

Forbidden Lawsuits

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 6:1-8

Code: 1825

First Corinthians chapter 6, we'll look at least the first eight verses of the chapter and get a running start on it. I've entitled the message simply "Forbidden Lawsuits." You know, the Bible is a very practical book, and some of you maybe came this morning visiting us expecting to hear messages about God and Christ and messages in regard to the death of Jesus Christ or who He is or something like that, or maybe topical things; but what we're doing this morning is just arriving at chapter 6 in 1 Corinthians and taking it as the Spirit of God has brought it to us. And the message this morning deals with lawsuits. Now, maybe you didn't think the Bible got into practical things like suing other people; but it does; and it has a lot to say about it.

This chapter is the most important statement in the Bible on this whole matter of litigation and court situations in regard to Christian people, people who love the Lord Jesus Christ and are part of His body. Now, the problem in the church at Corinth was that Christians were suing each other. Now, the Corinthian church, to which Paul wrote this letter, had a lotta problems. The letter was written as kind of a problem solver. He deals with problems of their divergence of human philosophies resulting in their inability to get along together, problems such as incest, somebody having a sexual relationship with his father's wife, problems of...of pagan worship, problems of drunkenness, all kinds of problems that the Corinthians had; and each chapter deals with a different one of 'em.

But one of the problems they had was the problem of suing each other. They were very busy taking each other to court; and, really, their motives became very impure. It got to the place where they were even doing it in order to rob each other. You'll notice at the end of verse 8, he says, "You do wrong, and you are defrauding even your own brothers. It isn't bad enough that you go to court, but when you get there, you rob the other one. Now verse 6 kinda keys us in on the passage. "Brother goes to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers!" Now, here is a community of Christians fighting among each other and asking for the non-Christian world to be the arbitrators of their fight, to play referee in the problem.

Well, of course, this is not unlike hanging your dirty laundry in the face of everybody. One thing about the church, the church never publicized that it's perfect; but we certainly do publicize our imperfections and rather grossly at times; and here is one of them that the Corinthians were making a big deal out of in that community. Now, you have to understand the historical background to understand what kind of an issue this was. We don't know much about the jurisprudence process in Corinth, but we do know a lot about it in the city of Athens, which was right adjacent to Corinth; and if

we get a little idea about Athens, we'll certainly be able to understand the Corinthian situation.

For instance, the Jews did not ordinarily go to law in a public law court. That just wasn't something they did; and if they ever had a problem, and in every city where there were Jews there was usually a Jewish synagogue. If you had eleven men, you could have a synagogue, and they would start one, and so the synagogue would become kind of the court, and the deciding process would be carried on right within that little framework of the Jewish family, and they never would take their problems into the pagan world. They were trying to show the world their unity. They were trying to show the world their love. They were trying to settle their own problems, and they also felt that God's Word, the revelation of God, the law of God, the Old Testament had all the answers to the problems of their life. It had answers to all the family problems, all the problems on a social level, cultural and economic level; and why would they need to go to a pagan court? In fact, the Jewish teachers said that, "To take our problems to a pagan court is the same as blaspheming God, for it is in effect saying, 'God doesn't have an answer to this problem.'" When, in fact, in their own law, the answer was there; and so they considered it blasphemy against the divine law of God to ever wind up in a courtroom outside of the fellowship of the Jewish people.

And it was an interesting thing, too, that the Roman and the Greek world accommodated this Jewish attitude. They allowed them the right to decide their own cases. In fact, even in the case of Jesus Christ, you know, it was their own decision to do what they wanted with Jesus Christ. They had that right, short of the right of execution, to decide their own cases; and the Romans and the Greeks were very tolerant in that regard; and Roman law was somewhat advanced and...and very, very tolerant in allowing the Jews to do what they wanted in terms of their own decisions.

What is interesting about this, too, is that it translated over into Christianity; because the Romans and the Greeks saw Christianity as a form of Judaism; and, since they saw it as a form of Judaism, they allowed Christians the same rights they'd always allowed Jews. That is, they could decide their own issues, so there was absolutely no reason for them to wind up in a pagan court. They had no reason to go there, because the courts would've accepted the decisions they had made in their own community and granted them sanction by the government. So it was ridiculous for them to even wind up in court, but here they were, always going to court.

Well, the reason primarily was they didn't wanna settle it in their own community, because they couldn't get what they wanted, and they wanted to gouge each other. So they wanted to drag into a pagan court and see if they can get more money out of it or more whatever they were after. And in addition to that, in the community in which they lived, particularly in Athens, the law system and the process of litigation was so much a part of life that it became the chief entertainment.

Lemme tell you why. In Athens, there were suits and law problems going on continuously. In fact, one historian said everybody in the city of Athens was a lawyer, more or less. I'll show you why.

