

Lake Cities Community Church
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Series: 1st Corinthians

“What’s Wrong about Rights?”
1 Cor 6:1-11

Many years ago a flock of more than a thousand quail lived together in a forest in India. They would have been happy, but that they were in great dread of their enemy, the quail catcher. He used to imitate the call of the quail; and when they gathered in response, he would throw a net over them, stuff them into his basket, and carry them off to be sold.

Now, one of the quails was very wise, and he said, “Brothers! Next time, as soon as the enemy throws his net over us, let us each put his head through a mesh in the net and then all lift up together and fly away with it. When we have flown far enough, we can let the net drop on a thorn bush and escape.”

All agreed to the plan. The next day when the quail catcher threw his net, all the birds lifted it together in the way the wise bird has told them, flew away and threw the net on a thorn bush, and escaped. This happened many days, until at last the quail catcher’s wife grew angry and asked her husband, “Why is it that you never catch any more quail?”

He said, “The trouble is that all the birds work together and help one another. If they would only quarrel, I could catch them fast enough.”

A few days later, one of the quail accidentally kicked the head of one of his brothers as they landed on the feeding ground. “Who hit my head?” angrily inquired the quail who was hurt. “Don’t be angry, I didn’t mean to injure you,” said the first bird. But the brother quail went on arguing. “You dumb bird! And not only that - I lifted all the weight of the net! You

didn't help at all," he cried. This made the first quail angry, and brought forth additional accusations, which involved a third bird and then a fourth; and before long all the birds were drawn into the dispute.

Then the quail catcher saw his opportunity. He imitated the cry of the quail and cast his net over those who came together. They were all still boasting and quarreling, and they did not help one another lift the net. So the hunter, with a smile lifted the net and put it right into his basket. (*Adapted from a story in The Moral Compass by, William Bennett*)

In life, as illustrated by this ancient parable, it is natural for us to fight with one another, because when you get kicked in the head, *it hurts*, and we very naturally lash out in return. And then in response to the lashing out, the other person accuses us. And in response to the accusation we defend ourselves and pull in others, and on it goes until we are defeated by our conflict. Then Satan with a smile captures us in his net and sets us aside useless to the Kingdom of Christ.

I know that many of you have experience that kind of conflict and hurt. And praise God there is a better way! Praise God that like the wise quail in the story, we have a voice of wisdom, in the Scriptures, presenting to us a plan that causes us to work together in unity and harmony, overcoming common enemies. A plan that results not in defeat, but in victory!

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter six, verses 1-11. As you find your way to chapter six, let me set the context for us. If you still have your book chart, you will see that today we finish the first major section of the book, chapters 1-6. In these chapters Paul has

been responding to a report that he received from the house of Chloe (1:11). Chloe out of her concern for the church told Paul that the church was sinking quickly in the mire of division, immorality and escalating conflict. We have studied these topics over the past several weeks and today we see that the conflict has gotten so bad that church members were suing one another in secular court. Paul tells them that though the conflict has defeated them (6:7) – if they will listen to wisdom, they might yet achieve victory.

I. 6:1 – The Problems & Reason #1

Let's move through the text together highlighting the salient points. Verse one: **Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor... (6:1a)** Stop there. What does it mean that they have cases against each other? It means there are victims. People who have been offended, defrauded, slandered, ticked off. It means we have people in the church with axes to grind, with agendas, who are seeking justice. In other words we have conflict that has been built up, organized, packaged and submitted in triplicate to the courts.

With your cases do you... **dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?" (6:1b)**. The word dare means, "I can't hardly believe this is true." In the Greek text the word dare is the FIRST word in the sentence and therefore emphasized.

In other words, **the problem here is not their problems, but how they were seeking to resolve their problems**. Instead of handling them "in-house," they were airing their dirty laundry before the watching world. Paul is saying - "That is not acceptable. How dare you do that!" Why? He is going to provide at least three reasons why this is not a good thing.

The first reason, in verse one is that by and large the judges are **“unrighteous”** people – that is they are not Christians. And according to Paul, look at verse 4 – unbelievers have no part in the governance of the church: **1Cor. 6:4 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?** We would not appoint an unbelieving person, regardless of how moral or ethical they were, to the elder board would we? Paul says, don’t submit your grievance before them. In verses 9-10 Paul reminds the Corinthians that there is a great difference between the values of the world and the value of the Kingdom of God. And unrighteous people will not have a stake in the coming Kingdom: **1Cor. 6:9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived...**

Paul is not disparaging the legal system, lawyers or courts. He is merely saying that when it comes to Christian conflict in the church the saints should judge the saints. He began this argument in chapter five with his judgment of the immoral man. We police ourselves based on our values and priorities.

