

**A Proper Sense of Dignity**  
**1 Corinthians 6:1-7**

*Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? 2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? 3 Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? 4 If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? 5 I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? 6 But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!*

**Introduction:** This passage is best explored once you understand something of the Greek Culture and of Jewish Sensitivities. William Barclay tells us about the litigious mentality of the Greeks in that day. In a Greek city every man was more or less a lawyer and spent a great part of his time listening too and judging law cases. If a person had a complaint against another they would immediately appoint three individuals to arbitrate their complaint (any man over 60 was obligated to carry on services as a judge or arbitrator). If this arbitration could not settle the case then it could be brought before various courts and juries which numbers went from 40 to 200 to even over 400 and some suggest as large as 1000 jurors. The Romans and Greeks loved the entertainment found in these trials and the format it provided them to continue to judge the rhetoric and argumentation of their peers which was a favorite pass time. This was the almost immediate way in which disagreements were resolved in Corinth.

Jews, of whom Paul belonged, had a totally different view of how to settle legal disagreements. They were taught that it was wrong to settle disputes among themselves through the legal courts. They settled things before their own elders and synagogue members. To them justice was settled in the spirit of family and not in the spirit of legalities. In fact for them to go to court against one another was considered blasphemy against the Law of God in favor of the laws of men. This is just the opposite of the approach of the Greeks.

Now Paul was a Roman and also a Jew. As a Roman at time he appealed to the legal system of Rome when the advance of the gospel was being threatened by non Christians. But because Paul was influenced by the customs of the Jews as they were informed by God's Word, he never sought to resolve a conflict with in the body of Christ or with his own fellow Jews through the foreign legal system of the Roman and Greek world in which he lived. And he is shocked that the Corinthian Christians (who pride themselves in being wise) are behaving so unwisely as to subject themselves and their people to the judgments of the world instead of dealing with their problems graciously with in themselves.

What I would like to do this morning is to high light some principles revealed in this text that will be helpful guides to the conduct of our lives as followers together of the Lord Jesus Christ. You may not have or may never be tempted to take another Christian to court... if you do Paul encourages that the binding arbitration should be done by members of the body of Christ... but regardless of this... there are clear lessons to be learned for ourselves in this issue that Paul is addressing.

**I. 1<sup>st</sup> learn the need to address Cultural Blind Spots to Truth and appreciate Cultural Sensitivities to Truth.**

Paul is exposing what the Greeks were blind too but as a Jew what he was sensitive too. Every culture has its cultural blind spots. Some have more and some have less. **But every culture... whether it be the culture of a given nation or race or that of a family or church has in it blind spots that they do not see.** You may recall when you were married and your spouse pointed out to you that some sort of behavior was not considerate and you thought to yourself, *“Why that’s the way everyone in my family does it.”* Well the first year of marriage is spent putting fresh light on various blind spots in your lives and then you go from there slowly nurturing, together, new blind spots you’ll pass on to your children. We all have them. Blind spots.

Every culture also has some sensitivity to truth. And so...your spouse was right... what you were doing, “eating with your mouth open” was inconsiderate. She grew up in a family that chewed with their mouth closed as an act of polite consideration and you didn’t. **I recall a pastor who church was helping a large group of refugees from a certain foreign country.** What this pastor discovered, to his shock, was that these individuals didn’t have the slightest hesitation to lie when it was convenient for them. In reports they were filing for the government refugee services they were claiming not to have cars and apartments and a number of other things that the pastor knew that they had.

Paul repeated a quote of his day in Titus 1:12 that *“all people from the island of Crete are liars.”* And you would have thought that this is where all these refugees came from. The leaders of this group of refugees came to him with their own pastor to explain themselves. “What you have to understand,” He was told, “Is that it is not considered lying to us to say only what is in our favor. In our country you could be asked if you had a car and we would say no because in our heads we would think, “I don’t have a large car...I have a small car... or I don’t have a red car I have a black car.”

The pastor’s response was, *“In your culture you may consider that acceptable behavior but in our culture and according to God’s word this is lying. It is a sin. And cultural or not it must stop.”*

Paul is facing the same kind of problem and likely the same kind of culture defense for bad behavior. Let us understand that we have our cultural blind spots but it is no excuse for sin and bad behavior. **And Paul is not so culturally sensitive as to conceal a straight forward rebuke of such behavior. Our obligation is to speak out against clear violations of God’s Word. We are not to excuse or become advocates for the blinds spots in any given culture... including those found in the culture of our own homes or the culture infused in our upbringing.**

