

# A COMMENTARY ON THE APOSTLE PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

According to the Homilies of St. John Chrysostom and other Fathers of the Church

by  
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## Chapter Six

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## CHAPTER SIX

### Settling Differences Within the Church

BACKGROUND: When the Corinthian Christians had serious differences among themselves, they would take the matter into the prevailing courts of law, the ruling members of which were not Christian. Thus those who should have been trying to live according to God's law were being judged by those who did not rule on that basis. In this chapter, Paul expresses shock at this practice, since even Jews living in heathen cities did not take such cases before Gentile courts.

**6:1. Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?** Paul implores the Corinthian Christians to settle differences between themselves by appointing judges from among their members, rather than turn to non-Christians to decide matters of contention.

**6:2-3. 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? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?** The lives of the saints, those who are members of the Body of Christ and trying to grow in holiness, set the standard for judgment in that God will use the life of a believer as an indictment against an unbeliever of like circumstances.

For when beholding the same sun and sharing all the same things, we shall be found believers but they unbelievers, they will not be able to take refuge in ignorance. For we shall accuse them, simply by the things which we have done. And many such ways of judgment one will find there.

CHRYSOSTOM<sup>1</sup>

This is so, not because God needs such a tool to judge by, but so everyone will readily see that His judgment is fair.

In short, on the awesome Day of Judgment every sinful man will see one who is like him opposite to him in eternal life, in that unutterable light, and will be judged by him. What do I mean? As every sinner looks on him who is like him, the king upon the king, the ruler upon the ruler, the impenitent whoremonger on the whoremonger who repented, the poor man on the poor man, and the slave on the slave, he will remember that the other was also a man, with the same soul, the same hands, the same eyes, in short with all other things in common, the same kind of life, and the same rank, the same occupation, the same resources. Yet, since he was unwilling to imitate Him, his mouth will at once be stopped (Ps 107:42) and he will remain without excuse (Rom 1:20), without a word to speak!

SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN<sup>2</sup>

Before God created man, he created angels—and endowed them with the gift of free will. Lucifer, an angel so named because it meant “bearer of light,” was next to God in power and glory, but that was not enough for him. Envy and pride grew in Lucifer to the extent that he rebelled against God. Together with other angels with that same rebellious spirit, he tried to unseat God from His throne—an impossibility (Isa 14:12-15). So Lucifer (the serpent of Eden, called the dragon, Satan, after his fall) was thrown from Heaven with his cohorts (one third of the angels of Heaven/Rev 12:3-4, 8-9). Thus the angels had their opportunity to choose between being with God or against Him, which is the opportunity each person has during his/her lifetime. The lives of believers, and the extent to which they remained obedient to God, will also be used as indictments against the fallen angels, who will receive final judgment at Christ's Second Coming along with man (Jude 6).

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** (a). In what way does man, like Satan, sometimes try to unseat God from His throne?

**6:4-5.** *If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? 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?* The original Greek text shows this verse as an instruction, not a question. The argument put forth by the Corinthians was that there was no-one wise enough in the Church to judge their disputes. Chrysostom's explanation of Paul's response is that even if this were so, which is doubtful, it would be better to have these matters judged by the least esteemed Christians than by non-Christians.

**6:6-8.** *But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! Now brethren, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be defrauded? No, you yourselves do wrong and defraud, and you do these things to your brethren!* To have disputes among themselves that need to be settled by non-Christians is an admission that they are not living according to Christian guidelines, under which it is better to be sinned against than to sin, better to be defrauded than to defraud. This lack of fairness, honesty and love is a more serious matter than determining who is right or wrong among them.

**6:9-10.** *Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.* Those who live unrighteously will deny themselves the blessings of God's Kingdom. Those who are wronged in this life yet continue trying to live the life of Christ as a product of their faith will enjoy God's promises forever, more than compensating for all injustices suffered in this world.

Notice the different types of sin mentioned:

*idolaters:* sin against God by giving to someone or something, worship that is due to God. One can "idolize" anyone or anything. Whatever comes first in our life is what we worship, be it self, spouse, children, friends, hobby, money, fame, power, etc. God must be our priority. If we give Him the worship that is His due, all other elements in our lives will take their proper places. We will be at peace, with joy in our hearts.

*thieves, covetous, revilers, extortioners:* sin against their neighbor by taking or desiring what belongs to another. To help us not to sin against our neighbor, Jesus said: ...*whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them* (Mt. 7:12).

*fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, drunkards:* sin against themselves by corrupting that which was formed in the image of God and destined to become as much like Him as possible, according to each individual's abilities and opportunities (read Luke 12:48).

