

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians

(SB_1Cor6A_Litigation Between Believers)

Introduction

Prior to providing additional instruction to the assembly (local church) of believers in Corinth, Paul knew that he had to address the various manifestations of spiritual immaturity that were: 1) destructive to the unity of the young believers; 2) destroying their potential for being a witness in the world; and 3) robbing them of rewards in eternity. Paul addresses the carnal, old-man-function (or behaviors) and the underlying old-man-thinking in the first seven chapters of 1 Corinthians.

- Chapters 1-4 – Sectarianism (divided loyalties) as a human viewpoint based power grab
- Chapter 5 – Immoral sexual relations between two family members (incest)
- Chapter 6 – Litigation between believers
- Chapter 7 – Sexual relations inside & outside of marriage

In chapter 8, Paul will begin providing instruction of a positive nature instead of a correctional nature.

As I read chapter 6 in a cursory fashion, several concepts and doctrines came to mind. Some were more-or-less directly mentioned; whereas, others seemed to lie just below the surface, but nonetheless they proved helpful in understanding the passage. As we study this chapter, the following Biblical concepts and doctrines (at a minimum) affect our interpretation and application:

- Three Types of Christian Sanctification
- The Appeal Trial of Satan: The Biblical Basis for a Philosophy of Human History
- The Doctrine of Judgments
- The Kingdom of God
- Christian Liberty
- The Eternal Security of the Believer
- The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit
- Redemption
- Justification
- The Three Phases of the Believer’s Existence
- “Internalization” and “Actualization” of Truth (a.k.a. Operation KRRY)
- Old Man Thinking vs. New Man Thinking
- Old Man Function vs. New Man Function
- Human Viewpoint vs. Divine Viewpoint
- Dispensations

As we examine chapter 6, our purpose is not to develop and support each of these concepts and doctrines. However, I will reference all (if not most) of them during the course of our analysis of this chapter.

CHAPTER 6

DO NOT SUE THE BRETHREN (6:1-11)

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? 2 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? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life? 4 So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no

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account in the church? 5 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, 6 but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? 7 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? 8 On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. You do this even to your brethren. 9 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, 10 nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 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.

In this pericope, Paul addresses yet another manifestation of the failure of the believers in Corinth to “actualize” the Truths of their new status “in Christ.” Of course, in order for them to have “actualized” these Truths into their Christian lives and walk, they must have first “internalized” these truths.¹ Paul presents a logical argument to illustrate the wrong-headed thinking that has resulted in this behavior.

On six occasions in this chapter alone, Paul uses the phrase “do you not know” and by so doing, he highlights Truth of which the Corinthians should have been aware. Outside of this letter, this particular construction only appears three other times in the entire New Testament. This is what makes the behavior of the Corinthians so flagrant of a violation of all that they had been taught. It is especially poignant for this group of believers who prided themselves in their wisdom and knowledge.

As Paul presents his case, the select Truths of which the Corinthian believers should have been aware, probably as a result of Paul’s instruction while he was with them, are referenced in the following phrases and verses.

- For instance, “do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” (1 Cor 6:2)
- “Do you not know that we will judge angels?” (1 Cor 6:3)
- Also, “do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” (1 Cor 6:9)
- Finally, “you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” (1 Cor 6:11) [*The references here that are in the past tense combined with the linkage of sanctification and justification highlight this to be a reference to positional sanctification vs. experiential sanctification – a distinction that is rarely noted in most modern-day uses of the term “sanctification”*].

So, Paul specifically refers to Truth relating to judgments, the kingdom of God, sanctification and justification.

Within the assembly of believers in Corinth, selfishness, protection of self-interest and disunity was the image that was being presented to the unbelieving world (1 Cor 6:8). A lust for power was prominently on display through these believer’s actions, e.g. sectarianism (chps. 1-4) and now litigation in the judicial courts of the world (chp. 6).

These were not criminal cases since, elsewhere Paul indicates that such matters should be addressed by the State (Rom 13:3, 4). Rather, these were disputes over property rights as

¹ We have examined Romans 6 in separate studies; however, briefly, the concept that Paul is explaining in Romans 6 (esp. vv. 6, 11 & 13) can be described by the terms “*internalization*” and “*actualization*.” “*Internalization*” is defined as follows – “to make internal, personal, or subjective...to take in and make an integral part of one’s beliefs.” “*Actualization*” is defined as – “to realize in action or make real” and “to describe or portray realistically.” *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Retrieved July 20, 2008, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.com>.

