

Series: **HOT POTATOES!** October 28, 2007

**WOULD JESUS SUE FOR WRONGFUL DEATH?
1 Corinthians 6:1-9**

I. INTRO

- A. Most of us have heard of stupid lawsuits. I just found out that my favorite story—about a guy using a lawnmower to trim his hedge, cutting off his fingers and suing the lawnmower company was—guess what—**urban legend!** But there **are** some pretty stupid ones that are true.

-Like the two guys who sued Anheuser-Busch for false advertising about how beautiful women come to life and dreams come true when you drink their beer.

-Like the guy who sued himself for 5 million because he had violated his own civil rights and religious beliefs when he got drunk and committed crimes which put him in jail.

-Or—and this is a Halloween special—the woman who sued Universal Studios for having suffered extreme fear, mental anguish, and emotional distress when she visited their Halloween Horror Nights haunted house. It was too scary.

-And, on the Halloween theme, in 2005, a guy sued NBC for 2.5 million. He watched an episode of Fear Factor that totally grossed him out, causing suffering, injury and great pain. The contestants ate rats.

-By the way, have you ever wondered what how much the cost of living would go down if just the **unnecessary, stupid—greedy** lawsuits were instantly thrown out of courts?

- B. The passage we're going to be looking at today raises the issue of lawsuits and court systems—and something that is a **big** deal to a lot of people who live in this part of the world. Our rights.

-The court system in the Roman Empire was different than ours—but not better—and a **lot** messier. The specific problem was that people in the church were dragging each other's reputations through the mud by appealing for their rights in a public, pagan court system—that just happened to be skewed toward the rich and powerful.

1. What Paul has to say about people demanding their rights—irregardless of the damage it does—speaks volumes to us. At least I believe it does.
2. Sometimes the courts are the only place of appeal for dealing with a bully. Many of the homeowners in New Orleans paid for home insurance with major companies—companies that then refused to pay for damages by finding loopholes. Or like a deadbeat Dad who walks out on his family and won't take care of them. I'm not talking about issues like those. There are some situations where you have no choice.
3. I think the core issue here is a relational dispute between people that **could** be settled without dragging it through the court system. But out of greed or revenge or pride, we won't. At the core, it's **our** need to be right, to be vindicated—no matter what it costs someone else. Sometimes the damage we're willing to do to pursue our rights is frightening. Sometimes it's not even a court thing. Every appealed your case to a little jury of friends around you with a very one-sided story about someone--boss, leader, or an **ex?** I have.

4. And so, this message is **not** about “How to file a lawsuit without technically defying the teaching of the Bible. I want to deal with the issue behind the issue. Attitude. Is my life about truth and fairness and grace—or about the **need to win**? And, honestly, what was Jesus like? Really? Did he just roll over and play doormat any time someone wanted something?”

II. **ANOTHER FINE MESS!**

- A. The case study Paul gives us here in this letter we’re studying is taken from everyday life in Corinth. Let me read what he says.

When one of you has a dispute with another believer, how dare you file a lawsuit and ask a secular court to decide the matter instead of taking it to other believers! Don’t you realize that someday we believers will judge the world? And since you are going to judge the world, can’t you decide even these little things among yourselves? Don’t you realize that we will judge angels? So you should surely be able to resolve ordinary disputes in this life.

If you have legal disputes about such matters, why go to outside judges who are not respected by the church? I am saying this to shame you. Isn’t there anyone in all the church who is wise enough to decide these issues? But instead, one believer sues another—right in front of unbelievers! (1 Corinthians 6:1-6 NLT)

1. Civil court, in that culture, was held everyday in the public squares. We’re fascinated with courtroom TV—you know, Judge Judy, Law and Order—well, they were too.

-And it would’ve made for great TV—cause it was messy. The goal was not just to win a settlement—it was to humiliate your opponent; trash their reputation. And the judges would almost **always** rule in favor of golf buddies and fellow club members. The word **fair** was not in most judge’s vocabulary.

