



We've been looking at 1 Corinthians and all the different ways to mess up a perfectly good church. Last week we learned sleeping with your stepmother isn't good. Still true! In the coming weeks we'll deal more with sexual issues, and with getting drunk at communion, divorce, eating food sacrificed to idols, the gift of tongues and all kinds of craziness. It ought to be obvious by now the church at Corinth was far from ideal. You'd probably never choose to be part of a church like this if you knew about all the issues going in.

But one of the things I love about this letter is nothing is swept under the rug. Paul isn't embarrassed to address issues that make us blush. And today is no exception as we come to 1 Cor. 6:1–11 where Paul deals with some folks in the church who were at each other's throats. It reminds us that Christians who live in community together are going to experience some conflict and disagreement. We should expect that from time to time.

Sometimes these disagreements revolve around money. As Christians, as a church, sometimes we do business together. We sell homes to each other; we rent homes from each other. We buy and sell cars to each other. We hire someone from the church to build an addition on our house or lay carpet or fix our teeth or tutor our children. Maybe we start a business together like a restaurant. It makes sense that we do this. We feel if this person is a believer we should be able to trust them. We want to help each other. If you've got a business or a skill, I want to hire you so we can help one another out and feed our families.

But what if someone doesn't do a good job, doesn't follow through, doesn't meet expectations, doesn't complete the work, or doesn't get paid for the work they did do—what then? What if you lend a brother some cash and you set up a payment plan but six months later he stops sending the checks? You need that money. But he says he can't afford to pay it any more. What do you do? How should Christians respond when something has gone wrong in a business deal with another Christian in their church? That's what was happening in Corinth and this is what Paul addresses in 6:1–11.

### **Do not take your brethren to secular courts.**

In our society we know the answer is to demand your rights and then if those rights aren't honored you go get a lawyer. We have between 80 and 90 million lawsuits filed every year in this country. Seventy percent of the world's lawyers are in America with 50,000 being added every year. The litigious nature of our

society can creep into the church. In recent years, a pastor sued his denomination for age discrimination because he couldn't find a church willing to hire him for the salary he demanded. The board of trustees of another church in Louisiana filed suit to fire their pastor. A few days later, another group, claiming to be the real trustees, filed a countersuit, asking that those who had filed the previous suit be removed as church members. A family in Illinois sued their church for injuries their 15-year-old son suffered at a church picnic when he fell out of a tree. His parents had watched him climb the tree and warned him to be careful, but after he fell, they sued the church.

This is what was happening in Corinth. Look what Paul says in v. 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?"* It's interesting their society was much like ours in this regard. William Barclay says, "The Greeks were characteristically a litigious people. The law courts were one of their chief entertainments." You can imagine that makes for a very unhappy church. Imagine showing up on Sunday morning and sitting next to someone who is suing you! It makes it kind of tough to sing "They will know we are Christians by our love" together. It makes for a very awkward prayer meeting when people are asking for prayer to beat one another in court. This was going on in Corinth. And Paul wasn't happy about it. He says, "...do you dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?" Paul is aghast at this. He can't believe they have the audacity to do this. This is crazy.

### **As believers we should settle disputes among ourselves.**

Right off the bat Paul says how to instead deal with these matters. He indicates they should have gone before the saints. Most of us think of "saints" as dead guys, but this is Paul's stock in trade term for everyday believers like you and me. He's saying, "Listen, you should keep these matters in the family. Take care of these issues among yourselves." Remember in chapter 5 he said they had no business judging unbelievers. Well, here he kind of reverses that and says you shouldn't let unbelievers judge you either. You should deal with these things in-house.

What does this look like? Say you're doing a real estate deal with someone in the church. You're selling them a home. You're giving them a good deal because you care about them. But when the deal goes through they don't pay you everything they said they

would. What do you do? Do you hire a lawyer? No. You try to work it out. If you can't, you go to the leaders of the church. You both agree to give them your case and do what they tell you. If the leaders are smart they'll bring in a godly real estate agent, or mortgage broker, someone who gets these things, and let them look at the facts and advise them in making a judgment.

There are a lot of reasons we may not want to do that. Perhaps we feel the church isn't capable to deal with this kind of thing. Why leave it to the amateurs? Or perhaps we're embarrassed to have to deal with these kinds of things in front of our friends. What will they think of us? Or perhaps we feel for some reason we won't get a fair shake; our rights won't really be upheld. Maybe we don't really trust the leaders of the church to be fair.

So in the next few verses Paul gives some reasons why they should do this. The first reason he gives is when you consider the destiny of believers you can see they're more than competent to deal with these things. Look at verses 2–6.