Listen to the words of former Chief Justice of the Supreme court Warren Burger: “One reason our courts have become overburdened is that Americans are increasingly turning to the courts for relief from a range of personal distresses and anxieties. Remedies for personal wrongs that once were considered the responsibility of institutions other than the courts are now boldly asserted as legal "entitlements." The courts have been expected to fill the void created by the decline of church, family and neighborhood unity.” Paul would say “amen” to that because one of the purposes of the church is to help its member work out their differences, big and small.

But let's pause for an important caveat. Question: Are there any occasions where the secular courts systems might be rightly used by Christians? Yes – I believe there are at least two exceptions. After seeing Paul's strong admonition against taking our conflicts to a secular courtroom I don't mean to confuse you or contradict the teaching here, but it is important we look at the whole counsel of God. Paul teaches, for example, in Romans 13 that God has set up secular government to maintaining order and we are to be in submission to them. Therefore, in most **cases of criminal activity** we are morally obligated to include secular authorities.

Both the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant serve (unfortunately) as spectacular examples of poor interpretation when they have in the past used 1 Corinthians 6 as an excuse not to bring sexual molesters to justice, while the laws of our land require us to report such abuse. Rather than protecting the church, this has brought the very shame Paul here is trying to avoid in this chapter. I was involved in case many years ago where a sexual molester of 13-15 year old girls appealed to the principle of 1 Cor 6 as justification for our church not calling in the police. Later we found out that several other churches bought into this poor theology!! But thankfully our elder board looked not only at 1 Cor 6, but also Romans 13. We called the police and this man was brought to justice in a secular court.

Secondly, I believe, secular courts can play an important role when **defending the rights of the poor and defenseless**. We mentioned earlier it is orphan Sunday. One of the best uses of the justice system is to stand up for orphans and the poor. God Himself is presented in the Bible as a defense attorney for the powerless. Psalm 82 reads: [Psa. 82:1](#)
[God presides over heaven's court; he pronounces judgment on the judges...Psa. 82:3](#) "Give

fair judgment to the poor and the orphan; uphold the rights of the oppressed and the destitute. [Psa. 82:4](#) Rescue the poor and helpless; deliver them from the grasp of evil people.

So there are times when the courts can and should be used as a godly option for dealing with conflicts and sinful human behavior. **But** – (and here we come back to 1 Cor 6) 98% of the time, IN THE CHURCH, our conflicts and wrongdoing should be handed in house.

Verses 2-3: Reason #2 – You are Competent

Paul gives the second reason for adjudicating matters internally in verses 2-3 [1Cor. 6:2](#) 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? [1Cor. 6:3](#) Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life? The second reason not to take your case to secular court is that you are **competent to handle them with God's help**. Paul looks into the future and says, "People, one day, perhaps very, very soon, when Jesus returns and His kingdom is set up physically on earth – you will be given positions of authority. You will be judges over men and women, and even angels. Therefore how can you punt that responsibility to the law courts?"

By the way, I realize this might be new information for some of you. Quick explanation: The Bible teaches that when Jesus returns, the Kingdom of God which is now largely spiritual will become physical. The world God intended before Adam and Eve sinned will finally be actualized, and believers will be given positions of responsibility and

leadership position in the Kingdom of God. We don't know exactly what this will look like or when it will occur, but you have a job promotion coming in the Kingdom.

Paul's argument is that if God is going to entrust you with that kind of responsibility then, then certainly you are qualified to handle the mediation of conflicts today! (for more on the coming Kingdom see Dan 7:22, Romans 8:7, 2 Tim 2:12, Rev 20:4, , Matt 19:28).

Verse 5 - The Solution!

Paul goes on, verse five, [1Cor. 6:5](#) 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.* Paul here pulls out sharp sarcasm. The Corinthians promoted themselves as being unusually wise. They wore t-shirts that said, "The Wise Ones." Paul is mocking them (in a loving way) because even though they claimed to be so wise, they were turning to pagan courts for help. They couldn't come up with one available wise person to help them work through their problems.

But, by introducing the concept of wisdom, Paul does remind us that we need wise and godly men and women to adjudicate and mediate conflict within the church. And (in their defense) it can be difficult to find such men and women willing to step in between warring parties. Who of us feels qualified to set down between a warring husband and wife, or to try to mediate between two people of opposite personalities who can't get along?

But we need wise people! The First Baptist church in Montgomery Alabama rejoiced in the calling of their new pastor, James H. DeVotie a young and idealistic man. The year was 1835 and they needed someone to lead them through significant cultural changes. He was confident in his abilities to preach and lead the church and began to make changes. The

congregation, however, saw his confidence as pride and interpreted his changes as being unnecessary and harsh. Their relationship quickly deteriorated into accusations and arguments. At a meeting in May 1835, church members invited five neighboring ministers to come and help resolve their differences. Only one had the courage to respond - a man by the name of Alexander Travis, who made his way to Montgomery to try to unify the two hostile camps.