2. Now, can you imagine two people who say they love Jesus and want his Kingdom of justice to prevail in this world—leaving church and berating each other in this kind of a system Monday through Friday? It doesn’t take a **lot** of imagination to see something like this totally fracturing a church and blowing up friendships, does it?

- B. You can understand why Paul, the founder and original leader of that church was so angry and frustrated. Before he had said, “I’m not trying to shame you, but....” Here he says, “I’m **trying** to shame you—kind of as a wake-up call—if that’s all that works!

1. If you’ll remember from past weeks, these people had **very** healthy egos—in the **unhealthy** sense of the word. They were pretty impressed with their own wisdom and sophistication. Paul says, “You mean you’re so smart—and you can’t find anyone in your church smart enough to make a judgment call when two people are at odds? Like, you’ve got to take it to the streets? Put your filthy laundry right out there for **everyone** to see?”
2. See, when people who are far from God watch something like this take place among followers of Jesus—right out there where everyone can see it--the question they ask is, “Wow! I wonder what goes on **behind** closed doors!”
-And what about the magnificent love the early church had been known for? Can anyone guess how long love lasts when people are in public court with each other—each trying to win? 0 seconds.

3. Paul looks out to the future—about who we will be and what we'll be doing for eternity. He says, and this is a very important concept, ***don't just think about the now, about winning and having your rights honored here in an unfair world. Think bigger! Why would you waste your life and your opportunities trying to get some money back?*** The bottom line is, "Is the total cost of enforcing your rights and getting what you want **worth** what you're ultimately paying for it?"

- C. Paul's closing words cut through all the fog that surrounds this part of life. He says:

Even to have such lawsuits with one another is a defeat for you. Why not just accept the injustice and leave it at that? Why not let yourselves be cheated? Instead, you yourselves are the ones who do wrong and cheat even your fellow believers. (1 Corinthians 6:7-8 NLT)

1. The message? Be careful when you think you've won. You may have lost. And if you've dragged someone's reputation through the dirt—like, you've gone out and rolled in the mud, there's no question about it.
You've **already** lost—whatever money or stuff you may have ended up with.
-See, if you've gotta win—no matter what—you **will** lay your integrity on the line. The truth will likely get bent, spindled or mutilated. And your actions may create bitterness and hostility and hurt—in you, and in the other person—that, apart from the grace of God can never be repair. And for **what?** Money?
So you can be right? Have your day in court and be vindicated?
2. The question that gets raised here is the one I want us to live with for a little while this morning. In a world obsessed with, ***I have my rights!*** and ***I don't have to put up with that!*** Paul asks two painful questions.
Why not just accept the injustice and leave it at that? Why not let yourselves be cheated?
(1 Corinthians 6:7 NLT)
-So, what's the deal? Do we just roll over when unfair, unjust things happen? Do we let people ruin our property and take our money—and let them get away with it?

III. THE BIGGER QUESTION

- A. For a few of you here this morning, the court thing might be a very real issue for you. Sometimes you don't even have a choice—someone else drags you into it. My advice to you is—be careful where you shop for wisdom.

-A number of years ago life had been **very** busy for Lori and me—so we scheduled a night to put up our Christmas tree. In the process of doing that, I got a call from a guy in the church. Unfortunately, we didn't have an answering machine. And since I was doing my super-pastor imitation at the time, I engaged. The deal was that he and another guy in the church had bought a piece of property together; he didn't like what the other guy was doing—and planned to file a lawsuit. So, I spent an hour and a half with him—which I stole from Lori—pleading with him to not go through with this thing.

-At the end of our conversation, this guy said, "Well, I think I'll call Darrell and see what **he** thinks!" I know I'm supposed to be gentle with other people's spirits.

I didn't **want** to be gentle with his spirit! I wanted to crush his spirit! But I didn't.

