



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Text 1 Corinthians 6:1-11

1 Corinthians

“Brother Against Brother”

TRANSCRIPT

We are in a series of studies in 1 Corinthians. We finished chapter 5 last week, took the entire chapter, and this morning we’re beginning chapter 6. We’re going to look at verses 1 through 11. I’ve explained before that the book of 1 Corinthians is really a book in which Paul is dealing with various problems, just different issues that had come up in the church. Many of them were moral issues. He does deal with some doctrine, particularly in chapter 15, when he gives a very extended treatment of the resurrection.

But much of it is just dealing with problems, going from one to another. He looked at the problems of factions within the church, party spirit. Last week he dealt with the subject of immorality in the church, and now it’s a different subject. In chapter 6, it’s lawsuits in the church, so we begin with verse 1.

“Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?

Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts?

Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life?

So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church?

I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren,

but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?

Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?

On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. You do this even to your brethren.

Or 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 effeminate, nor homosexuals,

nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we give you praise and thanks for this time to be together this Lord’s Day. We are thankful for it because it is a time of refreshment for us – it should be. It’s a necessary time for us. The author of Hebrews reminds us of that when he tells those to whom he wrote not to forsake the gathering together of the saints, not to forsake the assembling together, as is the habit of some.

Even in that ancient church, people were neglecting coming together on a Sunday to worship and learn and study the Scriptures, and it’s so easy to do that. But we give you praise and thanks that you have given us this time to come together, to study, and to learn about you, and to equip ourselves for the week to come, because that’s what we do. We fortify our souls. We refresh our minds with your truth. And that’s what we study here at Believer’s Chapel.

We open the Word of God. We open your inerrant Word, and it has its effect upon us. We don’t read it, we don’t study it without any effect. It always has a positive effect upon us, and so we pray that that will be the result of our time together; that the Spirit of God would open our hearts to receive the things that we’ve read and what we’ll study.

We pray that he would guide us in our thinking; that he would not only give us an understanding of what we’ve read, but as we pray so often on Sunday morning, that he would make the unique applications to each one of us. We’re different people. We have different problems in life, different circumstances. This text that we’ve read

has all kinds of applications for us that go beyond anything that a minister can apply.  
And so

Father, I pray that the Spirit of God would work within us, and that you would bless us, and that you would focus our minds on the things that we’ll do this morning in this brief hour. We don’t have much time here. We could spend so much more time on this text than we will give, but we will spend adequate time, and yet we need to have our minds focused on this.

And so I pray that you would enable all of us to put aside the details of life, all of the things that can crowd in on our thinking – the responsibilities of the day, of the week. We’re busy people. We have much to do, and we can begin to think about those things. Help us to set that aside, to clear our minds for 40 minutes and think about what’s been read and what it means and how it applies to us.

Convict us where we need to be convicted. Encourage us where we need to be encouraged, because this is a very encouraging passage. “Such were some of you” – you were sinners, but you’ve been saved. You’re different people, and that’s true of us, too. Help us to rest in that, to revel in that, to rejoice that we have been made new creatures in Jesus Christ.

That’s what Paul was telling the Corinthians. He’s telling us as well. The Spirit of God is telling us that. Help us to live as new creatures. So Father, bless us spiritually, and then we pray for our material needs as well. They are great. We have a long list of prayer requests. We won’t go over it. Help us to pray for those people during the week, and I pray that you would take care of them. Bless the sick. We pray for healing mercy. We pray that you’d give encouragement.

Sometimes it’s not your will that your people get well; it’s your will that they go through difficulty, because you teach them in and through affliction. And sometimes it’s your will that they come home to be with you. We don’t know the circumstances, we don’t know the end of it all for each individual, at least in the short term; you do.

But I pray, Lord, that wherever they are, whatever they’re going through, that you would bless and you’d encourage, and that you would be helpful to those who are without employment; open doors of opportunity to them. Give them patience in the meantime.

Those that are going through difficulties in the home, who are under pressure, and who are facing difficulties in work and pressure from work, I pray that you would give them relief, that you would give them peace, and help them to rest in the promises that you have given us, and you’ve given us abundant promises. We pray for those that are on vacation.

We have many that are traveling today, or are away, and some leaving tomorrow, some next week. We pray that you give them safe trips, give them rest and refreshment, and those of us that stay here and deal with the heat, and the labor, and the work of the week, give us strength to do that. Help us to rejoice that we have opportunities to work, and to be here; to be fellowshiping with one another.

