

# 'Handling Disputes'

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[0:00] Father in heaven, we do thank you for your word. We thank you that it speaks of the truths of this world and the Bible open in front of you.

I will have the slides, I'll have the verses on the screen, but easy to follow along if you have it in front of you. Again, there's Q&A; after as well, so please save all your hard questions for yourself. Some sort of leadership for quite some time, and I'm sure if you're a manager at work or you're part of a team at work, something that often comes up is a thing called conflict management. You know, you have employee A who's unhappy with employee B, and after a series of passive-aggressive emails going back and forth, you get employee C gets pulled into this mix.

You know, he's just really stuck there, right? He has to mediate between employee A and employee B. He really thinks employee A should just let it go, but next thing you know, HR fans out about this, and they're all going axe-throwing on a Friday night because that will solve all our problems if we throw an axe.

In fact, it doesn't really even need to be a workplace, does it? You've been alive for any amount of time. There's some sort of conflict management. It isn't just for those who are working.

[1:34] What about students? Student A, B and C, they're all working on a project together, but only if student A is doing any work. Student B and C are very happy, but student A is very unhappy. I see it in children as they fight for toys.

I was playing with this first. No, you weren't. I never get to play with this. I'm quoting someone there. I remember seeing two grown-up adults honking, making gestures that I can't repeat here at each other about whose parking spot it was.

It was Christmas. It was sort of midnight shopping, but I don't know. There are lots of different styles of conflict management as well. Pretty sure this turned up. Okay.

Okay. This is the Kilman conflict management model. Who's seen this before? Put your hand up. Yeah. Good conflict management people there.

But see, conflict is complex, right? You've got, you know, there's the problem, that issue that needs to be solved. There's a whole industry full of graphs and tables and mediators of how to deal with conflict.

[2:42] You know, it's always complex. It's history, how people relate to one another, promises made and promises broken. I haven't found this this week. This is conflict DNA.

In 15 questions will reveal your preferred style of conflict. What an interesting title, though. Conflict DNA.

Maybe it's just part of all of us. It's in our DNA. It's something about our makeup, something about who we are, and it shapes how we do conflict, right?

But as a side note, it's a bit odd, right? It's 15 quick questions, but it's a 16-page report. I don't know how personalised that would be. But some of us see conflict.

Some of us see confrontation. They kind of just get, yeah, let's go. Let's do it. Let's sort this out.

Others, at even the slightest hint of conflict or disputes, you start to shuffle in your chair and kind of think, oh, this is getting really awkward.

[3:44] I hope it doesn't escalate from this. And you look for the nearest exit, which is there and there. But, like, it does raise the question. Conflict happens so often around us, and we'll often find ourselves in the middle of it.

But what happens when conflict happens in our church? What happens when disputes are raised between people in our church? How do we handle conflicts in our church? That's what happens, right?

We're all different, different cultures, backgrounds, languages, upbringings, expectations. Sometimes we get each other, and often we don't. And many times we often hurt each other. But how do we respond? How do we deal with conflict and disputes in the church? Well, looking at our passage in 1 Corinthians 6, is helpful to tell us how not to respond. But as we unpack this text, we'll see how God, and living as God's people, we have what we need in the gospel to resolve and reconcile disputes and conflicts. You see, the focus of 1 Corinthians 6 isn't to not have conflict, but to deal with conflict with the power and the wisdom of the cross. [4:52] Look with me at verses 1 to 3. This is my first point. Do you not know? Verses 1 to 3. If any of you have a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord's people?

Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life? Paul's saying disputes will happen. He's not having a go at them for having disputes or conflicts. It's expected when you gather sinners together. But these are disputes within believers. These are not criminal matters. This is not a matter where the law is broken. Paul's also saying don't ever use the courts because Paul uses the courts himself in the book of Acts.

Paul isn't talking about criminal cases. In those cases, we, just like Paul, would use the court system to uphold the law of the land. But you notice at the end of verse 2, what he is talking about is trivial cases.

[6:00] These are civil cases between Christians within the church. You see, the church, which has the Lord's people, holy and set apart.

