

1 Corinthians 6:1-11

Introduction

Paul deals with yet another problem in the church at Corinth. He goes from private scandal (chapter five) to public scandal, and he deals with the whole matter of human sin in general. He paints a rather unpleasant picture – but at the climax of the section he reminds his readers of the power and the glory of the Gospel.

Living in the kind of world we are in at the moment, where things that a few years ago would have been spoken of in whispers are now discussed and practised unashamedly, we find the Bible is wholly relevant to our present day situation.

The scandal in the Corinthian church

Relations were so bad in the church, and there was such bitter feeling, that church members were suing one another in the law courts, and asking heathen magistrates to pass judgement. Christian people quarrelling, and then asking the world to settle their quarrels! This was done openly and publicly for everyone to know about. It showed just how little they had thrown off their heathen past, and were still influenced by the spirit of the world.

Jews never went to law against one another in a non-Jewish court. They settled their disputes before the elders in the synagogue. But with the Greeks, the law courts were a great place of amusement and entertainment. They were always suing one another. Now Christians were carrying on the same practices with fellow members. Paul is absolutely shocked.

Differences between believers should be settled before saints, i.e. fellow Christians. They should not go to the world. **Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? ... Do you not know that we will judge angels?** (1 Corinthians 6:2,3). We need to realize the dignity and responsibility of being Christian. We are going to share in Christ's glory and reign, c.f. disciples sitting on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). Surely we can solve petty matters that arise between Christians among ourselves. Better to suffer wrong than ask unbelievers and heathen to sort them out. It is un-brotherly, un-Christlike, and dishonouring to the Lord.

The basic principle is that we must never bring the church into disrepute before the world, never parade or talk about our differences before the world, never gossip about church or fellow Christians. "Things of the house within the house." **Let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers** (Galatians 6:10).

The wider discussion about sin

The words **Do you not know** occur ten times in 1 Corinthians. **Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the Kingdom of God?** (1 Corinthians 6:9). Let us be quite clear about this, and not entertain false hopes. The Kingdom of God is the

kingdom of the righteous, and the unrighteous will not be allowed in it. Then Paul gives a list of typical sins (there are many others besides these ones) which exclude people from the Kingdom, and which are such a curse on society and in our own lives. He includes sins against moral standards, decency, and property (v9-10).

How up to date this list is – just look at our TV screens, newspaper headlines, cabinet minister’s confessions, weekends in our towns, everyday speech. This is a sign of our collapsing, disintegrating society. Every century is similar, e.g. the Victorian era. But in the past, at least lip service was given to Christian beliefs, and immoral conduct was considered wrong even though it was practiced. Nowadays there is open rejection of Christian standards. The behaviour of an “alternative lifestyle” is dignified. “Live and let live” seems to be the motto of the day. Have a good time, don’t be judgemental, look after number one. The vices of the past have become virtues. The virtues cherished in the past – purity, honour, faithfulness – have become vices to be scorned and ridiculed.

Legislation since the 1960’s has opened the floodgates to debased moral standards and violations of God’s law. Leaders of the professing church, who have the ear of the public, are silent on these matters, or are willing to excuse or encourage. One American church leader said, “We have learnt not to get hung up on the Bible.” They prefer to get “hung up” on sins, and bless others in theirs. Nothing is absolutely good or bad, they say, it depends on the situation. Their test is, “Does this help towards my fulfilment as a total being?” As long as it does not hurt anyone else, it’s OK.

We have a righteous God, with a righteous Kingdom and righteous laws. **They will not inherit the Kingdom of God** (1 Corinthians 6:10), He says. There are no relaxations of the law, no exceptions, no mitigating circumstances. God’s standards are absolute. God requires righteousness for entry into His Kingdom. If it is lacking, there is no entry.

But, people say, God is too good, He is a God of love. If I have pleased myself and lived as I like, God will forgive me. They say this because they have no fear of God, or regard to the teaching of His Word. The truth is, it is not what we think or what other people think that matters, it is only what God says that matters. God made us, He is over all, and we are all in His hands.

