

Cross-Shaped Conflict

Introduction

Our country's motto for a long time has been "In God we trust". But functionally we all know that's no longer true, from several perspectives, but as some have suggested, it might now properly be said, "In suing we trust."

"80% of the world's lawyers live in the United States." We have an avg. of 15 million cases a year with an avg. of \$251 Billion in expenditures.

This is the air we breathe now, and nobody even bats an eye. Suing one another has become a way of life for us. It's a way to get even, a way to get back, and it's a way to get ahead. People even look for the smallest excuses to "get some" and off they go to the courts.

I was reading this week of some of these cases, a Florida minister and his wife sued a guide-dog school after a blind man being led by one of the dogs stepped on the woman's toe in a mall. They sought \$160,000 as compensation. They didn't win, surprisingly.

Another woman sued the company the "Clapper" which uses the sound of a clap to activate appliances. She claimed that her hands were injured by having to clap too hard.

An animal rights company is suing a photographer for using a picture of a gorilla who snatched the camera and took a selfie.

These are kinda funny, but it's serious.

This morning we are looking at the Corinthian church, which was inside the city of Corinth, which is not too far off from where we are. They had a legal system, and they loved using it. It was a source of gaining money, getting even, defrauding one another, and had even become a place of entertainment. The courts were loved. Suing was a way of life for them. And the church is in full participation in these courts. The church was not impacting Corinth, too much Corinth was in the church.

As we jump in here to chapter 6, Paul, with an ironic twist, ties chapter 6 to Chapter 5. If you were here last week you heard how in chapter 5 Paul is commanding the church to judge the sexually immoral person that is among them. He is very clear that their judgement is to be inside the church, not outside toward the unbeliever. Do not judge the unbeliever, he says.

But in chapter 6, he flips it, and now says, Not only are you not to judge outsiders, but you are not to let outsiders judge you.

This is an absolute shock to Paul. He is beside himself with a sense of holy indignation.

He begins, **6:1 "When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?"**

This line couldn't be taken with any more sting to it. "does he dare" is not soft. It's like, "how dare you, how dare you go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints, the church? How dare you?"

Paul is in utter shock, disapproval, and disgust. He's horrified.

He's horrified not that Christians are having issues, but that they are taking their issues before nonbelievers instead of before the church.

Now to be clear up front, Paul is not against the legal system. He himself appealed to the legal system in Acts. He also affirms in Romans 14 that God has given the legal system to us as a gift to punish the wrong doer.

Paul's focus here is particularly on civil cases, as opposed to criminal cases. There may be times when it is appropriate to turn a brother in to the police.

So this is not a slam against the legal system. It's a slam against christians that are having money or property disputes with other christians, and they are taking them to court for it.

After this initial line by Paul to bring up this issue, he goes on a rant articulating why this is so reprehensible to him and why this is so inconsistent with the fact that they are christians and Christ followers. This morning we are going to look at his argument. I've pulled out 5 reasons why christians taking christians to court is inconsistent with the gospel.

1. Taking other christians to court is inconsistent with your position in Christ (2-4)

“6:2 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?”

Paul first points the Corinthians to a future reality when they will be judging the world. The saints will one day judge the world. This obviously demands a bit of explanation, and although Scripture is not perfectly clear on all the intricacies of what this might look like, what we know is that christians will be reigning and judging with Christ under and in His authority.

Daniel 7:21 As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them, 22 until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.

Rev. 5:10, “and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

It's this future reality that Paul is ablaze with. He always has an eye to how things are going to shake out eternally.

And what he's seeing is an incredible mismatch between what has been promised to happen, what will happen, and how these Corinthians are acting. He's telling them they have forgotten the glorious promise of where the church will stand for eternity. They've become enamored with the here and now, with the world.

I don't know what all judging angels and the world is going to look like, but it is far more glorious and weighty than anything in this life. Like he says, if you are going to be doing that, how can you not settle what he calls a “trivial case.”

2. Taking other christians to court is inconsistent with your wisdom in Christ (5-6)

“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?”