And bless our fellowship in this hour. Bless our time of worship and learning. And we commit it all to you and pray your great blessings upon us. We pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.

[Message] I’ve taken the title of our lesson from the American civil war, which historians have described with the expression brother against brother. One of the saddest facts about that war is that was literally true. Families and friend were divided, and at times, actually fighting each other. A divided family is a great tragedy. So is a divided church. That happened in Corinth. Christian brothers were divided against each other and taking each other to court.

Saints were suing saints. The reason for the suits isn’t given, but it’s not difficult to imagine what they were, because the same thing happens in the church today. And Corinth, as I’ve said before, is quite contemporary. It’s a very modern church. Two Christian businessmen have a falling out over a business deal, or a family member contests a will, and rather than work things out amicably, they go to court. And the world watches.

That’s really what troubled the apostle Paul. There will always be conflicts in the church. There shouldn’t be; ideally, there wouldn’t be, but then, we don’t live in an ideal world. We live in a fallen world, and though we’re righteous with the righteousness of Christ, though we’re justified, though we’re saints, we’re sinners, and we have conflicts. But when we have conflicts, and when there are difficulties in the church, how will we deal with them?

The Corinthian Christians weren’t dealing with them – not well, at least. They were going to secular courts to find justice. They were airing their dirty laundry before the world. So Paul begins chapter 6 in much the same way that he began the previous chapter,

chapter 5, when he corrected the problem of immorality in the church. He begins with a sense of utter disbelief. “Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?”

Paul was shocked. That’s the idea in the word “dare.” Do you Christians have the audacity, the nerve to take your cases to unrighteous judges rather than go to the church? Now, Paul wasn’t criticizing law courts. He calls the judges unrighteous in the sense of unjustified, unbelieving, unsaved men. They were men of the world. He actually had respect for the courts; he used them. Later, he will even appeal to Caesar to try his case.

Before this, he in fact had gotten a fair hearing at the very court in Corinth where these Corinthian believers were suing each other, there at the *bēma*, the judgment seat in the marketplace of the city. Gallio was the judge, and he had shown impartiality toward the apostle, and he dismissed the case as not being a matter for Roman courts. But Paul also saw the contempt Gallio had for the Jews who had dragged him before the *bēma*, and he knew that other Roman judges would have the same contempt for Christians.

These lawsuits dishonored Christ; they dishonored the gospel. They brought shame on the church. So he instructed the Corinthians to do two things. First, in verses 1 through 6, settle their disputes in their own courts, within the church. That’s what the Jews did. They had what were called *beth dins*, or the *beth din*. It’s the house of justice. Those who lived in Gentile lands didn’t go to Gentile judges. They had courts within the Jewish community, and Paul’s counsel for the church is to do the same thing.

But secondly, he tells them in verse 7 not to have disputes at all. Better to be wronged and lose something material than gain something and dishonor God by what you gain. That, of course, would require selflessness from the Corinthians, who were not a very selfless bunch. Greed was the reason for the lawsuits. So to correct that, and encourage them to follow his counsel, he reminds them of who they are, and of the privileges that they had.

They were saints, and they were judges. He explains the significance of being saints later, in verse 9 through 11. He begins in verses 2 and 3 by explaining the importance of being judges, and reminds them that they will someday judge the world and judge the angels. That will occur at the end of history. That will occur at the great white throne judgment. Paul doesn’t say any more about it than that.

We’d be very curious to know what he’s describing there and know it in full, but just that fact alone, what he says here about what we will do, is amazing in and of itself.

Christians will participate in the last judgment with Christ. We’ll stand with him. We will judge men. We’ll judge unbelievers, and we’ll judge the angels – the elect and the fallen angels alike. Now, that’s a high honor.

In fact, that’s a position of cosmic greatness – I don’t know how else to explain it – which is the reason Paul speaks of it here. And his point is since we will someday be judges in matters of eternal importance, shouldn’t we be able to judge now in trivial matters of temporal importance? Of course we should. The idea that God’s saints, who will sit with Christ and judge the world, aren’t able to settle their own disputes, and need to seek justice from the very people that they will someday judge, is a disgrace.

