“An exegetical study on 1st Corinthians 6:1-11”

Introduction
The book of 1 Corinthians is the seventh book of the New Testament and it presents a church that is struggling with loving the world. Amidst the numerous rebukes and admonishments about various topics, the author wrote in ch. 6:1-11 about frivolous lawsuits in the church and their dire implications. The thesis of this paper is to faithfully exegete 1 Corinthians 6:1-11 and show how the passage applies to a modern reader.

The city of Corinth (Κόρινθος, Kórinthos) was a celebrated city of the Peloponnesus, capital of Achaia, which lay North of Argolis, that connected the Greek mainland with the Peloponnesian peninsula. Ancient Corinth was built at the foot of the Acrocorinth, a small but steep mountain 1,886 feet high on the Peloponnesian peninsula in southern Greece. Corinth had three good harbors (Lechaeum, on the Corinthian, and Cenchrea and Schoenus on the Saronic Gulf), and thus commanded the traffic of both the eastern and the western seas. Because of it's location between the Aegean sea and the Mediterranean, the Agnation Way, and other various trade routes, the city afforded flourishing commerce and international trade.

Corinth was destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C. and lay desolate for 102 years. Because Rome became vastly overpopulated, the city was eventually re-founded as Colona Laus Julia Corinthiensis by decree of Julius Caesar as a Roman colony in 44 B.C. specifically for Roman freedman at the promise of freedom and wealth. The city became famous for its artistry in bronze, wealth, and wanton sexuality. The word “Corinth” itself literally means “ornament,

3  Bromiley, 775.
4  Ibid., 2188.
satisfied, or beauty." Corinth was a mingling place for various cultures and religions creating a melting pot of Hellenism and paganism that influenced every façade of the Corinthian Christian’s walks. A large number of pagan gods were worshipped in Corinth: Asclepius (the god of healing), Venus (Roman god of love), Aphrodite (Greek goddess of love), Melicertes, and various sea deities (Poseidon). The worship of Venus and Aphrodite, whose temples were atop the Acrocorinth, were attended with shameless profligacy. Strabo’s first century account notes that their were 1,000 temple prostitutes maintained for pagan sex-worship. The imperial cult was also very prevalent in Corinth.

Pauline authorship can be evidenced from the theological concerns of the letter, the energy of its style, its vocabulary, and historical connections with the other Pauline letters and Acts. Its authenticity is attested by Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Ignatius, and Irenaeus. Paul wrote the letter at the end of his almost three-year ministry from the city of Ephesus sometime before the final day of Pentecost (1 Cor. 16:5-9). Paul went to Corinth for the first time on his second missionary journey in A.D. 49 where he preached and taught until he left for Jerusalem in A.D. 51 (Acts 18:1-4,18-19,24-28). On the way to Jerusalem, Paul stopped and ministered in Ephesus until he received a negative report about the Corinthian church from Chloe’s household (Acts 20:31;1 Cor. 1:11). He responded with a letter (1 Cor. 5:9). After receiving a Corinthian letter that displayed considerable theological confusions about various topics, Paul wrote 1

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6 Bromiley,773.

7 Crossway Books, 2189.

Corinthians. The exact year is unknown, but most scholars believe it was in the Spring of A.D. 53, 54, or 55. Paul’s desire for the Corinthian believers, who were divided likely because of arrogance of its more powerful members, was to work together for the advancement of the gospel.\textsuperscript{9} 1 Corinthians is a pastoral epistle occasioned by specific situations and problems in Corinth. The book makes extensive use of rhetorical techniques such as contrast, repetition, and analogy to further Paul’s arguments and corrections.\textsuperscript{10}

**Preceding context**

The preceding context of 6:1-11 would be ch. 5:1-12. All of ch. five is devoted to the sexual immorality found in the church at Corinth. Paul was astounded that a man who had his father’s wife (probably step mom) was allowed to be in fellowship the church (v. 2). He wrote that such immorality was not even common among the pagans (v. 1). He rebuked the Christian’s for their arrogance and lack of discipline in the body (v.3). The apostle moved on to say he had already past judgment of the man as if he were there ( 3-4) and that they were responsible to hand the habitually sinning man over to Satan outside of the church in order for repentance and restoration on the last day (v.5). In vs. 6-8, Paul used an application of leaven and Christ’s sacrifice to admonish the believer’s to strive for moral excellence and abandon their sexual immorality. He corrected the Corinthian’s misunderstandings about not associating with sexually immoral people (v. 9). He did not intend for the Corinthians to separate themselves from the lost world (v. 10), but to keep themselves away from so-called brothers and sisters in Christ who lived like heathens (11). Paul concluded in vs. 12-13 by disclosing that he and the church have no authority to judge the lost and then admonishes the Christians to exercise church discipline

\textsuperscript{9} Crossway Books, 2187.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 2191.
for the sake of the purity of the body.

