

Have you ever had your automobile mechanic say to you about your car, ‘the slight noise is just a symptom of a much bigger problem!’ You went to the garage for a suspicious squeak or rattle to be fixed, and you discover you have to replace their basic engine and transmission drive train – half the car!

In our passage, Paul wrote about a squeak, a rattle in the church in Corinth. Some believers were taking one another to public court. But that smaller rattle in the congregation was revealing a deeper, bigger, serious problem in the congregation – they did not understand the gospel, and they were not living it. Paul would have to replace their basic theological belief system!

**Christ gave His church clear instructions for how to deal with serious conflict between Christians.**

The secular city of Corinth had a litigious culture. They urged people to demand their rights. Furthermore, if their rights were denied, then the culture urged them to take that person or that agency to court over it. And that attitude got into the church in Corinth.

Since they ought not to take fellow believers to a secular court, then what ought they to do instead? Instead, they should remember the gospel and its implications.

### **1. Understanding public courts vs. the courts of the church. (v.1-6)**

Paul wrote the letter to confront various sins in the church. 1) divisions 2) immorality, and now 3) lawsuits. This means that Christians were taking legal matters regarding other Christians to the city’s secular court. The very fact that Christians would sue other Christians publicly in open court was a disgraceful scandal for the church. Specifically, the scandal was that Christians could not seem to get along with each other, and so Christ seemed to provide no difference in the lives of Christians, when compared to the lives of non-Christians.

Verse 2 – began with the question, “*or do you not know that...*”? This was a form of expression often used by Paul to bring out an important truth that his readers actually did know, but at the moment they were disregarding. It could be said that they were acting in such a way as if they did NOT know the truth that Paul was pointing out.

Two categories of people were distinguished with a new set of vocabulary, “the saints” on the inside and “the world” on the outside. Here Paul was suddenly fast-forwarding to the end of the world – and envisioning what would happen then, would be the reality that the saints will judge everyone else in the world!

Verse 3 – again Paul used that same introductory question, “*do you not know that...*” This time, Paul reminded them that in the future, we believers will even judge angels!

The logical and literary progression here was from the greater to the lesser. Follow the thinking here. Since we will be in the distant future expected to judge cases of greater importance and longer-lasting significance, we can reasonably be expected to handle the current cases of lesser importance and of shorter-range significance.

In verse 4, Paul grieved that there existed various legal cases between Christians. Again, Paul's sole issue of contention instead was where they decided to go to achieve a hearing on their legal matter.

In verses 5-6, by taking their case to someone OUTSIDE of the church, these two Christians were - in effect- saying about the church that there did not exist anywhere within the entire church any person with enough wisdom to arbitrate their matter for them. One brother had a complaint. Another brother was accused. And they were all forced to admit their underlying belief that no one in the church could deal with this! They should feel ashamed to be found believing that no Christian could handle their case!

## **2. Understanding reconciliation in a Christian manner. (v.7-8)**

In verse 7, Paul further emphasized that already a defeat was happening whenever a Christian was suing another brother. Almost anything else would have been better than to allow this situation to occur and to be repeated. For example, it would have been better to suffer a wrong, and never get justice for it. That meant it would have been better to have something illegal done against you and that never being made right. It would have been better to have something stolen from you or an injustice against you endured by you. Christians were expected to be able to absorb being wronged, and not retaliate.

In verse 8, Paul wrote that the readers of this letter of 1 Corinthians did not possess the requisite maturity and godliness to be able to absorb the wrong and overlook being illegally defrauded. But it was worse than that. These Corinthians were going farther, and even wronging others, defrauding others. Christians in Corinth were doing these wrong actions against fellow Christians!

The way for a Christian to mend things with another Christian, is the way Christ would have us do it. All conflict resolution has to happen in a manner like Jesus Christ!

And what is that manner? The manner of self-sacrifice. The way of self-denial.

Jesus came not to be served, but to serve, and to give up His life for others. So, the Christian manner is I'll be the first to lay down my legal complaint. I will not sue you.

Furthermore, even if you sue me, I will not counter-sue you.

To the world, that sounds like weakness. Does that sound like weakness to you? Then you have not tried it. It is not weakness. In fact, it is so extremely hard,

because it takes GREAT STRENGTH to live that out.

Someone famous once said, “Turn the other cheek.” Guess who? Jesus! Luke 6:28, “*bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also...*”

To be struck on the face, and not hit back, that is strength.

What is even stronger is to next turn to offer the other side of your face also to be hurt. That is the sort of strength that only Christ has. We seek Him for that.

### **3. Understanding the gospel, and its implications.(v.9-11)**

Notice that at the start of verse 9, Paul used that same phrase a third time in our passage today, “OR DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT...”

HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN THE FIRST PRINCIPLE OF THE GOSPEL – THAT GOD IS A HOLY GOD, AND THE HOLY GOD WILL NOT ALLOW PEOPLE INTO HIS KINGDOM WHO ARE DECEIVING THEMSELVES AND ALLOWING THEMSELVES TO STAY IN LIVES OF SIN?