1. But, truth is that sometimes when we're faced with an issue, or feel we've been wronged, we shop for wisdom until someone tells us what we want to hear.

-You have to be careful, because your emotions may take you where you shouldn't go. I think we have to be really honest with ourselves—and ask questions like, “Is this about justice, or is this about me making money off a bad situation? Is this mainly about **winning**? About proving that I'm **right**?”

-James, early church leader and half-brother of Jesus pointed out two kinds of wisdom. —and extremely wise leader says this:

...Jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere. And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness. (James 3:16-18 NLT)

-See, with God's wisdom, there's nothing to hide or damage the truth over—cause it's pure. It will tend to lead to peace. It's gentle—and there's a willingness to yield when necessary. It's the kind of wisdom that says “no” to retaliation and revenge.

It's **sincere**. And it's precisely the wisdom Paul describes when he says, **Why not rather be wronged than hurt the church?** That's a tall order isn't it? **Man** is it ever hard to do that when you feel you've been wronged! But when it comes to wisdom, you want to make sure you're dipping into the right barrel, right?

-See, all of our actions have long-term consequences—consequences we're not likely to even think of when we're in the heat of the battle.

2. One of the documents I read as part of my research was from a lawyer who was a Christ-follower. What she said revealed the kind of wisdom you'd want to listen to in a tough situation. Let me read one comment: “Count the cost. Litigation can be very costly—financially, emotionally, physically and spiritually. **The ripple effect of protracted legal action impacts extended families, friends, and entire churches.**”
-There's a pricetag on everything. Even when you win. And it's really **smart** to ask, “What's the price tag on this—and is it worth it? Would forgiveness maybe be a radically better option? I've found that most people want to be forgiven—they just don't want to humble themselves and **ask** for forgiveness.
3. I don't care who you are, what walk of life you come from, or whether or not you believe the Bible is true—the consensus on Jesus is that his life—and what He had to say about life was so pure and good—breathtaking, really. The more I know Him, the more clearly I see Him—the more I want to look like Him, live like Him and love like Him.
But doing that means swimming upstream. Bucking what most of us are used to seeing and doing. And the thought I've had is, “If I play by Jesus' rules—will I be a sucker? Will I look like an idiot? Will people nudge each other and whisper, ‘Go after him? He's an easy target!’”
-Recently, our family had to make a lawsuit kind of decision. As many of you know, my Dad fell in the hospital about a year and a half ago and ended up with a

blood clot on his brain. In the hours between when that happened and we were finally able to persuade them to have a specialist see him—and then send him by life-flight to Pittsburgh, there's clear evidence that the whole situation was bungled. It made our situation much more complicated.—and the brain damage worse than it needed to be. It became clear that he wasn't going to fully recuperate from this—and that the financial impact on the entire family could be quite severe. -I thought a **lot** about this—and then talked to my parents and to my brother and sister. I consulted with some close and respected friends here in this church. I even made some initial legal contacts.

-In the end, as we talked, we thought, "It's not worth it. It wouldn't change the situation; it would take way more energy than we have. Most importantly—it could harm the significant reputation my parents had lived out every day in that area as followers of Jesus. As I sifted through my own motives—and compared them to Jesus'—the One I want to be like--I found some good—and some bad. From what I saw in my own heart, I'm convinced that most of the stuff that goes on in civil courts—like the one Paul is addressing here—is either about money, about being right or about getting revenge. As it turned out—God had a **way** better plan for my parents.

- B. What would it look like for me...for you...to follow the words Paul wrote to a lawsuit happy world 2000 years ago:

Why not just accept the injustice and leave it at that? Why not let yourselves be cheated? (1 Corinthians.6:7 NLT) So, why *not*?

1. Well, I personally think worry about money...and the desire for money is way sneakier than most of us think. When there's money on the line, I think we will **always** be tempted to be less than truthful, or paint ourselves in a more favorable light!