**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? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life? So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? 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, but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?**

This is wild, isn't it? I'll bet you never would have thought of this. Paul says your destiny as God's holy people is to participate with Him in judging the world, and that includes angels. Where did Paul get that? Listen to these verses: Dan. 7:27 says, *"Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One..."* In Matt. 19:28 Jesus says to his disciples, *"Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."* And remember Rev. 20:4, *"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God...and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."* Paul is saying here: "Hey man, are you telling me you who are going to sit on thrones and judge the world and angels can't even take on these measly little business squabbles?" That's how Paul sees them. We think they're big things, but to Paul they're small compared to the things we'll deal with in the age to come. So Paul says, "Come on! You Corinthians are so proud of all your wisdom! Now you're telling me you can't find one guy in your church wise enough to deal with something like this?" It's kind of like if you had one of

the Supreme Court justices at your disposal to make a decision on a minor traffic offense but you declined to use him in favor of someone fresh out of law school. It doesn't make sense.

That's the first reason: the body of Christ is more than competent to deal with these matters. The second reason is very simply put—we're family. We're brethren. Four times in these verses he reminds us we're brothers, and of course when he says "brothers" that includes sisters. Verse 5, *"...decide between his brethren."* Verse 6, *"brother goes to law with brother..."* Then look down at v. 8, *"You do this even to your brethren."* So Paul is pulling out the family card and saying, "Families, don't do this to one another." Of course, in our society they actually do do this to one another. But the idea is it shouldn't be that way. Brothers love one another. They look out for one another. I go back to something I said last week—a lot of this sounds foreign to us because we don't have the kind of intimate relationships within the church family Paul assumes exist. We buzz into church five minutes late and bolt during the last song. That's the only contact we have with the church family all week long. So for this to make sense we need to step into a deeper experience of community. We need to be sharing life with fellow believers. Sometimes it takes a crisis like the one Vicente went through to show us how significant our church family really is; how much we really need each other.

There is one more reason Paul gives here for doing this. You have to read between the lines a bit but look again at v. 6. *"...but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?"* Why does he say *"...and that before unbelievers?"* He's saying the real shame here is the dirty laundry of the church is aired out for the whole world to see. In John 13:35 Jesus says, *"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* So the world looks at this and they have a field day because it gives them one more reason for their unbelief: "You Christians are no better than we are; you don't have anything different than we have. You need a judge to come and settle matters between you and force you to do the right thing. What have you got to offer us?" So the cause of Christ is degraded in society.

Tim LaHaye, writer of the *Left Behind* books sued the Christian producer of the movies that were made based on his books for not making a better movie. LaHaye's lawyer stated: "We wanted to provide a really strong Christian message." I hope you see the irony in that! Yeah right. So let's sue our brother so we can get the message out! (<http://www.crosswalk.com/news/508534/>)

You may be wondering, how far does this go? Are there ever exceptions to this? The answer is yes. We have to balance this teaching out with Romans 13:1–7. There Paul says God institutes secular government and law, and he works for justice through the government and through the court of law. We should be law-abiding citizens. So when someone breaks a law we have

every right to call the cops. Perhaps a helpful distinction is between sins and crimes. The church deals more with sins than with crimes. If a crime is committed, call the proper authorities. If a sin is committed, don't call them. They won't come. Don't call the police and say, "Come over right now! Someone in my church lied to me. That's wrong. It says so in the Bible." They won't come, right? You're on your own. You can't file a suit because someone got drunk or gossiped. Those aren't crimes. Those are sins. So a lot of things only fit in the church because we deal with sins. Other things fit in the courts because they're crimes. I know sometimes there is a fine line here, but it's a helpful distinction. God forbid, if someone ever abused one of our children here in Sunday School, that's a crime and we'll get the proper authorities involved. The Catholic Church has made a huge mistake on this one and they're paying for it. In this passage Paul isn't giving the church the right to cover up crimes.

### **Even better, we should be willing to take the loss.**

But Paul isn't finished. He wants to take this one step further. Look at verses 7–8.

**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? On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. You do this even to your brethren.**

Paul says let's go back to the root of this whole thing. Let's go back to the dispute itself. The very fact you've allowed this thing to get this far is a defeat for you. You've lost even before you go to court. It would be better if you just took the loss. It would be better if you just ate it. It would be better if you just decided there are more important things in life than getting your rights vindicated; some things are more important than money. Isn't this what Jesus taught? In Matt. 5:39–40 he says, *"Do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also."* And of course he modeled the same thing he taught. Peter writes, *"When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly"* (1 Pet. 2:23).