The problem with which they struggled in ancient Corinth was the same problem that is found everywhere. The problem is looking at religion as outward only. The wrong outworking is to conceive of God as merely as someone to be feared, and appeased, but not to conceive of God as someone to be loved!

They don’t consider God someone to be personally obeyed.

But this is how Christians are different. Christians understand the gospel and we live out the implications of the gospel news.

The lawsuit issue was the test! It was the rattle that revealed whether the car needed a major repair!

The believers in Corinth wanted to worship, and said that they were Christians, but if being a Christians meant that they had to dismiss their lawsuit, then they could not bring themselves to do so! Why? Because there was too much loss of money involved! That was a person controlled by greed, not a person controlled by Christ.

What is your test? Have you ever want to be able to handle a basketball like him, or tell funny stories like her, or sing so nice like him, or be athletic like her, or do schoolwork like him or have beauty like her or strength and good looks like him, or parents like him, or siblings like her, or get into those schools, and get those jobs and raises and careers and spouses and kids and grandkids and houses and homes and vacations and clothes and lives like other people are living?

This list of Paul included not just outward sins, but also sins inside your heart.

In verse 11, Paul says to the believers in Corinth reading this letter AND SUCH WERE SOME OF YOU.

You were just like the world. If such people will not inherit the kingdom, then how did believers get to a place of belonging in the church, and being set up

to inherit the kingdom? There is only one way for SUCH, there is only one way for SUCH PEOPLE TO inherit what they are not allowed to inherit by a holy God. One way. What is that one way?

Verse 11. *But You were washed.*

Not every one of them had lived a homosexual life or a life of immorality.

But some of them had.

Should we kick them out? No. Why not? B/c they were washed by Christ.

Should we kick you out? No. Why not?

Because you were washed by the cleansing blood of Christ.

Wait, what does this have to do with Christians suing Christians?

Because selecting a believer as an arbitrator can remind two believers who are suing each other in a secular court, that neither one of them deserves to have a place in God's kingdom.

A believer can remind other believers of:

The gospel of washing. The grace of humility. The gift of perspective.

The person offering the lawsuit drops it because he says I don't deserve to have this lawsuit move forward.

The person being sued says – let me cover the damages, for I must admit that I did break our contract. That is called sanctified.

*“You were washed. You were sanctified. You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God.”*

Like changing out of dirty clothes, the old man was taken off and thrown into the dirty clothes basket. And the new man was put on like clean clothes.

Sins, as filthy as they were, were washed clean away by the blood of Jesus.

The guilt of the sin was covered, the pollution of the sin was purified.

Let me quiz you about the gospel.

The righteous shall live by [blank] (by what?)

I'll give you two possible answers. Is it:

a) The righteous shall live by righteous behavior?

OR, is it b) the righteous shall live by faith.

Answer – by faith. Romans 1:17, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

How are your sins washed? By faith in Jesus. By faith I don't live in that sin anymore. The same God who washes us also sanctifies us and justifies us.

And being justified is what our Catholic friends never seem to thoroughly understand and celebrate with us. Justification by faith has been the celebration point for 500 years of protestant worship! When we are justified, we are considered right before God, once and for all. Because we are justified, we have the name of Jesus Christ placed upon us, and we go by the name Christians. Furthermore, we have the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is doing all of this – He is washing us, sanctifying us, and justifying us.

It is the Spirit who applies to us the redemption of Christ, and Him Crucified and risen again.

The Spirit takes the blood of Christ and washes our souls clean with it.

The Spirit takes the Holiness of Christ's character, and sanctifies our minds with it inside our hearts, and in our daily thoughts and actions.

The Spirit takes the justified position of Christ, and grants that position also to us as a permanent gift and unchangeable status. Consequently, we are under the highest possible obligation not to relapse into our former pollution and our former condemnation. We must never relapse into desiring to protect our own concerns, above the concerns of our brother.

**Conclusion:** *For a fellow Christian, we would rather die than sue.*

SI - Clara Barton, the founder of the American Red Cross, was reminded one day of a vicious deed that someone had done to her years before. But she acted as if she had never even heard of the incident. "Don't you remember it?" her friend asked. "No," came Barton's reply, "I distinctly remember forgetting it."

For Paul, the purpose of Christianity was to share good with the bad world, to bring light where there was darkness, to bring life where there was death.

But as Paul looked at the church in Corinth, the opposite was taking place. The world's darkness was entering the church, and making it dimmer. The world's death was entering the church, squeezing the life out of it.

Don't let anyone put out your light. Don't let the church start smelling like death. Don't forget that we were redeemed. Continue to be a blessing to others.

Be more interested in dying for a Christian, than suing a Christian.

Galatians 3:13-14, "*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree' – so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.*"