It’s equal to a confession of incompetence, and it’s a bad witness. It is in effect a denial of the privileged position that we have, and a denial of God’s grace; his transforming work of grace in our lives. They were behaving like the world. They were behaving as though there were no difference between them and the world around them. They were feuding, just like the men of the world.

They were putting themselves above their brothers, and then they were putting themselves under the world’s judges. He asked them in verse 4 how they could do that; how they could appoint men as judges who are of no account in the church, meaning who are nonbelievers. He was asking these questions for a reason. Not simply to remind them of truth, but to shame them. That’s what he says in verse 5. “I say this to your shame.”

That wasn’t trying to humiliate them, to belittle them, to make them feel small for the sake of making them feel small. He’s trying to do this for a purpose. He’s trying to shame some sense into them by showing them how inconsistent their behavior was, and how embarrassing it was for the church. Can’t anyone in the church arbitrate in these disputes? That’s what he was asking them.

“Is it so that there is not among you one wise man, who will be able to decide between his brethren?” That was an especially embarrassing question for the Corinthians, because you remember they were in love with *sophia*. They were in love with wisdom. They prided themselves on being wise. And yet from the way they were dealing with their problems, it appeared at least that none of them thought there was anyone among them wise enough to give a judgment, to arbitrate.

One of the commentators described Paul’s comment here as “biting sarcasm.” “Isn’t there anyone among you who is wise?” And that may be; this may be an example of biting sarcasm, but I think it’s also a legitimate question that he’s asking, a genuine inquiry,

and it gives us a standard that must be met if we are to have a healthy church, and that is we need wise men in it.

There are always going to be disputes when people live together – that’s even true in the church, as we’ve already pointed out. We live in an imperfect world, and we’re imperfect people. Even though we’re saints, even though we’ve been justified, even though we have all of the blessings that Paul will describe in a moment, we’re still sinners, and so there’s going to be disputes.

Even among the saints there’ll be disagreements, and things aren’t always clear-cut. They’re not always black and white. There’s a lot of gray in there, and so sometimes these issues that must be dealt with within the church are very difficult, and that takes wisdom to judge a matter, to sort it all out. And wisdom comes through study, and prayer, and experience.

You can have a very gifted young person who knows quite a bit and is very earnest, but doesn’t have much life experience, and finds out that a lot of the ideas that he or she had don’t quite work that way in life. And so life experience is vital to wisdom, and that means age. That means it’s good to have people who have been around the track a few times. So if anything, this passage is a plea for the church to cultivate men of wisdom; to pray that God would raise them up. We need them.

Alas, there was a lack of wisdom and arbitrators in Corinth, because Paul says sadly in verse 6, “Brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers.” It was civil war in the church at Corinth, and Paul says there would be no winners in this war. In verse 7, he says, “It is already a defeat for you that you have lawsuits with one another.” In other words, it doesn’t matter how this ends – it’s a defeat for everyone.

Now, that’s generally true. The time lost, the money lost, the bitterness that is caused by a lawsuit, makes it a lose-lose situation for everyone. And so the Lord, in Matthew chapter 5, addresses this kind of situation. He gives counsel to avoid court whenever possible. He says in Matthew 5:25 that a man is to make friends quickly with his opponent at law, and that’s actually the guilty person that he’s speaking of there, but if you can settle this thing out of court, do so.

Avoid a trial in court. It is a defeat, for the believer particularly when they go to court. But Paul is saying something more than what our Lord is saying. He’s saying that when that happens, when people go to court, when Christians go to court against each other, the body of Christ is injured. Seeds of bitterness are sown between brothers. The

reputation of the church is stained. At that cost, at that great cost, Paul says it’s better to take a hit than win a victory.

“Why not rather be wronged?” he asks. “Why not rather be defrauded?” I don’t want to be defrauded. That’s no doubt the response of some of these Corinthians. No, no one does, but it’s far better to be defrauded than to defame the name of Jesus Christ. This is a principle I think that Paul took also from that Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5, and the Lord’s instruction to us there, because you remember there’s that well-known instruction that when someone strikes you, turn the other cheek.

When someone asks for your cloak or your garment, give it to them. In other words, it’s better to take a loss than tarnish the name of the Lord, than bring disgrace upon his people. But the Corinthians weren’t thinking like that. They were thinking of themselves first, and they weren’t going to let anybody take advantage of them. That was their thinking. “I have my rights. I’m going to stand for them, and no one’s going to defraud me.”