*“There is a city bright.
Closed are it’s gates to sin.
Nought that defileth
Can ever enter in”*

God commands all men everywhere to repent, for He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice (Acts 17:30,31). The state of the soul is more important than the state of the country. All that matters is righteousness, not ability or cleverness, culture or sophistication. The question is, where will I be when I come face to face with God and when He looks for righteousness? The truth lies in our inward parts. Have I lived my life to His glory? Have I loved Him with all my heart? Have I kept His commandments?

And who has got this righteousness? We may not have committed the sins Paul has listed, but what about arrogance, pride, living for one's self, which keeps God off the throne of life just as much as grosser sins? By God's standards, there is no one righteous, no one who seeks after God, we have all gone our own way. Every mouth has been silenced and the whole world is guilty before God. We have all fallen short of the standard set by God (Romans 3:10-23). Thank God for the power of the Gospel

The relevance and the power and the glory of the Gospel

And that is what some of you were (1 Corinthians 6:11). Paul reminds his readers that some of them were involved in a gross, vile, corrupt way of life. Not just occasional lapses, but sin characterized their whole way of life. They were swept along with the tide of decadence. What unpromising material for a church membership. Their lives and standards were the very antithesis of God and His standards.

But now a tremendous change had taken place, and they were totally refashioned. **But you were washed.** Symbolized in baptism, they were cleansed from sin. The foulness and vileness of their sins had been completely removed.

You were sanctified. Set apart for God's use, delivered from slavery to old lusts and desires. Henceforth they were His, to live according to His will and laws and standards.

You were justified. Pronounced righteous. Christ's perfect righteousness was given to them because they had none of their own. They were acquitted by God, accepted by Him, and entitled to all the blessings of righteous men.

This changed relationship with God brings peace and power flooding into the soul. There is a new outlook, new attitude, and new values. Why had this happened? Through tremendous effort? Because they rolled their sleeves up? Because they tried, tried and tried again? The answer – **In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.** Because of the divine person, His atoning sacrifice on the Cross and His glorious resurrection – that is the ground of our salvation. The Spirit of our God is the agent through whom the work of salvation is accomplished in our lives.

It was nothing to do with them, and everything to do with the power of the triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Though they were born and brought up in the moral cesspit of Corinth, beyond the reach of any earthly power, they had been rescued from the tentacles of rampant vice, and had become a glorious trophy of grace. Never had Paul been more sure that the Gospel is **the power of God unto salvation** (Romans 1:16), and that God can **save to the uttermost them that come to God through Christ** (Hebrews 7:25).

Every Corinthian Christian was living evidence that what Greek wisdom and culture and civilization could not do, God had done.

*“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,*

Was blind but now I see.”

The proof of the Christian Gospel lies in its power. God takes the dregs of humanity and makes them men and sons of God. They are the living, walking proofs that Jesus can save, recreate, refashion, forgive and wash clean.

Seneca, a contemporary of Paul, wrote that what men need is a hand let down to lift them up. When man is overwhelmingly conscious of his weakness in everything, he finds the answer in the Christian Gospel with its sheer radiant power... able to make all things new. No man can change self at the profoundest depth – but Christ can.

Conclusion

Here in these tremendous verses is the Gospel we have to preach. The power of God unto salvation. On the one hand there is the warning, the danger, the condemnation. Yet on the other hand there is the hope, the promise of God's righteousness imparted to us.

Christ calls for a fundamental change of heart. Not a vague commitment to Christ, not saying light-heartedly that Jesus is Lord, not a return to church going. No, salvation and deliverance are ours when we turn our lives fully over to Him. Then He takes hold, renews, changes and refashions, absolving us from guilt of sin committed. We can stand in the presence of God accepted. Rise from the ashes of failure to walk before God. Let Him set you free. In helplessness and need, submit to the power of God unto salvation.