Paul is unashamedly shaming them here, and with biting sarcasm. It doesn't make any sense that the Corinthians would be taking their issues to the unbelieving courts. We learned from earlier chapters in Corinthians that they boasted in their wisdom, they thought they above everyone else in their learning and

ability. But Paul says here, are you kidding, how unwise you are! You can't find someone wise in your own midst to handle "trivial" cases. You aren't wise, you are foolish.

But in fact you should be wise. Not with the wisdom of the world but with the wisdom of Christ. Instead of taking matters to the secular courts where there is no moral grid, you are to rule the church in righteousness. Secular judges don't care about the will of God and ruling in righteousness. They don't care about sin and repentance.

The beauty of being able to take matters before the church is that you can trust the church is trying to hear from God, to dispense the wisdom of Christ in solving problems. The court system in Corinth was notorious for being corrupt and able to be bribed. How foolish you are to lean on their judgements.

Instead, you are to take matters to the church. Matthew 18 clearly lays out.

3. Taking other christians to court is inconsistent with the cross of Christ (7-8)

"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!"

Paul now shows them that by going to the courts against each other is already a defeat. He's saying, don't think that just because you get something settled in court, you win. No, you don't win, you lose.

You lose first, because you have left the path of the cross. You've left the example given to us by Christ.

You see when you let conflict arise to the level that you take others to court, you are about yourself, what you can get, and even at the expense of others. You do not have a heart of love or a heart for Jesus. You've violated all the "one another" commands.

It's a defeat because you aren't walking in love. Yeah, you may get justice, but your heart is wrong. And he takes it a step farther, he says, not just that you get even, or get what is rightfully yours, but that you "wrong and defraud each other—even your own brothers!"

Part of the reason why they were going to court was not just for what we would consider right justice, they were going to before crooked, worldly judges, with the purpose of getting more than justice, with the motive of wronging and defrauding their brother. That means there's evil underlying these impulses driving them to court.

So it's a defeat because they are evidencing that they are not about love, they are not about what they can give, they are not about how they can suffer for God's glory.

Paul lays out the clear answer to how instead they should respond. "Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?"

This should shock our systems a bit. This is where the gospel of Christ is radical and wars against our flesh. Why not suffer wrong?

What do you mean? Paul. You mean I am to willingly be mistreated, you mean I am to willingly be defrauded, to lose money that is rightfully mine. You don't understand, I need that money back. I need that property. My family is going to suffer if I don't get that money back. He stole it from me. He didn't pay me the rent he owes me. Won't that just enable him to keep on, he won't learn his lesson. What about justice?

Yep. I know. It's radical. It hurts. That's the path of the cross.

But what is important at this point to remember, is that just because you let it go, doesn't mean it's not getting taken care of. Romans 12, It is mine to avenge says the Lord. In those moments we aren't letting go of justice at all, we are rather by faith entrusting the situation to God that He will take care of it in His infinite and perfect wisdom.

Is this not what Jesus did? **1 Peter 2:19, "For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 20 For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.**

Jesus could have rightfully called down legions of angels to avenge Him as He was being crucified, but instead he kept on trusting, and kept on blessing. What does He say as some of His last words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

How do you deal with being wronged? Are you one to take justice into your own hands, or are you one to entrust justice to God's hands.

Let's look at this from another angle, another reason why this is a defeat to the Corinthians... This one actually reaches back to verse 6.

4. Taking other christians to court is inconsistent with your mission for Christ (6-8)

This next point arises from the later part of v.6. He says brother goes to law against brother, and that before, or "in front of". This has the idea from Paul, how dare you be airing the church's dirty laundry before the world.

Don't you know the mission of the church?

The mission of the church is to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth, in creed and deed, and belief and behavior. The church is called to be holy, set apart, different from the world, and to adorn the gospel of grace in all of life, that is to make it look good, attractive. And with the Corinthians going to the courts before unbelievers, they have lost their witness. They are more concerned with their rights, and self-worship, than the mission and glory of God, than witnessing to the world with their love and holiness. That is DEFEAT.

