

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Legalism – The Enemy of the Gospel</b>
<b>Reference</b>	1 Corinthians 6:1-11
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<b>Speaker</b>	David Adams

But you were sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the spirit of our God, so how in the world can you cat that way is what Paul was telling the Corinthian Christians. They had been called to be holy, to be saints, so how in the world could they continue to act as if they were unbelievers. Paul asked that question of the Corinthian Christians back in the first century and if he were here today, he would probably ask that of us too.

We are preaching through the book of 1-Corinthians and by preaching through a book of scripture sometimes you get the topics that you normally would not get to if you just gave everybody a free sermon. When we go through a book like this we come across problems that they had, grapple with some difficult things that apply to everyday life and we will see as we continue through the study of this book there life was not a whole lot different from ours. We face some of the same problems, some of the same temptations and we too sometimes succumb to some of these temptations.

Many of the Corinthians Christians were influenced more by their culture than they were by the teachings of holy scripture and by the teachings of Jesus. So in this letter, Paul is trying to help them understand what it means to follow Jesus and when you acknowledge Jesus as the Lord of your life how does that look in your daily life.

So our text today as I mentioned is going to be looking more specifically at lawsuits and when you think of the text from last week to this week, you think this is kind of disjointed, from incest to immorality to lawsuits then back to immorality, but we will see that there are some of the same underlying issues of the heart behind many of these problems. So today as we look at the scripture, I want us to ask three specific questions:

1. What issue is being addressed?
2. What were the resultant problems?
3. What are some helps to deal with the issues?

We can get some help for our daily lives seeing helps that can help us to follow Christ more clearly.

## What issue is being addressed?

The answer is lawsuits, suing. In any society, it seems like there is going to be conflict and conflict is expressed in different ways but it seems like in the Greek culture their favorite way of resolving conquest was 'let's go to court'. When we look at the issue facing the church in Corinth, we will see that the issue was not just lawsuits, but more specifically it was one Christian suing his Christian brother and then it went even further than that, it was not only one Christian suing his Christian brother but then they were doing that before unbelievers. Paul says,

I Corinthians 6:1

"When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?"

He is asking why in the world do you parade your dirty laundry before the entire city. Now Christians never claim to be perfect. We admit, yes we sin. We acknowledge, yes we have disagreements, there are conflicts but there is nothing advantageous to publicizing these and proclaiming our shortcomings before the entire world. Now one word of explanation about the terminology that Paul uses in this text, first of all he is not castigating judges, he is not castigating lawyers, he is not castigating the judicial system of his day, he is not saying that all of the Greek and Romans would have been corrupt. When he talks about the unrighteous, he is not talking about people that are just so immoral, they could never render a just verdict, but rather he is saying these people are not in a right standing before God. God is the one who makes us righteous and if these people have never responded in faith to Lord Jesus then in God's eyes they are unrighteous. So he is saying, why are you taking your case to unbelievers. Another translation besides unrighteous will sometime say the unjust and again he is not saying, you will never get a fair trial because all the judges are unjust but he is saying the just in God's eyes are those who have been justified by faith. So he is basically just saying, why are you taking your case to non-Christians instead of going to the saints and again saints he is not talking about people who are perfect but people who have been set apart for God, who have been called to be holy.

He is saying, solve it among yourselves rather than taking it to unbelievers. So the issue being addressed is lawsuits for one Christian suing another Christian and they are parading it before the entire community. When you look at this issue of the lawsuits, it goes deeper than just the lawsuits. There were some other underlying issues and we will look at several of those. The other problem is that the cultural norms of the world were invading the church. Corinth was a very corrupt, immoral decadent city, it was notorious in ancient times for

its wickedness. It was the "Sin City" of its time and people actually would travel there to participate in some of the sinful possibilities there in the city. So when you look at how corrupt the city was, it is a miracle of God and a testimony to God's grace that people in a city like that actually turned in repentance and faith to God. It is a miracle that a church was started in a place like this, but the people that accepted Christ did not become perfect overnight. When a person accepts Christ, yes they make that commitment but that doesn't mean they will never sin again. That was the problem in Corinth. Sometimes, it is hard to distinguish the sin as the whole culture was doing that. That's evidently what was happening in Corinth because the Greeks were known for being a litigious society. It was as common practice. It was almost like a hobby.