Something that really astounds me, I probably bring it up every week in my Bible study, is how much Paul loves the church in Corinth. But there's such a basket case full of people. But he has such love and affection for them, calling them the Lord's people, the saints in Corinth. And he's reminding them of that again here. You are the Lord's people, God's people. Paul is saying you will judge the world. Verse 2. You will judge angels. Now, those paying careful attention would recall this passage from last week that Ricky preached on. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church and you are not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. Expel the wicked person from among you. You see, the judgment that Paul's talking about in chapter 6 is a future judgment.

[7:03] It's you will judge the world. You will judge angels. Paul's talking about the end times, the time where Christ returned, and on that day, Christians will participate in some way in the judgment of the world.

Paul isn't saying the courts are useless. The court cannot bring judgment, but rather their judgments, their worldview, is different from the view of the church. They don't have Christ crucified as the bearings that they go off.

Their values and worldview are different. Look at verses 4 to 6 with me. Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you ask for a ruling from those whose way of life is scorned in the church?

I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother takes another to court, and this is in front of unbelievers.

See, the irony is that the previous chapter, they weren't willing to judge the insider, those who were part of their church, whilst at the same time they were judging those who were outside their church. In our chapter 6, they're being consistently inconsistent.

[8:12] They now judge the insider, but with outside help. The Corinthian church has forgotten its identity as the Lord's people. Full of wisdom and authority, they're taking each other to court, they bring shame to themselves, to the church, and I think ultimately to God.

This is a newspaper clipping from a couple years ago. In 2018, there was a stouch within a denomination, a fight over property, a church fighting within themselves over property and their proceeds.

This is what the judge said. Judge Sifras criticized the plaintiff for its conduct throughout the case and denied them any cost in the matter. Here's the next bit, verbatim from the court case.

The matter should never have come to court, particularly given the identity of the litigants. No doubt millions of dollars could have been deployed for charitable purposes. What a waste of considerable time and money.

It gets worse. Nobody can escape blame. I can only yet again encourage the parties to resolve all matters once and for all. And as the journalist puts it there, it's a scathing judgment, isn't it?

[9 : 26] It is shameful. See, a Bible commentator noted that the local courts of the day in Corinth was located in the heart of the marketplace.

It was in the middle of the marketplace. And the Greek culture found that a good legal battle was entertaining. You know, anyone's lawsuit soon became public knowledge. The justice system and the legal system was used to move up the ranks in the social hierarchy, to establish one's supremacy and honor and position over another person.

It was like the Greek first century version of TV shows like Judge Judy and Jerry Springer. The courts were to prove that you were better than someone else. Used for retribution, putting the other party down to get one leg up.

But as we draw the threads from first century Corinth to where we are in Melbourne, 21st century, it's a bit different, right? But there are many similarities. Our courts are in the corner of the CBD, not in the middle of Queen Vic Market or Westfield Shopo.

Our courts are generally open, like you and I can walk to them and we can sit into the rulings and stuff, but we probably won't spend our days doing that. We only hear about what's happening if the news outlets pick it up.

[10 : 41] This week I even tried to look up what court cases were going on just for the sake of this sermon, but they're all coded and I didn't want to waste my time. But we do have this.

We do have a court of public opinion. They may not have the authority to pass judgments or punishments, but it does impact people's standing in society. It's called social media.

See, armed with a keyboard or armed with our phones, everyone and anyone can say anything and everything. Imagine making up a post or ranting about something that happened at church publicly on social media.

Let's say after service, you go back to your car and you realize someone side swiped you on the way out. Your side mirror is just hanging on the floor. I hope that's never happened here, by the way. We're all good drivers. And there's a note on your windshield.

It's like, okay, this is a bit of comfort. But you open the note and it just says, whoops, sorry, with a smiley face. Now, you'd be pretty frustrated, right? And that's a nice way to put it.

[11 : 41] This rude person didn't even leave their number, their name. They didn't even come to church during the time to find you, to say that they've hit your car. And you begin to think, why would they write the note?

Maybe just someone else saw them. It kind of goes, oh, yeah, yeah, I'm guilty. I'll just fill this out and put this there to make sure everything's okay. You head home, open up your laptop and just rant.

Don't park at HTD. You get sideswiped and no one cares. We laugh and we kind of joke because it's absurd. It's a silly example. But that's what it's really like, right?

What would the world think? Wow, Christians, they're nasty. They don't care for each other. They don't admit when they're wrong.

They're just arrogant and proud and they take things from each other. Why would we listen to Christians? They can't get along just like us. See, Matthew 18, I think, has a better way of dealing with conflict.

