

ILL-FITTING SUITS**1 Corinthians 6:1-11**

INTRO: Are you familiar with of the words “Freshman 15”? It’s when an 18 year goes off to college and they savor every delicacy the school dining hall has to offer on their unlimited meal-plan. Or when they go off to college and eat every meal at McDonalds, or order from Papa Johns every morning at 1 AM. By the time they come home at Columbus Day Break they have gained 15 pounds – and it’s probably worse at Thanksgiving. That is the Freshman 15.

But, did you know there is a Quarantine 15? People spent more time than ever at home, and one thing they did was eat. Some got into gourmet cooking or experimental cooking – and, of course, that meant more eating. I am living proof of the Quarantine 15 – I have gained almost exactly 15 pounds. The problem is, the quarantine has been most over for 4 months and my weight is still creeping up. I need to do something before it becomes the Quarantine Quarter Ton. One of the many drawbacks to this weight gain is my suits don’t fit like they are supposed to. We’re heading into suit and sport coat season, and my suits are tremendously ill-fitting. I will not solve it by buying more suits and sport coats, instead I need to deal with the cause of my ill-fitting suits which is my lack of discipline.

The Corinthian Church was dealing with ill-fitting suits too. But their problem had nothing to do with a pandemic quarantine or portion control, and it had everything to do with what F. B. Meyer described as “Christian Failure”. As we move into 1 Corinthians 6, we will look at this as we again look at being the church in challenging times. Listen as I read, **(Read 1 Corinthians 6:1-11)**

Paul is being Paul here as he launches into a conversation about lawsuits after he had glazed Corinthian eyes with a stern discussion about handling the baggage of a church in a sexualized society. He’s got a method to his madness, and his teaching and style is not unfamiliar to the Corinthians. So if these 11 verses seemed a bit confusing to you, they were likely not to his readers. Though seemingly disjointed, in reality, it’s Paul responding to a laundry list of bad reports he has heard about the Corinthian Church. They knew exactly what he was up to and we can too. Let’s look at it.

The biggest concern for Paul here is a message to Christ Followers:

Don’t step into the quagmire of the world

- The Brethren in Christ have, for 60 or more years, participated in Bible Quizzing. It’s important because, not only did it help young women and men to know the Bible deeply, it also helped young women and men to find husbands and wives. You’re aware how tracing occurs with Coronavirus infections – when a positive test happens, the doctors try to trace back to everyone who were in contact with that person so they can be warned and or quarantined. Well, I can trace at least four marriages that came out of one Bible Quizzing Tournament at my home church in 1977; including Kathy and me. But seriously, Kathy, as with many of the young people here at ABC who were on ABC Quiz Teams can still quickly call to mind the scripture they learned while quizzing.
- One time that knowledge even helped a family in one of my congregations. We had a Quiz Team at Speedwell Heights BIC where I served from 1986 until 1990. It was a year when World Quizzing, which BIC Quizzing aligned with, was studying First and Second Corinthians. One of our quizzers was Tabetha and her parents had recently bought a log home. Very soon after moving into that home they discovered the home was infested with termites. They also discovered that the previous owner, a Christian, knew of the infestation and that was why they found it for such a bargain. The seller would not discuss any kind of solution and they began considering a lawsuit since it was clearly an open and shut case. But, as her parents discussed a lawsuit, Tabitha, who had been studying this very passage, told her parents, since the seller was a Christian, they should not sue him. They then came to me and some other folks at our church and asked our advice – and we all said, “Tab’s got a point!” In the end, they did not sue. As I recall, they sold the house back to the previous owner for the amount they paid and they found another house. Paul’s words worked.
- And they do. It’s bad enough that litigation is so prevalent but it’s a travesty when it happens between Christians. Ray Steadman, who preached a message on this passage entitled, **THE WRONG WAY TO RIGHT WRONGS**, and writing in the mid-1970s referred to a magazine account he had recently seen where two Bible societies whose mission was to smuggle Bibles behind the Iron Curtain, were suing each

other in a territorial dispute. He wondered if they ever read the Bibles they were smuggling. Let me point out, it was a national news magazine from which he got the information. The world is watching – they love it when we go at each other, whether it’s in a lawsuit over something in the church or two people going at it over some obscure theological point on Facebook.

