



# Sometimes Winning Is Actually Losing

## Introduction:

In today's text, Paul calls the Corinthian church to unity in behavior. Though they claimed to be very wise believers, their behaviour did not line up with their beliefs, and this incongruity was impacting their Christian testimony to the surrounding culture. Christian lives are supposed to be noticeably different to the culture, particularly in the areas of money, justice, anxiety, sexual ethics and in the way in which we deal with conflict. The Corinthians were dealing with issues among themselves by taking one another to court. These were not criminal cases, but cases that should have been resolved maturely and humbly among themselves. Their selfish ambition and immaturity was not only a sign of their lack of unity within the church, but also a terrible witness to the onlooking world around them, and Paul would have none of it.

## Today's Scripture Text

### 1 Corinthians 6:1-8

## Sermon Points

**When resolving disputes with other believers, Christians should:**

### #1. Support the flourishing of the church

Dealing with conflict in the courts, among members of the same church community would obviously bring about division, suspicion and hostility. We are supposed to treat one another as we would treat family members who belong to a healthy, functional and loving home.

- ♣ Why is it totally ridiculous for church members, within the same community, to take one another to court on civil matters?
- ♣ Does this mean that church members should not be held to account for poor behavior? Explain.
- ♣ Why does our desire to deal with conflict in a selfish and destructive manner, reflect our own spiritual immaturity?

### #2. Consider the reputation of the church

Paul was deeply concerned about these legal cases being on display to unbelievers, because it entirely misrepresented the gospel message of forgiveness and restoration. It also showed utter hypocrisy, because though this church claimed to have profound wisdom, its faith-life appeared to have absolutely no bearing on their ethics. What they claimed to believe had no impact on their everyday actions and responses.



## #3. Embrace the qualifications of the church

- Read 1 Corinthians 6:2-5 (MSG version)

Paul draws to the attention of the church, the collective wisdom that God has entrusted to the body. God has gifted us multiple gifts and talents to exercise for the benefit of one another. As individualists, we need to shift our focus to one of being part of a collective, and to then seek Godly advice and help from the collective. We also need to see that when we don't and we allow relationship to break down, that it will affect and damage the collective.

Not only are we blessed with help, by being part of a church community, we are also responsible for its health. In most church circles, we find that people only raise the flag for help, when the situation is already unreparable. We seek help only to try and rescue the "sinking ship", once we realise that all our own attempts have failed us. But trying to save a marriage once divorce papers are served, or try and solve a conflict when a law suit has started, is not how we are supposed to behave in a church family. Most of us keep our conflicts hidden from the church community because we are too proud to seek the help or advice of others, for fear of being perceived as a failure. But in so doing, we eliminate the very help we so desperately need, and that God has graciously gifted to us.

- ♠ Why do we struggle to get help from the broader church community, when we are dealing with serious conflict, and instead try to solve things on our own? (Have you ever learned this the hard way in your own life? If so, please share.)
- ♠ Why does Paul draw our attention to the collective wisdom of the church when solving conflict?
- ♠ *Personal Reflection: Are you reluctant to seek the counsel of others from within our church community when facing a conflict that involves two believers? If so, have you considered why? (Some examples of conflicts could be: an unresolved issue in your marriage, an issue with the loaning of money, a conflict in terms of a business decision, an issue with church leadership, an unresolved theological issue etc.) Process your reluctance to seek advice and help with the group.*

## #4. Follow the example of Jesus

- Read Matthew 5:38-40

When it comes to dealing with conflict, very often, the way of the kingdom of God is totally opposite to the world. Jesus himself taught and modelled what it looked like to absorb conflicts for the sake of others. He did so all the way to the cross, even though he was innocent. When he was accused, he did not defend himself. When he was unfairly tried, beaten and sentenced, he did not fight for his right to freedom. He did this because his plan to die for the redemption of humanity was more important to him than his own reputation.

The redemption of others is to be our highest concern, and sometimes that will mean laying down our rights for their good. This is one of the biggest tests of dying to self.



In following Christ's example, instead of fighting for what we deserve, we humbly give it up for the sake of the other person. For example:

- When it seems right to retaliate, we are to bless and release the person who has been unkind to us.
- When someone does not repay the money we loaned them, we let it go and we do not hold it against them.

This posture does not suggest that we become open to abuse from others, or allow ourselves to become a permanent doormat, but it reminds us to follow the pattern of the kingdom, which is opposite to our sinful, selfish nature. At times this might even mean suffering in some form for the benefit of others.

## #5. Remember the justice of the Lord

- Read Romans 12:17-20

If we are going to handle conflict with a gospel lens, we need to have an eternal perspective. As believers, we believe in a future when God will bring justice to the earth and right all the wrongs. Our hope is therefore placed in his perfect future justice, which allows us to endure injustice now.

- ♠ Why is it totally shocking to us that we may be expected to suffer for the sake of someone else's redemption?
- ♠ Why is it difficult for us to follow the example of Christ when it comes to dealing with the way in which others treat us?
- ♠ Why does an eternal perspective of justice help us to endure injustice in this lifetime?
- ♠ *Personal reflection: Have you ever made the choice to purposefully absorb the cost of a conflict for the sake of the redemptive plan in the life of another person? What was that like as an experience and what did it do to your faith?*