Let's say you had a problem with a guy, and you wanted to settle it. The first process you followed was known as private arbitration. A private arbitrator was given to you. A private arbitrator was given to him, and a neutral third party was chosen, and those three people were supposed to resolve the problem. If those three people couldn't come to any agreement and couldn't solve the problem, then your case was turned over to a court known as the Forty, and the Forty would appoint another arbitrator. There were certain public arbitrators, not private now, but public like a public defender. Everybody 60 years old, for the duration of his 60th year, served the community as a public arbitrator; and so if you couldn't get your thing settled by private arbitration, then public arbitrators were assigned to your case.

Now, if that didn't do it, there was a multiple jury court in Athens made up of 201 people for small cases, and we have records of anywhere from 1,000 to 6,000 people for big cases. You could have a jury of 6,000 people in your court case. Talk about a hung jury. How'd you like to convince all them? Well, it was a majority situation; but the idea simply being this: that with juries that big, and with the process this involved, everybody got into it. Everybody in his 60th year, knowing he'd have to be a public arbitrator, would have some sense of knowledge about the courtroom process; and all the jurors in those large juries were 30 years and older; so by the time you hit 30, you'd be involved in all of that. Law was a big deal; and, as I said, everybody was more or less a lawyer. If you weren't really in on the case, you were in on it in terms of sharing your opinion, discussion, and everything else, 'cause it was so much a way of life.

Well, here are these people in the Corinthian system. They are so used to doing this kind of a thing as a process of life. They get saved. They become Christians. They enter the church, and just like they did with everything else, they dragged that whole deal into the church, too. They dragged their philosophies into the church. They dragged their immoralities into the church. They dragged their litigation attitudes into the church. The whole style of life that they used to have just kept coming into the church with them. They never really knew how to make the break, and isn't that we saw last week where Paul tells 'em, "Don't you know a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" If you keep dragging into the church all these old patterns, you're just gonna corrupt the whole thing. So here they are suing each other, and there is absolutely no reason for this at all; and the whole intent of the thing was to defraud each other. Beyond getting what you deserved, they had really become venomous toward one another.

Now, Paul says in this Scripture, here's the principle, "It is a sin for a Christian to sue another Christian." Now, folks, you can't get much more practical than that. I mean that's not pie in the sky Christianity. That's not foggy theology. I mean that's pretty simple stuff. Do not sue another Christian. I mean that's...that's the end of the message, but we have so much time, I have a few other things that I wanna say.

Now, there are three misunderstandings. There are three misunderstandings that Paul points out that were being exhibited by the Corinthians in...in the light of this particular problem going on. When they were busy suing each other, Paul says it shows that they've misunderstood the rank of the church, one. Two, that they misunderstood the right attitude of the Christian; and next week we'll see that they misunderstood their relationship to the world. No. 1, they've misunderstood the rank of the church by doing what they were doing. Going to pagan courts was saying that the courts could accomplish something the church couldn't, and that was a misunderstanding of where God viewed the church...

Now, lemme show you, verse 1, "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust and not before the saints? How dare you...he says...having a matter," and the word having a matter, actually, there's a phrase there involving a verb, a preposition, and a noun, and that Greek phrase is a technical term for a lawsuit. So he's saying, "How dare you have a lawsuit against another and go to law before the unjust and not before the saints?" Now, that's the whole point of the passage.

Now some of you may have the word neighbor in your Bible, and that is...is not in the original Greek. The original Greek just says another. One of you going against another. One of you Christians going against another Christian is the whole idea. Not talking about the guy next door, the guy down the street. It's talking about another Christian having a lawsuit against a Christian is the issue. He says, "I can't believe that any of you would dare to do this." I mean it shocked Paul. It shocked him because he was Jewish, and the Jews never did it. It shocked him because he was a Christian, and he couldn't imagine brothers suing brothers, because the whole principle of the Christian community was the principle of love and forgiveness, right? And instead of loving each other and forgiving each other, they were stealing from each other and being unforgiving, and that's not only to get what they might have deserved, but more than they deserved.

He says, "How dare you? It's incredible that you have lawsuits against one another, and you're going to court before unjust and not before the saints." Now, a word about the term unjust. This is not to describe the moral character of the judges. He isn't even talking about their moral character. They may have been fine men. Some non-Christian judges can be as good or better than Christian judges in some cases, depending upon their knowledge of law and their fair spirit. That isn't the issue. He's simply saying these are unjust in terms of the fact that they are unjustified. They've never come to Christ. They are unsaved. They don't know the Lord.

