

'Handling Disputes'

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[0:00] Good morning for those who I've not yet met. My name is James. For those of you I have met, my name is also James. It's a great pleasure to open up God's Word with you today. Let me pray.

Father, we do thank you for this time in your Word. I pray that your Spirit would enlighten us and show us Christ our Saviour, our King. In his name we pray. Amen.

Amen. I've been in some sort of leadership for some time now and I'm sure if you've ever been a manager or you're a manager now or you run a team or you're being part of a team, something that always comes up is conflict management. You know, you have employee A who's unhappy with employee B, right? You know, a series of passive aggressive emails go back and forth. Then employee C gets pulled in and he's now thrown into it as well and he just thinks employee A should just let it go.

Next minute, HR found out about this thing and they're all going axe throwing on Friday night to solve all the issues. It doesn't have to be the workplace though, does it? If you've been alive for any amount of time, there's always some sort of conflict management, isn't there? You know, studying, students, you're working on a group project together. One person does actually all the work but gets the bad mark because the two people didn't do anything. I see it in children.

They fight for toys. I had this first. You always get to play with this. I want to sit in the front seat. It's my turn to choose the music and that was my morning. I remember seeing two grown adults as they honk and horn and make gestures I can't repeat here at each other whilst they're fighting for a parking spot. And there are lots of different styles of conflict management, isn't there?

[1:50] This is a Kilman conflict management model. There's assertiveness and cooperativeness and you kind of work through there trying to make a compromise. You see that in the middle? Conflict is complex, right? You know, we've got graphs and models to show it. There's a whole industry of conflict management and mediators and the like. You've got two opposing parties in each group or each individual. We're all with its own history or with how it relates to one another.

Usually promises made and promises broken. I haven't found this on the internet this week. This is called Conflict DNA. Reveal your preferred style by just answering just 15 questions.

What an interesting title. Conflict DNA. In some way, it's just all part of all of us. As a side note, it's 15 questions, but you get a 16-page report. I don't know how they do it.

But there is something about that, isn't it? It's something about our makeup, something about who we are, that we just always find ourselves in conflict. You see, some of us, when conflict comes up, when confrontation comes up, you lick your lips and go, oh, let's get into it.

Others, which I think I fall into, most people, when conflict comes up, you start feeling uncomfortable. You start shuffling in your seats and you kind of go, where's the nearest exit? It's there and it's there. But, you know, it's interesting, right? It raises the questions. Conflict will come up.

[3:24] It will inevitably, I can't say that word right now. We will find ourselves in it. But what happens when it's in our church family? What happens when we have disputes within our church community? How do we as a church handle disputes and conflicts with one another?

Especially when we've hurt one another. That happens, right? We're all different. We all grew up in different places, different cultures, upbringings, expectations. And there'll be times where we'll get on each other's nerves. And sadly, there'll be times where we hurt each other.

But how do we respond? What does it look like to handle disputes and conflicts in the church? Well, keep your Bibles open on 1 Corinthians 6. I think it's helpful that Paul tells us how to respond or in a sense correcting the Corinthians on how not to respond. But as we unpack this text, we'll see how

God's people, we have what we need in the gospel to resolve and to reconcile disputes and conflicts. See, the focus of 1 Corinthians 6 is not to have conflicts at all. It's but to deal with them with the power and the wisdom of the cross. Book of the verses 1 to 3. I'll put them up on the screen as well. Do you not know who you are? That's Paul's big thing in these verses.

Verses 1. If any of you has 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 are the things of this life? See, disputes happen. Paul isn't having a go at the Corinthians for having a fight. It's expected when you gather sinners with other sinners.

[5 : 23] But these are disagreements. These are disputes between brothers and sisters. These are not criminal matters. It's not a matter where the law is broken. See, Paul uses the courts in Acts 19 and Acts 25, just like we would if the law was broken. See, Paul isn't talking about a criminal case.

