

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: 1 Corinthians

Believers Before the Bench

1 Corinthians 6:1-11

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 10.23-24.10

Good morning Crossroads. It's good to have you here this morning. Let's take our bibles; let's turn to a very familiar book – 1 Corinthians. We're in chapter 6 this morning. By now you understand the Corinthian church was filled with all kinds of problems. We've talked through the issue of division and strife that the Corinthians we're having because they were elevating leaders, certain leaders over the other. We turned the corner and ended that discussion. Then turned the corner into chapter 5 and part of chapter 6. We looked at the issue of sexual immorality within the Corinthian church. We skipped over a section in verses 1 through 11. This is another issue that we discover the Corinthian church was having. They were struggling with the issue of lawsuits between themselves. Believers were suing other believers and so it brings up a natural question. We look at the text like this. Is it right, is it ever right for believers to sue one another? Is there ever a legitimate reason for us to move into some kind of litigation with another Christ follower? That's the question of the text. That's a question that we're going to be working through today.

Now, when you look at this you might say I'm not sure how much practicality for me in this issue at this point in my life. I would imagine that the majority of us are not in some kind of lawsuit situation. Probably only a minority that would say this is practical to them today. But, there's an underlying premise about this text that is very practical. What this text does is exposes for us, it teaches us who we are and how we are to operate as followers of Christ. And so if nothing else, as we move through this text we are reminded again who we are in Christ.

Now, you need to realize to the Corinthians this was a very practical issue. I'm sure you'll remember the major problems of the Corinthian church was that they were constantly bringing their cultural philosophy into the church. What Paul does is he has to retrain them and retrain their thinking. This is especially true, in this particular scenario and this issue because the Roman Greco World made a sport out of lawsuit and litigation. You just have to start moving through some of the historical data on litigations and jurisprudence throughout the Roman Empire and you'll find that there's a plethora of information. Now, unfortunately we don't have much historical data out of the city of Corinth. But we do have a number of detailed accounts of the Roman concept of lawsuits through the city of Athens which is, if you remember the next major spot for Paul on his second missionary journey after he left Corinth. We learn all kinds of information about the Roman concept of law through the information and the records that were left in Athens.

If we study Athens we would probably have a really good idea what was going on in Corinth at the time. So let me just give you a little bit of background. Let me give you a little bit of history. Let's just play this off the first person. Let's imagine you have an issue and you have to take it to some kind of court system. You've got a grievance with somebody else and you decide you're going to take it to the civil authorities. That's what they are there for but what you are doing is you're actually entering into a realm that was pervasive in the culture and the city of Athens of that day. If you took a case they would immediately assign you an

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arbitrator. They would assign you a man who was sixty years old because every Roman citizen who turns age sixty had to serve in some kind of civil capacity as an arbitrator in the law system. You would work with this arbitrator and the other party and try to resolve your conflict. If you could not resolve your conflict then your case went officially to what was called The Forty. Now, it wasn't because it represented forty men or forty people on a jury. What it indicated was that they heard cases forty times a year. In other words, there were forty set days that there was groups of juries gathering to hear cases and was overseen by a legislative body. Here's the interesting thing. If you're case went to a jury it wouldn't be like our modern juries that have a select number of your peers. The juries of those days had somewhere between two hundred and a thousand people on each case and at any given time there were hundreds of cases before the bench. So imagine, you're pleading your case before a thousand people. They're not looking to have a sense of unanimous vote but, rather, they're looking for a majority rule. Now, here's the thing. If you were thirty years or older as a Roman citizen you were called to serve on these juries. Now, imagine that. So you've got anyone thirty years and older and then anyone who is sixty years and older involved in litigation and court cases.

When you start researching, doing the data, crunching the numbers the number of lawsuits that were going on at any given time would encompass practically the entire population of Athens. So, you couldn't stop at a sidewalk vendor. You couldn't stop and get a cappuccino without seeing someone or talking with someone who wasn't involved in some type of litigation. It was pervasive. In fact, one historian said it appears as if everybody in the city of Athens was a warrior. Imagine that – somewhat of a nightmare. But just think about that. Everybody's involved in that. This was the culture of the Corinthian converts. They were coming out of this litigation-happy, this litigation way of life and Paul had to retrain them and say is this really the best way to demonstrate that you are a follower of Christ – to sue one another? This is where he begins.

