

Welcome to the fourth sermon in a series of seven based on 1 Corinthians. Today we'll tackle the 1st part only of chapter 6. I hope you've made use of the Daily Bible Study Guide which will help you read and study much more of this book for yourself. And as always, if you missed some of the series and want to catch up, there are copies of this sermon in the Narthex or you can watch past services on Facebook or Youtube.

The first part of chapter 6 focuses on how the early church community settled disputes. Lawsuits and litigation were an everyday part of life in Greek culture, just like it is for us. They were also a form of entertainment. Paul is calling us, however, to live counter culturally and consider a different way leading to a better life.

When I started reading this chapter, I thought about my jury duty service two years ago. Who here has served on a jury?

It's interesting, right? I've been summoned quite a few times, but usually requested an excuse, because I was the main caregiver for our kids and didn't have anyone else to watch them. I have gone a few times and just been there for the day and hadn't been called.

But about two years ago I was summoned and I went, because my kids were older so I was able to serve. Some people don't believe in serving and since then I've heard several stories of people just throwing out their summons if they receive one. Others feel very strongly that it's everyone's duty to serve and they enjoy serving. I'm such a rule follower that I would never throw away my summons. So two years ago I was called to a trial and then was chosen to sit on a jury.

What I didn't understand or think about until I sat through a trial myself, is that the reason some people enjoy jury duty is the entertainment value. In fact a few people said exactly that when I talked to them about their general experience. "It sure is entertaining!" And trials being a normal form of entertainment in the 1st century in Corinth was one reason why Paul wrote this first segment that Karen read for us.

There is a lot in these first eight verses. Let me say again that lawsuits and litigation were an everyday part of life in Greek culture, just like it is

for us. And, again, they were a form of entertainment.

Paul is calling us, however, to live counter culturally. Paul didn't say there is never a time to seek justice, though he did tell us to avoid lawsuits. One good question is - what kinds of situations is Paul talking about here? Read verses 1 & 2 again. There are two key words at the end of the second verse that help us understand Paul is talking about specific incidents - "trivial cases." So probably civil cases, property claims and such since it also says in verse seven "rather be cheated".

Look at Romans 13:1&2 for further clarification. This seems to say that God established those who are in leadership, so we must give to the authorities that which has been instituted by them. Most likely this section in Romans refers to criminal cases and not "trivial" cases. Paul was definitely not saying that criminal cases should have been handled by the 1st century church.

Paul tells the Corinthians not to take other believers to secular Roman courts over wrongs that could have been handled within the church body. Now, we don't handle any disagreements in a church body, so this is different for us now. But we do have a choice as to our posture as we experience "trivial cases" of wrongs against us. One of the most interesting parts regarding this, I think, is in verse 7 of our 1st Corinthians passage - read it again.

It's important to note that Paul wasn't saying they should allow others to treat them harshly and forget relationship boundaries. He wasn't saying they should enable or excuse abuse of any kind. He was reminding them that following Christ meant choosing an attitude of Christlike humility. Just because those in the world sue one another for sport and financial gain, we don't have to do that also; we can love each other sacrificially instead. We can live counter culturally by focusing on relationships rather than rights. One way we can do this is choosing to forgive debts or damages in order to value people more than property. Here in verse 7, Paul told the Corinthian believers their lawsuits were actually a defeat for them. He used the Greek legal word for defeat, *eyttema*, insinuating that when believers sue each other, nobody wins.

In fact, read Matthew 5:38-44 to be reminded of what Jesus taught about retaliation.

When someone slaps you on the right cheek, then what? Turn the other also

When someone sues you in court and takes your shirt, then what? Give the cloak as well.

When someone demands you carry their stuff for a mile, then what?