In fact, as Paul explains in verse 8, it was more than that. They were aggressive in all of this. They were so far from living by God’s principles of selflessness, of putting the other person ahead of oneself, that they were actually harming people. They were taking advantage of their brother. They were defrauding their brothers. That would’ve been serious if they were committing sin against unbelievers, but the fact that they were defrauding believers heightened the guilt.

Christians are to be guided in their relationships by love toward all, toward believer and nonbeliever alike, but they have a special responsibility to their brothers and sisters. They have a first and special concern for them; for those for whom Christ died. But instead of being guided by love, they were guided by greed. It was brother against brother, and they were ending up in the law courts of Corinth.

Now, sometimes that can’t be helped. In Romans 12:18, Paul says, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.” Now, sometimes it’s not possible, and sometimes it doesn’t depend upon us. Sometimes people are sued, and they’re forced to go to court. But Paul’s point here is our goal should always be to glorify God, not gain something for ourselves.

And one way we glorify God is by putting the other person ahead of ourselves, their interests ahead of our own. Now, these Christians in Corinth were doing just the opposite. They were concerned about their rights and themselves above everything else. They didn’t

care about their brother, their sister. So Paul makes them aware of the grave fact that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The Corinthians were behaving as if they had forgotten that. They were really regressing in their Christian life. What they were doing belonged to a bad past that they should have left behind, and so Paul reminds them of that. In verses 9 and 10, he gives a list of 10 sins that are inconsistent with the kingdom of God and the Christian life. The first five are mainly sexual sins; that was a big problem in the lustful city of Corinth.

So he writes, “Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals will inherit the kingdom of God.” Paul leaves no doubt here that homosexuality is sin, just as adultery is sin, and theft, and drunkenness are sins. The Corinthians Christians seemed to have forgotten that, because Paul tells them “do not be deceived.” Such things are wrong, and those who practice them are not saved.

He could be speaking to the modern church, because as you well know, there’s a powerful movement to make homosexuality acceptable in society, and as I mentioned last week, some mainline denominations have joined it, and people have become emboldened. What was once famously described as “the love that dare not speak its name” is now demanding to be heard. But the Bible is clear. It is not love, it is sin.

In Leviticus 18:22, Moses calls it an abomination. In Romans 1:26-27, Paul calls it unnatural. Jude describes it as gross immorality. But overexposure to sin, overexposure to that particular sin, can have a numbing effect, even on believers, and that’s happening, and it’s a danger for any society. Alexander Pope put it very insightfully, I think, when he wrote, “Vice is a monster of so frightful mien/As to be hated, needs but to be seen/Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face/We first endure, then pity, then embrace.”

The Western world is now in the process of embracing homosexuality. We are slouching toward Gomorrah. Possibly, we’ve already entered Sodom. And what’s happening in society can happen in church if we’re not faithful to God’s Word; if we’re not honest with the text, and honest with ourselves, and vigilant about the truth of God’s Word, in all aspects – doctrinally, morally.

That happened in Corinth. The Corinthians were conforming. They were taking sin lightly. “Don’t be deceived,” Paul said, “wicked people won’t enter the kingdom of God.” That’s not just homosexuals, it’s all kinds of wickedness; in verse 10, Paul lists others: thieves, and the covetous, drunkards, revilers, and swindlers. He could’ve listed

more than that. But then he makes a statement of historical importance about the Corinthian church.

What was very important about them, what had happened to them, and what is equally important for us, theologically – of great theological and ethical importance. He says, “Such were some of you.” That’s really the point that he’s making here in all; he lists these sins so that he can come to that one point, “such were some of you,” so notice that. They were; they no longer are. They had been fundamentally changed.

What changed them? Well, the gospel did. The gospel of Jesus Christ changed them. It is real power. It is the power of God. There’s no message like it. It’s unique. There’s no book like this one we have. And when I say the gospel, in its largest sense, it’s all 66 books of the Word of God. The Bible is the gospel. It’s the Word of God. It is inerrant. It is a supernatural book.

But focusing very narrowly to the gospel of salvation, that is a unique, supernatural message, and this brought radical change to them. It is the power of God. That, in fact, is how Paul describes it in Romans 1:16. He was not ashamed of the gospel, he said, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Whoever that person is who believes, it is the power of God to salvation. It changes you fundamentally.

