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Sermon Notes

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On Lawsuits: Better to be Wronged than to be a Bad Witness

1 Corinthians 6:1-11

I. The Facts of the Case: Fraud and a Lawsuit

A. This Corinthian Church is HUGELY messed up!

1. Apparently one brother had swindled, defrauded another in the church... we don't know how, but he had CHEATED HIM
2. To deal with this, the cheated brother took the first brother to court before the civil magistrates in the heart of the marketplace... in front of all their lost neighbors

B. This was HORRIBLE... scandalous!!

1. The Christian church was airing their dirty laundry in front of the very ones they were trying to win to faith in Christ

II. The Shame of the Lawsuit: The Pagan World is Watching

A. Paul's Tone is Very Strong... He is Aghast and Horrified

B. Paul Uses the Word "Shame" in verse 5 "I say this TO YOUR SHAME!!"

C. The Issue: Their Witness to a Desperate, Lost, Dying City of Corinth

D. Shame #1: Completely Defeated by Even Having Lawsuits at All

1 Corinthians 6:7 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?

E. Shame #2: That Someone Who Was Claiming to Be a Christian Would Defraud another Brother in Christ

1 Corinthians 6:8 Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.

F. Shame #3: That They Would Expose Their Dirty Laundry to the Lost People They Were Supposed to be Winning

1 Corinthians 6:6 But instead, one brother goes to law against another-- and this in front of unbelievers!

G. Shame #4: There Was No One Wise Enough in the Church to Settle This Temporal Matter

1 Corinthians 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?

III. The Christ's Laws of Loving Witness

A. "By this will all people know that you are my disciples..."

John 13:35 By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Jesus gives permission to the world to check the validity of our claims to be his followers by whether we are LOVING EACH OTHER or not...

1 Cor. 13: "Love is patient, love is kind, it does not env, it does not boast, it is not rude, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs"

B. You Are the Light of the World

Matthew 5:14-16 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

C. The Ten Thousand Talents

1. Jesus told a parable answering Peter's question "How many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus said "Not seven, but seventy times seven"

2. The parable of the Ten Thousand Talents involves a man who was called before a king to give an account for his actions, and he had embezzled and lost ten thousand talents of the king's money... an almost incalculably large sum... a talent is 75 pounds; we're talking about billions of dollars in today's money
3. The king demanded that the man be thrown into prison until he should pay back what he owed
4. The servant begged the king for mercy, and the king forgave his whole debt
5. BUT that wicked servant went out and found a fellow servant who owed him a substantial sum—about a third of a year's wages—maybe \$15,000... he choked him and demanded PAY ME WHAT YOU OWE ME! The servant fell on his knees and begged him to be patient and he would try to pay it back; BUT THE MAN REFUSED and had that servant thrown into prison until he should pay the debt
6. The other servants found out what had happened and told the king
7. The king dragged the wicked servant back into court... "I cancelled all that debt of your because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?"
8. In anger he had the man thrown into prison to repay the ten thousand talents
9. Jesus said plainly

"That is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

D. Turn the Other Cheek

Matthew 5:38-45 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' ³⁹ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰ And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹ If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. ⁴³ ¶ "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I

***tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,
⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.***

These clear teachings are an essential part of Christianity... turn the other cheek... if someone sues you, give them what they are demanding... give them MORE than they are demanding... don't resist them, don't fight them... go the extra mile

E. Do Not Be Overcome by Evil

Romans 12:19-21 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Only GOOD can overcome evil... if we respond in kind with vengeance, we have become as evil as they are

F. The Early Church's Selflessness

Acts 2:44-45 All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

How does suing a brother and seeking to win a settlement in court line up with that?

And the church's early sacrificial attitude was a big part of their power in evangelism:

Acts 4:32-33 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.

The Corinthians had shamefully turned away from these basic Christian principles that were essential to their Christian witness

They misunderstood their lives in this world... we are ALIENS and STRANGERS in this world, and all that we have in this world is a temporary gift of God, useful for the advance of the gospel

We can't take any of it with us... it is just a TOOL down here to seek to win the lost and sustain the people of God

Not only did they misunderstand their lives in this world, they misunderstood our exalted future in the next world:

IV. The Future Revealed: The Saints Will Judge the World and Angels

1 Corinthians 6:2-3 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!

A. Remarkable Revelation About the Future

1. Christianity is a revealed religion
2. Mysteries are uncovered that we would have no other way of knowing
3. This tells us some amazing insights about the role we will play in the future world that Christ will establish
4. Given our exalted role in the future world, we should be able to handle lesser things in this world
5. So Paul introduces these two bombshells with the phrase "Do you not know...?"
6. It is possible that he had taught these things to them when he was there with them, and he was reminding them of his doctrine that he had already laid down
7. Much of godly teaching is REMINDING... sometimes we forget key things, or don't make the connections we should be making with the doctrine we already know

B. The Saints Will Judge the World... "How Much More"

1. Bombshell #1: The saints will judge the world

2. This could refer to some role Christians will have, together with Christ, in condemning the unbelieving world to their just fate
 - a. The entire anti-God system will come crashing down
 - b. The saints will have a role in that justice
 - c. So, the entire thing will be reversed from what was going on in Corinth... why would the saints voluntarily stand before the pagans to receive a verdict
 - d. Someday, they will be judged by us!!
3. It may also refer to what follows Judgment Day
4. The saints will play an active role in the ruling of the future world, some more than others
5. “Judge” in that era sometimes meant “rule” or “reign over”
6. The future world that Paul is referring to may be the millennial kingdom, in which there are sinners who still do wrong

Revelation 20:4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

7. Or it could refer to the eternal kingdom

Revelation 3:21 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.

