

# A House Divided

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## *1 Cor 6:7-8*

### I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. In a sailing vessel, the mate of the ship, yielding to temptation, became drunk. The captain entered in the log of the ship the record for the day: "Mate drunk today."
1. When the mate read this entry, he implored the captain to take it out of the record.
    - a. He said that when it was read by the owners of the ship, it would cost him his post, and the captain well knew that this was his first offense.
    - b. But the captain refused to change the record, and said to the mate, "This is the fact, and into the log it goes."
  2. Some days afterward, the mate was keeping the log.
    - a. After he had given the latitude and longitude, the run for the day, the wind and the sea, he made this entry: "Captain sober today."
    - b. The indignant captain protested when he read the record, declaring that it would leave a false impression in the minds of the owners of the company, as if it were an unusual thing for him to be sober.
    - c. But the mate answered as the captain answered him, "This is the fact, and into the log it goes."
- B. We're often like both that first mate and captain, aren't we?
1. Perhaps we judge people harshly—maybe the person looks lazy or he looks irresponsible or she looks like an annoyance.
  2. Perhaps we want to get even—if someone wrongs us, he or she had better watch out, for we're going to exact revenge.
- C. Our text this morning deals with a situation in Corinth that was much like that.
1. Someone in the congregation had taken a fellow believer to court.
    - a. At the time Paul wrote this Epistle, it seems that the trial was still taking place.
    - b. The word for "judgment" (NIV) or "go to law" (KJV) is a verb in the present tense in Greek, indicating that as Paul wrote the suit was still taking place.
  2. The Corinthian church was apparently divided over this lawsuit and Paul writes about their divisions. He writes about DEFEAT & DEFRAUD.

### II. DEFEAT, v. 7.

- A. The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already.
1. The Corinthian congregation was very, very divided.
    - a. It seems that Paul opens this epistle speaking about the divisions in Corinth.
      - He writes, "To the church of God in Corinth" (1:2).
      - The "of God" indicates that God owns the church and that stands in stark contrast to those in Corinth who claimed to be following a certain preacher or their own desires.
    - b. They were divided over which preacher was better and Paul wrote to that effect: "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1:10).

- c. The passage concerning the Lord's Supper in chapter 11 makes clear that the rich refused to eat with the poor, thus the congregation was divided over social status.
2. Here Paul declares the fact that the fact they have lawsuits means that they are completely defeated.
- a. You know the Greek term for "completely" and you use it often; it's the word *holos*, from which we get the English word "whole."
- b. The word for "defeated" was a legal term used for a loss at court.
- In fact, the opposite word in Greek, the word for victory, is a word with which you are quite familiar.
  - That word is pronounced in English as Nike, the tennis shoe brand; the company named their shoes after victory in Greek.
3. Here's the point Paul is making: Even if you go to court and win the case against another brother, you are still defeated.
- a. Why would they be defeated if they won the case when it went to trial?
- Would they not divide the congregation for which the Lord Jesus died?
    - Is it really possible for brother to sue brother and not divide the church?
    - If you and I have an argument and I end up suing you, is it not nature for some members of the congregation to side with me and others to die with you? You're friends will likely take your side, while my friends take my side. Before you know it, that argument has permeated the congregation in such a way that everyone is arguing with everyone else.
  - Would it not also leave a bad impression in the minds of non-Christians?
    - Imagine for a moment that the elders and I have a squabble over my contract and I take them to court.
    - Do you not think that the judge, attorneys, witnesses, and the general public might have serious reservations about attending this congregation? I can imagine that might even make the *Charleston Gazette*—you know fights really sell newspapers.
- b. How does this apply in a congregation where we are not taking one another to court?
- First, as we mentioned last week, we should never take one another to court: period.
  - Second, I think this really says much about the way we need to fight with one another in the church.
    - The Corinthian church had a host of fights with one another and those fights were having serious consequences for the life of that congregation.
    - What are we going to do when we disagree with one another?
      - Jesus outlined the steps we are to take: Mt 18:15-17.
      - If I have a disagreement with you or you have one with me, I'm not to go to someone and gossip about you or you about me.
      - We're to settle it between just the two of us.
    - The wisdom in those words is not hard to see.
      - If everyone else knows about our disagreement, no longer do I just have to make things right with you, but I have to make things right with a whole host of individuals.
      - If everyone else knows about our disagreement, it allows members of the congregation to choose sides.
- B. Paul then asks the Corinthians two rhetorical questions: "Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?"
1. This certainly sounds like a money issue, and some have objected to seeing the court case as involving the incestuous relationship of the previous chapter on this basis.

