



Conflict and Character

No. 14
Series: 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 6:1-11

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Text

[1] When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? [2] Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? [3] Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! [4] So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? [5] I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, [6] but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? [7] To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? [8] But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!

[9] Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, [10] nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. [11] And such were some of you. 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.

Introduction

- Arouse Interest:
 - If someone were to ask you, “What does it mean to be an American?” What would you say?
 - Some of you might mention freedom, the declaration of independence, the separation of church and state.
 - Others might mention baseball or business. Maybe even McDonalds.
 - But if you flipped the question around and asked people from other countries what they think it means to be American what would they say about us? What would they say about you?
- Surface needs:
 - As a church, if we were to ask you what it means for you to be a Christian today? What effect following Christ ought to have on your life? What would you say?
 - And if unbelievers who knew you from work or from the neighborhood knew you were a Christian and tried on the basis of their observations to answer what it means to be a Christian, what would they say about you?

- There are a lot of different people out there who are claiming to be Christians today. At times it can be hard for people, maybe some of you here today, to tell what a Christian is. Maybe some of you would say something like, “A Christian is just a good person who really likes Jesus.”
- I can’t blame you for not being clear on this. We Christians sometimes make it kinda hard for you to understand what Jesus really is about.
- Orient to Text:
 - So to be helpful to you, and to remind those of us who are Christians who we really are, I want to draw our attention this morning to 1 Corinthians 6:1-11.
 - As we saw last week when we went through 1 Corinthians 5, the apostle Paul argued there that the world needs churches that are distinct. Well here in chapter 6, Paul actually gets a little more specific about the kind of ways Christians ought to be distinct. If we had to summarize Paul’s thought here, we could say something like this: ***Christians are called to live in light of Christ’s kingdom.***

Organizational Sentence: As we’ll see in 1 Cor. 6, the nature of the kingdom of God clarifies two things for us. Who will be in the kingdom (1-8) and Who won’t (9-11).

Who will be in the kingdom? (1-8)

- So, who will be in the kingdom?
- As we remember from our study, Paul is writing to a church that is filled with problems. People are discriminating over differences in status, dividing over who’s really spiritual or not. These are the kinds of Christians who are so arrogant in their so-called maturity that they can’t see the serious sins within their midst.
- You can imagine in such a tense situation that any sort of conflict would inevitably light a powder keg of pent up feelings. As we see in our text, some church members were actually suing other members in court.
- And Paul has strong feelings about this.
 - [1] When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?
- This is a strong word Paul uses in the Greek here for dare. How dare you do something like this? Why would you even consider it?
 - Taking someone to court like this not only deepens the division within the church, but it’s also a terrible witness to the watching world around them. A lawsuit unnecessarily airs out the dirty laundry of our fellow believers before the public.
 - And this isn’t even the worst of it. The legal courts of the time could often be biased towards those with wealth or power. And the consequences could be pretty severe for the church member who could not afford legal help.
 - The Apostle Paul is strong in his rebuke here. In verse 5, he says this to their shame.

- Now we need to qualify some things here. In our time, some churches have taken this text to mean that the church should never call the police about anything going on within the church. They think that the church has the ability and jurisdiction to adjudicate every dispute or crime within their body.
- I don't agree with that. If you look in verse 3, Paul says that the church is supposed to be able to judge matters pertaining to this life. That phrase "pertaining to this life" in the Greek is most likely a reference to financial matters.¹ Same thing with the phrase "Defraud" in verse 8.
- So I don't think Paul is saying that the church is qualified to judge every conflict within their body. Particularly when it comes to criminal activity, I think Paul is very clear in Romans 13 that the state is given jurisdiction to punish evil. This is why Christians ought to as best as we can in good conscience support our government authorities while also praying that the Lord would give them wisdom in doing their job.
- But having made that qualification, you and I still need to wrestle with the high expectations Paul has of all Christians. Look with me here starting at verse 2.
 - [2] Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? [3] Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! [4] So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? [5] I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, [6] but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?
- According to Paul, Christians are called to live as citizens of Christ's kingdom. And when Christ comes to fully establish his kingdom here on earth, the biblical expectation is that his followers will share in his rule and reign.
 - We can see this clearly in Daniel 7:22 and Revelation 20:4.
 - Jesus himself says in Matthew 19:28:
 - "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.
- And what Jesus is saying here isn't that surprising. All the way in Genesis 1, God created humanity in his image. And part of bearing the image of God is being a representative of his rule as we seek to spread his glory all over the world. That was the duty first given to Adam and Eve.
- Sin came into the world and messed this up by making us more concerned with spreading our own glory rather than God's, but the beauty of the biblical story is that, in salvation, Jesus is working to restore his people, even restoring us back to our former job.

¹ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007).

- Brothers and sisters, if you're a Christian, a citizen within the kingdom of Christ, you're coming into a kingdom where you too are expected to be a mature ruler. It's a sobering thought isn't it? According to Paul, you and I are actually going to be one day judging angels.