So, we ask the question again? Is it every legitimate for a believer to pursue another lawsuit with another believer? I think this is very applicable for us today.

Now, let's go to the text. What we're going to do is we're going to see two very clear principles emerge from this passage. It's not so much overt – you have to look for them in the text. And the first comes out of verse 1. Now, as we read verse 1 I want you to be listening for the tone. I want you to be listening for the inferences in the text. What is Paul saying. Verse 1, chapter 6. When one of you has a grievance against another does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Stop right there. Are you already getting a sense of the movement of the text? What is Paul saying? It's almost as if Paul is saying I can't believe that another Christ follower has the audacity to take a believer, one of his brothers, his sisters to court. That's the sense you really get. It's rhetorical in nature this question. And it's a sense where we can pull out the very first principle and it's just straightforward.

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I think Paul, if you ask him point blank, Paul, should we or should we not? He would say believers are not to sue believers. And we really get this from the inference of the text. So principle number one – believers are not to sue believers.

Now, he's going to spend the rest of the time, the next ten verses explaining to us why. He's going to give us four reasons why we as believers should not take other believers to court. Now he uses classic Greek logic here. He goes from the least to the greatest and so that's what you need to look for as we move through the text. He's going to start with the simplest argument and he's going to move to the greatest reason why we shouldn't be suing one another. Let's look at the first reason in verses 2 and 3.

He says do you not know; by the way he's going to use this phrase six times so it's important. It's almost a sarcastic bent to his tone. He says do you not know that the saints will judge the world and that if the world is to be judged by you are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life? Stop there.

The first reason why we are not to take believers to court is that, number one, you and I will have future authority. Believers, as believers we will have a future authority in God's millennial kingdom; in Christ's kingdom. Now, for some of you this might be a bit of a shock. I didn't realize that. You're not going to float around on a cloud and strum a harp all day and have nothing to do. That's sound more like hell than heaven if you ask me. But, no. You're going to be given a job to do. You're going to be given something of importance to do and we don't have a lot of data about this but scripture gives us a clear indication. Revelation 3:21, that we're going to reign with Christ in the new kingdom. Part of that reigning is a sense of judgment. We're going to be responsible, overseeing different aspects of the kingdom. 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6 says that there is going to be a judgment of angels and there is a day when angels that are bound at this moment, demon angels they will come to judgment. Now, what extent will be our involvement? We really don't know. In fact, we have to assume from the text that what Paul is doing here is reminding the Corinthians of a lesson or a teaching that he had already taught them and so he's not going to go on a rabbit trail and re-teach this. He's using this as a sense of proof text. It's as if Paul's point, he's saying because we're going to be placed in this position of authority, remember I taught you that, because we're going to be there we ought to be able to settle our own differences now.

Up to this point Paul is very generic. He's not being very specific about any of these cases. Very generic; very broad-based and yet he says, look at this, end of verse 2 he calls them all trivial. He says I don't even know what you're involved with in your lawsuits but they're trivial cases. He says they're only pertaining, end of verse 3, to this life. He's saying as believers we ought to have the ability to reconcile with one another without taking it further into litigation. So the first reason – believers will have future authority.

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The second reason comes right out of the text in verses 4 and 6. Look at this. He says so if you have such cases why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame. Now, you might want to circle the word shame. That's the center of the text. We're going to come back to it. He says can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers. Let's stop there. What principle arises out of here? Why should we not sue one another? He says because believers suing believers is shameful. In other words he's saying it discredits the Gospel. It discredits the Gospel of Christ when His people, His children are arguing to the point that it must be carried to unbelievers or to a civil court system. He says believers suing believers is shameful, discredits the Gospel. Shame, *entropé*. A difficult word to translate. The best way to say this is it demonstrates our true motives. That which would be covered up with a cloak is now revealed for everyone to see. It's as if everything's exposed. Another way you can translate this word is embarrassment. He says I say this to your embarrassment. Why would it have been an embarrassment to the Apostle Paul? Why would it have been an embarrassment to the Corinthians?