You see, at the end of verse 2 there, highlight in yellow, it's a trivial case. These are civil disputes. These are things between Christians that stay within the church. You see, the church has the Lord's people. The Lord's people, holy and set apart. You know, something that always astounds me with 1 Corinthians is how much Paul loves the church. He loves the Corinth church. But he also has a strong rebuke for them, doesn't he? There's no different here. He says to them, you are the Lord's people, the God's people. He's saying to them, you will judge the world.

We will judge the world. You will judge angels, he says to them, and we will judge angels one day. Now, those who pay careful attention and those who might recall last week, Ricky preached on chapter 5, and this is what chapters 5 verses 12 to 13, just a few verses above this says, what business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. Expel the wicked person among you.

Interesting, right? Has Paul changed his mind? It's just been one verse. But Paul isn't talking about the present time. He's talking about the time to come. He is talking about the day when Christ returns.

On that last day, Christians will participate in some way about the future judgment of the world. See, Paul isn't saying the courts cannot bring judgment.

[7 : 24] But rather, the judgment that's made in the courts of this world is not made in light of true wisdom. Wisdom revealed in Christ crucified. You see, their way of thinking, their system of thinking, their values and their worldview are different from what the church has.

So how much more are Christians to handle disputes internally? Look at verses 4 to 6. 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 in front of believers. You see, the irony is that the previous chapter, they weren't willing to judge the person inside the church, whilst at the same time judging people outside the church.

In chapter 6, they're being consistently inconsistent. They're now judging the person inside the church, but asking for outside help. The Corinthian church has forgotten its identity as the Lord's people.

The Lord's people with wisdom, with authority. Instead, they're taking each other to court, and it's brought shame to themselves, to the church, and ultimately to God.

[8 : 40] This is a newspaper clipping from a couple of years ago. In 2018, there was a stout between a denomination, a fight over property, a church fighting within themselves.

Justice Ciphra criticised the plaintiff for its conduct throughout the matter, throughout the case, and denied them any cost in the matter. And I quote verbatim, this is what the judge said in his ruling. The matter should have never 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.

He goes on to say, Nobody can escape blame. I can only yet again encourage the parties to resolve all matters once and for all. This is on the front page of the news of Sydney Morning Herald. And as a journalist puts it in this article, it's a scathing judgment, isn't it? It is shameful. See, a Bible commentator was saying that the local courts in Corinth today was located in the heart of the marketplace.

[9:52] And the Greek culture found a good legal battle entertaining. You know, anyone's lawsuit became public knowledge. The justice and legal system was used to move up in the ranks of life, to establish one's supremacy, honour and status above another person's.

Think about it as the Greek first century version of daytime judge shows. You know, Judge Judy, Jerry Springer, that type of thing. That's what they were into. The courts were to prove to showcase how much better I am over you.

They were used for retribution, putting the other party down to get one leg up, a continual show of one-upmanship. But as we draw threads from Corinth to present-day Melbourne, it's a bit different, right?

Our courts are in the corner of the CBD. They're not in the middle of Queen Vic Market or Westfield Shoppeau, right? Our courts, though, generally open, we don't really spend our days going to them, do we?

We only hear about what's happening in our courts if the media outlets pick it up. This week I even tried to look up the courts and what cases were being tried, and they were all coded, and I didn't want to waste my time.

[11:04] But we do have a court of public opinion, don't we? You know, they may not pass authority or judgments or punishments, but it does impact people's societal standing, doesn't it?

You know, social media armed with a keyboard, everyone and anyone can have their say about anything and everything. Imagine making a public post or a rant about an incident at church that could have been handled within the church.

Imagine this. After service today, you return to your car in the car park, and you realize someone sideswiped you. Your mirror's on the ground. There's gashes all along the side of your car. And there's a note on your windscreen.

You're like, okay, this is helpful. You turn it over and it just says, whoops, sorry, with a smiley face. You're frustrated, right? You're angry. How? This is so rude.

Why would someone do this? They didn't even leave a number or a name. I was just having morning tea. They didn't even come in to find the car that you hit. You begin to think, why would they write the note?