8. Certain believers in Christ will have the right to sit on thrones ruling in the New Jerusalem, and the New Heaven and New Earth

Daniel 7:27 Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.

C. The Saints Will Judge Angels... “How Much More”

1. In the next verse, Paul goes even further... Bombshell #2
2. The saints will judge angels
3. How can this be?
 - a. Some wonder if this is referring only to the devil and his angels (called demons)

Romans 16:20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

- b. In that scenario, we will have the authority to cast demons down to hell under the reign of Christ
4. But, others believe this refers to all angels, because angels are lower than glorified saints
 - a. Hebrews 1: Angels are called “ministering spirits” sent to help those who will inherit salvation
 - b. Angels are not said to be created in the image of God
 - c. So perhaps this text gives us a sense of authority in the New Heaven and New Earth over all angels

D. In both cases, Paul argues “How much more”

1. If the saints will be qualified to judge the world, why would we not be qualified to judge lesser things?

1 Corinthians 6:2 if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases?

2. If the saints will judge angels, how much more should we have the resources to judge temporary issues?

1 Corinthians 6:3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!

V. The Remedy Commanded: Humble Mediation Within the Church

- A. Paul’s Solution: Appoint Wise Men within the Church to Mediate

1 Corinthians 6:4-5 Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! ⁵ I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers?

B. Similar to the Wisdom Jethro, Moses' Father-in-Law Gave to Moses

Exodus 18:21-22 select capable men from all the people-- men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain-- and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. ²² Have them serve as judges for the people at all times

1. The idea is that these wise men would have the wisdom to listen to the dispute between two believers and help them work out an amicable solution
2. There would then be no need to go to the pagans for a verdict

C. NOTE: verse 4 is extremely difficult to translate

The script in the ancient Greek was written with no punctuation; so translators sometimes have a hard struggle to know what Paul was intending

Is it a COMMAND, a STATEMENT of fact, or a QUESTION?

Command (NIV):

Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church!

Statement:

But when you have matters of this life to be judged, you bring them before those who are of no account in the church!

Mocking question (ESV):

ESV 1 Corinthians 6:4 So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church?

It seems that Paul is really mocking their practice here, because he uses a very derogatory term – “those held in utter disdain”

It seems unlikely that Paul would use a term like that for Christians
 So, he's saying "Why would you take a minor matter like this before
 non-Christians, whose worldview we should utterly disdain?"

Instead, you should seek wisdom WITHIN THE CHURCH...
 especially from men who will follow Christ's rules of love and
 truth

D. Deeper: Renew Your Commitment to the Christian Principles Listed
 Above

1. Remember that we will be known as Christ's disciples if we LOVE
 one another; of far more importance than who is right or wrong, or
 who "wins" the arbitration is, is there GENUINE
 RECONCILIATION between these two parties of Christians
2. A truly wise, mature, Christian leader will seek the highest good for
 the individuals and for the church as a whole
3. But the SHAME of going to the pagans is reiterated in this final
 statement

***1 Corinthians 6:6 But instead, one brother goes to law against another--
 and this in front of unbelievers!***

E. Deepest Attitude: "Why Not Rather Be Wronged"??

***1 Corinthians 6:7 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?***

1. The real issue is the witness the whole church is having to the
 unbelievers in Corinth
2. There are SOULS to be won by selfless love
3. Instead, you folks are having LAWSUITS with each other...
4. By the time you get to that point, you are already COMPLETELY
 DEFEATED, no matter whether you "win" your case or not

5. WHY NOT RATHER BE WRONGED? Isn't it better to be wronged and cheated and take it with grace, than to go to a pagan court and defend your rights and win your money back
6. So for all of this time, Paul has been seriously addressing the PLAINTIFF... the one taking the swindling brother to court
7. Now, he turns his guns on the swindler

1 Corinthians 6:8 Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.

VI. The Serious Warning: The Wicked Will Not Inherit the Kingdom

- A. The Deeper Warning to the Church Member Defrauding Another Brother

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 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.