- a. It is definitely not a matter of heaven or hell whether or not the case concerned the man living with his father's wife. It is, however, quite possible that money was involved in this case.
  - b. It may have been that this woman was a wealthy widow, the father married her, and now she is living with his son, so the father sues to make sure he gets the money back.
  - c. Many scholars believe it is quite possible that this man's father has died and that the son married this woman to keep the money in the family and that perhaps other members of the family are suing to get their hands on the money.
  - d. While those seem to me to be solid, educated guesses based on the context of the passage, they remain just that—guesses.
2. Whether or not there were brethren in Corinth suing this man to get their hands on his stepmother's money is really irrelevant; what's not irrelevant is Paul's strong implication that it would be better to be wronged by brethren than to sue them.
- a. There can be no doubt that many suits are filed in court in order that the litigants might get rich quick.
    - I'm confident that the judge who sued the cleaners over the lost pants and the lady who sued McDonald's over the hot coffee wanted to get some money.
    - I don't have a doubt in my mind that when a lawyer comes on television and says if you've tried this medicine call this number that he or she is seeing dollar signs and hoping that people who have taken that drug will see the same.
  - b. That attitude is not at all Christian.
    - "A greedy man brings trouble to his family, but he who hates bribes will live" (Prov 15:27).
    - "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income" (Eccl 5:10).
    - 1 Tm 6:6-10.
  - c. We're to love one another deeply, to be brethren living in harmony and more concerned with the next life than we are this one.
    - How can that be the case if I'm concerned you might have a little bit more money than I have?
    - How can we be what we need to be if we're fighting over material things which are going to be burned up when Jesus comes again?
  - d. Paul declares that it's better if we're in a dispute for me to accept the wrong than to seek redress in court.
    - That is a principle which runs throughout Scripture.
      - Jesus said: "Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you" (Mt 5:39-42).
      - "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody" (Rom 12:17).
    - I realize that these are hard, hard words.
      - If you hit my car in the parking lot this morning and you refused to pay for damages, I'd want to sue you with every fiber of my being. But, Paul says that's not the way of the cross.
      - If you convinced me to invest in some business adventure and you ran off with the money, sure I'd want to sue you and take you to the cleaners. But, that's not the way of Jesus.

- Suits between brethren and strife between brethren is out of sync with what it means to be brethren.
  - Yes, I'd have every right to go to you and tell you what you had done wrong against me; yes, I'd have a right, if you refused to do the right thing, to bring the matter before the congregation.
  - But, no, I'm not to get a lawyer and take you to court.
- e. Will we seek reconciliation with our brethren?

### III. DEFRAUD, v. 8.

- A. Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.
- B. Paul has just declared that the Corinthians would be far better off if they just dealt with wrongs committed against them.
  1. They're not content with that—they're not just going to keep going when someone does them wrong.
  2. In fact, they were more than willing to defraud their brethren.
- C. These Christians were defrauding one another.
  1. The word for cheat here, the same one used in the previous verse, means basically to steal through deception or trickery.
    - a. At this congregation, we have helped several people with benevolent needs just to discover a few days later that they had told us a bold face lie.
    - b. I remember, in particular, there was a gentleman who called here on a Wednesday evening and told us that he was a member of the church in Texas, he was moving to the area, and he knew many of you; he even mentioned names and gave us an address where we could reach him in a couple days.
      - I went to visit him at the address he had given us, and he hadn't moved there. In fact, I was told that no houses had sold in that area in quite some time.
      - *The Christian Chronicle*, a newspaper for members of the church, had a story on this guy in their next issue and come to find out he had defrauded numerous churches of Christ throughout the country.
    - c. That's the idea behind this word—lying to get money out of you.
  2. That often happens in court cases, doesn't it?
    - a. How many people, although they've just sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, lie through their teeth?
    - b. Wasn't that likely what led to Bill Clinton's impeachment? Did he not know that if he answered fully and truthfully, he might be forced to pay Paula Jones?
  3. Can we not act in the same manner?
    - a. I want to get something from you, and I know the only way I can get it is to lie at court. I go ahead and lie.
    - b. Perhaps I want you to do me a favor, I want to smear your name, or I want something else from you and the only way I can get it is to be less than truthful. Am I not doing to you precisely what the Corinthians were doing to one another?
  4. As Christians we are to be an extremely honest people.
    - a. "The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful" (Prov 12:22).
    - b. "Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body" (Eph 4:25).
  5. Brethren, let us commit ourselves to treating one another with the utmost honesty!

- D. The Christians in Corinth were also doing wrong to their brothers.
1. If you're reading from a translation other than the NIV this morning, you'll notice that the NIV inverts the words: in the Greek, doing wrong comes before cheating. I don't have any idea why the NIV translators changed the order of these words from the Greek.
  2. The term for "do wrong" has been used throughout this passage.
    - a. We first saw the term up in v. 1 where Paul refers to court judges as "ungodly."
    - b. Here, Paul uses the verb form of that adjective to declare that the Christians in Corinth were acting as the ungodly judges.
  3. Can we not act ungodly toward our brethren?
    - a. If I slander you to make myself look better than you do, is that not acting ungodly?
    - b. If I refuse to speak to you because you committed some sin against me years ago, is that not acting ungodly?
  4. Paul places this acting ungodly in the context of a court trial, and it obviously fits there, for I would have the opportunity to lie about you, to refuse speaking to you, and to act totally unchristian toward you.
    - a. Yet, every time I see you, don't I have a decision to make about how I'm going to treat you.
      - Am I going to treat you as my brother or sister in Christ, as one for whom Christ died, and as a co-worker in the Lord's kingdom?
      - Or, am I going to treat you as someone I'd prefer not to be around, someone I can't stand, someone I'm just not going to tolerate?
    - b. How are we treating our brothers and sisters in Christ? Do you need to come forward this morning and become a part of the family of God and yourself to acting Christianly toward your brethren?