You may be the most self-righteous Pharisee, as Paul was; it’ll change you in a moment. You may be the most degraded sinner in the world, like some of these Corinthians; it’ll change you in a moment. You may be a slave, you may be a king. You equally need the Savior, and the gospel changes people. It transforms lives. That’s the solution. That’s the answer to America’s moral decline.

It’s not the ballot box; it’s not the voting booth. I’m not against those things. I’m not against a law defining marriage. I’m for all of that, but that is not the solution. None of those are the solution. The only solution to any moral problem is the gospel. Moral irregularities are symptoms of a spiritual condition, and the spiritual condition is our fallen condition, our sinful condition. It’s our separation from God.

We are born into this world alienated from God. In fact, it’s worse than that – we’re at war with him. We’re at enmity with him. That’s how Paul describes us in Romans 8. So these things that we see around us, what we see described here, is the outworking of that spiritual condition of being separated, alienated from God, and at war with him, and only Christ can reconcile men to God.

And that’s the message of the gospel, that through his death, Christ has reconciled man with God, and everyone who believes in him is reconciled. Everyone who believes is brought into God’s family, and is put at peace with God. He becomes a Father, not a judge. He becomes the one who takes us into his family and gives us a glorious inheritance. He makes peace for all who believe.

Now, that’s what Paul brought to Corinth, which was a society very much like our own; in fact, it was worse than our society. We see that here in the description that’s given in this verse. He didn’t come to town with a message of moral rearmament. He didn’t come campaigning to clean up Corinth. He came to proclaim salvation in Jesus Christ to the lost and condemned. And those who believed were changed – “such were some of you.”

The grammar is important. Grammar’s always important in every verse of the Bible, but it really has specific importance here. Again, the statement is a past tense, meaning you were, you no longer are. There’s no such thing as a Christian homosexual, or a Christian thief, or a Christian adulterer. There’s no room for rationalizing that. We are a new creation in Christ; all things are new, 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Now, that doesn’t mean that Christians don’t struggle with sin. We know they do. Paul speaks of that, the constant struggle they had, in Romans chapter 7. He describes it again in Galatians 5, with the war between the flesh and the spirit, and the whole book of 1 Corinthians is about that – one problem after another. He’s described these people, the Corinthians, as saints at the very beginning.

They’re saved people, but they struggle. They have sin in their lives. We all bring a lot of baggage from the old life into the new life, and God is constantly in the process of changing us, of giving us power over those things, and making us like Christ, and that’s the good news we have. We’re sinners. We all are sinners. We’re like these Corinthians. But the power of sin has been broken in the Christian, and there is victory as we walk by the Spirit in obedience to the Word of God.

So we all need to be an encouragement to one another. We need to realize we’re fallen creatures redeemed by the blood of Christ. We’re new creatures in him. There’s a principle of sin within us. We’re frail, and we can fall. We need to support one another in the ongoing struggle with sin and the desire of the flesh, but the good news is that struggle can be won, and it will be won, because we are a people who have been changed, and we have been equipped. We have a new nature, and the Spirit of God lives within us.

Now, Paul goes on in verse 11 to describe the change that has taken place. “Such were some of you. You were drunkards, you were revilers, you were swindlers; you were all of that. But you were washed. But you were sanctified. But you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.” There are three verbs here. The second two verbs are passive, which means they describe what was done to the Corinthians.

The first verb, washed, is different; it’s in what’s called the middle voice. It expresses something different – not what was done to them, but what they did themselves, or what they did to themselves. Has the idea of “you washed yourselves, you got yourselves washed,” something like that. Now, some have explained that that washing that he’s describing here as a reference to baptism, which is possible.

Not as the means of washing away sin – we don’t wash away our sin through water baptism. In fact, that is the Galatian heresy. Paul doesn’t talk about baptism in the book of Galatians, he talks about circumcision. There were those who were saying the gospel is believing in the Lord Jesus Christ and be circumcised. In other words, believe and then do a work. It’s no different if we substitute baptism for circumcision; that’s not the gospel.

Paul says that’s a different gospel; that’s not the gospel that saves. That’s heresy. That is anathema. So it wouldn’t refer to that, but it could be a reference to baptism as the symbol of the washing that’s taken place through the blood of Christ, and so it may be that he’s reminding them of the moment they were baptized, when they gave a public profession of faith, of what God had done for them.

