

And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Corinthians 6.11.

Perhaps you are beginning to see now a common thread running through this letter - snobbery. The Corinthian church is divided because they are judging their leaders and preachers on how well educated they are; how well they speak. Last week we saw how the smart set thought it frightfully advanced that a member of the church should be sleeping with his step-mother. And now in chap 6 we hear Paul going ballistic because they are taking each other to court, v6... It's the elite again, isn't it? because only the rich among them would be able to afford to take people to court.

It's hard to know what the quarrel was about. V7 would seem to indicate that it was a financial dispute ... It isn't the actual case that concerns Paul but the fact that Christians are taking Christians to court; and even worse, going to *unbelievers*, pagans, to find justice. They are going to the inferior world of unbelief and godliness to seek right decisions, v1... What does that say about the church when Christians wash their dirty linen in public? Publicly quarrelling over money and one's rights doesn't do much for Christian outreach! Why would a pagan want to join that bunch?

And here Paul becomes really sarcastic. These highly educated Corinthian Christians are so bedazzled by *wisdom*, *sophia*. They think they are so wise, and yet they are not wise enough to settle their own disputes. They have to go to pagan courts for wisdom! Vv5-6...

V2 is strange ... From the book of Daniel (7.22) there arose the belief that when the Son of Man came to earth the 'saints' would join him in judging the earth. It's in Rev 20.4, and Matt 19.28,

p987... At the 2nd Second Coming, we believers with Christ will even judge 'angels' (=evil spirits). So if Christians one day will join Christ in judging the world, why do these Corinthian Christians not think they can judge trivial financial disputes? 1 Cor 6.1-3..

Paul isn't concerned with the rights and the wrongs of this particular case. It's the fact that Christians have taken each other to courts. Everyone has lost. Even if the plaintiff is technically in the right, he is in the wrong for taking his brother in Christ to a pagan court to get his rights, v7... Even if he is legally right, he has become a cheat by taking him to court. Two wrongs don't make a right. And so he joins the other wicked people who won't inherit the Kingdom of heaven. (I have already mentioned how Corinth, with its public temples to Venus, the goddess of love, and the attendant temple prostitutes, was a notoriously sex-obsessed city). Vv8-10...

Well, so what? What could God possibly be saying to us today from this passage of scripture? Today, of course, is Mothering Sunday, and I don't need to remind you that it is not Mother's Day! Originally Mothering Sunday referred to Mother Church. The 4th Sunday in Lent was when apprentices were allowed home to their mother parish churches. On the way home for that day they picked flowers for their mothers as well. So today we thank God for the Church which nourishes us, and for our mothers who gave us life. In other words, it is a day when we can celebrate our families. Surely we don't take members of our family to court? It's a terrible day when we have to do that. Once you are in court people become dehumanised. Anyone who has been through the divorce courts knows that. Things become very bitter, and you wonder whether it was worth it.

Paul's words are particularly apt 2000 years later, because we live in an increasingly litigious age. Politicians seem to think that all problems can be solved by passing yet more laws. With all the Human Rights legislation, the courts are bunged with people scrambling to get their rights and compensation. With all the recent PC thought crimes, you can even now be taken to court for thinking the wrong things. In extreme cases there are even children suing their parents. In the Episcopal Church of the USA the Presiding Bishop, Katherine Jefferts-Schori, has become notorious for relentlessly pursuing congregations which reject her liberal, unbiblical, agenda through the courts. She shews her true colours by her unscriptural eagerness to take Christians who disagree with her to court. There's nothing like the illiberality of a liberal!

Is this how we should treat each other in families? What are we achieving by suing our parents, our brothers and sisters? 'We're getting our rightful share of the will, aren't we'? Well, yes, but was it worth it? Was it worth all the stress, the bitterness, the broken relationships that will never be mended? And isn't the church also a family? OK, we take a brother or sister in Christ to court. The judge says we were right. But was it worth all the hurt, stress and bitterness? 1 Cor 6.7... And isn't society as a whole a family?

The trouble is that we all live today as *individuals* with *individual* rights. Courts can only deal with the complaints of individuals. We stay in families or marriages so long as it benefits us as individuals. We belong to society, so long as there is something in it for us. We even come to church for what we get out of it. If things don't suit us here, we move on, don't we? We want

our rights and our entitlements. *That* is what is at stake here in chap 6 of 1 *Cor*. Paul is reminding us that we belong to each other – to our husbands and wives, to our children, to our brothers and sisters in Christ in the Church, the family of God. Therefore we can't live as individuals concerned only with our rights.

Let's go back to that list of naughty people who will not inherit the kingdom of God, vv9-10... They are all people who are bothered only about themselves, and who never think how their behaviour impacts on others, especially those nearest them. But we are herd animals. We belong to groups – families, the church, society. We who have been called into God's family, the Church, Mother Church, belong to Christ, and to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. We're unlikely at St Paul's to be taking each other to court, but we can at least get to know each other's names.

These smart, elite Corinthian Christians knew all about the Holy Spirit. Couldn't they talk in tongues and prophesy? And yet, by taking a brother to court, they shewed that they were not Spirit people. You may not feel Spirit-filled, but you are. He it was who brought you into the church; who makes Jesus real to you; who opens up the truth of scripture to you as God speaking to you. You may not always *feel* that this congregation of God's people is your family; but it is. You may not *feel* that, because of Calvary, Christ has washed away your sins; but he has. You may not always *feel* that these are your brothers and sisters in Christ; but they are. You may not always *feel* you are a loved child of God, but you are. God has called us to be far more than just individuals, out to get our rights. Become what you are, his loved child for whom Christ died.