

POWER

"... the gospel ... is the power of God unto salvation ..." (Romans 1:16)

DEFRAUD YE NOT ONE ANOTHER (1 COR. 6:1 - 8)

by Wade L. Webster

Both testaments give the inspired instructions not to defraud (Lev. 19:13; Mk. 10:19; 1 Thess. 4:6). Throughout time, God has required that His people be honest in their dealings with others. At least four different relationships are involved in the requirement not to defraud:

- A man is not to defraud his **neighbor** (Lev. 19:13; cf. Prov. 22:22; Isa. 10:2). The Parable of the Good Samaritan makes clear that our neighbor is not limited to those who look like us or who live on either side of us. Everyone with whom we come in contact is our neighbor (Lk. 10:30-37).

- A man is not to defraud his **brother** (1 Cor. 6:8; 1 Thess. 4:6). The command not to defraud one's neighbor clearly involved not defrauding one's brother. I separated the two prohibitions to put special emphasis upon the relationship that brethren are to enjoy.

- A man is not to defraud his **mate** (1 Cor. 7:5). Certain benevolence is due our mates (1 Cor. 7:3).

- A man is not to defraud his **Maker** (Mal. 3:8). When a man does not give as he has been prospered, he is defrauding or robbing His maker of the glory due Him (Psa. 96:8).

Although each of the relationships mentioned above is worthy of discussion, our focus in this lesson will be on not defrauding one's brother.

It should be noted from the start that defrauding one's brother is a very serious matter. Paul plainly declared that they were doing "wrong" (1 Cor.

6:7-8). The word translated from the Greek as wrong means "to act unjustly, to do wrong to or injure someone."ⁱ The brethren at Corinth were injuring one another and the reputation of the church by their actions. The situation was very shocking to Paul. He asked how they dared or presumed to do such a thing (1 Cor. 6:1). Dared is from the Greek word *talmao* and is often translated as "durst" (Acts 5:13; 7:32; John 21:12; Jude 9). It means "to have courage, boldness, confidence to do something, to venture, dare."ⁱⁱ The word indicates presumption. In addition to being shocked that two brothers would do this, Paul was shocked that the church would allow it to go on (1 Cor. 6:5).

Like the matter addressed in the fifth chapter, the saints at Corinth were far too passive (1 Cor. 5:2, 6-7). Although there were times within the book when Paul tried to keep from shaming them (1 Cor. 4:14), this was not one of those times. He spoke these things to their "shame" (1 Cor. 6:5). They needed to blush (Jer. 6:15). In this lesson, we will explore three reasons why their actions were shameful.

It Was Shameful

Because Of Who It Involved

The letter of First Corinthians was addressed to "the church of God" which was "at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2). It was addressed to those who were "sanctified in Christ Jesus" and "called to be saints" (1 Cor. 1:2). As you know, sanctification refers to the setting apart of something or someone for a holy purpose. The saints at

Corinth were supposed to be separate (2 Cor. 6:17-18). They were supposed to be peculiar or different (1 Pet. 2:9). However, they were in many ways like the corrupt city in which they lived. In fact, in some ways, they were even worse than the city in which they lived. As you recall, they were tolerating a sin that wasn't even named among the Gentiles (1 Cor. 5:1). In legal matters, they may not have been worse, but they seem to have been as ready to go to law with one another as unbelievers were.

Warren W. Wiersbe noted, "The Greeks in general, and the Athenians in particular, were known for their involvement in the courts. The Greek playwright Aristophanes has one of his characters look at a map and ask where Greece is located. When it is pointed out to him, he replies that there must be some mistake - because he cannot see any lawsuits going on!"ⁱⁱⁱ

Twice within the context under consideration in this study, Paul referred to "the saints" (1 Cor. 6:1, 2) and once to "the church" (1 Cor. 6:4). As noted above, the brethren at Corinth were supposed to be different because of who they were. However, they seemed to be as given to fornication and feuding as their fellow-Corinthians.