**Immediate context**

The immediate context of the passage is 6:1-11. Fee notes that a reconstruction of the case would be one brother (Man A) had defrauded another (Man B). To redress his grievances, Man B took Man A before the civil magistrates at the judgment seat, which was probably located at the heart of the marketplace (Acts 18:12-17). Instead of bringing the problems before the church, the man and maybe other Corinthians brought the divisive cases before the lost and depraved of the city. Paul argued that not only were the reasons for going to court wrong, but the fact that they were going before the corrupt magistrates of the city was utterly sinful. Paul was so concerned with having lawsuits against and amongst fellow brothers in Christ because they promote anger and resentment, invigorate divisions in the church, and hurt their witness of the gospel in Corinth. Paul, full of indignation over the wicked situation, did not give any argument but rather alternates between statements of horror, rhetorical questions, sarcasm, and threat. The immediate context can likely be separated into three sub parts: 6:1-6, 6:7-8, and 6:9-11.

In 6:1-6, Paul argued that the church was fully competent to judge trivial cases between the congregation. Paul began his discourse with the Corinthians with “Dare any of you η λμα η υμων.” The opening salvo of question one reveals both the nature of the problem and the depth of Paul’s feelings toward it. Thiselton notes that the questions carries the force of an

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12 Ibid., 229.

13 Ibid., 231.
exclamatory expression of censure: How dare you! In v. 1, “Having a case against another (πραγμα εχων προς τον επερον)” is an idiom for civil litigation. The unrighteous in v. 1 in all probability refers to the judges or juries which were arbitrating the litigations. However, scholars disagree on what Paul meant by the term “unrighteous (αδικων).” Fee argues the “unrighteousness” of the magistrates stems from their corrupt practices and methods in the Roman court systems. Others believe the term to be just a designation of the salvific standing before God of the judges. In vs. 2-3, Paul asked a set of questions that minimizes pagan courts in the light of eschatological realities. Paul asked the rhetorical question of “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” The nature and extent of the judging is unknown from the text. Since God is the one who judges the world (Rom. 3:6), it may be best to understand the saints’ judging as relating to ruling. The elect judging the world is alluded to and stated in Scripture as well as Jewish apocalyptic sects such as the Qumran community (Dan. 7:22; Matt. 19:28; Rev. 2:26,20:4). Paul basically concluded that “If the saints are competent enough to judge or rule the world, can they not handle trivial or tribunal cases or matters (κριτηριων)?” The judgment proceeds from the world (v. 2) to angels (v. 3). The question of which type of angels (fallen or holy) and the exact judgment (judge or govern) over them is also debated and


17 Ibid., 230.

18 Garland, 202.

19 Thiselton, 426.
unknown. The fundamental point still stands: If we are to judge and rule over the world and over angels in the age to come, we are surely able to settle matters pertaining to life among ourselves today. As Garland has suggested, v. 4 can be translated three different ways with the clause being read as a question in the indicative, an exclamation in the indicative, or an imperative. Because v. 4 is difficult to translate, MacArthur suggests that we [Christians] should not be so dogmatic about it. The fundamental meaning is clear: When Christians have earthly quarrels and disputes amongst themselves, it is inconceivable that those who rule eternally should try to settle them through corrupt court system run by unbelievers, by magistrates who are of no account in the community of God. Paul, in a likely sarcastic tone, says all of this to their shame (πρὸς ἐντροπὴ ν ὑμίν). He ends v. 6 with more rhetorical questions. Plagued by arrogance, the Corinthians should have been ashamed of their behavior, for they were not even wise enough to settle or judge (διακρίνω) a dispute between those is their own congregation.