-One day a guy apparently interrupted Jesus' teaching to ask him to play civil court. He apparently had been cheated by his brother out of part of his inheritance. You'd think that Jesus would go right after the cheat who did this. But instead he says to this guy,

"Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own." (Luke 12:14 NLT) That's when he told the story about the rich farmer who forgot the basic principle, **When the game of life is over, it all goes back in the box!**

-You may **legally** have a right to the money. The question is—is it **worth** it? Ironically, money has price tag. Did you know that? Sometimes it's energy—energy we have to steal from some other place. Sometimes we pay for our money in the currency of friendships.

Sometimes we **even** pay for our money with our children—flesh and blood. Money can be **very** expensive. Jesus constantly warned his followers, "Be careful. Be **careful!** Money and stuff has a way of becoming the bottom line that determines where you live, where you work, who you're friends with, what you drive, how important you feel...**and whether or not you file a lawsuit!** Life is **way** more important than that! Money has a price tag—and sometimes money is **way** too expensive. Do you understand what I mean by that?

2. I think the second major category of lawsuits would center around anger and revenge. When someone takes advantage of you, when someone you love gets hurt, when you pledge your life to someone—and they run off with another man—it just really, **really** hurts. Jesus, Son of God, warns against retaliation.

-In words that sound almost incomprehensible to us, he says, “If someone sues you for your shirt, give them your coat.” “If someone hits you on the right cheek, offer them your left cheek.” “If someone forces you to carry a load you shouldn’t **have** to carry—carry it the extra distance.”

-Why would He say that? In a world that’s **all** about rights, about making people pay for what they did, about winning—that just sounds crazy! Wouldn’t you agree? I think what Jesus was saying is that whatever people do—**don’t let them take from you your freedom to choose how you’re going to respond**. And if you have a choice, and most of the time you do, **responding** is better than **reacting**.

-See, retaliation just ups the ante. Say something nasty, someone will say something **nastier**; push someone, they’ll slug you; sue someone; they counter-sue. There’s no end to retaliation. Jesus says, “Why don’t **you** be the one to just **stop** the downward spiral?”

-Jesus talked about the antidote to this kind of poison. Do you want to know what it is? Are you sure—cause you might not like it. It’s forgiveness. That’s the only cure for a heart that’s been broken like this—by broken promises; by accusations; by rejection. I think most people would be surprised by the miracle of what takes place when we do what Jesus says.

-I saw an **amazing** example of this once. I was watching **American Justice**, and they were showing the sentencing hearing for Gary Ridgway—the Green River Killer. Family after family stood up from the victims, spewed their hatred and their desire to see him burn in hell. Gary sat there **totally** unfazed. He **expected** hatred.

-Then one old man stood up whose daughter had been murdered. He said, “What you’ve done is horrible. But the Jesus I serve tells me to forgive—so I want you to know that I’ve forgiven you!” And **that’s** when this hardened serial killer put his head in his hands and bawled. Forgiveness is powerful; for us; for those we ask it from; and those we give it to. Ain’t much of it out there!

4. There’s one more attitude that I think is at the basis of a lot of legal action. Pride. The need to be right. The need to have it declared to the world that **you** are right and the **other** person is wrong.

“No ones gonna do this to **me** and get away with it!” “I don’t have to take this kind of treatment!” It’s summarized in the quazi-famous saying, “**Sue the #@%&*!**”

-See, here’s the deal. If you get your back up, and you’re walking around with this need to be right, and this need to be vindicated, and an unteachable spirit—and a heart that refuses to make things right—you **can** do that—but there’s a price tag. Pride always—eventually--has a **huge** price tag. It leads to a fall. To humiliation. You’ll pay for it. Remember from a couple of weeks ago—pride leads to...a **fall, humiliation**. Humble yourself—and God will exalt you.