Why would you take these cases before unsaved people and not before the saints, when the saints are the ones who know the Word of God; and, therefore, they know God's principles. The saints are the ones possessing the Holy Spirit and can allow the Spirit of God to lead in the decision. So he has nothing here derogatory to say about a pagan man's moral character. He's not saying he's a...he's an immoral or an unfair judge. He's just classifying the unjust. There...there are only two kinds of

people, as we've told you, in the world - the saints and the ain'ts. And you're either holy or unholy, righteous or unrighteous, and that's all he's saying. You either know Christ or you don't. You know God or you don't, and he's saying, "Why would you take it to the unjust, those who have never met Christ, and not to the saints, the holy ones who know God."

Now, again, I say to you he's not complaining that Christians can't get justice in the court. There's justice to be gained in the courts. Not always. Jesus couldn't get it, and there was some political intrigue with the life of Paul, and there may be from time to time times when the courts don't give justice; but, for the most part in Roman law, as in law today, there is justice there; and government is established to protect good people and punish evil, and it just generally works out that way. So that isn't what he's saying. He's not saying every judge in the world is unjust morally. He's talking about their spiritual state before God, not their ability to evaluate a given case. They're unregenerate. They don't know Christ, and he's saying, "How could you possibly take matters within the family outside the family?" The church is responsible for these decisions. It should be taken to the saints is what he's saying in verse 1. Let the believers, and the word saints is the holy ones. Why would you give it to the unholy to judge? Why not to the holy, the family, the church? The point is this, no Christian is ever to take another Christian to court. That is sin and terrible testimony to the world.

Somebody asked me, "Well, what about a Christian corporation taking another Christian corporation to...to court? Does a group of Christians negate the law that applied to a single Christian?" No, of course not. One Christian doesn't sue another, but it certainly doesn't allow for ten Christians to sue ten other Christians. The principle is the same. Now, Paul shows it's ridiculous for you to go before pagan courts.

Now notice verse 2, and here's why. Here is the rank of the church. This is interesting, and he asks a series of rhetorical questions here. "Do you not know that the saints shall judge the world?" Now he says, "Don't you know that the...the holy ones, you, the church, the children of God, the saints, are gonna judge the whole world? Now if the world shall be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest criteria," in the Greek, which means law courts. If you are going to sit in the supreme court of all time and judge the world, aren't you capable of sitting in a local court and handling your problem? He says, "Just realize who you are."

"Do you realize that someday saints are going to judge the world?" This is really an amazing thing to think about. We know that the Bible teaches this: that someday the Lord Jesus Christ is coming back to earth, and there are many signs that point to His soon return. Jesus is going to come and set up a Kingdom on the earth, and the Bible promises that Christian people and the children of God all throughout the ages are going to reign with Christ in that Kingdom, and we are gonna be co-regent, as it were.

In Revelation it has us sitting with Him in His throne, Revelation 3:21. We are going to actually be reigning with Christ. Now, part of the responsibility as associate kings, just kind of an interesting term, just thought of it. Part of the.. the responsibility of being an associate king, as it were, is the responsibility of judging or ruling.

Lemme take you back into the Old Testament to give you an insight into this, in Daniel 7:22. You don't need to look it up. You can just listen. Read one verse. Daniel 7:22. He's talking about the time when Christ returns; and he says, "The Ancient of Days came, judgment was given to the saints of the Most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the Kingdom." Now, Christ is going to come, the one who is ancient, the one who has always been; and He's gonna set up His Kingdom, and the saints are going to sit in the seats of judgment. We are gonna judge in the Kingdom. We're gonna rule, as it were, over the nations. We're gonna be co-regents with God.

In Matthew chapter 19, Luke chapter 22, it tells us that the apostles are gonna reign on thrones over the 12 tribes of Israel. The apostles of Christ. In Revelation chapter 2 verse 26 and 27, it says, "And he that overcomes and keeps My works to the end, to him will I give power over the nations, and 'he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken.'" Now, he simply says, "You're gonna rule." Sometimes the word rule is used, and sometimes the word judge is used. It means to have oversight, to have rule, to have authority. Someday we are going to rule the world with Christ. We're gonna be making decisions as co-regents of Christ.

Now, if we can do that, handle the supreme court of Christ and ruling over the world, it seems fairly apparent that we oughta be able to handle the local matters that go on while we're around here, right? That's his whole point here. That, because of the ultimate design of the character of the church, fitting it to rule the world, it should be able to judge its own private matters...Now, instead of doing that in Corinth, they were taking things to pagan courts and just exposing their bitterness and carnality and pride and all of the sins that were characteristic of them.

Now he goes a step further. Notice verse 3. "Don't you know that we shall judge angels?" Now, here's another very interesting statement, that Christians also someday are going to sit in judgment or rule over angels. Now, there's two possibilities here. What does this mean? I think we oughta think about that. I'd like to know a little bit about - that's kind of exciting.