[12:06] Maybe someone saw them and they were just pretending. And you begin to fume and ruminate and get angry. You head home. You open up the laptop.

You start posting about church. Don't park at HTD. It's dangerous and people don't care. It seems absurd, right? It seems so silly. But that's what it's really like.

And I hope none of us gets our car sideswiped later. But what would the world think? What would the world think about your rant? Wow. Christians are nasty people.

They don't care for one another. They don't admit wrong. That's not a nice place to be. In Matthew 18, Jesus sets out a better way.

See, the goal of this is to win them over.

[13:22] It's reconciliation. Talk to them one-to-one. They refuse. Bring some witnesses that can hold you guys accountable. Help mediate to seek forgiveness, repentance from both parties.

They refuse again. Bring it to the church. That might mean taking to the pastors. If they still don't respond, then they're not repenting.

They cannot be seen as part of the church. They're moved outside of the church. See, they're not moved outside of the church because they're a sinner. Otherwise, the church would be empty.

We'd all be there. But because they refuse to repent and fail to realize the seriousness of their sin. See, the goal of this process in Matthew 18 is about reconciliation, about restoration of the relationship, restoration of the offender.

And I think this in Matthew 18 is really helpful for us, that it's a step-by-step process to help us deal with grievances that we have with one another. Let's look at the next few verses.

[14:24] This is my second point. Why not be wronged? Let's look at verse 7 and 8. The very fact that you have lawsuits among you mean 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. The Corinthian pride. The Corinthian entitlement.

The Corinthian division is evident here, isn't it? Taking one another to court publicly. What was and should be internal has not been dealt with and the whole world can see the fractures within.

It's about one party trying to get the leg up on the other. To improve social and moral standing at the expense of a brother or sister in Christ. One commentator, a preacher, puts it aptly. Lawsuits between believers is a failure of the church family. Lawsuits between believers is a failure of the church family. It's the pride that wants me to prove myself right over you and you wrong. [15 : 29] And again, it's that word. It will lead to us doing the wrong things to one another. To defraud one another. Pursue my own interest above yours. Look with me at the end of verse 7.

Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Paul is so countercultural here. See, to Paul, losing is winning. Why not rather be wronged?

Why not rather be cheated? Well, Paul, I'll tell you why. Because I was offended. Because I got mistreated. I got ignored.

I've been humiliated. I was hurt and I've lost out. No one wants that, right? No one wants to be a doormat to everyone else. To be stepped over by everyone else.

No one wants to be mistreated. To be fooled. And look at what Jesus says in the Gospels. You have heard it said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

[16 : 28] But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. 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 in Luke 17, 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, and seven times come back to you saying, I repent, you must forgive them.

Why not be wronged? Turn the other cheek. You must forgive them. Those verses just make it incredibly hard to live in the Christian church, doesn't it?

See, disputes and conflict will happen. 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 to continually forgive one another? How are we to continually turn the other cheek?

How are we to have the strength to forgive? We first need to think about how God has treated us. How has God reconciled himself to us?

[17 : 39] Like Paul is encouraging the Corinthians, or like Jesus is challenging disciples to forgive. We all, you all, we've all taken God for granted. We've all taken God for granted.

We've all wronged God. He was the offended party. We are the ones who have done wrong. We are the offender. You see, we take the many blessings that God gives us.

Health, friendship, sun and rain, even life itself. We love the good things that God gives us. We love them. But that's where the love stops. At the good things that God gives us.

We ignore our creator. We act and we live our lives as if he does not exist. We ignore the ways he's instructed us to live. We turn what should be God-honoring living and we lift ourselves up.

We create idols in our hearts. Living for ourselves and for our own pleasures. Greedy, idolatrous, sexually immoral, the list goes on. And it is to our detriment, isn't it?

[18 : 45] Causing rifts and pains to the relationships around us. See, 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? God has every right to punish us, doesn't he? Every right to wipe us out of the face of this earth. But you see, God does take us to court, doesn't he?

And he does make a ruling. The judgment for our wrongs, the judgment for our sin is death. But the person who takes that judgment, the person who takes that punishment is Jesus.