**The best way to address those blind spots is to listen to the voices of those setting forward God’s Word from outside your times and your culture in order to gain from them a unique insight to which you may have been blind.** Read old books, commentaries and biography of past souls. is You’ll be surprised at the sensitivities they express that we have so often become utterly calloused about. **Ex.** The story has been told for so long that it may not even be true but it is conceivable. A quiet Christian man from China is brought to America to study the Church. He is exposed to its churches and its programs and its wealth of resources. He is then asked to state his impressions on all he has seen and he says, *“I am amazed at all that you can do with out prayer and the help of the Holy Spirit.”* **A Blind Spot is exposed... and he was right to express his amazement.**

Also remember that the Lord Jesus has come to invade our lives and to invade our cultures and in the process to rewrite them according to his own will and purpose. To Christ nothing is sacred but God and His Word and Will. To Christ no tradition or way of doing things is beyond the alteration of His claims and rule upon the life. When he is allowed to take dominion of the soul he writes whole new sensitivities in our spirits. Listen to his voice and he'll change the way you live and he will open your eyes to see that many of your culturally embedded assumptions are wrong.

The other day someone read to me the account of a tribe in Ecuador that had years ago been ingrained as a war like tribe that settled all their differences in blood shed. They were actually head hunters and the tribe famous for shrinking the heads of their victims. It took years to bring the gospel into this people group. But now there are churches through out this race of people. Recently some one was reading a statement reflecting the old war like ways of the tribe in a church gathering. Someone spoke up and said, "Yes why don't we all go out side the church and settle our differences." And the church erupted in laughter. They had changed... their core cultural assumptions had changed... their old ways were non sense to them. Jesus had exposed them to the light and they would remain there. This is what we need. Don't let any one bully you back into the darkness... remain in the light of the Savior's presence and expose yourselves to the light of His word... listen to those who have received that light in other ages and places.

## **II. 2<sup>nd</sup> learn the Importance putting Right Thinking before your Actions.**

Paul's series of questions must of have been somewhat debilitating to those listening. They have prided themselves as being such wise thinkers and his questions suggest that they have not been thinking at all.

Seven questions in the first five verses. All of them underscoring these Corinthians failure to think the implications of what they have been made in Christ and what they have been taught. This line of questioning rings true to me. It takes me back before the inquisitions of my parents. "*What were you thinking? What did you think was going to happen? Is this how we have taught you to behave? If everyone jumped off a cliff would you jump off the cliff with them?*" I don't know if this was Mom and Dad's intent but the effect of their questions was to say as loudly as possible. Think before you act.

Are answer to the questions they gave us was usually this accurate and honest confession. "*I wasn't thinking. I didn't mean too.*" We were right for the most part. The sins that usually lay hold of us come upon us for lack of thought. They are the sins of impulse and presumption. They happen when we move by instinct and not by foresight.

There is a tendency in Paul's letters to address conduct after a lengthy time spent addressing doctrinal truths. The reason is that conduct is to be the reasonable response to truth. We are to do what we know is true and to do that we are to remember what we know before we determine what we shall do. When we do this we become something more than fact sheets full of Biblical trivia. We become instead living letters of the grace and power of God to save us to the uttermost.

**David said in Psalm 119:11** *Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*” He was not merely suggesting that he was engaged in a healthy plan of Bible memorization. He was saying that God’s truth would go first to the inner spring of his life and out of an informed heart practice would arise.

I suggest so that you may escape that humiliating exercise of questions, asked **after** bad conduct, you begin asking yourselves the right questions **before** you choose to act.

- Will this encourage purity and holiness in my life? **1 Tim. 5:22** says “*keep yourselves pure...*”
- Will this bring defilement into my body? **1 Cor. 3:17** says, “*defile not the temple of God.*”
- Is this a mark of victory or surrender? **Rom. 6:13** says, “*yield not your body unto sin.*”
- Does this edify me and others? **1 Cor. 14:26** says, “*let all things be done to edify.*”
- Is this questionable to my faith? **Rom. 14:23** says, “*He who doubts is condemned...and ... Whatever is not from faith is sin.*”

And again the heart informed with God’s word will ask more and more questions...

Is this a right use of my time, my money, my talents?

Is this a faithful way to fulfill my role as light and salt in the world?

Does this adorn the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Can I be a good example to others in this action or attitude of godliness and good works?

Does this appear to be evil though it may not be evil?

Will this offend any one unnecessarily?

Can this cause another to stumble against their own conscience?

Is this an unequal yoke?

Does this indicate a friendship with the world?

Does it make a provision for my fleshly desires?

Can I do this as unto the Lord?

Can I do it and put His name on it?

Will this bring Him glory and advance the cause of Christ and His kingdom?

Will this quench the yearning of the Holy Spirit for me? Will it grieve Him?

***Can I invite the Lord Jesus to fill me in the midst of this conduct and for this conduct because I know He wants always to fill me with His life? Think before you act... know God’s Word and hide it in your heart.***

### **III. A Proper Sense of Dignity.**

Paul writes and says, “*I say this to your shame...*” Basically Paul is saying here, “you are better than this. This is beneath you. I like that kind of correction. It is hard and it stings but it is so uplifting. It draws into the privileges of the Children of God and away from wading in the muddy pools of this world’s pleasure or expectation.