Do you remember the premise of Paul's argument to the Corinthian's work? Do you remember that? We're gone over that a couple of times. I'll take you there a third time. It's found in 1 Corinthians, chapter 10 – just a couple of chapters away. The premise of what Paul was trying to push through into the Corinthian's minds is that regardless what they do and he starts with the least. Verse 31, he says whatever you eat or drink. It's as simple as eating and drinking, something you have to do every day; or whatever you do, do all to the what? What does it say? The glory of God. See, that's who we are. That's who we are and what we ought to be producing in our lives; that our life produces a sense of work glorifying God. And so, in a sense what Paul is saying is this is the antithesis of glorifying God. You should not be doing this.

You say, alright, I understand that. But what if I do get into a dispute with another believer? What do I do then? Where do I go? We live in a fallen world. We are fallen creatures. We're not always going to get along. That's just a fact of life. So, what do we do? I think he tells us, he gives us a clue at the end of verse 5. Look at it. He says, middle of the verse, is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers? I think what Paul is alluding to is something that comes out of his Jewish background. You need to understand that the Jewish community, even though it was inset into the Roman Empire would not use the civil authorities or go into any type of litigation with anybody before the Roman courts. They would do their best to avoid it with what was called the Gentiles, or barbarians – those who were none-Jews and they would think it was blasphemous if one Jewish brother took another Jewish brother to a civil court. Why? Because they felt like their synagogue leaders would lead them in understanding the Old Testament and in the Old Testament would be all that was needed for the practicalities of settling issues of life. In fact, the synagogues would put together what was called a *bêt dîn* which was a group of wise men who would gather together to settle disputes among the brothers, among the brothers of Judaism. I think what

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Paul is doing is pulling this and remember Paul was Jewish, pulling this out of his background and saying the church needs to adopt this kind of concept. In fact, the idea of wise men is the idea that some scholars link to Elders of a church. So if you have an issue between another brother in another congregation or within the same congregation rather than running to the civil courts what Paul is saying is come to the Elders of the church so that they might arbitrate the issue ultimately so that you do not discredit the Gospel of Christ.

Now the third argument to why we should not sue believers, brothers and sisters in Christ might be the pinnacle of our argument; certainly the one that grips our heart the most and we see that in verse 7. Believers suing believers, essentially breaks the law of love, breaks the law of Christ. To have lawsuits, verse 7 at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Let's stop here. Let's look what he's saying before we go on. He's saying to have lawsuits at all with one another, one another encompassed within the body of Christ, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. What does it mean to suffer defeat? What does it mean? It means to be brought into a worsened state, right? We saw this last week. Ohio State vs Wisconsin, right? I mean, number one ranking loses to a lower rank? What happened to Ohio State? Where are we at now? Somewhere around 10th in the ranking? Shameful, isn't it? But you say, yeah – Purdue! But still we're in a worsened state than we were before our loss. See, what Paul is saying is even if you win, even if you win your lawsuit you're in a worsened state. It turns everything upside down. Why is that? Why does he say it is a defeat? Because it's contrary to who we are and how we are to operate. So who are we and how are we to operate?

Well follow me over to 2 Corinthians, just the next book over. 2 Corinthians, chapter 5. We're going to see an example and a principle: who we are and how we are to operate. Let's start in verse 17 of chapter 5. He says, therefore, if anyone is in Christ, in other words if anyone is a follower of Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, behold, the new is come. You have to love that verse. Let's stop right there. In other words, those of you who struggle with guilt over the past look at what this says in black and white. The old has what? Passed away. Stop bringing it up. It's gone. You're new in Christ. Isn't that great? I mean, you have to stop when you come across things like this. We're moving in another direction. I'm trying to prove a point but for those of you who come here this morning and you struggle with who you once were you've got to let that go. This is really Paul's point. That ultimately Paul's point to the Corinthians is you're not who you used to be. You don't act like you used to act. You're new in Christ. All this is from God, verse 18, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself. There's the example. Christ was the reconciler. And gave us the ministry of reconciliation. Do you hear that? He not only reconciled us but he gave us a job description. He said now I'm going to give you the ministry of reconciliation. That is in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation, therefore, this is what we are, therefore we are ambassadors for Christ. What's an ambassador? It's someone who represents, right?

