

Well, we're continuing our series looking at 1 Corinthians which provides us with a model on how to spectacularly screw up a perfectly good church!

Last week we learned that having an affair with your mum isn't a good idea, in fact letting any sin take a grip in your life will spiritually kill you.

And tonight, we're going to see what to do when Christians end up wanting to come to blows with each other!

Now that may come as a shock to you that Church could ever be like that!

But it can, and sometimes it can get so bad that we just want to sue the pants off each other!

This is what happens:

We like dealing with each other and that is good!...

I've hired people from church to paint our house, to repair the roof, to hack back that jungle we call sometimes call a garden!

My children have bought cars off a certain automobile trader in the church,

I've rented my house to the PCC,

This is good. We like to help each other.

If you've got a business or a skill that someone in the church can use – its good to give them terms that are fair and generous.

But what happens, if the person that you've hired doesn't do a good job, or doesn't meet expectations, or doesn't even complete the work you gave them!?

Or what happens, if the person *you are working for*

keeps changing their mind, or doesn't pay you, or expects you to keep doing stuff for free?

How should Christian's respond?

Well sometimes you can feel so hard done by that you just want to do is to take them to court!

Well that was what was going on in the Church at Corinth!

People were taking each other to court and it really screwed up their Prayer meetings!

Imagine being in a Home Group in Corinth and someone would say –

“would you pray for my court case it's a real toughie.”

*And then the person **opposite** would say*

“Yeah, but pray for mine harder! Because I'm suing the coat off that hypocritical Bible Study leader.”

That's really going to kill the atmosphere!

That's what was going on in Corinth!

So the question is:

when Christians have a **conflict**,

how do we deal with it? How do we resolve it?

This evening I want to talk about:

how to look for Justice

what happens when we only find Injustice; and

how to live in the Light of Ultimate Justice.

Looking for Justice, finding **Injustice**; and Living in the Light of Ultimate Justice.

So would you turn with me to 1 Corinthians 6, p1147, lets see.

1. How to Look for Justice.

v1 "If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints?"

The first thing God says is,
if you and another Christian have got some sort of disagreement then
before you run off to a non-Christian judge you should bring it before a saint.

Now, some of you may be thinking,

"Well, aren't all the saints dead? – how do we do that?"

If you were raised Catholic, you're right, all the saints are dead.

But when the Bible uses the word "saint" it just means somebody who loves Jesus,
it means someone who has been forgiven (or sanctified).

Saint. Sanctified – same root word.

It means someone who loves God.

So here's a guy named Bill, he's a plumber, and he loves Jesus.

So he's Saint Bill (there are a few of them at Southover!)

If he's happy to arbitrate for you then use him.

You don't need the judge— Bill the plumber will do just fine.

v2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?

*And if you are to judge the world, are you not confident to judge **trivial** cases?*

Do you not know that we will judge the angels?

☺ I just love the way God drops these huge ideas in almost as incidentals –

Paul says "do you not know you're going to judge the world and angels..."

And don't you just wanna say – well no!

what do you mean we're going to judge the world and angels, tell me more!?

But infuriatingly Paul just goes on – but it IS important so I'll return this idea when I
talk about living in view of Ultimate Judgment,

But for now we'll just let Paul get away with it, and return to it later.

So he says

v3 Do you not know that if we will judge the angels then

How much more the things of this life!

Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters,

appoint as judges even men of little account 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?*

On secondary disputes (he uses the word 'trivial' here)

We don't need a solicitor, we don't need the court,

What we should do is find someone who loves the Lord, has a sense of justice, and
Biblical wisdom and they'll be fine.

So you're buying some property from someone in church. You offer them a good price.

But when you come to move in not only have they NOT left the carpets as they said they would, but the light bulbs are missing and the brass power points have all been swapped for something tacky! What do you do about that?

Or perhaps you buy a car from someone in church – it's a good price, you're happy with it, but a few days later the clutch goes, the brakes fail and the radiator springs a leak.

What do you do?

Or maybe you employ a church member for a spot of decorating and they don't paint to the standard you were hoping, and it ends up costing 50% more as well – what do you do?

Well, Paul says for issues like this agree to get someone who is Godly to arbitrate. Find yourself a Godly Estate Agent (there's a cheap joke in there somewhere), that Saintly Second Hand Car Salesman And let them make a judgment and live with their decision.

