

“Maintaining our Testimony”

1 Corinthians 6:1-11

It's been a few weeks since we have been in 1 Corinthians so let's review what's happened so far. Paul along with Priscilla and Aquila, planted the church in Corinth approximately 2-3 years before this letter. They left after spending a year and half there and Paul began making his way back towards Jerusalem, revisiting churches he had planted or served at in the past to see how they were doing. Priscilla and Aquila met Apollos in Athens and saw he was gifted for ministry and mentored him to help mature him. In time, Apollos felt called to go to Corinth himself where he served the church for a while.

Paul had planned on getting back to Corinth one day but so far had been delayed because of other ministry responsibilities. During this time he received a report from Chloe, part of the Corinthian church, that things weren't going well. The church was divided. They were divided over their favourite preacher; some liked Paul, some Apollos, and some even Peter. Frustrated by their spiritual immaturity and the influence that Greek culture held over them, Paul said you are not being “wise” – an insult to their egos because they valued wisdom and rhetoric and speech making and discussing the latest trends.

Paul confronts their divisive attitudes by reminding them it wasn't human wisdom that saved them; it was the foolishness of the cross. The gospel of Jesus Christ who willingly suffered and died for their sins (and ours) even though He was wisdom and sinlessness personified, is what saved them not human intellect. Paul said the power of God is not in the messenger but in the message and person of His Son Jesus. Humiliation and suffering are the way up. Glory follows suffering.

He then reminded them in Ch.3 how unique they are; bound together by the Holy Spirit into the new temple/dwelling place of God. God has taken up residence in all of you but you are selfishly dividing over personal preferences. The gospel is not about you but God working through you. We're not here to elevate ourselves but to serve God and each other so He and Jesus are exalted. Paul says, Apollos and I are united in serving you, not divided. As a result some had become arrogant instead of following the example Paul left them.

This arrogance is revealed in two very sad ways. In Ch. 5 the church was not confronting and somehow ‘proud’ of a brother in the church who was having an immoral relationship with his stepmother. Paul said you should make a wise judgment by removing him from the church for the purpose of his repentance and Lord-willing restoration to the church family.

The second sad example of their arrogance is here in Ch. 6, where believers were taking other believers to court to settle disputes. This was bringing shame to God and Jesus because they showed their worldly attitudes by fighting over their rights in the public marketplace where the court was held, the main congregating area for people to shop and gather. The basic premise here is to sort out your problems with other believers amongst yourselves rather than following the world's ways of always demanding their rights. And there are two main ways to do this. When we have a disagreement with another believer Paul says,

Seek Reconciliation Not Retaliation
(6:1-6)

In Ch.5 we were told a specific event that needed correcting in the church. In Ch. 6 we are not told of a specific event probably because a number of Christians had taken their fellow believers to court over some kind of dispute. Paul does not give any details about what it was about – many commentators suggest it had to do with land boundaries. Because Paul addresses this as a generality I think it's fair to approach it from a general principal approach; there is no positive outcome for when a believer takes another believer to court. The court was conducted in the public square. No different than today, it was viewed as entertainment. We have all kinds of TV shows and movies centered around court cases. What was center stage on our news programs even in Canada in late May and early June? The Trump trial. In order to win your case you usually have to make the other person look bad. To take someone to court usually means you want to hurt them. The human system of justice is not the place for Christians to settle disputes among themselves. Why? Because the court system results in revenge and retaliation not reconciliation. When Christians disagree, the goal should be reconciliation, not to prove who's right and who's wrong. If you're only out to prove you're right, Paul says, you've already lost because that's not the way Jesus lived. Instead, Paul says

Settle family disagreements internally (vv.1, 4)

Notice Paul doesn't pretend we don't disagree at times, nor does he deny that Christians don't hurt one another. We still wrestle with sin. But now we have the Spirit and we should act accordingly. The Holy Spirit dwelling in you and the Holy Spirit dwelling in me wants unity and peace. Satan wants discord. Satan sews seeds of rebellion and personal rights and our desire to get even. That is not of God. Paul's statement in v. 1 shows his complete shock that believers would do this!

If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints?

In Greek, the sentence starts with 'dare' as in How dare you to take your dispute with a brother to unbelievers in public! They don't have your perspective. They don't care about Jesus or the gospel or God, all they care about is who wins and let's make sure it's a good show! Paul implies here that when we do this we're not acting like Jesus, we're not thinking about the gospel or our testimony for God. All we care about is we're right and the other is wrong. We want retaliation not reconciliation. In v.4 he emphasizes the point that judges in courts do not have in mind the things of God. Paul is stunned and saddened by this. Stop thinking about retaliation and defending your rights or proving your point. Start thinking, we're not in agreement about this, and as believers, we need to reconcile so as not to shame the Lord. In vv.2-3 Paul says something amazing that maybe we've never read before or never thought much about:

² Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? ³ Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!

Believers in Christ will assist the Lord in passing judgment on the world (unbelievers, not ourselves). Similarly, it's not good angels we will assist in judging but all those who left heaven to follow Satan. Why? What were angels created to do?

Heb. 1:13 But to which of the angels has He ever said, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET"?

¹⁴ Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to provide service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?