Go the 2nd also

But this is hard to hear and even harder to even think about practicing. It reminds me of a special kind of coffee. Maybe you've heard of it. It's one of the most prized coffee blends which comes from Indonesia and is called *Kopi Luwak*, whose beans are "picked" by a *Luwak*, which is a nocturnal mammal that vaguely resembles a skunk. The animal, also referred to as a *Palm Civet*, chooses the ripest, most succulent beans, eats them without chewing, digests, and then, well, they come out, still whole, in the animal's feces. Human pickers then pick up the droppings, wash them carefully and the beans are used just like any normal coffee beans would be. Except for the fact that these, having passed through the digestive tract of the animal, take on a special, delicate flavor, because of the enzymes that help to soften the bitter taste of coffee. And it's one of the best coffees in the world.

Now, when I hear about this kind of coffee, even though it's known to be the best, I think to myself, "No way am I able or willing to drink coffee that an animal has 'processed'!"

Sometimes I feel the same way when I read Biblical teachings. There is no way I'm going to be able or willing to drink from that cup - meaning live life that way. And yet we live in the tension of that truth. The truth that we are called to live counter culturally. It's hard and uncomfortable and much of the time, we really don't want to, but it leads to the best life we could ever have. But it's up to each of us to determine specifically how God is calling us to put these teachings into effect. All of our situations are completely unique. And so it's that personal relationship with God, that shows us OUR way.

Let me unpack this concept a little bit more. Who are Paul and Jesus most likely speaking to? Who's the audience?

The people in this church at Corinth and the people who gathered around Jesus on the mount were the marginalized, mainly poor, living outside the riches of the Roman Empire. They were not only aware of hardship, but most likely had relatives or friends who had been nailed to Roman cross in crucifixion and they'd seen thousands of people killed that way outside of their city. These were people who had zero political power or authority. Yet Paul and Jesus taught them not only how to have influence without being powerful, but how powerlessness was actually their greatest source of power.

The teaching - "When someone sues you in court and takes your shirt, give them your cloak as well." - if the only thing a person owned to be taken from them in a lawsuit was the shirt off their back, that would be a poor person indeed. And the clothing in those days was not like ours. Pants were not worn. Only a long undershirt was worn and then a cloak, or wrap, to go over it. In this case, giving them the coat as well would in essence cause the person to go naked. It seems unlikely that Jesus was literally teaching someone to go naked, but rather to use the image as a symbol of the injustice happening and abuse of power, which in the end would be a taking back of power. It would be like saying, "Fine - you're taking my shirt, then have my cloak as well - you win. I hope this makes everything right." But as 1 Corinthians 6:7 says, "The fact that you have lawsuits against each other means that you've already lost your case."

In a sense it was a taking back of power through peaceful resistance. Slapping a person is always a sign of disdain, a way to demean someone. In Middle Eastern culture the right hand is used for almost everything. Slapping with the back of the hand was the greatest sign of insult. In fact, slapping with the open hand was a sign of equality. So here, if the right cheek is slapped it would have been with the back of the right hand. Jesus is basically saying, stand up to your aggressor by also offering the other cheek as a way to say, "I am not willing to be belittled." The aggressor would either have had to slap the person with an open hand, insinuating equality. Or choose not to slap them again. In either case, some sense of power would have been restored.

Lastly, In the case of someone forced to go a mile, most likely to carry something, like the Roman soldier forced Simon to carry Jesus' cross, Jesus says instead of retaliating or complaining or refusing, choose to go a second mile also. Why? Because Roman soldiers by law had the power to press anyone into service for one mile only as "every road led to Rome" every mile on a Roman road would have been marked out mile by mile. This way they knew exactly when their mile was finished. But a person going more than a mile of their own free will would have turned the tables on that power dynamic AND would have gotten the soldier in trouble. Again, a form of peaceful resistance and a changing of the balance of power.

Living Counter Culturally is a calling. It isn't done easily, without thought and consideration, but by listening to God and being in relationship with God daily through the Holy Spirit we can lead changed lives and be part of changed culture. May it be so.