So that's fair enough.

And to be honest most of the church's conflicts are like this.

They may seem like big issues at the time, they may dominate our thinking and rob us of sleep.

And we may get really (disproportionately) wound up about them

but in Kingdom terms, in life and death terms they are trivial, they are secondary.

In fact we spend far too much time worrying about mole-hills which we perceive to be mountains.

But are off little import.

And it becomes a matter of disgrace

when we allow such matters to cause divisions amongst us

when we allow disagreements to fester and pollute our friendships

when we allow someone's thoughtlessness or mistakes to spoil the fellowship of the Church.

So God shows us what we need to do.

On secondary issues get a wise Christian to arbitrate...

But what about weighty matters?

What about armed robbery or drug dealing or terrorism...

What if you come home and your Christian roommate has got posters of Osama Bin Laden on his wall, has strange chemicals on his bookshelf and there's a lot of ticking things in his room?

Well in this case Bill the Plumber and Steve the Rector are not the people you want!

"Steve I think my room mate is Al Qaeda would you mediate for me – are not the words I ever want to hear!"

No.

You need someone with a gun, who likes green face paint and spends his time jumping out of helicopters!

On weighty matters call the Police.

What do you do if a crime has been committed -
stealing or assault or rape – you call the police!

To our shame the church has not always done this
The Catholic Church has really screwed up on this!
They've had Priests who have committed crimes against children,
and the church leadership have said
"We won't notify the authorities, we'll just deal with it internally"
That is an act of evil.

When a crime has been committed
it is not be about covering up for fellow Christians no matter how much you love
them;
It is about protecting victims.

If it's a weighty matter, if it's a crime - hand it to the proper authorities
If it's a secondary matter – and most of our conflicts **are**, then we look for Justice
through a mediator.

That's how we find Justice in the Church...

2. But what happens if all we actually get is INJUSTICE?

What if we look for Justice but only find injustice?

What if they don't want to mediate?
What if they honestly believe that they have acted fairly – even if we **know** they
haven't
What if they just don't care?
What then?

Paul says

*v7 The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have already been
completely defeated.*

Why not rather be wronged?

Why not be cheated?

And here we get to the heart of what it means to be a Christian!
And to be part of this amazing thing called church!

Here is the question:

- Would you give up your rights for the sake of the Kingdom of God in Southover?
- Would you rather be wronged than destroy the chance of reconciliation and peace
in this church?
- Would you rather take it on the chin so that perhaps one day the person who is
your adversary now - might see the error of their ways - and become your
stronger friend later - and so build a more powerfully Christ-like community?

That is the question and that is the driving force of Paul's argument.

Because

Isn't this exactly what Jesus did for us?

Isn't it a fact that Jesus gave up his rights for the sake **of the possibility of seeing** the Kingdom of God in **your** life?

He gave up the adoration of angels, the purity of heaven,
the power of being the one who brought the world into existence and became a child.
He up his rights for the sake of seeing the Kingdom of God in your life!

Isn't it a fact that Jesus allowed himself to be 'wronged', by the very ones he came to save,
so that there would be a chance of reconciliation between you and him

They called him a liar when he spoke the truth
They said he was demon-possessed when he cast our demons
They slandered him when he brought salvation to the sinners
They called him a drunk when he talked of God's love
They used every trick in the book to silence him when his truth became too uncomfortable.
Did he not lay it all down for you and me?

Isn't it a fact that Jesus was crucified
to allow for the possibility that we might, one day, see the error of our ways, and
become his devoted friend a result?

He let himself be wronged so that you may see your value to God
He let himself be covered in sin so that you might be forgiven
He let himself be crucified so that one day you and I might see that,
in fact, it was US in the wrong, it was US that rebelled, it was US that killed the Son
of God
so that we might become his devoted follower and friend.
so that we might be reconciled to God!

And if he values reconciliation with us that much.
Then shouldn't we do the same for each other?

We speak a lot about how we understand God's love for us.
The proof of whether we actually get it
is the extent to which we ourselves will offer that same love to others

So if someone in this church wrongs you – even if they wrong you deliberately – the call is to take it on the cheek and to be prepared to offer the other one;

If someone presumes upon your good will and takes you for granted – the call is to give even more so that they may see your love;

If someone robs you of your shirt then don't write them off... be prepared to offer them your coat too!