[12 : 44] If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two along, two others along so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church. And if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. You see, the goal is not to win the argument.

The goal is to win the person over. One-to-one, just a heart-to-heart chat. If that doesn't work, bring other people with you so that they can help you seek forgiveness and reconciliation and repentance from both parties.

Refuse again, bring it to the church. I think that means taking it to the pastors maybe. I don't know. I'm still new. Take it to Andrew. That's a great person to take it to. His email's on the back of the

bulletin.

But even if that doesn't work, they cannot be seen as part of the church. They're not moved outside because they're a sinner. Because if they're moved outside because they're a sinner, then all of us should be outside of the church.

[13:51] They're moved outside because they refuse to repent. They fail to realize the seriousness of their sin. You see, the goal of this process is reconciliation, is restoration of that relationship, the restoration of that offender.

I think Matthew 18 offers us a better way. Let's get back to our passage in verses 7 to 8. This is my next point. Why not be wronged? 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? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong. And you do this to your brothers and sisters. It's the Corinthian pride, the Corinthian entitlement, and the division is evident.

Taking one another to court publicly, dealing with stuff that was internal, that's now external, and the whole world can see the fractures within the church. It's about one party trying to get one leg up over the other, improving its social and moral standing at the expense of the brother or sister.

One commentator, one preacher, put it aptly, lawsuits between believers is a failure of the church family. Lawsuits between believers is a failure of the church family.

[15:10] It's the pride that says, well, I'm right and you are wrong. And that would lead to things to wrong others, to defraud our brothers and sisters, wouldn't it?

To pursue my own interests above and beyond my brothers and sisters. But look with me again at verse 7, the end of verse 7. Why not rather be wronged?

Why not rather be cheated? Paul is so countercultural here. He's saying losing is winning. Losing is winning. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?

If I were to answer that rhetorical question, I'd say, well, Paul, I was mistreated. I was ignored. I was humiliated. I've been hurt. I've lost out. I don't want to be a doormat to everyone else.

I don't want to be mistreated. I don't want to be made a fool. Paul, that's why not, Paul. Look at what Jesus says in Matthew chapter 5. You have heard it said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but I tell you, do not resist an evil person.

[16:16] If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them, the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. And Luke, again, he says this, so watch yourselves.

If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them, and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day, seven times come back saying, I repent, you must forgive them.

Why not be wronged? Turn the other cheek until you have no cheeks left. You must forgive them. Those make living in a Christian church family just so incredibly difficult, doesn't it?

Why not be wronged? Turn the other cheek. But you see, without the gospel, without the cross, those are difficult. See, disputes and conflicts will happen.

Now, I don't want to deal with the pain. I don't want to be wronged. I don't want to be cheated. How are we going to forgive each other continually? How are we going to have the strength to give and to forgive and to reconcile?

[17:24] I think first we need to think about how God has done that to us, how God has treated us. How has God himself reconciled to us? See, like Paul is encouraging the Corinthians or like Jesus is challenging his disciples to forgive.

It all has to come first with us and God. We all have fallen short. We've all taken God for granted, haven't we? We've all wronged him.

We're the offending party and we've offended God. You know, we take the many blessings that he gives us, right? Of health, friendship, sun and rain and even life itself.

We love the good things that God gives us. We love them. And often, that's where the love stops. At the good things that God gives us. We ignore our creator.

We act and we live as if he doesn't even exist. We ignore how he's instructed us to live in this world that he's made for us. And we turn our lives to what should be God-honoring living into selfish and inward selfish living.

[18:34] Living for ourselves, our own pleasures, our own greed, our idolatry. And that's to our detriment, right? Like our sin ruins us and ruins the relationships that we have around us.

And this deeply grieves God. This deeply wrongs God. It cheats him of the glory and the honor that he is due. But how does God treat us?

See, God has every right to punish, to wipe us off for the face of the earth, for our sin and our rejection. But what does God do? See, God does take us to court. And he does make a rule.

He goes, your sin deserves death. Your sin deserves judgment. And Jesus will take that. Jesus will take your sin and your judgment.

Jesus will take your punishment that you rightly deserve. Because Jesus, God's one and only son, took the death penalty for us. He takes the punishment that we deserve.

