

Gospel Over Grievance

Sunday, October 12, 2025

Start with Application Testimony

- **Last week's exhortation:** Prepare your heart to both give correction to, and receive correction from, your brothers and sisters in the church.

INTRO

- **We are going verse-by-verse, in a topical study through I & II Corinthians**
 - **Current Topic:** Church Relationship – The holy work of being the Body of Christ.
 - So far in this series we have been digging into the practical realities of working through the challenges that come from being in relationship with others in the church, so that we can build a strong Church community and experience the blessings of God together.
 - In today's lesson we are going to talk about applying the wisdom of God, and prioritizing the growth of His Kingdom, when there are disagreements and disputes between us – even those that could be as serious as lawsuits.
 - We are not expecting to walk away from this lesson with black & white instruction on how to handle these complicated matters in every kind of situation. These things are complex. But we should walk away wrestling with questions we hadn't considered before, with humbled hearts that are teachable and ready to learn a new way of engaging conflict and dispute in the church.

READ

1 Corinthians 6:1–11 CSB

¹ If any of you has a dispute against another, how dare you take it to court before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? ² Or don't you know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the trivial cases? ³ Don't you know that we will judge angels—how much more matters of this life? ⁴ So if you have such matters, do you appoint as your judges those who have no standing in the church? ⁵ I say this to your shame! Can it be that there is not one wise person among you who is able to arbitrate between fellow believers? ⁶ Instead, brother goes to court against brother, and that before unbelievers! ⁷ As it is, to have legal disputes against one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? ⁸ Instead, you yourselves do wrong and cheat—and you do this to brothers and sisters! ⁹ Don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God's kingdom? Do not be deceived: No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or males who have sex with males, ¹⁰ no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit God's kingdom. ¹¹ And some of you used to be like this. 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.

EXAMINE

#1 | We must be able to apply God's laws and truths in real life scenarios

1. 1 Corinthians 6:3,5 *"Don't you know that we will judge angels—how much more matters of this life?... I say this to your shame! Can it be that there is*

not one wise person among you who is able to arbitrate between fellow believers?”

- a. As people who have received the revelation of God, we ought to be better equipped than anyone to settle disputes in real-world matters.
 - i. *We should also be ready to submit to the judgement of others in the church, who have shown they know how to apply God’s wisdom. (This ties back to Church Discipline)*
 - ii. **NOTE:** *It’s important to note that Paul clearly has personal lawsuits in mind here – not criminal issues, which should be brought to secular courts. (Romans 13:1-7)*
- b. The wisdom we receive from God is not merely religious and philosophical – it is practical. (2 Tim. 3:16-17; James 3:17)
 - i. *If we have been learning and maturing in God’s wisdom, then we should be able to apply it in our real life circumstances.*

#2 | The reputation of the Gospel should matter more to us than our personal rights

- 1. 1 Corinthians 6:6-8 *“Instead, brother goes to court against brother, and that before unbelievers! As it is, to have legal disputes against one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves do wrong and cheat—and you do this to brothers and sisters!”*
 - a. Paul is calling them out for making the message of Jesus look bad in the eyes of unbelievers – they claim to be all about love and forgiveness then turn around and sue each other.

- i. *They may win their law suit, but the reputation of the Christ is tarnished in the process.*
- b. As Christians we must see ourselves as part of something much bigger – our actions affect the reputation of Jesus and the believability of the Gospel message. (Col. 4:5-6)
 - i. *In a worst case scenario, suffering wrong with grace provides a powerful testimony to the watching world – far more valuable than any other victory.*

#3 | We must imitate the patience and mercy of God

- 1. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 “*Don’t you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God’s kingdom?... And some of you used to be like this. 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.*”
 - a. God has made us righteous, and so we must never return to unrighteousness – this includes prioritizing personal interests and offenses over what’s best for everyone.
 - i. *The litigious self-seeking attitude that Paul is confronting revealed that the Corinthians did not really understand who they’d been, and who they now were in Christ.*
 - b. Having received the patience and mercy of God in our own lives, we should be the most patient and merciful people that anyone encounters. (Luke 6:35-36)
 - i. *Remember, the world is watching to see if the Gospel is true.*

REFLECT

Let's take a moment to pray

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide our attention and lead our conversation, helping us see and understand what He wants us to apply in our lives.

APPLY

Process the passage together with these questions:

- How can we guard our hearts when we feel we are the victim, so we don't turn around and harm others?
- What are the qualities of a "wise person" in the church that you would trust to help judge a dispute?
- What are some other ways our interactions with other believers affect the reputation of the Gospel?

Where we want to "land the plane"

- The way we handle conflict within the church is a public billboard for the Gospel. When we are wronged, our first instinct might be to demand our rights and seek personal vindication, but Christ calls us to a higher path. Remembering the incredible mercy God has shown us—forgiving our much greater debt—empowers us to absorb a loss for the sake of Christ's reputation. We must resolve to handle our disagreements in a way that honors God, honors one another, and promotes the Gospel to the watching world.

Exhortation for the Week

- Reevaluate the disputes you currently have, or have had, with others in the church. Reconsider the way you have been thinking about and approaching those conflicts.

FOOTNOTES

1. **For Further Reading:** The historical Christian teaching on this passage consistently emphasizes that public lawsuits between believers damage the church's witness. Theologians from the early church to the modern era have argued that the church should be equipped to settle its own disputes and that it is better to suffer wrong than to harm the reputation of the Gospel. For specific commentary, see **John Chrysostom**, *Homilies on First Corinthians*, Homily 16, which calls the practice a “great disgrace”; **John Calvin**, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:7*, which condemns an “immoderate fondness for litigation”; **Matthew Henry**, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1 Corinthians 6:1–8, which stresses that the “credit of our religion” is the higher value; and **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**, *Life Together*, which frames the church as the proper context for all brotherly matters.