- B. Be Not Deceived: The Wicked Will Not Inherit the Kingdom
- C. It Is Wicked to Defraud another Person
- D. You Are Putting Money Above Your Soul
- E. We Will Revisit this Text Next Week

VII. Applications

- A. Basic Question: Can Christians Ever Go to Court?
 1. Deep ethical question with many levels of answers
 2. I do not believe this passage rules out all involvement of Christians in lawsuits
 - a. Paul himself used the Roman courts to make his case

- b. Paul wrote in Romans 13 that the authorities that exist have been established by God; this includes the courts
 - c. In Acts 16, in Philippi, when the authorities there wrongly beat and imprisoned him and Silas without a trial, he didn't just meekly go away, but demanded that the authorities come and escort them out... I really believe Paul was trying to fight for religious freedom for the new church he had planted
3. Clearest lesson: DON'T TAKE ANOTHER CHRISTIAN TO COURT!!
- a. Let's keep it simple...
 - b. I would have a hard time skirting the clear teaching of this passage: WHY NOT RATHER BE WRONGED? WHY NOT RATHER BE DEFRAUDED?
 - c. "Rather" = rather than take that Christian to court! Airing dirty laundry in front of a pagan audience
 - d. It is BETTER to lose the money or the possession or the portion of the business than to litigate and press your rights and "win" the case, but show no regard for your Christian witness in front of a watching pagan world
 - e. We should care MUCH MORE about the souls of non-Christians that might be involved in our court case than about the material benefit that might come from winning the case
4. Basic rule is your MOTIVE
- a. If the issue is a matter of principle concerning other people, their rights, their freedoms... not just your own selfish rights or advantages, it may well be necessary to go to court
 - b. We can well imagine a Christian public defender whose whole life is spent defending the poor, weak, needy from attacks by the powerful... such a Christian would spend most of their days in court
 - c. We can just as well imagine a Christian District Attorney whose whole life is spent putting criminals behind bars and upholding

the just laws of the society... this is Romans 13, the authorities that exist have been established by God

- d. There may be many examples of Christians going to court for the benefit of the gospel, or religious freedoms—like the rights of Christian bakers not to bake cakes to celebrate gay marriages; or years ago the rights of families to home school, and not be required by law to send your children to the government schools... such cases have been tried and won in courts of law
- e. But the issue here in 1 Corinthians 6 seems to be very CARNAL... “I was wronged, I lost money... I want SATISFACTION!” How are we acting like supernatural beings that will judge angels in the next world?
- f. John Calvin said lawsuits can make those who get involved in them VERY UGLY:

John Calvin actually was training to become a lawyer when he was called into ministry... he studied at two separate French law schools

In his commentary on this passage, he noted that the parties involved in a lawsuit are usually motivated by greed, impatience, revenge, hostility, and obstinacy:

“Indeed whenever lawsuits occur frequently, or the parties are obstinate in joining issue with each other with the utmost rigor of the law, it is perfectly obvious that their minds are inflamed far too much by wrongful, greedy desires, and they are not prepared for calmness of mind and endurance of wrongs, according to the commandment of Christ.”

Another commentator made it plain that a court case is often a “fight to the death in which irreparable harm – economic, psychological, and spiritual – is done to both parties.” (Kistemaker, p. 178) The trial becomes like an ugly brawl in which no one comes through unscathed... worst of all is the damage done to the reputations of BOTH parties... how then can either one be a loving, self-denying witness for Christ?

B. Central Issue: Our Loving Witness to a Dying World

1. We are surrounded every single day by people who are “dead in their transgressions and sins” and who continue to “store up wrath against themselves for the day of God’s wrath when his righteous judgment will be revealed.” They are “without hope and without God in the world”
2. We are supposed to be “lights shining in the darkness as we hold forth the word of life”... people are supposed to see a supernatural hope in us that causes them to ask us to give a reason for the hope that we have
3. We are God’s ambassadors, as though God himself were making his appeal through us to be reconciled to God
4. The gospel ministry has been entrusted to us!
5. PEOPLE ARE WATCHING US!!

C. Go Over the Basic Rules

1. Do the citizens of Durham see our love for one another?
2. Are we acting like the light of the world?
3. Having had our infinite debt of sin covered, are we choking other people and demanding “Pay me what you owe me!” Are we characterized by gracious, loving forgiveness of all wrongs against us, or are we unforgiving to people who sin against us?
4. Do we turn the other cheek, give our tunic as well, go the extra mile with people who try to hurt us or take our possessions? Do we see our temporal blessings as LESS IMPORTANT than the work of the gospel? Are we willing to BE WRONGED rather than expand a conflict?

NOTE: the words “Why not rather be wronged?” is powerful for all levels of conflict in the Christian life... it is often better to be wronged, misunderstood, overlooked, receive the unfair short end of the stick... than to FIGHT with your spouse or your family member or with your fellow church member

5. Are we being overcome by evil or overcoming evil with good?

6. Are we acting like the early church that so loved each other that they did not claim that anything was their own, but they shared everything they had??

D. The Call to the Unconverted

1. The salvation of souls is above everything in Paul's mind here
2. The Corinthians were more concerned about their money than their souls, or the souls of their lost neighbors
3. But our money will not mean anything if we lose our souls

Matthew 16:26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

4. Christ came to save sinners like you and me!