

**Intro:**

We're well into our series "Church: are you serious?" As we've been mentioning, our hope throughout this series is that, regardless if we are new or seasoned in our spiritual journey, we will move from distance and disgust to dedication as it relates to God, Jesus, and the spiritual community, called the "church" in the Bible. Our hope is that we can move toward spiritual health- individually speaking, and as a group- this is so important if we are to be a community of the love and mission of Jesus.

Our series has taken through the Bible book of 1 Corinthians, a book that is about an early spiritual community of Jesus that existed some 2000 years ago in the Roman city of Corinth. There's been a lot for us to learn from them, there's a lot that hits close to home for us today, even as we live in a totally different time period and world. Today, we touch on a section of the book that, like last week, has the potential to evoke some seemingly contradictory feelings, especially if we have a problem with Jesus and church.

Some of us will like this because it addresses hypocrisy. Yet at the same time some of us may not like this passage because it holds a certain moral standard that may get under our skin, get a little personal. We like the passage because it critiques problems we see; we don't like it because it may critique us. But if we want the former, we need to be open to the latter.

I pray we can open up ourselves to what God may have to say, regardless of where we come from- I believe he has something to say to each of us here; we are not here by chance. Let's take a look at our passage today as we talk about the topic of dealing with conflict in a spiritual community. We'll read the passage together, discuss bad and good conflict, and open it up for questions and comments before we close.

Read Text: 1 Corinthians 6:1-11

Now, conflict in a spiritual community, or in any relationship, is inevitable- its simply part of human relationship, whether we like it or not. Of course, conflict can be there because of something good- for example, growth and change in relationships tend to cause conflict, but that is something good. Take getting married, for example. It's a good change in life- not that everyone has to experience it. But it can bring a lot of conflict! Then there is conflict that comes not because of something good but something bad, something the Bible calls sin. Furthermore- the way we handle and work through conflict, not just the cause of conflict- can be both good and bad. This passage obviously focuses in on some bad ways the Corinthian community was dealing with it. But, there's some good as well.

Let's take a look at the bad first. The passage essentially has this to say: **Bad conflict- conflict caused by sin and handled in a bad way- is completely out of line with who we are as Jesus followers.**

Text: now, it seems pretty clear what's going on here- people in the church are taking each other to the public court (v.1). The words used in the original language refer to interpersonal civil issues, not criminal; we talking about issues that did not involve the immediate physical danger to the people or society as a whole. Now, to take each other to court, that's a bad thing, according to this passage. But there's a little bit more going on here. Studies of the time period have shown that the courts of that time were thoroughly corrupt, utilized by rich to get what they wanted. If you remember some of the background information we've discussed with the Corinthians, we know that the church had problems socio-economically speaking where the rich mistreat the poor (chapter 11 has it as an explicit problem). We don't know the exact details here in chapter 6, but it most likely involved the two socio-economic groups as well, where the rich, knowing that the courts were clearly to their advantage, were taking the poorer brothers and sisters there and getting what they wanted. In fact, the word used for the judges here is literally "unjust"- so there's an issue of injustice at work here. And note also how defrauding is brought up in v. 7. So there is a double evil here- not just that they are suing people in court, but that they are doing so with the intent of using the corrupt court for their advantage. This is bad conflict for sure.

But there's more. It's not just bad in and of itself, it's bad because it is completely out of line with who we are as Jesus followers; it's against our identity as Jesus followers.

Text: Four ways this goes against our identity...

*1. Against our identity as those who reign with Jesus and will judge the world (v.2-3).*

This is what Paul is saying in v.2-3: don't you know we will reign and judge the world, even angels? If we're doing that, can't we handle these little things ourselves?

This is a rather interesting point in the Bible. We don't know how it will work. But we do know it's because of our being united with Jesus, not our somehow being superior than others in and of ourselves. It's about Jesus, not us. You can look at some other passages that mention this. (Rev. 2:26-27. Matt. 19:28, Heb. 2:5-9).

*2. Against our identity as a growing community (v. 5)*

*3. Against our identity as a witness to the world of God's love (v.6)*

4. *Against our identity as the holy people of the eternal life. (v. 9-11)*

The words “wronged/do wrong/wrongdoers” in 7, 8, 9 are the same. And their in fact the same as the word in v.1- “ungodly” or “unjust.” We’re talking about act of injustice, what the passage is saying is that this behavior that is happening here is a serious sin, listed with others states of being that lead to life without God.

However, the passages point is in v.11- this is what you were; this is not what you are now. This is perhaps one of the most powerful statements in the Bible. You have a different identity- so be different!

A side note: this passage has generated a lot of heat because of its discussion on homosexuality. Go online for more.

Our context:

For some, this applies to us directly- we come from a background where taking people to court is somewhat normal. The message is clear for you in this passage: don’t do that with a brother or sister! There may be exceptions- in our extra study notes, there are some links to two lawyers who are Jesus followers and their take on the passage. But overall, the message is clear.

But for others of us (I would say many, though I could be wrong) can’t imagine ever doing this- that’s good. But the passage still has something to say, I believe, as we think about some of the internal attitudes that are involved in the act mentioned here. This passage still has something to say to us in terms of getting rid of those attitudes. For example, we can guess that some of the attitudes here include:

Bigotry- I’m better than you because of my race, culture, class, family.