- Paul says to settle differences between Christ Followers in-house. Period! He says it is a Christian failure to think that the world (specifically the pagan Greek law system) can speak into the lives of redeemed people. The world might look at that and tell me that’s an arrogant statement, but it’s not. It’s not meant in pride at all – it’s just truth. What can a non-Christian contribute to a Christian dispute? Even with a Christian judge on the case, our U.S. system of justice is set up to be not-sectarian because of the free exercise of religion clause in our constitution, thus we are being judged by a world system and not by the church. The best way to settle a dispute is to go to God’s people for their advice and arbitration. Fellow Christ Followers know both of you and they know the Bible and, with prayer can help resolve disputes. Paul, with false incredulity, asks in verse 5, “*Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers?*”. The answer is clear. It is not possible. There IS someone who can moderate a dispute between two Christ Followers.
- He goes on in verse 6, *But instead, one brother takes another to court—and this in front of unbelievers!* It is a sad time when believers duke it out publically. Let’s keep our fights in house. Let’s not be the source of a smile on Satan’s face.
- Seemingly changing his course, but, in reality, not, Paul spends the remainder of our text warning the church to . . .

Stop being like the wicked

- You see, for the Greeks, and the Corinthians were Greeks, courtroom drama was truly a spectator sport. Going to court to watch a trial or a lawsuit litigation, was a grand spectacle. There was an entire industry built up around it. I remember how, when I worked at the Reformatory, seemingly every man there was innocent. Truthfully, I remember only two of the hundreds of men I worked with in the Ashland College OSR program, who actually admitted their guilt. Instead they were all legal experts who could tell you exactly why they were as clean and pure as the wind driven snow. And then there were the “jailhouse lawyers” who studied all they could in the prison legal library and were the bane of the Corrections Officers’ existence. Barclay writes that “... *in a Greek city every man was more or less a lawyer and spent a very great part of his time either deciding or listening to law cases.*” Here on Sunday, everyone is ready to get home to see the Browns or the Packers after church and they wish the preacher would just finish up. In Corinth, they were eager to get off to Spiros’s thievery trial.
- Don’t get caught up in it – don’t be like the wicked! And then Paul says, don’t get caught up in this other wickedness because people that practice it do not inherit the kingdom of God (v. 9). Let me read it, *Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.* 1 Corinthians 6:9-10.
- Now we covered a lot of this last week, but we need to look at it again because it’s very germane to this discussion. Last week the issue was a man, who professed to be a follower of Jesus Christ, was sleeping with his father’s wife. It was scandalous even for a pagan, and worse that it was a Christian. Worse, it was out for the world to see! The same in this case: Corinth was Sin City. The Corinthians needed to be reminded early and often they needed to leave the old, default response, sinful life behind and live the holy life of the children of the true and living God.
- So Paul says that sexual immorality, idolatry, adultery, sex with men, thievery, drunkenness, slander and swindling are a very incomplete list of what was the old default setting but is no longer acceptable for Corinthian Christ Followers – and for 21st Century Christ Followers too. Truth be told these sin are the root cause of just about any sin you can think of, so there is no way to rationalize our way out of guilt.
- Nevertheless, I want to cover the subject of homosexuality briefly. Let me read an excerpt from Barclay on this written in the 1950s. He writes, “*This sin had swept like a cancer through Greek life and from Greece, invaded Rome. We can scarcely realize how riddled the ancient world was with it. Even so great a man as Socrates practised it; Plato's dialogue The Symposium is always said to be one of the greatest*

works on love in the world, but its subject is not natural but unnatural love. Fourteen out of the first fifteen Roman Emperors practised unnatural vice.” Barclay then goes into a stomach churning description of several of them, including Nero who would have been Emperor at the time Paul was writing to the Corinthians. I chose not to read it to you because it is disgusting. Let me just read Barclay’s closing sentence because it is especially fitting for present day society. Referring to homosexuality, Barclay writes, *“In this particular vice, in the time of the Early Church, the world was lost to shame; and there can be little doubt that this was one of the main causes of its degeneracy and the final collapse of its civilization.”* Let me read that again: *“there can be little doubt that this was one of the main causes of its degeneracy and the final collapse of its civilization”*. We are there again. Barclay calls it vice, but such language would get him castigated and shamed for his words now, 60 years later. What was wrong is right and what was right is wrong. And that is our world and that is our challenge. The world we live in is nothing new and this is not new territory for Christ Followers.

- A quick word in case you struggle with same sex attraction – as with any temptation, it is a sin only if you participate in it, but not if you deal with it in a Biblical way and resist it.
- The ill-fitting suits the Corinthians were struggling with are as ill-fitting today as they were in 52 AD. Our civilization is teetering in much the same way Barclay describes. Our society has been infiltrated with the same behaviors and the church’s response must be the same today as what Paul proscribed in this letter.
- Do not sequester yourself. Let’s live for Jesus loudly. Not obnoxiously, just make sure people know that Jesus can redeem them out of a collapsing world. Live, and influence, and love, and help change the world one soul at a time. Don’t surrender to the way of the world, win the world over to the way of Christ. Amen!