Jesus, God's one and only son, took the death penalty for us. Taking the punishment that you and I deserve. You see, Jesus would rather be wronged, he would rather be cheated, if it meant he could make the relationship right.

Jesus was offended. He was mistreated and misjudged. He was ignored and rejected, humiliated and nailed to a cross to make this relationship wrong.

[19 : 57] See, Jesus lost out would be a massive understatement, wouldn't it? He would rather be wronged so that he could reconcile you with the Father.

Now, please hear me clearly. I'm not going to minimize the real pain and the grief and the heartache that you've experienced for being wronged. But no wrong in this life that we bear compares to the wrong that Christ bore for us.

See, God knows what he's asking of you. God knows what he's asking of me. As he says, why not be wronged? It is through God's strength, the wisdom and the power of the cross, that we can be

wronged, that we can suffer injustices because we have Christ.

Because Christ bore the ultimate grievances in our place. Because Christ endured, therefore we can endure. Because Christ absorbed our wrongs, and when others do the same thing to us, we lean on his strength and his power to help us.

I've been trying to teach my six-year-old the Lord's Prayer. And the line that I find really hard in the Lord's Prayer is, forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

[21 : 16] I want God to forgive my sins. I don't really want to forgive other people for theirs. That's the difficulty, isn't it? But it is in the strength, the wisdom of Christ, that we are able to do these things.

But let's look at our last point, who we are now in Christ. Look with me at verses 9 to 11. It's interesting the forgetfulness of the Corinthians in verse 1. John is raised by Paul again here.

It's the phrase, 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.

And that is what some of you were. 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.

In my Bible study this week, someone comments, it goes, geez, that's a really long list, kind of encapsulates everything. But that's what Paul's doing. He's reminding the Corinthian church, you're not inherently better than unbelievers, because you are saved.

[22 : 34] The sin that shapes you and characterizes you, that's what God saved you from. You know, verses 9 and 10, this is what you were, it's exactly who you were. Wrongdoers, sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, greedy, drunkards, slanderers, swindlers.

These are the people who do not inherit the kingdom of God. These are not citizens of heaven. Do not be deceived, Paul says, verse 9. If any one of these things characterizes someone's life, they will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Do not be deceived. Repent of these things. See, those who follow Jesus until Christ's return are just repentant sinners, will continue to put to death that sinful nature.

That is what it means to follow Jesus, putting sin to death every single day. You see, we are saved by Jesus, saved by Christ, who has washed us, who has sanctified us, who has justified us.

See, because of Jesus, we are clean from the filth of sin. We are freed from the grip of sin. And God now no longer sees us as sinners.

[23 : 47] We've been made right with God. See, that relationship restoration, that relationship reconciliation that we have with God now flows into the Christian community, that flows into this church family.

See, that forgiveness, that reconciliation we have from God, allows us to do the same thing to one another. Our brothers and sisters in Christ. See, we might not take one another to court.

I don't know of any active litigations that any of you have with one another. So it might seem a bit far-fetched for us. And he goes, oh, this is an easy application for this sermon. Don't sue each other.

Done. But do we have grudges against one another? Do we hold grievances against one another? Do we ignore or resent one another?

Brothers and sisters, as we remember what we once were, that will help me look at you and help you look at me. Help us see each other's sin and how you sin against each other.

[24 : 47] And we'll take it more seriously. Because it's a salvation issue. It's an inheritance of the kingdom. Because we'll take sin seriously. And we'll cherish forgiveness and grace.

See, we delight in the relationships put right because God has put that relationship right with us. It's a powerful gospel witness.

is a church where conflicts that are characterized by grace, forgiveness and reconciliation. Because it's the gospel that changes how we deal with conflict.

Let me pray. Father in heaven, we do thank you for your word. Thank you most of all for your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

who chose to be wronged, who chose to be humiliated, who chose to die in our place to make us right with you. May your gospel continue to empower us to live lives with one another, seeking reconciliation, seeking each other's good.

[25:59] Amen.