So if that's the culture you are brought up in, everybody goes to court, it is a lot of fun, it is a lot of entertainment for them. Then when people accepted Christ in Corinth, they bring in this culture to influence the church. It seems like the Corinthian Christians were allowing the church to be influenced by culture more than they were trying to influence the city for Christ. So the Corinthians after letting the culture invade the church, they needed to hear these words from Paul, don't be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. The way a Christian thinks and acts should be different from the way that an unbeliever thinks and acts.

There were also additional issues behind the lawsuits, in addition to just the fact that there were these cultural norms invading the church. Perhaps the biggest problem that they were facing was sin. That was what was behind the lawsuits. For example, the sin of pride and arrogance, which will then lead to a quarrelsome spirit, where you have to push yourself and your ideas and your rights through. Several times in the letter Paul has addressed the issue of pride and we have seen what a major problem that was among the Corinthian Christians. This is not a problem unique to that day and time, we all struggle with this. Sometimes out of a desire to promote ourselves or to defend ourselves we do things that do not reflect the spirit of Christ.

So what is being addressed here not only the law cases, not only the culture invading the church but several sins, another sin that seems to be prevalent is the sin of greed. That's frequently the main reason behind a lawsuit when you are suing somebody. Sometimes, it goes to the point of even trying to take advantage of a situation. So that's what the Corinthians were doing and Paul even says, you do wrong and you defraud even your brothers. So going to court was not just to get what was do you rightfully but a way to make money at your brother's expense. So we see the sin of greed playing into the issues here.

Another underlying sin behind the lawsuits I think would be this desire to get revenge or a lack of forgiveness. We also see that back in verse 8.

1 Corinthians 6:8

But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!

It is definitely not a Christian attitude, although quite a common attitude not only then but also today. Now if go into the Old Testament, it did say in the law that an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth but the idea behind this law in the Old Testament was not revenge. The purpose of this in the Old Testament was to provide an appropriate just punishment for a crime. So the Old Testament in saying an eye for a eye is not to say get revenge, it say there is a limit to a just verdict but remember Jesus went beyond the just verdict. Jesus said,

Matthew 5:38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ 39 But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

So the Corinthian Christians were not even living up to the Old Testament maximum of a just retribution, they were wanting revenge and they definitely were not following the words of Jesus. So all of these sins can also be lumped together and we can talk about the lack of love that is behind all of this. There was just no evident brotherly love in the church in Corinth. This glaring lack of love for one another seems to pervade many of the problems that this church was facing and that’s probably the reason an entire chapter is devoted to the theme of love.

Chapter 13 is the corrective for all of the problems that Paul is addressing in this book.

1 Corinthians 13:4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.

That was not being practiced in Corinth. Maybe we should ask ourselves, do we love like that today. Put that type of love into practice, put that into action and that’s going to solve a lot of our problems and it would have helped to solve the problems that the church in Corinth were facing. It would have solved this problem of lawsuits that was being discussed in the text today.

The church in Corinth was not exercising church discipline. When these issues arise, the church as a whole needs to be involved. The church can help solve the problems, but in the Corinthian church, the church was divided, nobody was listening to anybody else, nobody was willing to sit down and have a cordial Christ like discussion. They were just willing to fight and argue, they wouldn't stand up for the right, they wouldn't necessarily lovingly point out what was wrong, so you see there are multitude of issues that were being addressed in this chapter by Paul. Lawsuits were the real problem but all of these other things caused even more problems.

### **What were the resultant problems?**

It is obvious that the Christian fellowship in Corinth was pretty much nonexistent. The relationships within the church were broken, no community to speak of, no body life. How can you enjoy one Christian fellowship with someone at worship on Sunday if the previous week he was suing you in court and trying to cheat you, it is not going to happen?

