

Grace & Grievances // 1 Corinthians 6:1-11

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[0:00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! 1 Corinthians 6, starting in verse 1. When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare to go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?

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?

Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more than matters pertaining to this life? So if you have any such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church?

I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute among the brothers? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?

[1:17] To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?

But you yourselves wrong and defraud even your own brothers? Or do you not know that the unrighteous will inherit the kingdom of God?

Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

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. This is the Word of the Lord. Thank you, God.

[2:31] It was January 31st. And the school cafeteria served pizza for breakfast.

The girls brushed their hair forward and made ponytails over their faces. The boys put sunglasses on the back of their heads to make it look like their faces were looking the other way.

Everyone, including the teachers, had their shirts and pants on backwards. Why? Because it was National Backwards Day at school.

You guys know this day is an awkward classic. Teachers love to spice up those winter months. I remember racing my buddies trying to speed walk backwards down the hallway as fast as I could. And we would just smash into each other and kind of ricochet off the walls and tumble. Visits to the bathroom were extra awkward on these days trying to figure out the zipper situation in the back.

[3:36] But for one day, everyone acted like this was completely normal. We would laugh because it was obvious that we were made to live another way.

It was fun for one day. But what if backwards day became every day? What if this was considered just normal life?

Well, ever since sin entered the world, people have been living life backwards. There is a general rightness to the world.

But there is also this sense that things are not as they should be. There is a distortion that has become normal.

Sin has cut us off from our Creator and it has disordered our loves, our wants, our desires, our lives in this world. So much so that we don't usually even recognize it.

[4:37] And we kind of just feel at home in our backwardness. But for the Christian, God has turned everything around.

Through Jesus Christ, He has made a way for you and for I to walk rightly before Him. He has given us a new and better way to live. But this is the dilemma Paul is addressing today in our text.

God has turned everything around, but you are behaving as if the backwards ways are the better ways. We see Christians in the same church bickering over trivial things.

And then they are going to blows legally and doing it before an unbelieving world. It's as if they never learned to walk rightly. Any reference to God and His people are just kind of left out.

Instead, these guys are resorting to the old ways when they lived apart from God and for themselves. And those in the church are not stepping in to say anything.

[5:51] Well, we face the same dilemma in our lives today. Anyway, we go back to the old ways of living. Blind to God and walking through life backwards.

Our desire for stuff is too big, while our desire for Christ's honor is too small. Our focus on the present is too big, while our focus on eternity is too small.

Our demands for our personal rights are too big, while our moments of embracing sacrifice are too small. Our amazement at the world's wisdom is too big.

And our amazement at Christ's wisdom is too small. So what's the fix? Paul offers something surprising here. If you look at our text, the question, do you not know?

Do you not know? It comes up three times in our text. Verse 2, verse 3, verse 9. And each time he brings up that question, he links it to something about their new identity in Jesus Christ.

[6:58] The problem is not first their behavior. That's not the biggest problem he's concerned about. It's not behavior, but their being. Do you not know who you are?

Who you are? H.P. Charles said, sound doctrine is essential to godly living. You cannot do what you do not know.

Do you not know who you are? Paul knows that being leads to behaving. The heart moves to the hands.

So Paul's saying to us, this morning you have been transformed by the grace of Jesus. Don't walk backwards. Don't go back there. Live in light of who you already are in Christ.

I believe the main point for us this morning is this. Let's live together in a way that rightly reflects your new identity in Christ.

[8:01] And we're going to look at these three markers of identity. Do you not know that you are saints? That you are brothers? That you are transformed?

So let's take a look at point one. You are saints. You are saints. The theme of chapter 5 was that believers were not rightly judging those inside the church.

But in chapter 6, Paul is continuing the theme of judgment inside and outside the church. Verse 1, if you look, it says, So here's the situation.

Man A, let's just call him Corey because he's from Corinth. He defrauded man B. Let's call him Chris because he's a Christian. So in response, Chris took Corey to court.

Okay, so what's the big deal about that? Well, first we see that this involved one Christian against another Christian from the same local church.

[9:27] It says one of you has a grievance against another. So these are Christians who are members in the same local church, Corinthian Grace Church.

Secondly, we see that the issue at hand was a grievance. So in verse 7, we see that it involved Corey defrauding Chris. The language points to it being kind of this petty civil argument about probably property.

So this is not a criminal case involving murder or abuse or something like that. This would be more in line with one story I recently saw about a man being annoyed by his neighbor's fence being three inches onto his property.