indicated by the Greek *pragma echon* (Gr. *πράγμα έχων*).² By using the word translated “dare” (from Gr. *tolmao* – *τολμαω*) in verse 1, Paul is admonishing them instead of commanding them to settle these matters internally. (*Tolmao* is from a root that means to “lift,” “to carry,” “to endure,” “to suffer,” “to venture,” or “to be courageous”). So, Paul was allowing for the possibility that under certain circumstances, believers might need to go into civil courts.³

If appeal was made to Roman law for the right of Jewish and Christian communities to try their own property cases [sic], certainly it would be right to take some cases before the civil court. By analogy, Paul who had received his Roman citizenship according to Roman law, appealed to the civil courts--to the Roman commander (Acts 22:25-29), to the governor (Acts 23:27; 24:10-21), and to the emperor (Acts 25:4-12)--to establish his right to a proper trial and proper treatment as a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37-39). In modern life this biblical principle allows for church cases to be brought into civil courts to determine the extent of the rights of the congregation, as for example, their right to own and retain their own church property. What concerned Paul was that the Corinthians were failing to exercise their prerogative in settling such cases themselves, a prerogative they would exercise at the Second Coming and in the eternal state (vv. 2, 3).⁴

This behavior effectively subordinated the wisdom that believers should have possessed and that is derived from the Truth they should have “internalized” and “actualized” in their lives to the courts of the world’s justice system (1 Cor 6:1-5 cf. 9-10). In this context, these believers should have been willing to forgo their petty disputes and place the long-term interests of promoting the Truth to the unbelieving world ahead of their temporal interests according to Paul (1 Cor 6:7).

WHAT ARE ALL OF THE DOCTRINES AND CONCEPTS TO WHICH PAUL MAKES REFERENCE IN BUILDING HIS CASE OR ARGUMENT?

➤ *Doctrine of Judgments (Specifically in Relation to the Kingdom of God)*

The doctrine of judgments encompasses much more than that portion to which Paul refers in our passage. If we were to engage in a complete study of the Biblical teaching on this subject, we would need to address such issues as the bema seat judgment of Church Age Body of Christ believers after the Rapture, the judgment of the sheep and goats at the 2nd Advent of Christ, the judgment of believers of other dispensations, and the judgment of unbelievers at the Great White Throne Judgment. However, to do so, would distract us from the portion of this doctrine that is relevant to Paul’s argument, i.e. the participation of the Church Age Body of Christ believer in the judgment of unbelievers and angels.

In several passages, Paul alludes to us ruling and reigning with Christ and our appearance with Him; however, many details are lacking. Traditionally, dispensationalists have provided the missing details from passages that are Jewish in context. Nevertheless, when we examine the Pauline corpus of material for information on the subject, we find much to support the conclusion that believers of this present Gentile-centric Church Age Body of Christ will participate in ruling and reigning (thus judging) with Christ during the eschatological kingdom age.

² Frank E. Gaebelein, general editor, *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976-1992), electronic software version.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

- We will appear with Him in glory; however, the exact nature of our role is unclear. The following passages (i.e. Col 3:4 & 1 Thess 4:14) allude to the return of the believer of the Church Age Body of Christ at Jesus' 2nd Advent – a return which must be preceded by the Church Age believer's resurrection at the Rapture (1 Thess 4:16-17).
 - *"When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."* (Col 3:4)
 - *"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus."* (1 Thess 4:14)⁵
 - *"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord."* (1 Thess 4:16-17)
- Scripture references our heir-ship with Christ and our reign with Him; however, details regarding the relationship of our inheritance and reign in the Millennium are few. Again, most dispensationalists allude to passages that are Jewish and/or Age of Israel in context (e.g. Matt 16:24-27; 19:28-29; Lu 22:28-30 and probably Rev 2:26-27; 3:21 are examples). However, Paul makes numerous references to the Church Age Body of Christ believer's role and involvement in the earthly, millennial kingdom so that we do not need to resort to hermeneutical error in order to obtain our understanding of our participation in that kingdom.
 - *"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God [a reference to the restoration of creation at the inauguration of the Messianic, millennial Kingdom]. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of glory of the children of God [a reference to the fact that resurrected believers of all prior dispensations at the time of Jesus' 2nd Advent will rule and reign with Him]."* (Rom 8:16-21 cf. Heb 1:1-2) [Bracketed comments are my interpretive insertions].
 - *"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? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, matters of this life?"* (1 Cor 6:1-3) [To my knowledge, this is the only passage that explicitly indicates that Church Age believers of the Body of Christ will judge angels].
 - *"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory [a reference to ultimate*