You know, the highest class of beings ever created was angels, and we're gonna be exalted to the place someday where we rule over angels. We judge angels. "Now, if we are gonna judge angels," he says, "how much more things that pertain to this life?" I mean if we're gonna do that, I mean don't you think we can take care of the petty things in this world? Seems to me we should. And you say, "Well, who are these angels we're gonna judge?" That's a good question. Notice this, this is what we call in the Greek an anarthrous construction, which means there's no article. I just put anarthrous in there so you'd think I was educated. What it means is that there's no article. Doesn't say the angels

or which angels or what kind of angels. Just says angels, and that gives it a qualitative sense. Angels as beings. In other words, he's saying we're gonna be put above superior beings. We're gonna be placed above the angels.

Now there are two kinds of angels, good ones and bad ones. Evil angels and holy angels. Does this mean we're gonna judge the evil angels? Well, there is gonna be a judgment of evil angels. There's no doubt about that. Second Peter 2:4 says that, "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them to hell, delivered them to chains to be reserved unto judgment." Says the same thing in Jude verse 6. "The angels who kept not their first estate, he reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment." So there's going to be a judgment of evil angels. Will we be a part of that? Could be. Doesn't say which angels here, but it might be that we'll be co-reigning with Christ and judging, ruling over, fallen angels.

Now, others say, "No, it means good angels. It means good angels, because, if it meant bad angels, it probably would say that, so it probably means good angels." Well, that could be. If it means good angels, what are we gonna judge 'em for if they didn't do anything? Well, then you'd have to say, "Well, the word judge is used synonymously with the word rule," and that's true. To judge in Israel and to rule in Israel meant the same thing in the old testament, so maybe he's just saying generally we're gonna rule over them. You say, "Which view do you take?" Well, I'm sort of a theological packrat, so I'll take both, and I'll assume that what he's saying here is he's collecting everything up and saying, "You're gonna rule the world, and you're gonna rule angels. You may be in on the judgment of evil ones, and you will certainly be part of the rule of the good ones."

Just think about it. In heaven someday, we'll have a position to rule over angels; and, of course, their submission to us will be voluntary. Now, I don't understand all the implications of that. I just...I just kinda feel that's kind of interesting to think about; but if we can judge the world someday with the equipment that we have in the power of the Spirit of God and the knowledge of His Word, and if we can judge angels, then we ought to be able to settle our own matters down here. That's a fairly good argument, isn't it? That's what he's arguing here.

Then he comes to verse 4, and this is a very difficult verse. There are so many possible translations, and we really get lost in the Greek here. We don't know what he's talking about in terms of very specific uses of tenses and everything. It's very complicated in the Greek, but lemme just give you the simplest thing that I can think of, and I can't...I can't be dogmatic on the exact meaning, but the general meaning of the thing is the same no matter how you cut it. If then you have...and you see the judgments there? If you have law courts would be the best translation. If you are having law courts or tribunals. It's the same word used at the end of verse 2 translated matters. Anytime you see a word translated matter in one verse and one verse later translated judgment, you know they got trouble with that word. It means something, but not everything; so they had a hard time deciding what. It means law courts. That's the best we can come up with.

So if you're having law courts or you're having trials or...or tribunals of things pertaining to this life, then you'll notice in most of your Bibles there's a question. There is no way to tell in Greek what is a question and what isn't, because there are no question marks; and the form of the verb for a question and the form of a verb for a statement are the same. Now there's...the only way you can tell is around the context. But here it seems better to me not to make it a question. "If you are having law courts of things pertaining to this life...a command...set them to judge who are the least esteemed in the church!" In other words, you'd be better off in your situation if you have to have a decision, if you have to have a court, if you have to have a tribunal, if you have to have some litigation, to set the least esteemed Christian in charge of it than to go before the world. You see what he's saying?

I mean the least esteemed Christian is better equipped to handle a family matter within the framework of Christianity than the most competent pagan judge. Plus it's much better for your testimony; and so I think Paul is saying simply that. Christians are more capable than pagans, because they rank above all. In Christ, we are above the world. In Christ, we are above angels; and, remember, it's only because we co-reign with him as joint heirs to His Kingdom...

So if you're going to reign over angels, you're gonna reign over the world, you oughta be able to handle your own cases. "You would be better off," he says, "in these things, if it has to be, if you have to have judgment, to get the least esteemed Christian to handle it rather than the world." Keep it out of those courts.

Then he gets kind of direct in verse 5. "I speak to your shame! Shame on you," and not in a simplistic sense, but in the purest sense of the word shame does he say it. "I speak to your shame! Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, no, not one, that shall be able to judge between his brethren? You mean you gotta go to the world? You don't have one person who can make a decision among you? Nobody there can do it?" There's something sarcastic in that. "You who all have been telling how wise you were. You who have everything don't have anybody smart enough to settle a case between your brothers? You gotta take it to the world to do it? What shameful behavior. I speak to your shame. How is it possible?"