And so he sues his neighbor, has him tear down the fence and rebuild it three inches further over. Trivial. And that's the nature of this lawsuit.

It was a fence fight between two guys in the same local church. Okay? So now here's the thing. Conflicts are going to happen.

[10:42] They are going to happen. That's to be expected. However, Paul cannot believe how these two professing Christians who are members at Corinthian Grace Church have decided to handle this conflict.

Does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? So you see what Paul does in this initial conversation?

He distinguishes between two groups of people to make a point. And he's not saying plaintiff and defendant or oppressed and oppressor. What he does is really surprising. His two groups are very

different.

And what's most important in Paul's mind is a person's identity in relation to Jesus Christ. That's what this division of two people is all about.

And here's why. If a man has really recognized his rebellion before his creator, it's going to change things. If he has really recognized God's just wrath against his sin.

[11:51] If his eyes have been opened to the forgiveness available in the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. If he has received the gift of grace by faith and he has been made into a new creation.

If this guy now lives a life of worshipful gratitude to honor his master and Lord Jesus Christ. If his citizenship really has been transferred to the kingdom of heaven.

And he's living for Christ as his king. If all of that is true about this guy. Then it should have a bearing on every aspect of his life.

Even that. All of life.

All of life must be filtered through the realities of our relationship to Jesus Christ. That's why Paul brings up this distinction of unrighteous and saints.

[13:00] Unrighteous and saints. A saint, to be clear, it's not a reference to some super spiritual person that lives in a monastery.

Okay, saint in the Bible is another word for Christian. Christian. It literally means one who is sanctified.

To be set apart. Set apart from what? It's a reference to those who have been set apart from sin. To live for Christ.

That's what saint means. So apart from Christ, all people are unrighteous. All people are unrighteous.

We were all there living life backwards. So it's important to note that Paul's distinction is not a blanket statement about the justice system being untrustworthy.

[14:07] Okay, the point is not to avoid all worldly courts or litigation. I mean, we even see Paul, the same guy writing this letter, appealing to his Roman citizenship for a measure of justice.

And then he defends himself in a court of law. This same guy writes in Romans 16 that worldly government is a good gift instituted by God to restrain evil.

So there are certainly cases that we should entrust into the hands of the justice system that God has instituted. Especially in situations of abuse and robbery and rape and violence.

So the point here is not that the justice system is filled with evil people and is to be avoided.

Remember, the situation at hand is a fence fight.

A trivial dispute that has spiraled out of control. So Paul's point is to show us that the goals of the world and the goals of the people of God are bound to different things.

[15:22] The aim of worldly litigation in the court is different from conciliation in the church. Earthly courts, they're bound to the physical world.

Earthly courts, they're bound to the here and now. They're not thinking in terms of eternity. It's temporal. It's earthbound. Just think about it. The best the legal system can do is to take things away.

To make external restitution. But it does nothing in terms of the heart. It has no power to transform or to reconcile relationally.

It doesn't address literally the heart of conflict. It can only respond to the results of conflict. It operates without reference to the creator.

Only in reference to his creation. Okay? So, in fact, the word for unrighteous talks about saints and the unrighteous.

[16:30] That word unrighteous is rooted in the word unjust. Unjust. In other words, when viewed in reference to God, the world is composed of lawbreakers against him.

The word is used again in verse 9, the unrighteous. It's describing types of rebellion of those who are opposed to God.

So, Paul is pointing out, in some sense, the irony that those who have been justified by God think it's better to submit their case for judgment before those who are unjust in the sight of God.

So, Corey and Chris have bypassed an opportunity for godly confrontation in the context of wise believers.

And they've gone straight to the godless system and authorities to demand the fence to be moved three inches. They aren't thinking about life in reference to God.

[17:36] They aren't thinking about honoring Christ. They aren't thinking about life in relation to Christ as king. They're only thinking about worldly gain.

And they're demanding worldly justice. Is this not going to the backwards way of living? And so, what does Paul do?

He brings us back. He brings us back. Our attention to this, to the foundational realities about who they are in Jesus. Don't you know who you are?

Don't you know? Don't you know that saints will one day judge the world and angels? Now, we don't know a lot of details of what this will look like.

But it's clear from several spots, including in Revelation, that believers will one day stand with Jesus at his return in judgment over all those who have rebelled against God, both men and angels.

[18:43] That's what's coming at the end of all time. The saints will one day stand in victory with Christ over sin and rebellion.

So Paul is driving these believers to live in light, not of right here and now, but of future realities. Do you not know that those you're asking to be judge over you, you will one day judge?