Application

- And if that's who we are supposed to be, if that's who's going to be in the kingdom of God, then shouldn't you and I be wise and mature enough to handle the everyday conflict that comes up in our church?
- Friends, we need to be clear here. Jesus isn't simply calling us to barely slide into heaven. The biblical calling given to every Christian is that we would all be presented as mature in Christ. That we would all have the spiritual wisdom necessary to adjudicate not only our own conflict but also the conflict of other brothers and sisters in our church. That we would all be able to rule well over whatever sphere of influence God has given us because one day we will be placed in charge of ruling the world.
- Even if you aren't the wisest person or most insightful person in the world, we can see that for Paul, the biblical expectation of every Christian in verse 7 is that we would be the kind of people who have the sense and maturity to place the good of others, the unity of the church, and the witness of Christ above our own needs and desires. That we would rather receive the wrong than rile up divisions within our spiritual family. This doesn't mean that we ought to let others walk on us, but it does mean that we are spiritually and emotionally mature enough to see the big picture. That we are able to sacrifice for the greater good.
- One of the great ironies of 1 Corinthians is that the church then bragged about their wisdom, while not being wise enough to handle the little conflicts that would come up in everyday life. And as sad as it is for them, it's even sadder for us today when those of us who claim to have so much theological knowledge can't use any of that stuff to settle with one another and come to peaceful resolutions.
- It's heartbreaking to hear Christians, members of our own church even, say that we had a falling out. Or that person let me down and we don't talk anymore. Or I can bear with so and so anymore. It's just too hard.
- Friend, how hard was it for Christ to bear with you at your weakest moments?
- Now I get that in this life, we won't always have happy endings to every conflict, but I would bet that a good number of our disagreements could be worked out if we just had the spiritual maturity to talk it out.
- If you're here visiting us today, you might have a pretty jaded impression of what the church is. You might think it's filled with divisions and strife. I wouldn't really be able to argue with you. The church can be a messy place.
- But at the same time you gotta admit the ideal of what we're striving for is pretty special. If you could live in a community like this, where everyone was trying to grow in wisdom and maturity, where people were willing to sacrifice for the greater good of the community, you would wanna be here too. You would want to hang around neighbors like this.
- I can't say our church does this perfectly, but I can say that there are real signs of this kind of community within our people. I can say that Jesus is really at work

making us like him, and you can see it if you take the time to look. It's in the way our parents apologize to our kids. The way we take the initiative to have hard conversations with one another. It's in the way we wrong each other and still forgive without forsaking our family and friends.

- That's the kind of community that the kingdom of God will be like one day.

Who Won't Be There? (9-11)

- Of course, if that's the kind of people that will be in the kingdom of heaven, then we need to ask the question who won't be there?
- And this is what Paul addresses here in verse 9.
 - [9] Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, [10] nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.
- Now, the most controversial point on this list comes at the end of verse 9 where Paul talks about men who practice homosexuality. Does Paul think same sex relationships are sinful?
- The Greek words in question here is (ἀρσενικοῖται).
- If you look this up online, you can't find a whole bunch of arguments about how this word has been mistranslated from the Greek, and has only recently been translated as homosexual.
- I need to concede that older translations didn't always translate these terms to refer to same sex relationships. Martin Luther's German translation of the Bible doesn't translate this to refer to homosexuality.
- I also need to concede that this word is unique. (ἀρσενικοῖται) is a word that isn't really found anywhere else in Hellenistic literature. It's a compound word that can literally be translated as male bedder.
- Of course with compound words, you need to be a little careful. In English, when we talk about the butterflies, we're not actually referring to flies with butter on them.
- So how do we get at what Paul is getting at here? Well the compound version of this word doesn't appear anywhere else, but the two words it's made up of (ἄρσεν), and (κοίτη) appear in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament.
- These words are found together in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13. And there, it's pretty clear that this is a reference to same sex sexual relationships.
- Now some progressive scholars concede that (ἀρσενικοῖται) is a reference to Leviticus, but they argue that what Leviticus is referring to isn't consensual same sex relationships. They would say that this is some sort of abuse or oppressive relationship that is being referred to.
- But if this were the case, then why in Leviticus 20:13 are both parties considered guilty for the sin?
- Friends, you may not like what the Bible says here. You may not agree. But I think we should all just be honest here that Paul, a conservative, Jewish,

Christian, most certainly believed and taught that same sex sexual relationships is a sin. And if Paul is speaking for God, then it follows that God considers same sex sexual relationships to be a sin.