Verse 6, "Brother goes to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers! How can you do this?" What is to be characteristic of Christian brothers? John said in 1 John that, "We are to love the brothers," right? How can you be Christians and be suing each other and dragging it into a court of unbelievers to make a decision between two Christians? Just doesn't make sense. The thing that was lacking in Corinth, among other things, was love; and he said to them in 13, "If you have everything but don't have love, you're nothing but a gong, sounding brass, a tinkling symbol."

You know, long ago, even a...a non-Christian like Plato said this. Plato said, "The really good man will always choose to suffer wrong rather than to do wrong. The truly good man will always choose to

suffer wrong rather than to do wrong." Now, listen, I'll apply that to this. Even the pagan man knew that. It's a sin to sue a Christian. It's better to suffer wrong than to sue a Christian, right? It's better. You say, "But he took a lotta money." It's better to suffer wrong than to sue a Christian. You never sue a Christian. That's wrong.

For a Christian with the love of Christ in his heart, he would rather suffer insult, injury, loss, damage, rather than inflict it on somebody else, especially a brother. Vengeance, for a Christian, is absolutely absurd. It is absolutely absurd. A Christian does not order his acts by recompense, by a desire for revenge. A Christian orders his acts by love and forgiveness, doesn't he? And a Christian will seek peace at any cost. Paul says, "I can't believe it. Suing each other."

You know, I can say that this is a...a good thing, I guess. Maybe it's good only in the sense that I'm ignorant, but the six-and-a-half years that I've been here, we have never had in our congregation that I know of a lawsuit...that went into public courts; and I'm thankful to the Lord for that. None should, and we are ready and able and aware and set to be able to handle those kind of problems if they come up within the church. Now, we have had occasion for a lawsuit between a Christian here and a Christian in another congregation. We arbitrated it by taking elders from their congregation, elders from ours, meeting together in private, praying over it, seeking the mind of the Holy Spirit, and deciding it; and it never got out of the...of the community of believers, and that's exactly what the Bible says to do.

Was talking to Sam Erickson earlier this morning, who is an attorney and chairman of our board of elders, and he was saying that, in the six years or so that's he's been involved in this, in the literally dozens and dozens and dozens and dozens of cases that he handles as an attorney, every time, he says 90 percent of the time, he can convince Christians who start this procedure in all the business that he does, and it's...much of it is outside our community, our congregation; but he can convince Christians 90 percent of the time to follow the Biblical pattern; and, "In every case," he says, "without exception, they have been blessed. He said, "On the other hand, every single time I have ever seen them disobey Scripture, the result has been terrible. They are bitter. They are hateful. No matter what happens, they lose in the end. They...they don't like their attorneys. They don't like the way things were handled. They're not happy with their money. They have a guilty conscience. Etc., etc., etc. That's confirmation right from the people who know.

And it simply says this, people. Do it God's way and He blesses. I'd rather have God's blessing than money, wouldn't you? I'd rather not even get to court and have the blessing of God than try to fight for something that would be in violation of His principles. So we've endeavored to do this, and we've disposed of at least one case. I was in on that as one of the arbitrators, and it was an exciting thing to be able to settle it in the family. Now, lemme add this. It may be under some circumstances, and I have to leave in a loophole here, it may be under some circumstances necessary for a Christian to go to court. Sometimes you have a sad thing where one Christian want to divorce another one, and in a

divorce situation, of course you know what the Bible says. God hates divorce. God hates it. Malachi said that. God doesn't want divorce. Divorce just shatters lives, and sometimes a Christian will be divorced by another Christian, and there's no way that that Christian can try to preserve a union which he believes God wants than to go to the court, and he isn't really the one who is suing. He's just going to protect what he believes God has ordained. There's no personal vengeance there. There's no personal gain there. There's no monetary motive there. If his motive is to glorify God and preserve what God has said is right, then...then maybe there is justification at that place to go to court, and I won't make a moral judgment on that.

There may be such a thing in custody situations, too, where you have children, and you have parents that are split; and one parent is a...is a solid, really God-honoring, Christ-loving parent, and the other one is just...claims to be a Christian but I...I knew of one situation just like that. This woman claimed to be a Christian and became a prostitute, and there was a natural desire to get custody of the children, and the court case came up, and custody was given to the Christian situation; and it was a really...it was a good thing. It was a very happy thing. The children were being abused. They were being beaten up by various and sundry men. All kinds of tragic things were happening.

I'm not saying that the Bible forbids ever entering a court under any circumstances; but what the Bible is saying is when your motive is revenge, when your motive is recompense, when your motive is even getting what you deserve to get, when it's involving you alone, then it's in violation of all these principles. Now, if you're trying to rescue somebody from the clutches of Satan, or if you're trying to save something which you believe God has ordained for His glory, then that may be something you'll have to make a personal evaluation of. But the general principle here is very clear. Don't go to court. Why? Because the church will do the judging. If you've got an issue, bring it to the church. Bring it to the elders. Let us know about it if it's an issue between and another Christian or a group of Christians and another group of Christians.