Paul continued in v. 7 with “Now therefore (ἡ δὴ μὲ ν οὖν)” which at once looks back to the preceding thought, and continues it, bringing under special consideration the fact that brother goes to law with brother. Paul wrote in v. 7 that having a lawsuit amongst brothers in a church is already a defeat for you (ἡ πτημα ἐν ὑμίν). No matter who wins or loses the lawsuit, all lose spiritually. Their litigious spirit betrays a moral deficiency and reveals the triumph of selfishness

21 Garland, 204.
22 MacArthur, 139.
23 Crossway, 2198.
over love—something Paul addresses in v. 13. Paul, wanting them to lay down their arrogance, questions “Why not suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?” The term “defrauded (αποστερεισθε)” literally means “to deprive of one what is due.” Paul believed the Corinthians, for the sake of their witness and the gospel, should just be cheated and endure suffering for the kingdom. Paul affirmed and applied the principle of Jesus “to turn the other cheek” as he does throughout his writings (Matt. 5:39; 1 Thess. 5:15; Rom. 12:17). In v. 8, Paul wrote instead of being wronged, defrauded, or cheated, the Corinthians were doing that to others—even to the people they were supposed to love the most, their brothers.

In vs. 9–10, Paul seems to threaten or warn the Corinthians about their immoral behavior likening it to the corrupt magistrates in earlier passages and a host of other wicked people in the immediate passage. Yet again, he asked a rhetorical question of “do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” “The kingdom of God” may refer either to the kingdom of God in heaven; or to the church on earth—most probably the former. The image arguably derives from Jesus’ teachings (Matt. 25:34). Paul assumed that since God’s kingdom is a marked by righteousness, the unrighteous can have no part in it. Paul did not list ten different types of sin someone can commit to lose their salvation. He was likely comparing ten habituated actions, which by definition can find no place in God’s reign for the welfare of all, with those qualities in accordance with which Christian believers need to be transformed if they belong

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25 Garland, 209.


27 Garland, 211.
authentically to God’s new creation in Christ.28

“Fornicators (πορνοὶ)” - Fornicators are those who commit physical or spiritual adultery. The term in this passage must refer to those who are single or celibate before marriage because an adulterer is mentioned soon after. The New Testament uses the word in Matt.5:32,15:19; John 8:41; Acts 15:20; 1 Cor. 5:1,6:13,6:18;7:2,10:8; 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1Thess. 4:3; Rev. 2:14,2:20-21;9:21;14:8; 17:2,4. Every form of unchastity is included in the term “fornication.”

“Idolaters (εἰδωλολατροὶ)” - Idolaters in the New Testament are those who not only give to any creature or human creation the honor or devotion which belongs to God alone, but those who give to any human desire a precedence over God's will (1 Cor.10:14; Gal. 5:20; Col. 3:5; 1 Pet. 4:3).

“Adulterers (μοιχοὶ)” - Adulterers are any married men or women who are sexually or intimately unfaithful to their spouse. The terms fornicator can be used interchangeably.

“Effeminate (μαλακοῖ)” - Effeminate are those who are considered “soft” or figuratively catamites. The word is used only two other times in Scripture but their context involves clothing and its texture (Matt. 11:18;Luke 7:25). In the Roman culture, an effeminate was the passive partner during homosexual intercourse.29 Much debate surrounds this term and its translation due to our present culture and beliefs around us.30 Paul further condemns homosexual practices in Rom. 1:26-17.

28 Thiselton, 439.
29 Winter, 119.
30 Scholars handle these terms: Fee (224), Garland (212-215), Thiselton (440-458), and Winter (110-121).
“Homosexuals (αρσενοκοιταί)”- Homosexuals are those who have a desire for the same sex and seek to corrupt the man/woman relationship that God ordained as sacred. The term occurs in 1 Tim. 1:9-10 where the wording is similar to the Septuagint’s translation of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13. In the Roman culture, a homosexual or someone who defiles himself sexually with another man is the aggressive partner during homosexual intercourse.

“Thieves (κλεπταί)”- Thieves are those who take away another man's property, secret or openly, by fraud or force. The term is used in the New Testament in Matt. 6:19-20,15:19; Mark. 7:21-22,11:17;Luke 19:45-46;John 10:1; Rom. 2:21; 1 Cor.6:8,10 Eph. 4:28; Tit. 2:10; 1 Pet. 4:15; Rev. 3:3, 9:21.

“Covetous (πλενεκταί)”- Covetous people in the New Testament are people who wish to have more than what they posses and desire to have other people’s things. People who are eager to gain. The term is used in the New Testament in 1 Cor. 5:10-11 and Eph. 5:5.

“Drunkards(μεθυσοί)”- Drunkards are those who indulge in too much alcohol. The word occurs only one time outside of this immediate passage in 1 Cor. 5:11.

“Revilers (λοδόροι)”- Revilers are those who spread rumors and scandals out of evil desires or motive. They destroy with their tongues (Jas. 3). The word occurs only one time outside of this immediate passage in 1 Cor. 5:11.