Please note that the matter under consideration within the context (1 Cor. 6:1-8) involved brother against brother (1 Cor. 6:6). The strife was between "brethren" (1 Cor. 6:8; cf. 6:5; Gen. 13:8). Please understand that Paul was not implying that it

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would have been acceptable for them to have defrauded an unbeliever (cf. Lev. 19:13). We noted in the introduction that God's people were instructed not to defraud their neighbors (Lev. 19:13; cf. Prov. 22:22; Isa. 10:2). Paul was simply showing how shameful it was for those within the same spiritual family to be treating one another in this way (1 Cor. 6:5). Consider a parallel to the Civil War that took place between the North and the South in our own country.

What made the Civil War worse than other wars that we have been involved in as a nation? Was it not the fact that the Civil War involved brother against brother? I believe that it was. There is something worse about brother taking up sword against brother; and, that is true whether the sword is his own or that of the government (Rom. 13:4).

Have you ever watched any courtroom television? If you have, then you have probably seen a case involving family members - brothers and sisters, parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, etc. Often, the judge will point out the shame of family members taking one another to court and will call attention to the fact that they should have been able to work the matter out without coming to court. I believe that you will agree that there is something worse about these cases than other cases.

Please notice the **"and that"** construction employed by Paul (1 Cor. 6:8). It shows the shock that Paul felt over the sinful suit taking place between saints.

Lenski noted that both men under consideration in the context were bringing charges against one another. He wrote, "When Paul writes about one 'having a matter against another' he means one member against

another, but *pros* denotes reciprocity, for each of the two has something against the other...If the matter in question were entirely one-sided, Paul would have used *kata*."^{iv}

It was Shameful

Because of *What It Involved*

Paul described the matter under consideration as *small* (1 Cor. 6:2). In his commentary on First Corinthians, Reese notes that the term *smallest* "speaks of things that were of the most trifling sort - having to do simply with earthly, and therefore transient things, money, property, and the like. The kind of things settled in 'small claims court.'"^v Matthew Henry noted, "They went to law for trivial matters, things of little value."^{vi}

Paul described the matter under consideration as *secular* (1 Cor. 6:3-4). He said that it was a matter "pertaining to this life" (1 Cor. 6:3-4). Reese notes that the Latin translation of this word is "saecularia - secular, worldly - as opposed to spiritual."^{vii} As Christians, our affections are to be on things above, and not on things on the earth (Col. 3:1-2; Mt. 6:33). However, we sometimes fight harder for the things of this life than we do for the things to come (1 Tim. 6:12).

Paul described the matter under consideration as *sufferable* (1 Cor. 6:7). He thought that those involved should have been willing to "take wrong" or to "suffer" themselves to be defrauded (1 Cor. 6:7; cf. Mt. 5:38-42). He argued that they should have put the influence of the church before their own self-interests. The reputation of the church should have come before their individual rights. Clearly, had they loved the church as much as they should have, they would not have aired their dirty laundry.

It should be noted that not all matters are small, secular, and sufferable. Roy Deaver noted the following:

It is our studied conviction that 1 Cor. 6 does not forbid an eldership- functioning as an eldership - when all other efforts have failed - in order to protect the LIFE, the WORK, and the PROPERTY of the congregation over which they serve as elders, to take whatever legal action MUST be taken. It is possible - and in fact, has happened - for an eldership to be placed in a position in which (for the protection of the life, works, and property of the congregation over which they serve) they have no alternative but to place the matter in the hands of the legal authorities. As watchmen, they would be derelict in their duties should they fail to do so. If it is true - as many hold - that elders cannot take such action, then- obviously - the deed to the property is not worth the paper it is written on! When such action becomes necessary, we maintain that it is not in violation of the teaching of 1 Cor. 6:1ff, and that it is in fact a situation to which 1 Cor. 6 is not applicable. Such is not a matter of a private dispute between brethren. The very life and work and property of a congregation is not such as could be described by the words "smallest matters," "trivial cases," "these pettiest cases."^{viii}

Roy Deaver further noted:

Clearly, it is the case that legal matters can be dealt with only by legal authorities. Religious problems can be (and ought to be) settled by brethren and among brethren. Gallio had the right attitude when he said, 'If indeed it were a matter of wrong or of wicked villainy, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear

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with you: but if they are questions about words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; I am not minded to be a judge of these matters" (Acts 18:14, 15). It is the state which has the authority to issue a deed to a piece of property. Obtaining a deed is a legal matter, and we have to go to law to *obtain* our deed to the church property. We may - in harmony with the scriptures - go to law to protect that deed and the rights which it represents.^{ix}