Lemme go a step further. Now this may hang some of you out, but lemme say it anyway. I myself, personally, this is me talking, I would be very hard pressed to ever even sue an unbeliever for anything. You know why? If anybody wanted anything I had bad enough to sue me, I would give it to 'em, and let 'em...I'd let 'em have it. It's yours. And then I'd just say, "My friend, the Lord knows maybe you just need it more than I do," and I'd just commit him to the Lord. "'Vengeance is Mine. I will repay,' says the Lord." You don't have to worry. You say, "Well, what about me? He took...he owes me the..." God knows what he owes you, and God'll take care of you. God'll take care of him, and I'd just as soon leave him with God as try to mess with it myself. You know, God doesn't take 15 percent...or 50 percent or whatever, and I'm not being vengeful. I'm just saying you do it God's way, and God makes things right. God is the great Judge of all, isn't He? God's gonna make all things equal in the end. God knows what's best.

And we'll get to that principle as we look at the second point here. First of all, to sue another Christian and to take him into a pagan court is a lack of understanding of the rank of the church, the place of the church. Secondly, it's a lack of understanding of the right attitude of a Christian. What is to be the attitude of a Christian? Is to be forgiveness. If somebody wants something of mine that bad, I'll give it to him. I don't have any problem with that.

A guy asked me this morning, he says, "I worked for this guy for so long, and he never paid me, and I never got my money. What should I do?" I said, "Write him a nice letter and tell him you...you forgive him and just say that the Lord Jesus Christ has forgiven you all your sins, and you were guilty before him and could never have paid him off, and so, in turn, you wanna pass a little forgiveness on to him, and tell him you're thankful that you have the grace in your heart to forgive, and just want him to know that."

Ohhhhh, see. Guy read that letter and fall over in a dead faint. See? Why not? That's the Spirit of Christ, isn't it? But, you know, we get caught in this world where we're trying to hold onto all the little greenies we can hold onto, see. And in the struggle, we crucify our own souls. There's no need for that. The Lord knows you have need of things. If He takes care of the grass of the field and the flower which today is and tomorrow fades away, and close the lilies and...and make sure the birds have something to eat, don't you think He'll take care of you, oh, ye of little faith?...And maybe if you fight to keep what somebody else took, you didn't need it anyway, or you wouldn't be fighting to keep it. The Lord knew it was a stumbling block.

Notice verse 7. We'll get to the second point. I don't wanna meddle too much. Verse 7 says, "Now therefore, there is utterly a defect among you, because you go to law one with another. Why do you not rather take wrong?" Oh, really. "Why do you not rather allow yourselves to be robbed? Just accept the wrong." Listen, God's still on His throne. He's gonna take care of you. You know, isn't it exciting to be a Christian just from this standpoint, to know that God is operating in my behalf? God is on my team. That is exciting. God is on my team.

You know, I remember when I was a little kid, we used to choose up teams. There's always one kid you wanna choose first. You know, the really good kid. I mean when you think about it from the Christian standpoint, you know, I'd take God on my team. That's terrific. I mean from there on in, it's won, right? God is on our side. God invests His power and His wisdom in our behalf, and so what do we worry about? "Rather," he says, "take wrong. Allow yourselves to be defrauded"; but, instead you're fighting back doing wrong and defrauding your own brothers. You're taking him to court and asking for more than you deserve.

You know, so many people go to court to take more than they deserve. What a testimony. Terrible testimony. I'll never forget on our honeymoon, we were parked in San Francisco. My wife and I, we had a new little car on our honeymoon, just sitting there looking at each other with cow eyes, you

know. Star struck and all that stuff, and a Tanner Gray Line Bus hit us and knocked us halfway down Market Street. We were just sitting at the signal, and all of a sudden, pooom! Flying through the intersection we go in this car. This Tanner Gray Line's brakes failed. It was full of people. Hit us really hard, and it caved in the back of the car, just ummmmm, you know.

So we got home. I'll never forget, the Tanner Gray Line representative came to the house; and he says, "Well, we're not giving you much money." That was how he started...and I said, "Well, okay, fine." Kinda looked up. He said, "And we're gonna go to court over this thing, and we're gonna keep it just the way we feel it oughta be." I said, "Well, I'll tell you, sir, I have a good friend of mine who can fix the back and a...and a guy'll put the bumper on, and I think about \$200.00 will do it."...

"Uh, yeah," he said. Never forget this. He was so shocked. Said, "Any medical injuries?" No, the whiplash routine thing. "I, no, no, it's fine, great. No problem. Just...just a couple hundred dollars will be fine." "You sure?" Guy wrote me out a check for \$350.00. Says, "Oh, you need a little more. You need a little more." And then I had a chance to tell him something about my faith, and I think it may have meant something to him. I don't want anything that isn't mine, and even what's mine can be yours if you want it that bad. That's the attitude. You see? Take wrong, rather than defraud somebody. I mean that doesn't do anybody any good. That doesn't do your soul any good. It injures the other party, destroys the testimony of Christ.