“Swindlers (ἄρπαγες)”- Swindlers are those who use dishonest or manipulative tactics for social, political, material, or monetary gain. The word occurs three other times in Luke 18:11, 1 Cor. 5:11, and Matt. 7:15.

Paul wrote that some of the Corinthian believers “were (ητε)” those things mentioned in the preceding vs. Paul used “but (αλλα)” three times to indicate the contrast of the Christian life
with the worldly life he has just been describing. He wrote “but you were washed (αλλα απελονσασθε). The term “washed” literally means “have remitted or cleansed.” Debate surrounds the nature of this washing. For centuries in church history, the washing had salvific effects and occurred at the literal Christian baptism. Ambrosiaster argued “The Corinthians had received all the benefits of purity in their baptism, which is the foundation of the true gospel. In baptism, the believer is washed clean from all sins and is made righteous in the name of the Lord….“ However, Paul was more than likely referring to the spiritual washing of regeneration (Tit. 3:5;John 3:3-8). Paul maybe was making an indirect allusion to the rite of baptism, but his main focus was probably on the spiritual transformation made possible through Christ and effected by the Spirit. Paul continued with “But you were sanctified (αλλα ηνιασθητε).” This “sanctified” is a similar concept to the washing and is the initial break with the love of Son, and with the power and practice of sin, that occurs at regeneration (Acts 20:32;Rom. 6:11;2 Cor. 5:17). Paul concluded his warning and explanation of why they cannot live the same as they were with “but you were justified (αλλα εδικαιωθητε).” Thiselton notes that “the Greek term without doubt has its full meaning of justification by grace: you were put in right relation with God, you were put right in your standing.” Paul ends his dissertation with how the Corinthians were washed, sanctified, and justified. This was accomplished completely “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

31 MacArthur, 143.
33 Fee, 247.
34 Crossway, 2198.
35 Thiselton, 455.
Seceding context

The apostle again instructed the Corinthians further about matters of sexual immorality. Some of the Corinthian Christians were using prostitutes, theorizing that bodily appetites were affairs of indifference for Christians just as they apparently were for everyone else. Paul reminded them that the bodies of Christians are one with the resurrected Christ, and in risen form, the Christian’s body will be eternal. What they do now in the body, therefore, is important. The Corinthians were rationalizing their sexual sins with their new freedom they had in Christ. In 6:12-20 Paul demonstrated three of the evils of sexual sin: it is harmful to everyone involved; it gains control over those who indulge in it; and it perverts God’s purposes for the body.

Application

A good application of 1 Corinthians 6:1-11 would not be that Christians should never under any circumstances go to court. Paul wrote in Romans 13:1-5 that government and the powers that exist are there for the protection and good of the people. Evangelical Christians today need to rediscover the lost doctrine of Regeneration. Regeneration is the spiritual change wrought in the heart of man by the Holy Spirit in which his/her inherently sinful nature is changed so that he/she can respond to God in saving faith, and live in accordance with His Will (Matt. 19:28; John 3:3,5,7; Tit. 3:5). The Bible conceives salvation as the redemptive renewal of man on the basis of a restored relationship with God in Christ, and presents it as involving "a radical and complete transformation wrought in the soul (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23) by God the Holy

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36 Crossway, 2198.

37 MacArthur, 146.

Spirit (Titus 3:5; Eph. 4:24), by virtue of which we become 'new men' (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10), no longer conformed to this world (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9), but in knowledge and holiness of the truth created after the image of God (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10; Rom. 12:2)." Regeneration changes the man from a self-seeking, God and people-hating, utterly lost sinner who cannot obey the law (Rom. 3:9-18; Isa. 59:1-15) into a child of God who can obediently please his or her heavenly Father (Rom. 6:14,17-22).

Because this rebirth or renewal of your life has occurred, a Christian should not practice sin. Furthermore, a true Christian will not and can not habitually practice sin (1 John 3:4,6,9). Paul warns the Corinthians and all Christians that that “unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” (1 Cor. 6:9a).” Saved Christians do not make a practice of sinning. Leonard Ravenhill said “There’s only two types of people in this world: those dead To sin and those dead In sin.” There is no in between. If a so-called brother or sister is behaving as the people described in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, they need to make sure their calling and election is sure (2 Pet. 1:10) and repent for the sake of the purity of the church, the gospel witness, and their very lives. What one does as a Christian matters! The gospel should never be damaged by the lives of those who are supposed to be carrying it.

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Bibliography