[19:36] You see, Jesus would rather be wronged. He would rather be cheated if it meant he could make the relationship right with us. Jesus was offended.

He was mistreated. He was misjudged. He was ignored. He was rejected, humiliated, nailed to a cross. You know, Jesus lost out would be a massive understatement.

Jesus, the son of God, would rather be wronged because he was reconciling you to the father.

Now, please hear me clearly. I'm not minimizing the real pain, the grief, and the heartache that we experience when we've been wronged by our brothers and sisters in Christ.

But no wrong that we bear in this life compares to the wrongs that Jesus bore for us. God knows what he's asking of you.

It is through God's strength, the wisdom of the cross, the power of the cross that we can be wronged, that we can suffer injustice because we have Christ. Because Christ bore. Because Christ bore the ultimate price for our grievances in our place.

[20:50] Because Christ endured so that we can endure. Because Christ absorbed our wrongs so that when others do it to us, we can absorb that. Because we lean on his strength to help us.

I've been teaching my son Levi to do the Lord's Prayer and there's one line in the Lord's Prayer that I find really hard. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

I really like the first part. Forgive us our sins. Ah, yeah, done. Good. Thank you. As we forgive those who sin against us. That just seems a lot harder. Thank you. But it is in the strength and the wisdom of Christ that we are able to do these things.

So let's look at our last point. It's who we are now in Christ. Verses 9 and 11. Verses 9 to 11, sorry. See, the forgetfulness of the Corinthians in verse 1 is being raised again here by Paul in verse 9.

It's the, do you not know? Look with me in verse 9. Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived, neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who have sex with men, nor thieves, nor greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

[22:06] And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, and you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. In my Bible study this week, someone mentioned that seems like a really long and exhaustive list.

Right? Verses 9 to 10, it just covers everything. The sin that shapes and characterizes unbelievers is what we were for believers.

Verse 9 to 10, this is exactly what we were before Christ saved us. We were wrongdoers, sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, greedy, drunkards, slanderers, and swindlers.

The list of people who don't get to heaven. It's a list of people who aren't citizens of heaven. But verse 9, Paul says, do not be deceived. If one person is characterized by these things, they will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Do not be deceived, brothers and sisters, repent of these things. See, those who follow Jesus until Christ's return will continually repent, will be putting this sinful nature to death.

[23:15] I think that's what it means to follow Jesus. Christians are repentant sinners saved by Christ. Christ. What has Christ done? He has washed us. He has sanctified us and he has justified us.

You see, because of Jesus, we are cleaned from the filth of sin. We are freed from the grip of sin. And when God looks at us, he doesn't see sinners. He sees saints.

We are justified. See, we have been made right with God and that relationship restoration, that relationship reconciliation that we have with God should overflow into the church family, should overflow into our community.

See, the forgiveness and reconciliation we have with God allows us to do the same with one another, our brothers and sisters in Christ. I don't know of any active litigations that any one of you have with another person.

So it's easy for us to kind of go, ah, that's easy. Don't sue each other. Done. Easy sermon application. We all did well this week. I don't know of any litigations, but I do know that it's really easy to hold grudges.

[24:24] It's really easy to hold grievances against one another. It's really easy in a church this size and this complex to ignore and to resent one another. It's really easy to gossip and to slander against one another.

But brothers and sisters, as we remember what we once were, that will help us look and respond to each other. As I see your sin, as you see my sin, we'll take sin seriously in our family because it's a salvation issue of repenting and trusting in God.

We'll take sin seriously and cherish the forgiveness and the grace that we have in Christ Jesus.

We'll delight in the relationships put right because of God. See, this passage in 1 Corinthians 6 isn't about glossing over conflict.

It isn't about ignoring conflict. It's about dealing with conflict as grace-filled, saved, and redeemed people of Christ. Imagine this as a gospel witness, a church where we deal with conflict that is characterized by grace, love, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Imagine what the world would see when we do that because the gospel changes how we deal with conflict. Let me pray. Father, we thank you for your son, Jesus.

[25:51] We thank you that he bore our wrongs, that he was cheated, that he suffered and died on the cross for our sake, that reconciled our relationship with you, and he made a way for us to be right with you.

We thank you because of what he's done, that we are right with you, that we are your people, saved, washed, and redeemed by the blood of Christ. In his name we pray.

Amen. Amen.