You guys are scrapping over a fence as if that's the most important thing in this world? Really? So Paul calls Corey and Chris out.

But he also calls the church out more broadly in verse 2. If the world is to be judged by you, are you, are y'all, the church, incompetent to try trivial cases?

You see, Paul, he expects the believers in the church to be involved, for you and I to be involved in challenging and mediating and counseling one another through our conflicts before it spirals out, upstream.

[20:11] So where do we go with our conflicts? Where do we go? Are we too quick to outsource it to systems that are godless?

Are we too quick to outsource it to systems that are bound only to this world without reference to the heart and to the god who can transform from the inside out?

Are we too quick to sprint? Secondly, you are brothers.

You are brothers. Paul goes on, verse 5, I say this to your shame. Can it be that there's no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers?

Verse 6, But brother goes to law against brother and that before unbelievers. Notice the shift in identity language here.

[21:24] In these few verses, just before he held up this banner of saint above the believers. Saint. But now he emphasizes their family relationship together.

Brother against brother. This isn't just a dispute between random strangers. This is a dispute that is splintering a family.

Namely, the family of God. And one of the things I love about living in our area is that there's still somewhat a value placed on family.

And generally, we have a cultural respect for family. I know my brother and I, we scrapped like cats and dogs as kids. But we would do anything for each other.

Even if we fought each other all the time. People will go to great lengths for their family.

[22:28] Right? I know many of you in here have done so. Do anything. You'd lay your lives down to sacrifice and defend your family. And that's a really good impulse because God loves the family.

But, our biological families are meant to point us to our eternal family. This is just a shadow here. We're talking about the blood-bought children of God who will dwell together for all eternity.

Forever. Forever. Paul is, again, driving our minds to think in terms of our identity in relation to Jesus Christ.

Christ. The reality is, as Pastor Dave Zuliger wrote, the family of God runs deeper than our physical families because we are connected not simply by the blood pumping through our veins, but by the blood of Christ spilled on the cross.

So that means that the unconditional love and sacrifice that you demonstrate toward your physical family should only be the beginning of how you are expected to treat your spiritual family in Jesus Christ.

[23:43] Just let that sink in for a second. That should only be the beginning of how you treat your brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. So when Paul addresses Corrie and Chris and all the Corinthians as brothers, he's highlighting how out of place it is for them to allow a fence fight to spiral out of the bounds of the family and to do it in front of non-family.

Unbelievers. Verse 7. Take a look. It says, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you.

So how is this a defeat for them if it hasn't even taken place yet? Well, the burden here for Paul is what this public family fight communicates, especially to those who are unbelievers.

For Chris, the plaintiff, the action is already a loss. Even if Chris wins, he loses because he doesn't know how to swallow a small loss for the sake of unity and the church is trivialized as powerless and unhelpful in the eyes of a watching world.

They see that and say, see? Doesn't mean anything. They're just like us. For Corey, the defendant, he may have defrauded Chris and gotten some kind of material gain, but now, what's the outcome? [25 : 17] He's soiled the name of Christ and he's put the rotten fruit of greed and more seriously, unrepentant pride on full display. So Chris was motivated by self-protection and Corey by self-gain.

That's their motivation here. They were thinking in worldly temporal terms. They're no different from the world. Their desires, their actions just look exactly the same.

Why would anybody want to join this family? It's a loss. But Paul, again, he draws their attention to the realities of their actions in light of their identity in Jesus Christ.

He's wanting them to see that there's something bigger at stake than winning a fight about offense.

What about winning unbelievers to the family of Jesus Christ? Is that a category for you?

He's saying, are you so consumed with winning and losing earthly things that you're willing to make a mockery of the name of Jesus Christ in the eyes of an unbelieving world?

[26 : 27] Paul says a little bit later in chapter 9 that he aims to become all things to all people so that by all means he might save some.

That's his greatest ambition. He'll take small sacrifices. He'll take big sacrifices. He'll swallow it for the sake of the family, displaying the beauty of Christ and inviting others to join this family.

Listen to what Paul says. This may be surprising. He speaks to the one who is in Chris's position, the plaintiff, right? The one who has been wronged.

And he says in verse 7, why not suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?

Do you hear what Paul's saying? We should have a category in the Christian mind for surrendering rights and swallowing loss. when it comes to your desires, do you have a category for making Christ look beautiful to unbelievers even if it costs you?

[27 : 49] Even if you can't demand to be right. Even if you can't click sin on the social media post to set them straight.