Earlier while on another topic Paul says, “*I am not writing this to shame you.*” But here Paul is ready to heap shame upon them.

Shame is the emotion of an offended Dignity or Pride. As such usually shame is not a good thing. The reason I say this is that most people's sense of dignity and reasons for pride are misplaced. Many times a sense of shame keeps a person from a proper confession of sin. They may confess but only in an attempt to remove the sense of shame so that they can feel good about themselves all over again.

In this case what happens is that they think that if they hadn't committed that sin...well then they would be okay and could feel okay about themselves. They think that that one sin spoiled their personal résumé of dignity. But they are wrong. Their sin isn't an exception that spoils them but it's the proof that condemns them. They are not okay. Their reason for dignity "*I am better than most people*" was misplaced. We are all sinners before God and shame is not a problem. Guilt is. We don't need to clean up our résumé, we need to have our hearts cleaned. **Ex.** Harold Freleigh and the pin he took from a mantle as a young boy. Haunted by years with a sense of shame by that conduct. Could not seem to find relief through confession. Then God showed him what was behind it. *Harold you had thought you were a nice young man and you are disappointed in yourself that you... you Harold Freleigh should have stooped to such a thing as to steal a pin.* And this was moral pride and an arrogant expression of a false dignity.

Shame is always the expression of a pricked pride. Usually shame is not good because the sense of pride we feel is illegitimate. But there is a place for shame because there is at times a proper sense of pride and dignity. **Remember in Proverbs 31 that King Lemuel's mother reminded him that certain conduct was beneath one who was to be a King.**

Christian you are going to one day reign with Christ. One day you are going to sit in judgment over the world and the powers both earthly and angelically that have been exalted in the world over the course of time. **Daniel 7:26, 27** speaks of the day when the last power of the Anti Christ will be torn down and then it says this, *'But the court will be seated for judgment, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.'*

**Psalms 149** *To execute vengeance on the nations; And punishment on the peoples, To bind their kings with chains And their nobles with fetters of iron, To execute on them the judgment written; This is an honor for all His godly ones. Praise the LORD!*

And even now the Christian exercises judgment on the world. We don't pass the judgment of discipline and punishment that we will day be authorized under Christ to give but today we do pass a judgment on right and wrong, good and evil and on what is worthy and unworthy.

Paul demonstrates this kind of judgment on the unbelievers in Corinth in his very words. In verse one he says, "*Dare you...go to law before the unrighteous*" The real force of the words are "*Dare you go for justice before the unjust.*" Then in verse 4 He says, *do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge?* The language is harsher in the original. It is "*do you appoint those who are accounted as nothing by the church to*

*judge?"* Here Paul says the unbeliever is not only unrighteous but in matters of the Spirit, which are the matters of the church, they are accounted as nothings.

How odd that we so often fear the world's judgments and God says they are in relation to the Spiritual realities that are ours, nothings. We bow to the trends they set and worry lest we offend their expectations and judgments of the petty matters of this age and yet we are those who will one day sit in judgment over the ages and in our day are called to rightly judge the times and seasons in which we live.

**How foolish and beneath our calling, our present duty and our future place of reckoning to be lost concerning ourselves with this worlds opinions and verdicts.**

*Shame on you!* Paul says. *What a terribly weak understanding of the dignity you have as the Son's of the Living God.*

Yes there are things that our position in Christ should lift us beyond. They are beneath our status in Christ and so an insult to Him and an insult to His saving grace to us. We have mistakenly thought it was only arrogance that would lead us to think that certain attitudes and actions were beneath us but according to our heritage in Christ and our future as those who will reign as a Kings and Priest with him, there are things that are beneath us and when we indulge in them we should be ashamed at our little faith and the poor estimation of all that already is ours and all that will be ours. We need before the judgment of the ages and the consideration of our conduct in the world... **A proper sense of dignity.**

When you find a person turning the gospel of faith into a formula for simply pursuing a bigger house and a larger recreation vehicle... *shame on them*. When you find a person who determines that the grace of God in saving them was a permission slip to simply live for the pleasures of this day... *shame on them*. When we speak of winning the lost but under that banner build excuses for being people pleasers... *shame on us*. When you fight over petty offenses and challenges you your rights when one day yours will be the right to judge the nations under the scrutiny of God's glory and holy law... *shame on them*. Paul rightly says in light of our present and future place with Christ, *Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?* Who but the faithless fight for petty penny rights when they are the heirs of all things in Christ? When the judgments of this world or the claim upon your rights for the day are more important to you than the judgment of Christ and the fact that you are now seated with him in heaven and will sit in judgment with him over all those in the today's world ... the word is *shame*.

**It is beneath us and a proper sense of Christian dignity.**