Greed- I should get more than you.

Self-centeredness- I should get what I want, and I will step on anyone who stands in my way.

These attitudes are simply unacceptable. Consider the following: [James 4:1-2](#), [Luke 12:13-15](#)

Do any of these lurk beneath our hearts today? We need to rid ourselves of these.

And the reason is, we are new people, we have a different identity. Why do we keep living like we don’t have that identity?

**The Good: How do we conflict well, then?**

Two things noted in the text.

1. *Take care of it in house (v. 2, 5)*

Process: This is similar to Matt. 18:15-17

People: as a church, we need to be a place where people are being developed, becoming more and more like Jesus.

But there’s something more beneath that, having to do with an attitude of our hearts.

2. *Practice absorption and trust (v.7)*

This is from Jesus- his teaching ([Matt. 5:38-47](#)) and his life ([1 Peter 2:22-23](#)). It is elaborated in [Rom. 12:17-21](#). It involves taking a hit when wronged, not looking for revenge or payback, and trusting God to take care of matters. This is how Jesus showed God’s love- He took this hit, the punishment our wrong doing deserved- so that we could enter into a right relationship with God. And this is what we need.

Of course, some us will say this: “What they did was wrong. If I don’t stop them, they will hurt others.”

This is true. We’re not saying that you should not say anything when wronged, or that you should try and correct a situation. If you remember last week’s talk, there are clear instances where something needs to be stopped or else it will affect many others. But this has to do more with being personally wronged in light of the context. Yes, we should talk about it and try and correct a situation. But as we do so are our motivations correct- is there revenge or a desire to get something paid back? What if they disagree? Can we take the hit, trust Jesus, and love?

Let’s think of some examples.

a. First, with something that could be considered a grey issue, not black/white. Some of you know that I currently don’t earn a car, and so I’ve been borrowing a car when I need it. Not too long ago, Megan and Mikolai let me borrow their car. Let’s pretend, now, I accidentally ding their car. Now, some of you would think that I should pay for that ding- I definitely would just to let you know. But lets pretend I didn’t feel like I needed to (perhaps based on my culture or family background)- it was a risk he should have known about, it’s his responsibility as the owner, and in my estimation, he needs to let it go if he is truly my friend. What would this verse ask Mikolai to do? Matt. 18 would suggest that he should first talk about it with me privately and try and figure it out- hey, so what’s going on, how come we’re no seeing eye-to-eye? Let’s pretend I’m pretty rude about it, and I just don’t see it the way he does. What then? Well, perhaps we’d get someone else involved to maybe help get perspective. But after that, we still don’t agree with each other. Now what? Mikolai could take me to court, wage a crusade against me, things like that (that he would never do). Or he could take the hit, repay my seeming evil with good, trusting Jesus.

b. Dan Cookson Testimony. (This is beyond “civil.” It is criminal. But it gives us food for thought.)

“The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate. So it goes. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.” Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here?*

**Challenge:**

Conflict will come. That’s normal. How will we deal with it?  
Do we need to get right with God about our attitudes?  
Do we need to engage in certain steps?  
Is God asking us to be better at absorption and trust?

For seekers: do you realize that God absorbed the wrongs you committed against him? He came and took on the consequences of our wrong-doing. Will you accept that for yourself? You do so by letting him in your life as both the one who forgives and the one who leads.

**Extra Study Notes:**

On the general issue of if Christians can sue each other today, see the following articles by lawyers:

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/august6/27.66.html>

[http://www.christian-attorney.net/christians\\_lawsuits.html](http://www.christian-attorney.net/christians_lawsuits.html)

v.1- note “ungodly” is literally “unjust/unrighteous.” The same original word is used in v.7,8, and 9, translated as “wronged/do wrong/wrongdoers.” The focus of the word in context seems to be acting unjustly toward others.

v.2- Christians judging the world? See Rev. 2:26-27. Matt. 19:28/Luke 22:30. Dan. 9:22 is usually cited, though it could refer to Israelites or angels as well. The judgment is more about us being united with Christ as He will rule and reign (Rom 6:3-11, 2 Tim. 2:12, Rev. 22:5)

v.3- How is it that we judge angels? Based on our position in Jesus as humans. Heb. 2:5-9. This could refer to both good and bad angels, or bad angels only: 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6.

v. 4- can also be translated, as in the NIV- “Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church!” The question is if “the people of little account/those whose way is scorned” (one word in Greek- exouthenemenous) is about unbelievers or believers. If unbelievers, the point is straightforward. If believers, then Paul is using some sort of irony. The term is used in 1 Cor 1:28 for believers, and in all other usages of Paul for believers (Rom 14:3, 10; 1 Cor 16:11; 2 Cor 10:10; Gal 4:14). Immediate context could suggest “unbelievers.” Interpreters are divided.

v. 9- On homosexuality and the debate on whether it is still considered a sin, see:

[http://www.ethnos.us/files/pdf/Homosexuality\\_survey\\_of\\_verses.pdf](http://www.ethnos.us/files/pdf/Homosexuality_survey_of_verses.pdf)