And so he's saying, why not rather be wronged and defrauded than to blow your witness, to paint a poor picture of the church.

He's emphatic here about doing this to your own brothers in Christ. The world knows its sad when brother goes to court against brother, for the unbeliever this can make headline news. How much more tragic when it's a brother in the church against brother in the church?

You are to be putting the church on a stand, making it look glorious to the world. And instead, you've made the church look no different from the world. Right? God calls the church to be the light to the world, a city on the hill, and lamp, not under a basket, but on a lamp stand. It is not our perfection that makes us shine, it is Christ, but Jesus shines through us in our holiness and in our love.

You haven't put Christ on display, you've put your sin on display. Does that make the church look attractive? Absolutely not. The world doesn't need that!

But when you choose rather to be wronged, you are putting Christ on display. See this is the other side of the coin. There's the private, entrusting yourself and the situation to God's justice, but then that goes public, when you entrust to God vertically, you release grace horizontally.

What do I mean? From the justice side of it, I am trusting God to take care of it. Therefore it is no longer in my hands. What does that allow me to do. That allows me to love this brother. What just went public? Radical grace.

The essence of grace is giving someone something they do not deserve. Now that's something the world needs. They need to see grace in action. This is the mission of the church, to display grace, not judgement.

“During the autumn of 1980, one of the most beautiful demonstrations of not demanding rights was seen in Los Gatos, California, by a diabetic with impaired circulation. He was told that he needed to have one of his legs amputated below the knee, but the surgeon cut off the wrong leg. The man's other leg was later removed. The man asked that he not be identified by the news media, and he refused to pursue legal action against the hospital or its staff. The man simply replied that everybody makes mistakes in this world.”

I want to return back to the question, how do you deal with being wronged? Are you one for justice, or are you one for grace?

Even now, you may not be tempted to take someone to court, but this nevertheless applies to you in any situation. The point is not just “don't go to court” the point is, handle being wronged shaped by the cross and for the mission of God.

Often our impulses are so self-centered. I want us to consider the bigger picture of God's glory and the beauty of His bride in redemptive history. It's much bigger than just our individual selves, how we respond reflects the gospel.

lastly,

5. Taking other christians to court is inconsistent with your new identity in Christ (9-11)

“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.”

V.9 follows hard on the heels of v.8, the thought is not broken. the unrighteous here that Paul is talking about is addressing those of 7-8. In other words, this is a warning text. You Corinthians are wronging and defrauding each other. Don't be deceived! Those who wrong and defraud each other will not inherit the kingdom of God. You persist in that and show no evidence that you have come out of the world, than you aren't saved.

Is he preaching salvation by works? Not at all. And that's why after this sharp warning he gives them this gospel reminder.. 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.”

The point is singular that Paul is making. You have been saved, now act like it. You are a new creation, now act like it. You have been forgiven, now act like it. You've been covered in the blood of Jesus, made righteous, now act like it. You've been given His Spirit, now act like it.

Stop taking each other to court. Stop wronging and defrauding each other. That's not who you are!

This is a beautiful text, Paul obviously enlarges upon more sins than what is going on in the civil courts. It functions as a key ethical text of the whole letter.

What's beautiful is we see here clearly what is all over the pages of Scripture, that anytime a command is given, and gospel promise is given first. The command is to stop fighting, the promise is Christ has given us peace. The command is to stop lusting, the promise is Christ has made us pure. The command is to be content, the promise is we already have everything we need in Christ.

The Christian life is about becoming who you already are in Christ. The power for change is in the gospel promise by faith, it's not in your strength or effort.

The passive nature of these verbs. Christ washed you, Christ justified you, Christ sanctified you. Those aren't things you did.

Paul is rooting them back in the gospel.

Conclusion:

We may not be in danger of taking other christians to court, but its the heart issue that still applies. What are we going to be as a church? How are we going to handle conflict in the church?

Will we be a church that handles hurts and offenses gracefully?
that trusts God even if through suffering?
that faithfully lives out the mission of God to be a bright and beautiful church?