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What are we representing? We're representing Christ. What has Christ done? He's reconciled us. You are now a reconciler.

Do you see what's going on here? He says believers suing believers breaks the law of love because that's not who you are. You are a reconciler. You're not one who causes disputes. You are the one who demonstrates love.

I remember when I first came back to Mansfield from schooling and started the church, launched the church I was introduced to a man who had a rather influential business here in town. He was a seeker. He didn't know much about what it meant to follow after Christ and so we met on a somewhat regular basis and I would answer his questions we would go through different issues he was having. Well, one issue he was having – he was really struggling with he was involved in a lawsuit with his parents, his mother and his father who had originally owned the business and transferred the business to him. I don't remember all of the details of the case but obviously this was destroying the relationship between son and between the mother and the father. This was really devastating the entire family, this particular rift or this lawsuit. He asked me about it. I said do you really want me to tell you what the scriptures say about this particular issue. He said yes, I really do. So I took him over to Matthew chapter 5. Now Matthew 5, very popular passage of scripture. It's often referred to as the Sermon on the Mount or the Beatitudes. Christ works through a number of different issues like anger and lust, divorce and let our yes be yes and our no be no, things like that. And he has a section where he talks about retaliation. And in chapter 5, starting in verse 38 Jesus said you've heard it said this way, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth which was very common, very common today, right? You do to me – I will do to you. It's one of those types of things. Jesus says I'm going to turn that. If someone slaps you on the cheek turn the other cheek to him. Offer him your other cheek.

And then he gets very specific, verse 40, he says and if anyone would sue you, here it is, if anyone would sue you and take your tunic. Now your tunic was called a chillon. It was an undergarment. It was the closest thing to your skin. Usually the thing that was not exposed. So he's saying if someone takes everything from you, right down to your underwear, if someone takes that let him have your cloak, your outer garments as well. He says if someone takes everything – give it to him. If someone forces you to walk a mile, go with him two miles. This is often considered the law of Christ, the law, the love of Christ. We'll talk about that more in a moment.

So, I mentioned this to him. I said what I think you ought to do is end the lawsuit, reconcile with your parents to bring your family back together. He said I couldn't do that. We're talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars. I would lose that for your own family. I said lose it. Lose it. Honor Christ and see what God does in your own life. This very issue drove him away from following Christ. He could not follow the concept, the basic concept laid down in scripture.

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Robert Taylor, who is a law professor also a believer himself, writes extensively about these type of issues. He writes

“A court case often is a fight unto death in which irreparable harm (economic, psychological, and spiritual) is done to parties. The person who sues another person is bent on obtaining, under cover of law, this party’s financial resources. He is intent on winning the case regardless of the damaging effect the trial may have on the defendant.”

I might add to the plaintiff as well. It has damaging impact. We see it around our society. What does Jesus say in Matthew 22:37? What does he say in this pivotal point in scripture? He says what is the greatest commandment? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like unto it – love your who? Neighbor as your self. If you do these two all of the law and the prophet hang on these two commandments. James, the brother of Jesus called this the Royal Law of Christ. That’s where we get that statement. You see, you are ambassadors of the Royal Law of Christ.

Now let me fit in the last point and then we’ll talk about the ramifications. The last point we see in the text Paul moves to the extreme. He says the greatest reason why you don’t bring lawsuits among yourselves is because it is an action of unrighteousness. Lawsuits among believers is essentially unrighteous. That’s what he says in verses 8 through 11. Notice he says to them, calls them defrauders in a sense, but you yourselves wrong and defraud even your own brother. Then notice he says and it’s all connected here. Do you not know, there’s that phrase again, that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Then he gives us kind of a panoramic view of the society in Corinth. He says, neither the sexually immoral, or idolaters, or adulterers, or men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor greedy, druggers, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. Now, what I did in my bible was I circled the word swindlers and I drew a line through the line defraud because I think that’s the connection that he’s making. What do swindlers do? They defraud, right? He’s saying you’re acting like an unrighteous swindler when you take your brothers to court. He says you’re acting as someone who’s defrauding. Then he says and such were some of you but you’re not that way anymore. That’s not who you are anymore. You’ve been washed. You were sanctified. You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ by the Spirit of our God.