Jesus repeatedly calls believers to break the cycle of revenge, hostility, and score settling. He calls us to do this.

So for the Christian, there is a very different grid for addressing conflict within the family. It's a different grid.

Counselor David Powlison, he used the phrase the constructive displeasure of mercy. When anger surges up in your heart, is there a right anger?

Is there an appropriate anger? It does say be angry and do not sin. Scripture says that. So he's drawing our attention to how you can actually do that rather than sprinting to court.

[28 : 59] The constructive displeasure of mercy describes a Christian way of engaging conflict. Mercy is not passive niceness and it's not conflict avoidance.

It's neither of those things. True mercy is willing to feel and express loving displeasure towards what is destructive, towards what is dishonoring to God, and is harmful to people.

There is a good displeasure towards those things. But it does so with the goal of restoration, not condemnation. It does so with an eye towards reconciliation and redemption, not canceling people and setting them straight.

displeasure. Displeasure. It means you recognize that something is wrong in the sight of God. This isn't just the stuff that rubs you the wrong way and you've got a chip on your shoulder and you've just got to clear the air.

I've just got to get this off my chest. No, it's things that are wrong in the sight of God. That's a good checkpoint for your offense before you let loose.

[30 : 17] Because this displeasure is not motivated out of pride or out of vengeance, but things that break the heart of God. Things like selfishness, things like division, gossip, harshness, deceit, bitterness.

These are the things that break God's heart. Constructive means your response aims to help. When you engage, your aim is to help, to restore, to heal, to reconcile, to build up.

Is that your aim when you get in there? And mercy, mercy means just this entire posture that's shaped by compassion.

It's shaped by patience, humility, an awareness of your own need for grace when you enter in. As brothers brought into the family of God through undeserved mercy, we're motivated to be merciful to others because our Heavenly Father has been merciful to us.

While you were still sinners, Christ died for you. can you lay it down mercifully for another enemy, another trespasser?

[31 : 42] Oh, that's a radically different way to enter into a conflict than what the world has to offer. Well, this aims at the heart and it orients the people involved in relation to God.

It brings Him into the equation. He has turned us around. That's what He's done. He's turned us around so that we can walk in the way He designed us to walk as brothers in a family.

That's why Paul is just shocked by the news of a professing Christian defrauding another member. Verse 8, but you yourselves wrong and defraud.

Even your own brothers. Proverbs 17, 17 says, a brother is born for adversity. That's not saying he's born so you can fight him.

A brother is born for adversity. The default posture of a true brother is not fighting against his brother but fighting for his brother. This church is filled with brothers and sisters that fight for one another.

[33 : 00] Let's keep fighting for one another and not against each other. Point 3, you are transformed.

You are transformed. Paul, he's dumbfounded by their lack of brotherly love in Jesus Christ.

And so again he questions, do you not know? Verse 9, do you not know? Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?

The kingdom of God. God's kingdom has God as its king.

That may sound pretty straightforward but God's kingdom has God as its king. He's the rightful creator.

[34 : 07] ruler. He's the rightful sustainer. He's the rightful ruler of all. So anything, anything that attempts to disorder that right arrangement is unrighteousness.

It's unrighteous. So when we live in God's creation without reference to him as creator, that is unrighteous. unrighteous. When we treat God's creation as supremely important and we don't depend on God, that is unrighteous.

When we love the gifts more than the gift giver, that is unrighteous. When we live without reference to the author of life, this is unrighteous.

when we place his crown on our heads and demand the world to bow to our desires, that is unrighteous.

All of these things, these are disordering God's design. It's living life backwards. And the kingdom of God is incompatible with the kingdom of this world.

[35 : 24] It's incompatible. God, you know, most people in Greco-Roman society regarded the practices in this list as perfectly acceptable. But Paul is alerting us to the fact that cultural norms are not the standard for righteousness.

What's okay in the eyes of the culture is not what the standard is. So don't be deceived, he cries out to them. Don't be deceived. Don't gloss over sin just because everybody else is fine with it.

Don't dismiss it. So he wants us to be clear. So he demonstrates not an exhaustive list, just a sampling of what the unrighteous life looks like.

Look at verse 9. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Notice in verse 9, idolatry crops up unexpectedly in the list of sexual sins at the beginning. And at first glance, I thought, man, this seems kind of out of place here.

[36 : 44] But the Corinthian religious scene was dominated by two massively influential temples dedicated to Apollo and Aphrodite.