Satan had no desire to serve humans and convinced numerous angels to rebel because he knew man is a lower creation than angels. Heb. 2:5-9,

⁵ It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. ⁶ But there is a place where someone has testified: "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? ⁷ You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor ⁸ and put everything under his feet." In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. ⁹ But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. ¹⁰ In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering

The point Paul is making here is even though man was made lower than the angels, God has this pattern that the higher rank serves the lower rank. Angels serve people. God became man to serve people. Jesus suffered and died for sinful people, so they could be lifted up. Those who want to be right, those who want to win are not following the model of Christ. And so, in the end the last becomes first and saved people will judge wicked angels. All this to tell us

God expects more from us (vv.2-3)

God believes you and I are fully capable and mature enough to judge the unsaved and the rebellious angels of the world. He has great expectations for us. He rewards those who humble themselves recognizing we are wrong; that we can't save ourselves, that living for self means you lose and that repenting of our sins and accepting Christ means we win. So keep living that way. God expects us to humble ourselves and serve one another. Settle our disputes for His glory.

When believers want to be right and insist on it by going to court, or vindictively voting against everyone else in a meeting (because they didn't get their way) or spreading slander about someone among other Christians so they will side with them to prove they are in the right, Paul says the name of Jesus and God are smeared.

Avoid dishonouring God's Name (vv.5-6)

⁵ I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? ⁶ But instead, one brother goes to law against another—and this in front of unbelievers!

You shame yourselves and your testimony. People will say, 'Wow, isn't that sad that these two people who claim to follow Jesus are fighting against each other.' Glad I'm not one of those! We see this principle laid out in Titus 2:9-14,

⁹ Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, ¹⁰ and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.

¹¹ For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹² It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Paul was referring to Christian slaves to serve their employers in an honest manner because you're saved. Don't be dishonest or lazy or critical or slanderous because those things do not make

the teaching about God our Saviour attractive. Similarly taking your dispute with another believer and making it public to make them look bad and you good; makes God look bad and the gospel unattractive.

Has our poor work ethic, our bad attitude or our critical words made the teaching of God unattractive? Have we carried our dispute with a believer (our spouse or kids) in a public atmosphere prove we're right? God expects more from us. What will prevent us from going in that direction? Having God's perspective. Vv. 7-11

⁷ The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? ⁸ Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.

⁹ Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Paul tells us we should ...

Choose to be Wronged, Like Jesus **(6:7-11)**

If you have not been willing to reconcile with another believer and have aired your dirty laundry in a public manner for the purpose of proving you are right, you just lost in God's eyes. You've missed the point of living for Jesus. We are supposed to die to self,

Gal. 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. (1 Pet. 5:5-6)

Suffer temporal loss for the sake of Christ **(vv.7-8)**

Ask yourself, why do I have to be right about this thing? What would happen if for the sake of unity and the gospel I let others have their way or I admit I am wrong or I give something up or I just close my mouth and stop arguing? What does it really change? Will it matter in eternity?

Jesus chose to suffer for us. He went silently as a sacrificial slaughtered lamb to the cross. He chose to lose so we would win. There's a bigger purpose here.

Some of you I'm sure have thought, 'Yeah but didn't Paul use the courts for his own purposes at times?' Yes, but not to take a believer to court but to use his right as a citizen to advance the gospel. In Acts 22:25 he was about to be flogged by a Roman for stirring up a riot for preaching the gospel but he appealed to his right as a citizen enabling him to preach the gospel another day. In Acts 25:10-11 he appealed to Caesar meaning he wanted to be tried in court by angry, unsaved Jews because he knew his defense would include sharing the gospel.

This thing we are having a dispute about with another believer, do we really have to be right or to win here when ...

We both have a great inheritance coming! (vv.9-10)

Paul reminds them that they are new creations in Christ. That the gospel saved them out of a sinful lifestyle of selfish pursuits, of seeking to find joy and satisfaction in sinfulness which didn't satisfy. Now, however, because you've been saved you inherit the kingdom! I think we err in this passage when we focus on the sin list. Paul's point is you've all been saved from sinful choices you previously made and now you have a great inheritance waiting for you. You have joy, hope, and an eternal purpose in life! Why are you so fixated on selfishly being right about this issue? Whatever you gain here you will eventually lose anyway. We have so much more in store for us! We're saved. God has changed us from the inside and believes

We can change because we have been changed (v.11)

Perhaps you have an argumentative spirit. Is that part of your new in Christ nature or part of your old sin nature? Our old sin nature. Every time we argue to prove our point to be right means we keep feeding our sin nature. God has changed us and keeps changing us. We're washed; we're sanctified and we're justified. God did when we got saved and He's still doing it today, and tomorrow. When we demand our way, we are fighting against the work God is committed to doing in our lives.

We are washed, sanctified, and justified by God in the name of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. That is the greatest thing to have in life. And so few have that. So why fight with a fellow believer who is also washed, sanctified, and justified and you will enjoy all the inheritance of God's kingdom promises forever in perfect holiness – probably sharing an apartment with the one you didn't always get along with! 😊

The danger of these convicting words this morning is that we hear them without doing them.
Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. (James 1:22)

If God has spoken to you about an issue with a believer that needs reconciliation, move beyond good intentions and trust God by faith He can bring resolution. When we choose human means to defend ourselves rather than pray and obey God's Word to reconcile, we deny God the opportunity to work powerfully in both of our spirits to bring reconciliation. He can and will do that if we trust Him.

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

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If you have any questions or comments about this message please
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