That he’s reminding them of all that baptisms symbolize. I’d say that’s possible, but I don’t think it’s likely, because there’s nothing in the context that would support that. There’s nothing in the context that suggests anything of the ordinances of the church. So Paul may have had in mind a metaphorical washing; in effect, I think that’s certainly what he is talking about.

In other words, he’s describing the forgiveness of sin and the cleansing of our conscience by comparing it to a washing – by being bathed with water, cleansed with water. That’s what Ezekiel did in Ezekiel 36:25. There he gives, the prophet gives the prophecy and promise of the future new covenant that God was going to establish with his people when he would, as Ezekiel said, sprinkle clean water on them, and they would be clean of their sins and idolatry.

And idolatry and all kinds of immorality was a problem with the nation at that time, but he’s saying the day’s going to come when God’s going to sprinkle you with clean water. He didn’t mean that literally – he wasn’t saying it’s going to rain water and that’s going to have a spiritual effect on you. He’s speaking metaphorically, figuratively, descriptively. It’s what our Lord did when he spoke with Nicodemus in John 3:5, and he says that in order to enter the kingdom of God, Nicodemus must be born of water and the Spirit.

He doesn’t mean baptized, and then born again – baptized with water. He’s referring to Ezekiel 36:25, and what he means is you must be spiritually cleansed by the Holy Spirit; born again. Well, that had happened to the Corinthians. They believed in Christ. They were cleansed. They were washed by the blood of the Savior. They’re like the saints of Revelation 7:14, who washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

What a beautiful picture that gives. They take their filthy garments, as it were, and they wash them in the blood of the Lamb, and they don’t come out crimson, they come out white as snow, pure. And what John is saying there is that the cross of Christ is the only thing that takes away sin. Secondly, they were sanctified. This is a past tense in Greek; specifically, it’s an aorist tense, which is the simple past tense – very common in Greek.

And it looks at an event as occurring at a point in time. That’s the idea; a point in time. This happened. That’s all he’s saying. They were sanctified. And I mention that because it’s speaking of something that happened, not something that’s progressing, so this isn’t progressive sanctification that occurs in the life of every believer, in which the Holy Spirit is conforming us to the image of Christ.

That’s going on all the time. He’s always leading us, and dealing with us, and transforming us. This is something different. This is positional sanctification, and it’s a reference to their conversion, when they were set apart by God as his holy people. When they were regenerated and believed, they were set apart. They were sanctified. They became saints, holy ones, and that’s how God uses people. It doesn’t have a moral meaning.

They, in fact, were far from being moral people, the moral people they should’ve been. We are, too, for that matter. But this is how God considers us. He considers us to be saints. He considers us to be holy. We’re set apart. We’re different. And thirdly, they

were justified. That means they were declared righteous. It’s a legal term. It means they were acquitted of wrongdoing, and they had been pronounced innocent.

They had been pronounced right with the law. We see that, for example, in Deuteronomy 25:1. That’s a very helpful verse in defining what justification means, and there Moses is giving instruction to the judges of Israel. And basically, he’s saying, “Judge correctly. Judge righteously.” He says, “Justify the righteous and condemn the wicked.” In other words, don’t pervert justice.

It doesn’t mean make people righteous, or make them guilty or wicked. He’s simply saying declare them to be what they are. If a man’s guilty, pronounce him guilty. I don’t care if he’s got money. I don’t care if he’s got influence. If he’s guilty, he’s guilty; pronounce him that. And don’t take advantage of poor people. If they’re innocent, declare them innocent. That’s justification, and that’s what he means here.

God does that to the sinner whenever he or she believes in Jesus Christ, because at that moment, that very moment of faith in the person and the work of Christ, faith in the sacrifice that he’s made for us, that sacrifice, everything that Christ accomplished on the cross, everything that he bought for us is applied to us. It’s as though we put our hand upon him, and everything that is in him becomes ours.

Our sin became his at the cross; his righteousness becomes ours at the moment of faith. We are just in God’s sight, and it’s all by grace. It’s all a gift. All of this was done for them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, which simply means by the person of Christ, and in the Spirit of our God. A triune God has saved us is what he’s saying. Now, that’s positional. That’s what we are, as it were, legally, before God.