That's hard for us to swallow, isn't it? It seems there are more important things in life than winning. There are more important things than our rights being recognized. Sometimes it's even better just to eat it. This is hard for us. Why is it so hard? A lot of reasons. It might be our pride. By taking the loss we end up looking like the one who was wrong in the first place. We hate the thought of that person looking like he won. Or it might be greed. We can't let the money go. Sometimes it's justice. God is a God of justice. So we fight to the bitter end in the name of justice. And sometimes when we're defending others who can't defend themselves that's good. But most of the time it's all about

me. We forget we'll never get perfect justice here on earth. So what do we do? We wait for that last judgment; that day at the end where Jesus straightens it all out, and you finally get your day in court.

A lot of this is a faith issue for us. The only way you'll be able to let something like this go and let yourself be wronged is to believe God will take care of you. God will provide for you and in the end God will bring everything to light. God will judge. If you don't believe that you'll never be able to let it go.

### **Those who wrong and defraud forget who they are.**

So Paul goes on and he reminds the Corinthians of who they are and that the way they're acting contradicts that. Look at verses 9–11.

**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, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 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.**

Sometimes we rip these verses out of their context. I've heard sermons on these verses that have nothing to do with the issues Paul is dealing with in chapter 6. That's a mistake. Paul is saying people who wrong and defraud others won't get away with it. If you live this way and call yourself a Christian you're actually deceived. You think they can say, "Oh I am a Christian. I have eternal life. I've accepted Jesus so I have my fire insurance." But all the while you live a wretched life. Paul says, "You're deceived. People who live like that will not inherit the kingdom of God."

We're not talking here about people who struggle with sin. We all struggle with sin. We're not talking about people who are repentant over sin. We're talking about people who live this way and have no sorrow over it but somehow still think they're saved. Paul says, "You're deceived." I believe the evangelical church makes a huge mistake here. We give people assurance of salvation because they prayed a prayer when they were six years old and maybe even got baptized but there is **no** fruit in their lives. It's not that these people have lost their salvation but rather that perhaps they were never saved in the first place.

He gives a long list. We don't have time to go into every single item on this list. Notice he includes some things we might consider real bad but they're right alongside of some things we might be tempted to think aren't so bad. We think fornicators and adulterers, they're bad. Homosexuals, thieves, they're even worse. By the way, homosexuality was rampant in that culture. That's why he mentions both active and passive participants in

this. But then he talks about those who are covetous and those who drink too much and those who revile or slander or gossip. We tend to tolerate and overlook those things. But Paul puts them all side to side. Sin is sin. You see, all of these things have as their root selfishness; the kind of grasping and demanding that the Corinthians were falling into in their lawsuits. Even sexual sin has selfishness at its root. Paul says you can't live in and practice any of those things and expect to inherit the kingdom of God.

Don't you love what he says here? *"...and such were some of you..."* The church is made up of people who used to live that way. We're not any better than anyone else. But something happened to us. Someone changed us. What does he say? He says, "And such were some of you, **but** you were washed. **But** you were sanctified. **But** you were justified." All of that was done in the name of Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. When you become a Christian something happens to you. It's not like you decide you're going to be a different person and turn over a new leaf in life. No! Salvation is all about what God does for you. He washes you clean from sin. He sets you apart as holy. He declares you not guilty and gives you a righteous status before him.

Really what Paul is saying to the Corinthians is what we've seen before in this letter. He keeps coming back to this: You need to live out what you are. You've been washed, set apart, justified; now live what you are. Don't act like people who have no inheritance in the kingdom of God. I love what John Newton once said, "I am not what I ought to be. I am not what I wish to be. I am not

what I hope to be. Yet I can truly say I am not what I once was. By the grace of God I am what I am."

## Conclusion

So here is what it comes down to: Have we been transformed? Are we different? Are we brothers and sisters in Christ? Then whatever disputes we have, let's settle it. With love and compassion for each other, let's deal with the issues between us. If we need to, let's call in a third party of godly character and objective reasoning and talk about our hurts. Let's settle it. No sense holding it in and letting it fester. That only poisons us further against being able to love our brother. We won't just reluctantly accept whatever decision is made but deep down in our hearts stay resentful; nurse the bitterness. We're going to settle it. We're going to get to the heart of the matter and learn to forgive each other.

It makes perfect sense to do this as we celebrate the death of Jesus this morning in communion. He took the wrongs you committed and chose to suffer for them. He did this so you could be washed. As you hold in your hands symbols of the body and blood of Jesus poured out for you, how can you hold on to those wrongs done to you? May our actions and our hearts match what these symbols represent.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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