And homosexual behavior and cult prostitution were just normal part of the pagan worship practices. So sexual sin was literally an aspect of their idolatry.

Now, that might sound kind of shocking to modern ears, but isn't sexual sin at the epicenter of worship in our culture? I mean, just think about the politics of sexual identity.

It literally dictates the outcomes of public policies and elections. Sexual indulgence is key in our marketing tools. Pornography is a booming industry.

Our cultural elevation of sexual identity is, in fact, a twisting of a good gift into a false God. That's what it is. It's living life backwards.

[37:56] And this list also alerts us to the reality that sin is not simply a problem of activity. It's not just the things that you do. This is not a list of sins, but of sinners.

If you look at the list, it's idolaters, not idolatry. Adulterers. Thieves. It's talking about people. We are much worse than we realize.

Our sin problem goes all the way to the roots of who we are. Not just what we do, but who we are. It's a problem of identity.

In fact, John Piper says it this way, all of us are bent to desire things in different degrees that we should not want. us. We are all disordered in our emotions, our minds, and our bodies.

All of us. All of us have gone astray. It's what scripture says. There are none who are righteous. No, not one. We have all, every single one of us, lived life backwards with disordered loves, disordered lives, disordered desires.

[39:09] We all were among the unrighteous and those who were separated from God. Romans 1:18 says, for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness, here's the word, suppress the truth, suppress God's good design.

Because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator who is blessed forever.

Amen. For all on this list, every one of us have been on this list, not those who would inherit the kingdom of God.

Every one of us in our nature have been on this list. we've all been unrighteous. So how does the unrighteous become eligible?

How does the unrighteous become what they inherently are not? Righteous. Well, the good news is that there is change available.

[40:29] There is good news in verse 11. Verse 11 alerts us that the sinners on the list are now the saints in the seats.

That's what this is showing us. How did this happen? How did the idolaters and the thieves and the homosexuals and the drunkards move from unrighteous to righteous? righteous?

It's not by the church attendance. It's not by reading a certain amount of Bible chapters each day. It is not by doing more or trying harder.

H.B. Charles wonderfully said it this way, Christianity is not about religious activity, moral conduct, and charitable service. It is about regeneration.

Regeneration. This is at the heart of biblical Christianity. Such were some of you. They were not driven away. They were born again.

[41:27] That's what the good news does. How did it happen? How did this good news happen? 1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also suffered once for sins.

The righteous for the unrighteous that he, Jesus, might bring us, the unrighteous ones, to God.

A substitution through the death and life of Jesus Christ to make us alive. He was dead but raised again to new life. And so to all who are united with him in faith.

They put their trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all their sins. I know I was an idolater but now I belong to you. I know what I did now I belong to you.

They were washed. They were sanctified. They were justified. They were washed. God removed the dirt of their transgressions and he forgave their sins.

[42:33] They were sanctified. God removed their unholiness and declared them holy based on Jesus' atoning sacrificial death on the cross.

They were justified. God removed their guilt and declared them righteous. Who is the actor here? God. God.

Through Christ they are washed. They are sanctified. They are justified. People. Paul is taking all the people of Corinthian Grace Church back to the foot of the cross so that they can hear what Jesus has to say about who they are.

He looks eyes with all of them who were prostitutes and drunkards and swiddlers and he looks eyes with you Trinity Grace all of you who were gossipers and slanderers unfaithful all of you who binged on porn and those who exploded in anger those who got high and those who wallowed in self pity those who were self righteous those who were cynics do you not know who you are?

do you not know? do you not know? you are not who you once were that's not you anymore that's not who you are do you know who you are?

[43 : 55] you are washed you are sanctified you are justified Jesus says to you you are mine you are mine therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new new creation the old has passed away behold the new has come he's made us new that's not who I am anymore the new has come because of what Christ has accomplished for you so if you're not a Christian I invite you to come today bring your nothing and receive everything die to your unrighteousness and be born again and he will change you from the inside out he will do it we're no longer living life backwards we're not going back we're not living life backwards he's turned everything around so that we can walk with him walk in light of him walk for his glory we are saints we are brothers we are transformed so let's live let's live like it let's live in light of who we are together in a way that reflects this identity in

Jesus Christ may God help us father we praise you we thank you for your mercy and though you were displeased with our sin against you you had mercy on us demonstrating the ultimate sacrifice death on a cross for undeserving sinners so you can make us into saints and so we declare you are glorious you are worthy of our thanks you are worthy of our lives help us to live in light of who we are in Christ amen you've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens for more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at