But all of that has moral implications. Because we are who we are by the grace of God – washed and sanctified and justified – we cannot go back to that old life. We’re different. We’re not like the world. We’re not like those people we once were. We can’t go back to that. So what’s with all the lawsuits, Paul was saying – that’s the old life. It’s not the new life. Civil war in the church is incompatible with citizenship in the kingdom of God.

Look, if God can cause such transformations in the lives of people as he did those people in Corinth, making thieves and drunkards into saints, then he can solve legal problems in the church. There’s no problem too great for God to fix. If he can give life to the dead, he can fix the most mundane, petty problems that we deal with all the time, but they get out of hand and separate Christians.

He can fix any problem, whether it’s between colleagues, or spouses, if we will simply look to him. If we will simply seek his power through the Spirit and obey his Word. We do that, God will lead us to peace and prosperity spiritually. Now, we may lose something materially in the process, in sacrificing for the name of Christ, but let me say this – and I’ve said it before, and I’m not the first person to have said this – God’s no man’s debtor.

And if you have to give up something for the honor of the name of Christ, and unjustly so, God knows that, and he’ll make it up to you in this life, and certainly in the life to come. So Paul is telling them, “You can’t go back to the old life. Quit living like you were before. Stop fighting. Stop going to court and pitting brother against brother. Stop being led by pride and led by the flesh. You are a new creation. Live like it.

Be in practice what you are in principle. Be morally what you are theologically. You are holy in the eyes of God, so live holy in the eyes of men.” And we can – we can do that by the grace of God. We can only do that by the grace of God. We can only make the sacrifices we need to do by the grace of God. We can do it. We have the power to do that. Listen, the greatest miracles in the world are the miracles that take place in the church, that take place through the church.

That take place by God through his people as they proclaim the Word of God and they preach the gospel, because it changes people from scoundrels to saints, and it gives them real victory over sin. If you’re facing a problem in your life, in your business, in your marriage, it can be solved. The power of God is within you, and you look to the Lord, and you trust him. He will fix your marriage, and he will fix all of the problems you have.

Trust him and rest in him. Don’t seek the world’s ways. He gives us the victory. And the world should see that in us. The world should see changed lives, different lives, lives lived in the power of God. The gospel offers that. The gospel gives that. It gives real hope, and the world should see a change. It should see reality in us, and it should hear the truth from us. The most compassionate thing that we can do as Christian in this world is to be true to God’s Word, and not excuse sin.

We’re to expose sin and give the solution. I don’t mean we’re to go buttonhole every sinner we see and tell them they’re a sinner, but when the time is appropriate, we do expose them. We certainly don’t compromise our positions on things. We expose that, and we give the gospel, because as I say, the gospel is the solution, the gospel of faith in Jesus Christ, and salvation in him. He makes people a new creation.

So if you’re here without Christ, but you want what he alone offers, which is new life, a clean life, then come to him, believe in him. That’s all that’s required; faith in Jesus Christ. Trust in him and be saved. He is the Son of God, who died for sinners, even the chief of sinners, in order to save all who believe in him. And he’ll save you, if you come to him. May God help you to do that.

May God help all of us to rejoice in what he’s given to us, what we are. By his grace, we are new creatures. We are a new creation. We have power to live that life, so may God help us to do that. Let’s pray.

[Prayer] Father, we’ll spend all eternity singing praise to your grace, and we thank you for it. Thank you for the grace that has brought us into your family, that’s made us a new creation. Give us the desire to live as that before the world, and with one another. We thank you for Christ and his death for us, and it’s in his name we pray. Amen.

Because he gives deliverance, he gives freedom, he cleanses us. Believe in him. And that’s all that’s required – simple trust in Jesus Christ. So turn to Christ and be saved. He’s the Son of God who died for sinners, even the chief of sinners, in order to save all who trust in him, and he’ll save you. And may God help all of us who’ve trusted in him to live for him; to be in practice what we are in principle; to live as holy men and women before the world.

Well, we can do that by God’s grace, so let’s seek it. Let’s pray. Father, we do pray for your grace and your mercy. We have that. We have it in Christ; you have poured out your grace upon us. You have blessed us beyond comprehension in Jesus Christ. We are a new creation. All things are new. Why do we forget that? We so often do.

We so often put our mind on the things of the world, and forget the things of heaven, the great truths of your Word. We confess that, and pray that you would continually impress upon us who we are. We are saints, and we are judges, and someday we will judge the world. We are not to put ourselves under this world’s system. We are to be an –