Pastor Travis was a man of wisdom. In order to maintain neutrality, he refused to stay in the homes of either group, registering instead at a hotel. After each faction had its say separately, Travis called a general prayer meeting. Pastor DeVotie at first refused to attend but later hid behind a door to listen. Travis prayed a passionate prayer for contrition, repentance, and unity that so moved DeVotie that he walked down the aisle in tears to pray for a restoration of fellowship. The two parties were reconciled to each other. But it took the outside involvement of a wise mediator. Solomon said, [Prov. 16:16](#) **How much better to get wisdom than gold, to choose understanding rather than silver!** You can't put a price tag on the beauty of two people formerly in conflict now reconciled!

Verses 6-8 – Reason #3 / High View of the Church

Paul's third reason for not taking a fellow believer to court is found in verses six and seven: [1Cor. 6:6](#) **but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?** [1Cor. 6:7](#) **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?**

The third reason not to take church conflict to secular courts is that **it is better to be wronged than to damage the church of Jesus Christ**. We have seen this theme several times previously (3:15-17). It is better to take the hit yourself: to lose the money, to suffer the slander or indignity, than it is to drag the church through the mud. Paul has a very **high view of the church**. In fact it is so high that 95% of us do not share that view. To be OK with being treated unfairly goes against everything in us and in our culture -- and so in my book 1 Corinthians 6:7 wins the award for being the #1 verse in the Bible that is least likely to ever be applied in real life.

Ken Sande, the President of Peacemaker's ministry who has worked with thousands of attorneys (and is himself an attorney) said: "No attorney I have talked to thought that Christians were noticeably less likely to file a lawsuit than a non-Christian." He estimates that conservatively "Born again Christians in the U.S. file 4 to 8 million lawsuits every year, often against other Christians, costing 20 to 40 billion dollars." Though not often applied, we must learn to give up our rights if we are going to live in unity with one another.

In the summer of 1986, two ships collided in the Black Sea off the coast of Russia. Hundreds of passengers died as they were hurled into the icy waters below. News of the disaster was further darkened when an investigation revealed the cause of the accident. It wasn't a technology problem like radar malfunction--or even thick fog. The cause was human stubbornness. Each captain was aware of the other ship's presence nearby. Both could have steered clear, but according to news reports, neither captain wanted to give way to the other. Each was too proud to yield first. By the time they came to their senses, it was too late. (*Closer Walk*, December, 1991).

Because we are unwilling to give up our rights we collide over and over with people. But sometimes people do give up their rights. I can think of a couple times in our church when one of you has been offended or wronged by someone else - and you choose to accept the wrong for the sake of unity. I can't share the examples but they were beautiful and show great maturity. I pray that you and I will be found worthy some day to give up a significant right for the sake of unity in the church.

Verse 9 – Be who you are!

Let's close our exposition with verse 11. Paul has described the unrighteous and their sinful nature and concluded by saying: **1Cor. 6:11 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.** Paul concludes his discussion about this topic by telling the Corinthians **to be who they are!!** You are sanctified. You are justified, now begin to live this way. He exhorts them again to grow up spiritually, so that they might build a godly church.

Application

Let's talk not for a moment about application. Paul's teaching translates almost without change across time and culture. Here are five quick points of application. First, don't take a fellow believer to court. If we have missed this point, we have missed the passage. We talked about a few exceptions, but for the most part, this is prohibited for believers. Second, seek reconciliation of an offended brother or sister. I call this "the hard work of the ministry." Most of us are, by nature, conflict-avoiders. However, for a church to

grow in maturity and to make an impact, we must keep short accounts, be quick to forgive and deal with issues as they come up. Third, Get help if needed. If you have tried to restore a relationship without success, ask for help – from a godly man or woman. From the elder board. Forth, help others when invited. When your friend calls you for help, or you are asked to work with two warring parties at work, don't be quick to say "no." Godly men and women must step forward to assist in peacemaking. You are competent with God's help. If you need coaching on peacemaking, we can provide that for you as well. And fifth Read LCCC's Relational Commitments, especially the section on assisted peacemaking, which I have put on the back of your handout (LCCC Relational Commitments, page three). We have attempted to build peacemaking principles within the culture and governance of our church. Those of us who are members, have already agreed to treat one another in this way. So I would encourage you to refamiliarize yourself with that document.

I would like to close with this short story in closing. Years ago, a large statue of Christ was erected high in the Andes on the border between Argentina and Chile. Called "Christ of the Andes," the statue symbolizes a pledge between the two countries that as long as the statue stands, there will be peace between Chile and Argentina. Shortly after the statue was erected, the Chileans began to protest that they had been slighted -- the statue had its back turned to Chile. Why should Jesus have his back always to them? It was offensive! Just when tempers were at their highest in Chile, a Chilean newspaperman saved the day. In an editorial that not only satisfied the people but made them laugh, the newspaper simply said, "The people of Argentina need more watching over than the people of Chile!"

I love the image of Christ watching over two parties – because in Christ we have

unity and harmony. As we live with one another, remember Christ is watching – and we need him to watch us, so that we might give up our rights, humble ourselves and repent as we seek unity in the church.