Now, lemme give you some principles that'll help you to understand this. Turn to Matthew 18. This is really...this is one of the most interesting stories in the Bible. Matthew 18. It's really so far out, it's hard to believe. It's a parable, and a parable is a story that Jesus made up to illustrate something, and you'd have to have made this up, because this is really, really bizarre.

Matthew 18:21, "Peter came to Him. He said, 'Lord,'" and Peter was really feeling magnanimous. Man, old Peter, he was really gonna show the Lord how spiritual he was. He says, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times, Lord?" You know, "Shall I do it seven times?" The Lord says, "No, four hundred and ninety times." What a great answer. "Uh, you know, my boss held back my paycheck. How many times do I forgive him for this? Seven?" No, four hundred and ninety. Wow. Hum.

And Jesus illustrates it with this story. "Therefore is the Kingdom of Heaven likened to a certain king." Now, this is a king. This king is rich. I mean this king is very rich. "And when he had begun to reckon, he started looking through his books. He began to reckon." I mean he went over his account. See, he's looking down at the books. "And, hum, one was brought unto him who owed him...catch this one...ten thousand talents." This guy...there's only one way a guy could ever get ten thousand talents. That is a lot of money. He would have to have two sets of books. This guy embezzled the kingdom. This must have been an extremely wealthy kingdom, and this guy, listen to me, one talent, now hang onto this, one talent was worth a thousand weeks' work. One talent. A guy

works a thousand weeks, he gets one talent. Now how many weeks would he have to work to get 10,000 talents? Well, it just gets astronomical, 200,000 years. I mean that's a lot. You know?

See, how could a guy ever get in debt like that? He stole half the kingdom. He falsified the books, but to show you why the story is so incredible, it says, verse 25, "For as much as he had nothing with which to pay." It's one thing to steal it, but to spend it must be something else. How'd he ever get rid of all of it? It must amount to over \$20 million in the economy of that day. Incredible amount of money.

And a guy says, "You've stole all this money from me." "And so his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife and children." Now, one of the things they would do with debtors was sell 'em as slaves. I don't imagine there was a very high price tag on an embezzler. Do I hear a quarter? You know, but they were gonna try to get something outta the guy anyway and sell him for whatever he might have been worth; and try to get some payment.

"Oh, the servant therefore fell down and worshipped him," which was what any of us probably would've done in the same situation, "saying, 'Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.'" Hogwash, right? He'd have to embezzle the last half of the kingdom in order to pay the first half.

Verse 27, "Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him and forgave him the debt." Absolutely incredible. Forgives him \$20 million debt. You ever had a debt like that? You ever had anybody owe you \$20 million? You think you'd forgive him? Who do you think this king is? Who is this king in the parable? It's our Lord. Did you have a debt to God that you couldn't pay? Did you have a debt to God that no price could ever pay? What did He do with it? Forgave it, didn't He? That's who it is.

Watch what happens. "Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, loosed him, forgave him his debt. But the same servant," here's the guy, just got forgiven \$20 million debt...he went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. You know how much work that is? A hundred days' work. Peanuts. He owes him a hundred little pennies, "And he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what thou owest.'" Boy, what a creep this guy is. Just got forgiven \$20 million. He's trying to collect on a hundred days' work, and doesn't even ask the guy anything. He chokes him first. Shoulda noticed the order there in verse 28.

"And his fellow servant...did the same thing...fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I'll pay thee all.'" He musta heard the first guy's speech, 'cause he said the same thing. "And he wouldn't, but went and cast him into prison till he should pay the debt." What a serious thing. He threw him in prison. He couldn't provide for his family anymore. His kids would be orphaned till he could pay a hundred days' wages. Well, he shouldn't have done that, because, "His fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, came and told the king what he did to his

fellow servant. And then the king, after he called him, said, 'You wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt, because you besought me. Should not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?'"

That's pretty fair, isn't it? "I forgave you \$20 million. Couldn't you forgive him a hundred days' work?" Little over three months of work? "Oh, and his Lord was angry, and delivered him to the inquisitors till he should pay all that was due unto him." Oh, that'd take a long time. Now the principle. "So likewise shall My heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother his...what?...trespasses."

