

1 Corinthians Session 4: Kingdom Values and Purity (1 Cor 6:1-20)

(Scripture references based on NIV)

1. Key Learning Objectives

Key pointers to keep in mind as you prepare and lead the session.

To understand that:

- As God's family which has power to judge, Christians should judge appropriately and responsibly.
- Christians should be willing to suffer injustice for the sake of Christ.
- Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit and belong to the Lord.

2. Warm-up activity / Starter Question

Choose one of the two to discuss, just to break the ice. There is no need to hear from everyone or correct any opinions here.

- You bought a pre-loved item e.g., musical instrument from somebody in church for \$300 but the seller had second thoughts and demanded it back soon after. The purchase price would be refunded. Would you be willing to return the instrument, knowing it was a good buy that you will not get elsewhere? How would you feel? What would you do?
- Somebody in YM posted something untrue about you on social media. What would you do?

3. Opening Prayer

Thank God for each member in the small group today. Ask that:

- *God would enlighten us on His perspectives regarding our freedom and rights*
- *God would help us forgive those who have wronged us*
- *God would help us to flee from sexual temptations*

4. Context

This chapter focuses on the two issues of lawsuits and temple prostitution. Hence the purpose of this context is to help one understand the Greco-Roman culture that the Corinthian Christians were living in and why the two issues were problems that Paul had to address.

Link to previous study

- Paul highlights that Christians should judge those 'inside' the church e.g., the incestuous man (1 Cor 5:1) but should not judge those 'outside' the church (1 Cor 5:12). In the same way, as the church does not judge those outside, it should not go 'outside' with its 'inside' affairs.
- Thus, Paul reacts in horror and sarcasm to the Corinthian Christians airing their 'dirty linen' in a public forum well-known for its corruption, instead of having their disagreement arbitrated amongst fellow believers who want the best for their brethren.

Lawsuits

- General context of lawsuits
 - Law courts and legal arbitration were a part of the way of life among the Greeks of Corinth. Jews living there were empowered by the Roman government to try legal cases in the Jewish synagogues, while the courts for the non-Jews were held in the marketplace.
 - Greek culture found legal battles entertaining, so anyone's lawsuit soon became public knowledge.
 - Secular magistrates and jurists who handled litigation were notoriously corrupt because they accepted bribes and ruled in favour of friends and those with a higher social standing.
 - Only the rich/high standing were able to afford litigation and *could* take advantage of the poor who could not afford a lawyer.
- Paul's issue with Corinthians engaging in lawsuits (for leaders' reference only)
 - Paul finds it incredible that the Corinthian Christians think that these unrighteous judges can settle disputes more justly than the church, especially since they are suing fellow brothers/sisters in Christ.
 - Christians suing each other to prove their rights in the public courts/square, directly contradict Paul's view that Christians should be witnesses of Christ to all, especially those who are not yet of the family of Christ!
 - The Corinthians were full of pride and arrogance about their own "wisdom" (1 Cor 1-2). Paul responds with biting sarcasm: "Is it so with you that there is nobody among you who is wise, so that he/she might render a decision between brothers?". A trial between Christians reveals how they truly lack Christian wisdom.

Temple prostitution

- The act of sacred prostitution within the Temples of Aphrodite in the city of Corinth was well-known and well-spread.
- The prostitutes would use their earnings to pay for dedications and ritualistic celebrations in honour of Aphrodite.

- Some prostitutes also viewed the action of sexual service and sexual pleasure as an act of devotion to the goddess of love, worshipping Aphrodite through an act rather than a physical dedication.

(Reference for this context came from [here](#) and [here](#)).

5. Scripture Reading

Assign two youths to read the passage aloud.

6. Discussion Questions

Though v1-11 and v12-20 seem to be about different moral issues, they are connected by the same overarching idea that Paul expects the Corinthians to know a particular spiritual truth (“Don’t you know” in v3, 9, 15, 16 and 19) that they do not demonstrate in their behaviour. Hence, Paul has to exhort them to align their lives with these spiritual truths.

Q1-4: Problem of lawsuits among believers (v1-11)

- 1) **With reference to v2-3, what is the spiritual truth that Paul expects the Corinthians to know? Instead, what was happening in the Corinthian church?**

Spiritual truth:

- Believers will judge the world (v2) and angels (v3).
- Optional exploration: more details on “judging angels”
 - This likely refers to ruling with Christ as co-heirs and being given some form of authority.
 - This will take place in the Kingdom age after Christ’s second coming. The Bible is not entirely clear about what form this judgement by the saints over the world and the angels will take, though this does not likely mean deciding the ultimate fate of these beings (Matt 25:41).

What actually happened:

- They could not resolve conflicts for the sake of unity though they were one body in Christ.
- They were taking one another to a secular court with non-christian judges.
 - It was likely that wealthier members initiated the process since poorer members would not be able to afford lawyers.

** Do note that in this passage, the disputes are civil cases (v2 - “trivial cases”, v3 - “the things of this life”, v7-8 “cheating and defrauding”) e.g. loans, business dealings, property, employment, etc. If criminal activity is involved, it has to be reported to the police. The government has jurisdiction over criminal cases e.g. rape, murder, theft, forgery, embezzlement, etc. because in perpetuating a crime, the perpetrator is committing the crime against the state, not just the victim. God ordained the governing authorities to enforce criminal law (Rom 13:1-5, 1 Pet 2:13-14) and so, criminal cases should be handed over to the local law enforcement authorities. What Paul condemns is believers taking one another to civil court.*

2) Based on v1-7, why was Paul so upset?

