

What's the Message – Lesson 125

Come with us now as we continue our search for guidance for our own lives regarding lawsuits between Christians . . . then marriage and divorce.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Lord, we come before you admitting our weakness and failures. We regularly fail to love our neighbor as we ought, and all too often we do not love our spouse as we should and fail to keep our wedding vows. Help us now as we turn to Your word and seek guidance for our lives. Amen.

As Rev. Harley Swiggum has written: “One of the failings of the saints within the Corinthian church was the manner in which they were handling their grievances with one another. The fact that Christians had grievances was no surprise to the apostle; but the fact that they were settling these grievances in the law courts of their unbelieving neighbors was a surprise to him.” As we read in chapter 6:1 – 8:

When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? . . . So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not suffer wrong?

What is Paul trying to teach the Corinthians here, and for that matter, trying to teach us? Is he telling us to never use a law court for a civil issue? No, judges have been instituted by God to protect the lawful from the lawless. But Paul is presuming here that Christians are not lawless people. At least, that is the way it should be, but unfortunately that is not always the case because we are sinners, too. So when we have an issue that requires a judge to settle, Paul is telling us to look within the Christian fellowship to judge the case. Paul is also setting a high standard for our

relations with our Christian brothers and sisters. He is saying that to sink to the level of requiring a lawsuit is already a defeat for us.

He is saying that it is better for us to suffer wrong rather than to press a lawsuit on a brother, because that is not dealing on the basis of love. Paul is reminding us that our motivation in all our relationships is to be based on love, as imitators of Christ. As Jesus said: *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you* (John 15:12).

Paul next turns to the matter of immorality, then to marriage and divorce. He begins this section by quoting a slogan of the “freedom” group at Corinth and throws their specious argument back in their face. He says: *All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. . . . Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body* (1 Cor. 6: 12 – 20).

Paul carries this same attitude over into his instruction on marriage and divorce. Then in verse 31 he puts his words into context and reminds them that “the present form of this world is passing away.”

In other words, he reminds them that life in this world is temporary, and that our focus should always be on God and the eternal world that awaits us. Our temporal life will find us in some station in our society, and that must be dealt with accordingly, but the temporal must be kept in balance with the eternal. Marriage definitely has a place in this life, and it is good. But if one has not married, it is also good to remain unmarried. Hear what Paul has to say in chapter 7:

Because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her

husband. . . . To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. . . . To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

There is one more bit of guidance we want to take from Paul at this point. Starting at verse 32 of chapter 7, he has this to say:

I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

Our next lesson will continue with Paul's practical guidance to the Corinthians on matters of offense and behavior.