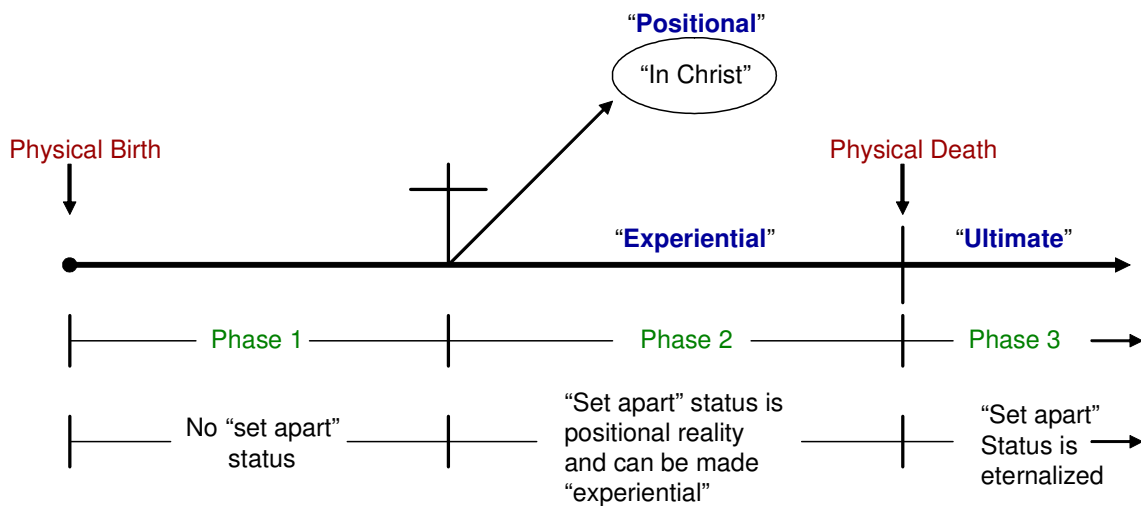
⁵ On the surface, this verse seems to reference the 2nd Advent and if true, would lead us to the conclusion that Paul is saying that believers of the present age return with Christ at His 2nd Advent. However, in the verses immediately following, Paul indicates that believers who are alive at Jesus' coming (the Rapture) will meet Jesus and the believers who have already died in the air (1 Thess 4:17). The *Expositor's Commentary* clarifies with the following. "Though we might expect Paul to write 'God will raise' instead of 'God will bring with Jesus,' he used the latter because of an unexpressed connection in his mind between the two ideas. To be brought with Jesus presupposes rising from the dead as part of the process (v. 16). The words 'God will bring' point to a continuing movement heavenward after the meeting in the air (v. 17), until the arrival in the Father's presence A more detailed analysis of the process follows (*gar*, v. 15)." Frank E. Gaebelein, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989-1998), electronic version.

sanctification], by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.” (Phil 3:20-21)

- “...therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. This is a plain indication of God’s righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering.” (2 Thess 1:4-5) [There is an association between believers of the present age and the kingdom based upon passages such as this].
- “It is a trustworthy statement: ‘For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we endure, we shall also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us; if we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself.’” (2 Tim 2:11-12)
- “In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.” (2 Tim 4:8)
- “...looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.” (Titus 2:13)
- “For He did not subject to angels the world to come...” (Heb 2:5)
- “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Pet 1:3-7)

➤ **Three Types of Christian Sanctification**

I have introduced this distinction previously; however, Paul alludes to “positional sanctification” in 1 Corinthians 6:11 as a Truth associated with the Corinthians salvation. The diagram below is used to relate the three types of sanctification (being “set apart”) that is applicable to the believer’s experience.



An example of passages that support this categorization include the following:

- POSITIONAL SANCTIFICATION

- 1 Corinthians 1:2

2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:

- 1 Corinthians 1:30

30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.

- 2 Thessalonians 2:13

13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

- 1 Peter 1:2

2 According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.

- Hebrews 10:10, 14, 29

10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Heb 10:10)

14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. (Heb 10:14)

29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? (Heb 10:29)

- EXPERIENTIAL SANCTIFICATION

- 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4

3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor. *[Note the explanation of the type of behavior that accompanies this use of the word "sanctification"].*

- 1 Thessalonians 5:23

23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. *[The goal of the believer's spiritual walk in time is experiential sanctification].*

- 1 Peter 3:15

15 But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.
- Hebrews 2:11 (possibly a reference to both Positional and Experiential)

11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.

- ULTIMATE SANCTIFICATION

- The concept is present in Scripture, even though “sanctification” is not associated with the word “ultimate” or passages addressing the believer’s status in “phase 3” (another concept expressed in numerous passages)

➤ *Doctrines of Justification, Redemption, Reconciliation and Propitiation*

A full-orbed study of these doctrines is beyond the scope of our present objective; however, since Paul mentions “justification,” this all-important doctrine, we need to pause to acknowledge it and at a minimum define it.