Hebrews 12 tells us that
Jesus considered his life, his sufferings, his crucifixion even as 'nothing,
in comparison to the joy of having a relationship with you

When we understand that for ourselves we then show it to others.

Would you rather not be wronged?
Would you rather not be cheated?
Would you count it as secondary to maintain the possibility of reconciliation?
to demonstrate the Spirit's power in the life of the church?
That is our call

Look for Justice through a mediator
When you find only Injustice, copy Jesus, show his love
And do this (thirdly) all

3. in view of an Ultimate Justice.

Because the truth is that there IS ultimate Justice and no-one gets away with anything.
v9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?

**How is it possible to turn the other cheek, to let yourself be wronged, to offer forgiveness – even to those who have really hurt you?
even to those who have crucified you?**

The answer is because no-one gets away with it

You see we need to realise that this life is **secondary** when compared to the glory of an eternity with God.
This life is as nothing in comparison to what we already have.
Therefore any sacrifice made now,
any sacrifice given to help people find God and live with him forever is worth its weight in Gold and
is an act of supreme love and faith.

Do you see.
Giving it up now – so that someone else may find eternal life is an act of supreme love and faith.

There is an Ultimate Justice
And we will be part of it.
v2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?
v3 Do you not know that we will judge the angels?
Let's unpack that a bit...

Would you turn with me to Revelation chapter 20 and I want to finish with this passage.

Revelation is a strange book, it is a combination of straightforward prose and the most extraordinary, unusual apocalyptic visions.

The pictures should not be taken literally – they are just pictures being used to convey a message.

In chapter 20 v11
we read this
Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it.
The throne represents authority and the person sitting on it is Jesus.

Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.
everything is revealed.

The physical is destroyed all that is left behind is the spiritual.

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened.

Whoever we are,

no matter what our position, or achievements, or status
we will all stand on a level before God and books will be opened.

And in those books are a record of everything that we have said or thought or done.

All will be laid bare before Jesus; and

Another book was opened, which is the book of life.

In this second book are the names of everyone who has accepted the mercy and grace of God.

Who has placed God rather than Self at the centre of their lives –
who has lived for a relationship with their Creator.

The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and

death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them,

and each person was judged according to what he had done.

Jesus will return and everybody that has died and gone to heaven will be judged according to what they have done.

And everybody who has died who had no faith in God are judged according to what they have done.

And everyone who is alive at the time is judged according to what they have done.

And verdict is simple. And we will help make it...

Romans 3:10 “no-one will be declared righteous”

Romans 3:23 “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God”

God who is pure will look for pure lives in his books and will find none.

God who is holy will look for holy lives in his books and find none.

Everyone – Christian and Non-Christian, those with faith and those without, those

who love God and those who don't

will acknowledge that their verdict is clear

no-one is innocent

no-one qualifies to be God's friend

no-one has a right to heaven

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.

Death dies. Death is destroyed.

As a concept it is annihilated and obsolete.

It is totally destroyed.

If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life,

they too were thrown into the lake of fire

The only thing that separates those who love God from those that don't are those who love God have accepted God's Grace and Mercy and want a relationship with God as Lord.

Those that don't want it – don't get it.

So listen...

This life is more important than our rights and our reputation

This life is more important than clothes or gadgets

It is beyond houses and success

And you and I need to see this.

We play for higher stakes, we play for eternal life and lasting joy

This life is not about us.

If we make it as such, it will be the only life we will ever know and we will lose it all

- our hearts will sink, our souls will be in dismay and we will realise how selfish we

have been with the gift of God.

This life is not about us.

It is about the Kingdom of God

Therefore any sacrifice made now,

any sacrifice to help people find God forever,

any sacrifice that shows people true love, unconditional love, sacrificial love, JESUS

love

is worth its weight in Gold and is an act of supreme faith.

Jesus said to his disciples in Matthew 19

"I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things,

when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne,

you who have followed me will also sit on thrones, judging the tribes of Israel. And

*everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will **inherit eternal life.***

We play for higher stakes –

Give everything including being wronged to build the Kingdom of God here at

Southover.

It is the act of supreme love and faith.