This is not the best way to develop a community. Broken relationships in a church are a result of the problems that they were facing. It was not only the broken relationships in the church but witness to the community was being damaged, destroyed even. The gospel message includes God loves you, God wants to change your life and transform you, God wants to give you a new heart and fill you with his love, come to my church and I will sue you. It just doesn't work that way. You have zero credibility talking about the love of God if there is no love of God evident in your life.

What kind of witness does the church have in their community? None.

The witness to your community is damaged, it can be destroyed.

### **C. Shame/dishonor to themselves & to cause of Christ**

In pride, people go to court to defend their honor but in reality they bring in shame upon themselves, bringing shame upon the church as a whole and they are dishonoring the name of Christ. In verse 5, Paul said *I say this to your shame!*

Shame on you, your behavior is shameful, no honor in what you are doing, you have dishonored yourself, you have dishonored the church and you have slandered the cause of Christ.

### **What are some helps to deal with these issues?**

We might say that you just need to stop it, but that doesn't do a whole lot of good as a general rule. You tell somebody to stop it and you don't give them any resources or any helps they might stop it for a while but they will probably continue to do it. So Paul wants to go ahead and give some practical helps on how they can stop it. So Paul first of all will tell the people, remember your destiny, back in verse 1 Paul had introduced the problem with the lawsuits where one Christian goes and sues another Christian and goes before a nonbelievers and then he wanted to hold out an eternal perspective to the believers and he told them in verse 2,

1 Corinthians 6:2 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!

So look at the reasoning here, Paul is saying in the future you, as well as, other believers will be judging the world, you will even be judging angels, so if you Christians would be judging angels, surely you can work together enough to discern and judge and resolve these trivial cases that are among yourselves. Now the Corinthian Christians probably would not consider their case to be trivial, nothing that concerns me is trivial would be there idea, but from an eternal perspective the things they were dealing with were not really so important. Things like pride, power, influence, esteem, money, these same seem important to us now but they really fall short when you look at things from an eternal perspective. So Paul is telling them, remember your destiny, remember you will judge the world, remember you will even judge angels. Now you might ask, what does all of that mean?

Paul more than likely when he was writing this, he was possibly thinking of a passage in the Book of Daniel,

Daniel 7:9 "As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. 10 A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened...13 ... and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be

destroyed... 18 But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.'

So in this passage from Daniel, it appears that God the father sits in judgment over the world, he gives the kingdom to the son of man and from the New Testament we understand that to be Jesus, but then the saints, those of us who belong to God we receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever. Jesus alludes to this in the gospels. For example, in the book of Matthew

Matthew 19:28 Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Paul seems to be expanding this to include all believers. We don't know what is going to be involved, we have no idea how that's going to look but the point that Paul is making, since you are going to have such a big responsibility in the future, surely you can deal with minor issues today. You might ask, what about that part in verse 3 that talks about judging angels. Is it going to be the good angels or the bad ones or both. Again, we don't know. You can only speculate and that's really not worth your time, because this is the only time in the scripture that we find this phrase of us judging angels. So it is the only information we have and evidently that is all we need to know from God's point of view. So no need to speculate and don't let a verse like this distract you from the point that Paul is trying to get.

The point he is making is, if you are going to be judging angels, you need to be judging and discerning well today. You can prepare for your future role, how can you prepare while today in everyday life if you are in a dispute practice discernment and ask, are my actions based on wanting to bring glory to God. Are my actions springing from a love for God or I love him with all my heart, soul, mind and strength. Are my actions based on loving my neighbor as myself? Ask yourself, am I only thinking of myself or am I thinking of Christ? Am I thinking of Christ body, the church? Am I motivated by arrogance and pride? Am I willing to forgive? Are my actions leading other people to faith in Christ?

