because he was judged, he was innocent, he was not guilty, and yet he was not acquitted but he was

condemned to death. So unfair but he wanted to absorb the wrath of God for that reason, and if he is your Savior, don't be so hard-nosed and just show yourself to be a Christian and realize it, you're washed and sanctified.

You know, the Apostle Paul knows himself as well. He knows his own sins and he is writing this to give some courage, to give some hope, to be humble, for God's people to rejoice in such a Savior in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God, the Holy Spirit changing the hearts and changing the will. You know, simply said, the Apostle Paul is conveying this message if that wouldn't have happened. What are you talking about? Some money, you can take that loss for God's glory knowing the Lord has done this? Whatever. But you know again to them that feel, "I belong to that list, drunkards, revilers, extortioners, I belong there, that's me. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." You see, as snow, as wool. So no matter who you are, no matter what you have done, if you would have had all the sins of the whole world on your neck, if you would really be the chief of the sinners, God will be glorified in your salvation.

He can make ugly people look beautiful so therefore repent. Repent of your sins and confess them. Maybe you have sinned some gross sins in the past and you didn't tell anyone, maybe hardly anyone knows, sometimes you have flashbacks, you know those things, whoosh, they're under the carpet again, maybe you have never confessed them before God, maybe you never told the Lord, you say, "Well, he knows anyway," but tell him. Tell him out loud. Tell him plainly, "Lord, those years, those places with those people, with those things I did, with those things I said and so much I drank, and this and that," just tell him and say, "Lord, I confess it. I'm sorry." And may the Lord come in with that, to confess it and be certain of this, that the Lord Jesus is a Savior, a willing Savior.

So holiness of the congregation. There was disagreements and there's also holiness and he connects that somehow and then in the third place also peace in the congregation. Verse 12, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." Congregation, the 12th verse is kind of a transition on the first part of the chapter to the second part, and the second part is about the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit. So this is kind of a transition.

"All things are lawful unto me." What did he say? All things are lawful unto me? I can do anything? I can sin? I can do anything I want? All things are lawful to me? Paul, what are you saying? Well, of course, he does not mean that the moral law is not valid for him because he just talked about all those heinous sins. You see, he doesn't say, "Whatever you do is fine, it's lawful, all things are lawful," that's nor regarding the moral law, that's clear in the context. So what then? Does he mean I am free from the ceremonial law? Maybe. Does he mean I'm free from the Jewish laws they have added to the Bible? Maybe. Does he mean I am delivered from the curse of the law? Certainly. He is talking about the liberty of the Christian, Christian liberty, and Christian liberty is that they are

not slaves anymore but free. So they don't obey God as slaves but they obey God as free ones.

And there are also things that are not sinful in themselves, I think that's what he mainly is saying, there are things not sinful in themselves but not expedient. So you can't say that's wrong. It's in the Bible, it's wrong. I can find a text about it. It's a sin. No, you can't find anything, something that is not per se a sin but it is not expedient. What is expedient? Well, today we would say helpful, or we would say that's not beneficial, or we would say that it's not benevolent, or we would say there's no profit in there. So there are things not per se sinful but you better not do it, you better not have it, you better not eat it, you better don't smoke it, you better don't because, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." So is it wrong to have beer? To drink wine? No, but in certain circumstances it might be better not to. If you can handle that, "I will not be brought under the power of any."

So that's the danger. I heard someone talk about cigarettes. Is it a sin? No, but I should not be brought under the power of it. And so I am sure you are able to figure yourself things you do and people take offense and you say, "What's the matter here? It's not a sin. What are you talking about?" Yeah, it's wrong. "It's not wrong." It is wrong. "Well, where is it in the Bible?" And they come with a text that does not really prove it and you just are offended and you say, "Sorry, I'll just keep doing this. I don't care what you say. It's not about your opinion. I don't want to be a legalist. I don't want to fake it. I'm not a Pharisee. It's not in the Bible. Period."

"All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient." You have to yet bow your knees and say, "Lord, I don't see the sin in it. I really don't. But Lord, help me deciding is it helpful? Is it expedient? Is it the right thing to do in these circumstances? Is it to thy glory? Is it to the welfare of the congregation?" And of course, you can point fingers and say, "Well, they are the Pharisees and they have to let go, and they have to accept, and they have to tolerate this." We always talk about the other. They have to change and they have to be this and they have to be that, but let us all start with ourselves.

It's remarkable how often this topic comes up in the Bible. "Abstain from the appearance of evil." That's a little different but close. If something has the appearance for some people, kind of it looks like it's wrong, abstain from it. Maybe it's not wrong but it looks wrong.

Or 1 Corinthians 8, "But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ." So when you don't care and they're offended and they get turned off and they perish, that's our sin. Ye sin against Christ for

something that's not wrong. Something is not wrong and you do it and it's a sin because in those circumstances you should not do it.

Then the Apostle Paul is quite bold and he says, "Wherefore, if meat," flesh, "meat." Nobody in Corinth went to the butcher, the butcher was close to the temple and that meat was first sacrificed to the idols. So it was holy meat and some people said, "No, you can't eat that. That's polluted. That's sacrificed to the idols." And others said, "Who cares? Those idols don't exist anyway. It's still the same meat. Nothing changed. I have no problem with eating it. I eat it." And all of a sudden, "You can't do that." Well, why not? "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth," as long as I live, as long as the world stands I am not going to eat that meat if I offend my brother in Christ.

Romans 14, "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." Now think of Timothy. Timothy had a Gentile dad and a Jewish God-fearing mother, and therefore when he was a child, he was not circumcised, and this is in New Testament times, and the Apostle Paul said to Timothy, "You'd better get circumcised." What was that for? It doesn't make any sense but the Apostle Paul thought, "You know, everyone knows that he's not circumcised so there will be an obstacle to listen to him so we need to remove that offense, remove that barrier so that they will know that he was circumcised." So he asked Timothy to be circumcised. "Him would Paul have to go forth with him and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters, for they knew all that his father was a Greek."

Do you know what a sin is in your marriage or when you're dating? Things change. If he does not like this, if she does not like that, what's the problem? "I just don't like it." Do you just do your own thing, whatever she thinks, whatever he thinks? Or do you love one another? "It's okay, I don't see the problem but if you see a problem I adjust." That's love. If you don't adjust, you don't love. And so also in the congregation of Christ, we also need to be able to adjust and to be flexible, and to do what's the best for God's glory and the congregation.

So in the church we have to be cautious to not unnecessarily offend one another. Is it difficult? Well, you don't want to belong to the peacemakers then? "Blessed are the peacemakers." Would you like to belong to the proud? To the ones who say, "I hate to pretend. I hate to fake things. I'm just not the type of person." You know, you don't have to fake things, you don't have to pretend things, you just think for yourself, "I don't see the problem. I don't see this as a sin. I don't change my mind on that but I want to be expedient, I want to be wise for God's glory and for the congregation." That's not faking, it's being wise.

So maybe I didn't convince some of you with this last point but what else could it mean, all those verses? How would you interpret that? "All things are lawful unto me, but all

things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." Do you know those disagreements will be over some day, and there will be perfect holiness in heaven, and there will be just complete agreement on everything when God will be all-in-all.

So congregation, what's the heart of the message this morning? Well, if I would have to pick something and you say that's the heart, "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God." Oh, that's preached to you and that's true for others, that's sweet, that's to the glory of God, and welcome in that strife, welcome in walking on that narrow pathway and crucify your old nature, and some were inheriting, inheriting not deserving, not qualifying but inheriting the kingdom of God. Amen.