Paul was upset for the following reasons:

- The church was allowing unbelievers to settle their disputes when they should have the ability to discern better (v3).
- There was no sense of compromise/self-sacrifice for the sake of unity (v7).
- This matter was shameful to Paul (v5) because this damages the witness of Christians before unbelievers (v6).
- If disagreements could not be resolved among “family” members and require legal action, then they have already lost (v7a). Nobody wins except the devil.
- Implicitly, the Corinthian Christians deemed the judgements of unbelievers as more valuable/valid than that of the church.

3) In v9-11, what is the spiritual truth that Paul expects the Corinthians to know? Why might Paul see the need to remind them of this truth?

- Wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God* (v9)
- Paul thinks that Christians, who should be different, are just like the pagans around them.
 - i.e. greedy and defrauding their neighbours, tolerating sexual immorality and idolatry in their midst (5:1-13, 6:1-8). Paul implies that such behaviours are not only shameful, but “wicked” (used in v7-8, same word “wicked” used in v1 those in the world who are going to be judged by the saints.) Those who are “wicked” (including those “Christians” who persist in the same evils) will not inherit the kingdom of God, i.e. on the Final Day of Judgement.
- Paul reminds them of their identity in Christ. Having been justified and sanctified by His sacrifice, they should be living according to Christ’s teachings.

4) In light of who they are in Christ, how does Paul exhort them to rectify the situation?

It would be better to accept injustice (v7).

- It would be better to let themselves be cheated than to defend their “rights” at the expense of God’s glory and the higher good of His kingdom.
- While our natural tendency may be to defend our own position and not to lose out, Paul affirms that no one who accepts wrong for the sake of God’s glory will be a loser.

Testimony to outsiders:

- Even if the other Christian is clearly in the wrong, is it not better to be taken advantage of than to damage the cause of Christ?

Testimony to themselves:

- In light of the injustice Jesus suffered for their sake, what would their insistence of their own righteousness say about how they regard Christ's sacrifice?

Q5-6: Problem of sexual immorality (v12-20)

5) a) From v12-20, what are the spiritual truths that Paul expects the Corinthians to know?

- Their bodies are members of Christ which should not be united with prostitutes as that means they would become one flesh with them (v15-16).
- Their bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit (v19).
- Their bodies were bought with a price (v20).

b) v13 tells of the Corinthians' perspective towards their bodies. How does this inform us about the Corinthians' view of sex with prostitutes?

- They probably used this motto to justify giving their bodies whatever their bodies wanted.
 - E.g. "My body wants food, so I eat. My body wants sex, so I go to a prostitute."
- This is animalistic and unbecoming of Christians in light of the spiritual truths above.

c) What did Paul exhort them to do to rectify the situation in v18?

Flee from sexual immorality because whoever sins sexually sins against his own body (v18).

- Paul may be addressing the misconception where some believe that sin is something spiritual, while sex is merely physical, and thus, it is not sinful e.g. "Food for the stomach and stomach for food" (v13).
- To Paul, committing sexual sin is spiritual because our bodies now belong to God. They have been bought with a price (v20) and is now the temple of the Holy Spirit (v19).
- In fornicating with a prostitute, a man unites the body of a temple prostitute with the Spirit of God! This is not just a physical act, but a serious sin. Hence, what is done with our bodies regarding sex is profoundly different from what we do regarding food.

6) In v12, Paul quotes the Corinthians' mantra of Christian liberty, "All things are lawful for me". How does Paul's response summarise how the Corinthians should view sexual immorality?

- It seems that the Corinthian Christians applied this mantra to justify the use of prostitutes.
- Paul argues that their freedom must still be governed by God's values.
 - Not everything is beneficial: Does this practice build you up spiritually since your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (v19)? Paul explained the rationale for sexual purity in v15-17. Our bodies are part of the body of Christ, and so should never be joined to a prostitute or to anyone outside of marriage. Besides, when an individual Christian commits sexual immorality, it disgraces the entire body of Christ, linking the body of Christ to immorality.
 - We should not be mastered by anything: Would we become enslaved or addicted to it? Casual sex could become a runaway desire that may be hard to stop.

Note: These are reasons against sexual impurity, but there are also reasons for sexual purity which Paul does not mention here. A more thorough answer requires a look at doctrines regarding marriage.

(References came from [here](#)).

7. Main Discipleship Takeaway

Ask the youths how they would summarise everything that has been discussed today with one sentence.

As believers, we should align our lives with spiritual truths and behave accordingly. In this chapter, we are not to do wrong to fellow believers and to flee from sexual immorality.

8. Application / Reflection

Split up into smaller groups to share. Leaders are encouraged to have prepared their own thoughts and sharings for the application questions. It is recommended to pick at most two of three questions for deeper reflection.

- 1) A member of your YSG borrowed \$200 from you and kept asking for more time to pay you back after the deadline is over. You have extended the deadline twice. What would you do, knowing that:
 - He used the money for betting online?
 - He used the money to buy medicine for his mum?

- 2) Based on today's passage, how should a Christian settle disputes differently from a non-Christian?
 - *Further prompts:*
 - i) *Settling disputes in church while taking into account what Paul says may be taken to the opposite extreme. What does this look like?*
 - ii) *To what extent should one particular Christian keep compromising for another?*
- 3) How might v12 guide our thought process for significant decisions in the future? (e.g. the company you keep, education/career choices, romantic relationships etc.)
- 4) Where would you draw the line between asserting personal freedom ("I have the right to do anything") and being a complete pushover?

9. Closing Prayer

Remain in your smaller groups and take turns to pray for each other. Where there is time, encourage members to share about specific areas for prayer in their lives.

- Ask God to forgive us for any tit-for-tat attitudes we may have in response to offences.
- Pray that the Holy Spirit will help us demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit more, especially where there is conflict e.g. to be kinder, gentler, have more self-control.
- Pray for wisdom in our decision-making.