So we will judge the world in the future, now we need to judge our actions, discern our motives and put into practice this discerning that God allows us to do now. So what are the helps to deal with the issues, first of all remember your destiny and expand your horizons to an eternal perspective. A second help that we can get from this passage is, use your God-given resources. Look again at verses 4 and 5

1 Corinthians 6:4 So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? 5 I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers?

Elsewhere in this letter, it is obvious that were several people in the church in Corinth who thought that their wisdom was superior, but as we saw back in chapters 1 and 2, the wisdom that they were showing and bragging about was a worldly wisdom and not Godly wisdom. They seem to think that they had some kind of special inside or some superior knowledge and so Paul is using sarcasm here and he is saying, if that's the case why don't you demonstrate it. Don't take it outside the church, use it, but in reality we do have at our disposal the wisdom of Christ.

God will give to all believers this mind of Christ if we allow him to do it. So then use this God-given resource of Godly wisdom to work together, to resolve conflicts and disagreements. Other God-given resources would include the Bible. One passage of scripture that can help us in resolving problems is what Jesus said to do when there is a problem in Matthew chapter 18

Matthew 18:15 "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

So this is the biblical way for dealing with the issues, the church in Corinth was facing, don't go to court, don't sue before ungodly people, use the resources that God has given to us, follow the example that we find in the scripture. Not only do we have the wisdom, the mind of Christ and the holy scripture, God's Holy Spirit is living within us. There are wise mature, honest godly Christians that we can avail of their wisdom, their understanding. So let matters stay among the believers in the church.

### **Give priority to your Christian witness**

Guard your Christian testimony, bring honor to the cause of Christ, do nothing to bring dishonor. The Corinthian Christians were doing just the opposite

1 Corinthians 6:6 but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? 7 To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you.



They were bringing shame on the name of Christ. They were hurting their witness before nonbelievers and even the person that won the court case was actually suffering a defeat because he was being defeated spiritually. Their Christian witness had been damaged and now he could no longer share with any kind of credibility about the love of God. Guard your Christian witness, guard your Christian testimony.

*Someone else's eternal salvation and your opportunity to share the gospel with someone else that's more important than your rights, more important than your pride, more important than your saving face and more important than your money.*

### **Be True To Your Calling**

After talking about all of the problems related to the lawsuits, Paul then listed several sinful behaviors that needed to be dealt with. He says, some of you were like that but you were washed and sanctified in the name of Lord Jesus Christ. Paul reminds them of what he had said at the very beginning of the letter. Remember your calling, they were called to be saints, called to be set apart, to belong to God, called apart to be holy. So remember, be true to your calling, to be true to our calling would include loving like Jesus did. Jesus says,

John 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

It includes forgiving people as God has forgiven us.

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

And it includes being willing to endure wrong and suffer loss if necessary. Paul said,

1 Corinthians 6:7 To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?

It is totally foreign to our instincts, but it is true, and it is biblical. It is God's way. Remember we have the example of Jesus.

1 Peter 2:20 But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 21 For to this you have been called, because

Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued **entrusting himself to Him who judges justly**.

In dispute trust that the judge of the universe will handle honestly and justly, God will deal with the situation.

24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

This is the gospel message. This is the message that can change our heart, take out that heart of stone and put in a heart of flesh, give us God's love in our heart, knowing that Christ died for our sins, he was raised on the third day and when we come to him in repentance in faith we can have our sins forgiven, we can be given new life. So Paul is telling that people, be true to your calling.

### **Remember, God is at Work**

1:9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

God will perfect you onto the day of judgement. God is at work. It is not our individual effort just to try to be better, yes we need a willing heart and yes there are some sacrifices, yes there is some individual effort, but it is God who is working in us that makes this possible. So daily we want to come to God, just like we did at the very beginning of our walk with Christ, coming to him in confession of our sins. That's not just a one-time thing because daily we sin and responding in faith, trusting him to lead our lives.

The advice that Paul gave to the church in Corinth he will give to us also. We can trust God. So remember your calling, remember your destiny, use the God-given resources that you have, count on God to work within you.