Would you like the Lord to turn you over to the inquisitors to pay your debts? If you wouldn't, then you better forgive 'em. Jesus said, "Forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors." Right? Jesus has forgiven us. What should be our attitude? What should be my attitude towards somebody who robs me of a certain amount of money? What should I do? What's the one thing the Bible calls for me to do? Forgive him. What should be my attitude towards somebody who doesn't pay me what they owe me? Forgive him. You say, "Yeah, but what about the guy who steals what you have?" We've got a Bible verse for that. Matthew 5:39, terrific. What about the guy who takes what you've already got? It's not that he owes you something. It's that he steals. The other Scripture applies to this as well, of course, 'cause that guy did steal the money from the king; but just look at this. Verse 38, "You've heard that it has been said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,'" And I guess you hear that quoted a lot in Christian lawsuits, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," the Bible says, you know.

"But I say unto you, resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Now this isn't sort of Christian...Christian indifference or sort of a pansy attitude in...in conflict. What it's saying is that when somebody takes something from you, give him something else. Verse 40, "If any man will sue you at the law and take away your coat, go to court and fight him." Is that what it says?...Have it out. "If any man will sue you at law and take away your coat, let him have your cloak also." Now that would really be something, wouldn't it? "Hey, you...you stole my car. How would you like my other one?"...

Now, you see, the picture here is of a very poor man, a poor man who has a debt, and he doesn't have any way to pay the debt except the clothes on his own body, and he...if any guy sues you and says, "Well, if I can't get anything out of him, I'll put a lien on his clothes," and he takes away his underclothing, his tunic, just the regular clothing that he wore. He says, "If he wants that, you give him your outer coat, too," and the outer coat was a precious thing to a poor man, because it was his bed, as well as his coat. Give him everything you got till you're naked. Give everything you've got to the man if he wants it, 'cause that's the right spirit...

And verse 41, "Whosoever shall compel you to go a mile," what should you do? "Go two miles." And I like this. "Give to him that asks you; and from him that would borrow of you, turn not thou away." Anybody asks to borrow anything, "Of course, it isn't mine." Whose is it? The Lord's.

You know, I had a wonderful privilege this week. There's some families in our church came up and said, "We're going on a little deal, on a fellowship. Could we take your car, 'cause we need a big station wagon, 'cause we've got seven or eight people." Well, sure, I mean what could I say? I've been studying Matthew chapter 5 all week, you know? Now wait'll I tell you this. So off they go in my car. He says, "I'll let you use my car." He delivers a brand new Cadillac. So I've been driving around in a brand new Cadillac. See, you never know what the Lord's gonna do, see?

I came in the office the other day. I walked in the front office. The secretary, Sharon Rose, she saw me driving this new Cadillac, you know. Bless her heart. She looked at me, and she said, "Is that your new car?" I said _____ I said, "Yeah, how do you like it?" "That's just fine, if you feel that you should have a car like that, that's just fine." I said, "Well, I'm glad you feel that way. I...it's about time. It's about time. This...this poverty thing, there's no reason for," you know. I played along, and a little while later, said, "I can't...I can't let this go any further." About 15 minutes later, I said, "I can't have you sitting there looking nice and thinking evil thoughts...So that isn't my car. I gotta...I gotta tell you that, you know." But you never know, see, what the Lord's gonna do. Give away a Ford, you get a Cadillac.

Hey, the point is simply this. The...the point is that the Christian attitude, the Christian attitude in a situation like this is, if a guy takes something of mine, hey, take something else. That's just the...the magnanimous spirit of forgiveness. Everything I have in this world, people, isn't mine. It's all the Lord's. He's just given it to me to be a steward of, and if it's gonna get passed around, it's gonna get passed around.

What is the principle then that a Christian operates on? What is the right attitude of a Christian? It is the attitude of compassion. It is the attitude of forgiveness. I'm not trying to protect my property. I'm trying to protect my relationship with God, so I do what's right before Him, right? Paul says to the...to the Corinthians, "If you go to court, you are...you are not understanding the rank of the church, and you are not understanding the right attitude of the Christian, which is forgiveness and love." There's no reason to ever go to court to gain something back. If you need something, the Lord will return it to you. Probably ten times over again. And to be defrauded by a man is certainly not to be defrauded by God. He'll supply everything you need. Let's be obedient to God and let His blessing flow. Let's pray.

Father, we do thank You for...giving us insight into the Word this morning and teaching us a very practical lesson. We're gonna even continue it next week, Lord, and look forward to more insights into this kind of behavior is pleasing in Your sight. Thank You for bringing our guests with us this

morning to...to share and enjoy our fellowship. Pray that they'll come back again and again. Even as we close, Lord, we ask that You'll speak to the hearts of all of us, and if there's something in our lives that's just not what it oughta be...some anxiety, some problems...some pain, some sense of lostness, that You'll draw us to Yourself today. For those who've never confessed Christ, who've never asked Jesus Christ to take over their life...we pray that this might be the day they do that and know the resources that come with Him. For those who are Christians, but have been disobedient, may this be a day of confession and renewed obedience. Speak to all of us, Father. We thank You in Jesus' name. Amen.

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