These sins mentioned by Paul therefore violate Jesus' new commandment (Mt 22:36-39). To avoid sinning against God, neighbor and self would be to obey the spirit of all of the Commandments—and of course, to sin against neighbor and self is also to sin against God, in whose image neighbor and self were created.

**6:11. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.** They who are baptized in the name of the Trinity are *washed* of all sin and become a part of the Body of Christ. Christ is holy, so they, too, are made holy, *sanctified*, through the Holy Spirit. As part of the Blood Covenant, they are *justified* (qualified for salvation) through His perfect obedience.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** (b). We are cleansed of sin at Baptism and are sanctified and justified by becoming a part of the Body of Christ. Do we automatically remain in that purified state? How does the Church help us to do so?

**6:12-13. All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.** Certain behavior is expected of Christians. A specific type of immorality was mentioned in Chapter Five, but now Paul speaks in general terms.

Even though Christians are no longer under the Old Testament Law as far as having to be perfect to earn salvation (see this study for 1 Cor 5:2), they should not be ruled by their passions. Food is an example. The Old Testament law required that the Jews eat only certain “clean” animals (Lev 11). This requirement was abolished by Christ, Who cleansed all creation with His atoning sacrifice (read Acts 10:9-16). But even though Christians can now eat anything they wish, they should not abuse this freedom by becoming slaves to the stomach and giving it anything it wants, becoming gluttonous. The stomach and food are perishable and meant to serve man. We should be in control of them, not allow them to control us. The spiritual discipline of fasting is a tool to help us be in control of our passions.

**6:14. And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.** The same power that raised Christ from the dead will, if we call upon it and cooperate with it, help us control our worldly passions and raise us to new life now and on the last day.

**6:15-18. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For “The two,” He says, “shall become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.** Through the Sacrament of Marriage, *two become one flesh* (Gen 2:24), and Christ is involved in the relationship. A Christian, however, who is involved in an illicit sexual relationship creates an unholy alliance, which brings shame to the Church, as well as to him/herself.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** (c). Is sexual immorality more or less harmful spiritually to a Christian than other activities that are harmful to the body, such as using recreational drugs or excessive alcohol?

**6:19-20. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which is God’s.** Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross atoned for the sins of mankind. Those who become a part of Him through Baptism avail themselves of this saving grace. The Holy Spirit dwells in them through Chrismation. Having provided for us in such a grand fashion, unworthy though we are, God expects us, by our intentions and by our actions, to bring glory (not

shame) to Him.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT COMMENTS

**(a). In what way does man, like Satan, sometimes try to unseat God from His throne?** God has set forth guidelines which, to the extent followed, will prepare us to share eternity with Him. Those who insist, rather, upon making their own rules as they go through life—on doing things “their way”—are, in essence, trying to unseat God from His throne and put themselves in His place. It won’t work!

**(b). We are cleansed of sin at Baptism and are sanctified and justified by becoming a part of the Body of Christ. Do we automatically remain in that purified state? How does the Church help us to do so?** We are sanctified and justified through Christ as long as we remain a part of His Body by trying to grow in holiness. This process can be compared to a difficult uphill climb, but the Holy Spirit helps us as long as we invite and cooperate with Him. Unfortunately, as human beings living in a world where it is easy to sin and difficult to pursue righteousness, we tend to stray from this path. Sin erects barriers between us and God. If we sincerely regret such a lapse, the Church offers restoration through the Sacrament of Repentance (Confession) which, if participated in sincerely, removes any barriers and returns us to the sin-free state of the newly-Baptized, free to continue the struggle (Mt 10:22). The Sacrament of Eucharist offers the opportunity to continually renew our union with Christ.

**(c). Is sexual immorality more or less harmful spiritually to a Christian than other activities that are harmful to the body, such as using recreational drugs or excessive alcohol?** Any voluntary activity which is harmful to a body in which the Holy Spirit dwells is sinful.

...for it is not your body which is insulted; since it is not your body at all, but Christ’s.  
CHRYSOSTOM<sup>3</sup>

Sexual immorality, however, involves the union of sinful persons who live in rebellion against God’s word, and it distorts God’s plan for man to cooperate with Him in procreation within the family unit. Therefore it is considered compound sinfulness.

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<sup>1</sup> Schaff, “Homily XVI,” Vol. XII, p.91.

<sup>2</sup> C.J. deCatanzaro, trans., “The Discourses,” *Symeon the New Theologian*, p.107.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff, “Homily XVIII,” Vol. XII, p.102.