- Why? Is God puritanical? Does he think any sexual activity is inherently sinful? No. On the contrary, sex is God's idea. And as we'll see in 1 Cor. 7, God is very pro sex.
- At the same time God also places a great deal of restrictions on how we express our sexuality. According to the Bible, sex is to be enjoyed solely within the confines of biblical marriage. Marriage between one man and one woman for life. Any other form of sexual activity is considered sinful.
- Because as good as sex is, it's also powerful, and it can powerfully harm us and others around us if we do not keep it within its designed parameters.
- When functioning rightly, sex within marriage brings out the best of both husbands and wives as the two learn to love each other and lean into their strengths as men and women.
- Sex also produces children, and when paired with lifelong monogamy, it places kids ideally within the safety of their biological parents who have an inherent vested interest in their upbringing. Ideally, this is the best place for a new child to be nurtured and raised.
- And mysteriously, sex within God's design somehow gives us a small picture of how Christ loves his church and how we are one with him.
- But when we go against the grain of God's design it has unintended consequences for ourselves and for others around us. One unintended consequence that we see now in our culture is how same sex unions are driving the market for test tube babies. Children that are made in a lab.
- I'm not a prophet, but my guess is that these kids are going to grow up with a great deal of identity crisis. Because how can you know who you are, when you really don't know where you came from or who your mom and dad are?
- I can't thoroughly deal with the topic of same sex sexual relationships here. If you would like to talk more, I'd be happy to speak with you after the service.
- But before you leave thinking that God hates you if you are gay, let me point out a couple of details here that might change your perception a little bit.
- First of all, in this list, God doesn't single out same sex sexual activity as any more immoral than heterosexual immorality. No, Paul lumps all sexual sins together along with idolatry, drunkenness, and greed and says that all these various activities are inherently against the kingdom of God. And anyone who is characteristically one of these things will be excluded from his eternal kingdom.
- But not only does Paul level the playing field, Paul also seems to flip the script here as he usually does and speaks directly to the people within the church of Corinth.
- Do **you** not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? In other words there were those in Corinth who themselves were unrighteous. Who themselves were struggling with sexual immorality and greed. And the implication is that if those within the church of Corinth remained in their sins, they would not inherit the kingdom of God.

- And this is something I think is important for us to remember. For the Christians here in this room, we should be far less worried about the immorality going on out there than we are about the immorality going on in here.
- Paul already said in 1 Cor. 5:9-13 that he expects the world to act worldly. But he has issues with Christians claiming to belong to Christ and still acting like the world. Why?
- Verse 11.
 - 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.

Illustration

- Crawford Loritts used to say that when he was growing up, his Dad one day caught him stealing something small from the store.
- And he pulled him aside and said, “Son, do I not provide enough for you?”
- “No, Dad.”
- “Have you ever needed something, and I have not come through for you?”
- “No, Dad.” And then his Dad said,
- “All your life, I worked as hard as I could so that no son of mine ever needed to resort to petty theft.”

Application

- Friends, let’s be clear here, what makes a Christian a Christian isn’t what we do, anymore than what makes someone a son is what they do. No fundamentally what makes someone a Christian is what Christ has done for us. And this is what Paul is reminding them of. He is saying that their life is inconsistent with who they are in Christ.
 - You were stained with sin and Jesus washed you clean with his blood.
 - You were by nature an unrepentant sinner, and Jesus sanctified you and set you apart for a high and holy calling.
 - Friend, you were an enemy of God. And knowing that Jesus, lived the life that you could never live, paid the price that you could never pay, and rose again from the dead to purchase your pardon and place in his kingdom.
- Now I want our church to be a hospital for sinners. I want us to be a safe place for people to be honest about the ways we’re struggling. I want us to be a community that is patient and long suffering in our love and care for one another.
- But I don’t want us to stay sick for the rest of our lives. I want us to remember who Jesus is and who we are in him. And I want us to start living as if Jesus Christ really is our king.
- I get that it’s a long battle. Lingering sin never goes down easy. And there may be some of you who are struggling with things that you’ve never told anybody.
- It would not surprise me if there are even members of our church who struggle with same sex attraction. And it wouldn’t make me love you any less if you told me that.
- But fundamentally, what makes a Christian distinct is that Jesus Christ is our king and we have a place in his kingdom.

- And if that's true, then to stay in sin is unthinkable. Brothers and Sisters, sin is rebellion against our king. It's antithetical to the way of life in his kingdom. And if you can sit still in your sin, then in Paul's mind, you might have forgotten your king.
- But when we remember who our king is and what he's done to save us, we remember that our king is a king worth fighting for.
- And if you're here today, and you don't know where you stand on this Jesus thing, and you don't like the sacrifices Jesus asks us to make to come and follow him, friend all I have to say to you is that whatever Jesus is asking you to give up, I can assure you that Jesus is better than that.
 - Jesus gives a better security than money, a better peace than alcohol, a closer intimacy than physical affection.
- And you don't have to take my word for it. You can get to know Jesus for yourself. Spend some time praying, get to know his word, get to know the people who strive to live in light of his kingdom. Friends if you take the time to get to know this king Jesus, you just might start to call him your king too.