And so what is the last reason? Why do we not sue one another? Because lawsuits among believers is a form of unrighteousness. You say, are there no exceptions? Are there no exceptions in the Word of God? Well, I don’t want you to forget that God has instituted civil government for a purpose. Romans 13:1 says God has appointed government leaders to be in authority over us. He’s given them the authority to create laws, to establish a sense of order, to protect the unprotected. That’s why our government exists. Certainly Paul used the Roman

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civil government for his own purposes. We see that all throughout the book of Acts. But do we see any type of exceptions?

Now I did quite a bit of reading on this because I knew that would be a question that was in your mind and there was a debate between scholars whether there is an accepted reason to use civil courts among believers. Some have stated the reason of divorce. Perhaps you don't want a divorce but your partner is leading you into divorce. You have no other recourse but to protect yourself. Perhaps over child custody issues or perhaps it's over protection of your livelihood. You may be forced to go into civil litigation.

I said that there were two principles that emerged from the text. What's the second principle? I think it's at the end of verse 7. Remember he said to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. But then he tells us something else, he says why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? I think if there was an exception in scripture, if there was an ever a reason that you have to go to court then you have to keep not only the Royal Law of Christ in mind but you need to keep this mentality of rather being wronged or defrauded in your mind.

I think the second principle is that litigation should never be for personal gain. If you're forced into litigation make sure that it is never for personal gain.

Thirteen years ago I was in a car accident. I was traveling through the Village of Lexington, just crossed over the bridge. Traffic had slowed. I was in the passenger seat, actually. My mother was driving. My wife Michelle was in the back seat. Traffic had slowed almost to a sudden stop and a person behind us rear-ended us. And I think he tried to stop but he got a little bit confused because he was an elderly man. Have you ever heard the little ditty about poor Jake? There's lies poor Jake. He stepped on the accelerator not the brake. This is exactly what I think happened to this guy. He got a little confused; stepped on the wrong pedal. Wham. Right in to the back of us. Now, I was really the only one slightly injured. My wife was fine. My mother was fine. I had a little bit of a case of whiplash. Nothing major. A couple of visits to the chiropractor and everything was taken care of. This man gets out of the car, very apologetic. I knew him. It's the Village of Lexington. There's not a lot of people who live there. You kind of tend to know one another and you run into each other at the grocery store and the gas station. I knew him. I knew his family. I knew his kids. And he was very apologetic. Of course he gave us all of the insurance information and all of that and it was done. The car was going to get fixed.

About two weeks after this ordeal I started getting phone calls from lawyers. I was getting phone calls every day wanting me to take this man to court and I told them I'm not going to do this. I'm fine. He knows I'm fine. And then they started throwing around numbers. Let me just be honest with you I was tempted. The amount of money would have nice at that particular time in life and I had to make a choice. But what kept moving through my mind

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was I was going to bump into this guy at the grocery store. I was going to bump into this guy at the gas station. Like I said, I know this man. He knew I wasn't that badly hurt. Then what was ironic I started getting phone calls from his insurance company asking about the lawsuit and assuming that there was going to be a suit. I said I'm not going to sue your client. I'm not going to do this. They couldn't believe that. And so they kept harassing me. In fact, they called me so many times and it was the same woman who called me every time and she was offering a settlement and they wanted me to sign a paper and I said look, I'm not going to sue anybody. I understand you have to protect your client but I'm not going to do that. And finally they would call back and I guess I was in a mood because they called back and they offered again and I said I tell you what. If you don't stop calling I am going to sue you. And they stopped calling after that.

I had to think in my mind that this man knows that I am a follower of Christ. We live in a litigation-happy world. Let's go against the grain. This is not who I am or what I'm about. It's not who you are or what you're about. It's not how you operate. Why? Because you operate in an entirely different law. The law of Christ. See, that's how we operate. We're reconcilers. We're ambassadors.

Do you want to know how you can make this real practical for right now in your life? You don't have to wait for a situation to get to the point of litigation before you can enact the law of Christ. Be a reconciler and an ambassador. See, we all have divisions. We all have issues. We all have people in our lives that cause pain and hurt. We walk as those who live under a different law, seeking to reconcile so that we might proclaim the name of Christ. Amen? Amen. Let's pray together.