It should be further noted that there are times when it is clearly permissible for a brother or a sister to go before the courts in an individual matter. For example, the innocent party in a marriage is given the right by God to put away their sinful companion for their companion's fornication and to marry another (Mt. 19:9). Brother Deaver notes that these rights "include both *scriptural* and *legal* right. In both (a) the putting away and (b) the forming of another marriage the law of the land would have to be involved. Obviously, the innocent party is here told that he or she may call upon the law to the extent needed. Certainly, Paul, in 1 Cor. 6, did not take away this right!"^x

It was Shameful

Because of *Where* It Involved

As already noted, the matter under consideration was shameful because of *who* and *what* it involved. It was a small, secular matter between brethren. It was a private matter and should have stayed private. Jesus had already laid down the law that brothers were to settle disputes among themselves (Mt. 18:15-17). The most shameful thing of all was *where* the matter was taken. The matter was taken to the legal courts, instead of to the local church.

Paul spoke of their taking the

matter "*before the unjust*" (1 Cor. 6:1). Please note that "the unjust" in the passage are contrasted with "the saints." We have already elaborated on what is meant by the term *saints*. Therefore, "the unjust" refers to those who have not been set apart from the world for holy purposes. The unjust were worldly judges/juries who did not live by the same holy standards that governed God's people. Some suggest that these judges were prone to bribes and other abuses. We know from the trial of Jesus that they were not always just. However, Paul's concern was not over whether or not the saints would get a fair trial. His concern was for the church and her influence. Please note that the problem was not going to law, but rather where they were going to law. It was permissible for them to go before the saints. The fault was in going before unbelievers.

Paul spoke of their taking the matter "*before the unbelievers*" (1 Cor. 6:6). It was bad enough that brethren could not work out their differences, it was worse that they

went before unbelievers to do so. Again, please notice the "*and that*" construction employed by Paul. Paul used this construction to express shock and to call attention to the sinfulness of what they were doing (1 Cor. 6:6, 8). Imagine two believers going before unbelievers to have their case decided. What kind of impression of the church do you suppose this would have left upon the judge and/or jury that heard the case? Do you think it would have encouraged or discouraged them from looking into the Lord's church further? How foreign the actions of the church at Corinth were to what the Lord wanted the world to see when they saw the church. As you recall, He declared, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35; cf. John 17:20-21; Psa. 133:1; 1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:4-6).

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Deuteronomy 5:32

Wade Webster, Editor

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Paul argued that saints should go before saints, and not unbelievers, in settling matters like this (1 Cor. 6:1). In fact, the least esteemed among brethren were to be preferred over the most esteemed among unbelievers (1 Cor. 6:4). Perhaps, Paul was sarcastically saying, "Let the little members decide the little matters." Bill Jackson believed that Paul was "stating that the least prominent, the least influential, and perhaps those with the least time in Christ, if faithful were "qualified to judge the matter at hand."^{xi} He pointed out that Christians would judge (are judging) the world and angels (1 Cor. 6:2-3; cf. Eph. 5:11; Heb. 11:7). Surely, they should be able to render judgments in matters pertaining to this life. Reese noted, "Those who are worthy of sitting as judges in a 'supreme court' are certainly qualified to function in a tiny 'local court.'"^{xii} In a congregation that prided itself in having spiritual gifts, surely there was a man wise enough to judge between these brethren (1 Cor. 6:5).

Under Roman law Jews could try virtually every offence and prescribe virtually every punishment except for death. No doubt, the same allowance held true for Christians.^{xiii} In other words, there was no need from any standpoint for these two brothers to go before a pagan judge. Roman and Greek law allowed them to settle the matter among themselves. The Jews followed this practice. Wiersbe noted, "Even the unbelieving Jews dealt with their civil cases in their own synagogue courts."^{xiv} The church could have, and should have, done the same.

In this study, we have seen three reasons why the actions of those in the Corinthian congregation were shameful. Their actions were shameful because of *who, what, and where* was involved. As lawyers and legal actions multiply within our country, let's make sure that we do not become like those around us. Let's make sure that we put the influence of the church before the interests of self. Furthermore, as Biblical illiteracy grows and grows, let's make sure that we are knowledgeable of matters like this.

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