Five of the most basic soteriological truths or doctrines found in Scripture are *justification, redemption, reconciliation, sanctification and propitiation*. (Sanctification has been briefly explained above). Paul mentions “*justification*” in 1 Corinthians 6 and that doctrine will be briefly described below along with a brief discussion of the other closely related doctrines of *redemption, reconciliation and propitiation*.

- JUSTIFICATION

Definition: Justification is a judicial imputation of God’s own righteousness to the individual who accepts the gift of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Justification occurs at the point of faith or trust in the work of Christ alone and it is apart from any work or good deed by that individual. (Note: Justification is logically, not chronologically, related to other phase 1, soteriological truths such as redemption, reconciliation, and propitiation)

Passages: Romans 3:22-24, 28; 4:5; 5:1; Titus 3:4-7

22 Even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. (Rom 3:22-24)

28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. (Rom 3:28)

5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness. (Rom 4:5)

1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom 5:1)

4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, 5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4-7)

- REDEMPTION

The doctrine of redemption encompasses the concept of the kinsman-redeemer in theology related to Israel and the Jew, the Pauline concept of redemption accomplished through Jesus' sacrificial death, and the future redemption of creation in association with the establishment of the Messianic, millennial kingdom. However, for the purposes of this study of 1 Corinthians 6, we will limit ourselves to the most basic meaning of redemption as it is provided to us through Paul.

Definition: Spiritual redemption of the Church Age Body of Christ believer was accomplished through Jesus' sacrificial death on the Cross by which the price was paid to purchase the believer from the slave-market of sin. Each of the four Greek words which are translated "redemption" carry this idea, i.e. *agorazo*, *exagorazo*, *lutroo*, and *apolutrosis*.

Examples of passages:

1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23 – *agorazo* is used

6:20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

7:23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men

Galatians 3:13; 4:5 – *exagorazo* is used

3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us--for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE"

5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:18 – *Lutroo* is used

14 Who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. (Titus 2:14)

18 Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, (1 Pet 1:18)

Romans 3:24; 8:23 – *Apolutrosis* is used

24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. (Rom 3:24)

23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. (Rom 8:23)

- RECONCILIATION

As is true of the other soteriological doctrines we have mentioned, there is much more to the doctrine of reconciliation than will be presented in this brief synopsis. We will only address the basic meaning of the term as provided to us through the Paul.

Definition: The soteriological doctrine of reconciliation refers to the removal of the sin barrier that exists between God and man so that man may be at peace with God.

Example of Passages:

Romans 5:10-11

10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. 11 And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Colossians 1:20-21

20 And through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. 21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds.

- PROPITIATION

Again, only a brief analysis will be presented of this all-important Biblical doctrine.

Definition: Propitiation refers to the satisfaction of God's righteousness which was accomplished by Jesus in His sacrificial death.

Propitiation is associated with the mercy seat in Hebrews 9:5 and the Greek word *hilasterion* is used there. This word (*hilasterion*) means "that which expiates"

3 Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, 4 having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; 5 and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat [*hilasterion* – Gr. ἱλαστήριον]; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail. (Heb 9:5)

The mercy seat was the lid or cover to the ark and it was made of solid gold, with the figure of a cherub standing with outstretched wings looking down upon the mercy seat. The ark contained the two tablets of the Law, the Ten Commandments. So, the mercy seat covered the Law of God.

The cherubim are first seen in Scripture to be guarding the tree of life in the Garden after Adam and Eve had sinned and been expelled. Gold is symbolic of the righteousness of God.

The lid or cover of the ark of the covenant was sprinkled with the blood of the expiatory victim on the annual day of atonement. The blood symbolized the life of the people – the loss of which they had merited by their sins and for which an innocent

animal was slain and its blood sprinkled on the mercy seat, thus having an “appeasing,” “expiating” or “propitiatory” effect in relation to the righteous Law that had been broken.⁶

When Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the Mosaic Law, atonement or covering was no longer necessary since the penalty for sin and violations of the Law had been expiated or addressed in full. (Expiation is enduring the full penalty for a wrong, thus completely addresses all guilt versus atonement – the temporary covering for or passing over of sin).

Examples of passages:

Romans 3:25

25 Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed.

1 John 2:2; 4:10

2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. (1 Jn 2:2)

10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Hebrews 9:5

5 And above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 6 is built upon other concepts – concepts that are developed more fully elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, but concepts that are important to understanding this passage. We will develop a better understanding of some of these concepts as we progress further in our study of 1 Corinthians.

⁶ James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible; Showing Every Word of the Text of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order* (Ontario, Canada: Woodside Bible Fellowship), electronic edition, Logos Research Systems, Inc.