- C. And that really brings us to the bottom line with all our rights, with all our needs, with all our pain, and with all the unfair things that go on every day. The lawsuit stuff is really the tip of the iceberg. The bottom line issue, as I said about, is an attitude issue. ***I have my rights! I am not going to be taken advantage of! No one does that to me/my family and gets away with it!***

-That's the world system. You either buy in—or you don't. Now—is Paul...is Jesus telling us to just roll over—let anyone do whatever they want to you? Of course not. You just have to be careful of the heart attitude behind your life. You have to ask tough questions—like how what you're doing is going to affect others. People you love—your kids—your church. Is it going to be divisive? Remember what wisdom from above looks like? It's pure. It seeks peace. It's gentle—sincere.

-The issue is **where** you look for justice, I think. Is the final court of appeals on **this** planet...or not?

Who runs the whole show, really? Is Jesus really Lord of all? Are all things on this planet in His hands—or are they in the hands of the wealthy, powerful, the famous, the infamous. Is He really Lord over courtrooms, judges, and juries? Are you going to put your soul in the hands of a well-oiled lawyer—or the Lord of all? And is everyone really a final accounting for everyone—or does every injustice have to get settled on this side of eternity?

1. The bottom for followers of Jesus has always been, first, what He taught and how He lived; second—that all the courts of this land, whether they're fair or not—give an account to Jesus. Some courts on this planet, like the courts Paul was talking about, don't even **try** to be fair. Justice is for sale to the highest bidder. Even the most meticulous courts on this planet miss details and pass out wrong judgments.

-But one day it will **all** be made right. The question is, do you really **believe** that? I know—it's a stretch. We can't see it, feel it, touch it, smell it or eat it. And it's only written of in an ancient book, filled with the stories of people who always pointed forward. To Jesus.

2. It's strange, isn't it, that the only truly just One who's ever lived was unjustly judged in a kangaroo court of people who hated him, and then horribly beaten and executed. Pilate, the only one who could have stopped it **knew** he was innocent—and chickened out. Washed his hands. Gave the order for his execution. The record tells us that the whole time this was going on, Jesus never defended himself.

-And that answers the question in the title, doesn't it? Would Jesus sue for wrongful death? No. **In fact**, He **allowed** himself to be betrayed, hauled off, beaten and nailed to a cross. He said, "No one **takes** my life from me; no one can. I **give** my life." When he stood on the thresh-hold of eternity—He handed over his rights as God. When he stood on the verge of death, He handed everything else over too—his property, his rights, his clothes and his dignity. All for people like you and me who demand their rights, their money, and to **be** right.

3. When I look at Paul's advice to these people—it sounds **so** good. **Instead of claiming your rights—demanding that you get your piece of someone else—why don't you just accept the injustice?** Easy to say...hard to do.

-There probably are times when we can—and need to appeal to our rights. Paul did that on a few occasions—once when he was about to be unjustly beaten;

another when he appealed to Caesar. These institutions **do** belong to Him--as corrupted as they sometimes get.

-Paul says, "If you're in a mess—there's a **better** way. Get together and settle your issues. If you've wronged someone—**make it right!** If you've been wronged—you may have to let it go. If you need help—get it. But don't act like everyone else in the world system—grasping for everything they think they've got coming to them!

IV. CLOSING THOUGHTS

- A. Not real long after Paul wrote these words to the Corinthians, he ended up in prison. In fact, he spent most of the rest of his life in prison—writing letters while he was chained to a guard.

-Under those conditions—he wrote one of the most beautiful, moving passages in the Bible. It's one that always challenges me—and moves me to do what's right. After challenging people to get along; to not be selfish or try to impress others; to put others before themselves—he says this:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11 NIV)

- B. And that's **our** calling if we're going to follow Jesus and not just talk about Him a lot. And that's a **tough** calling—because it doesn't come naturally.

Shoot, without thinking, I still catch myself reaching for the biggest piece of lasagna!

Following Jesus is not about grabbing all the stuff we can in life—including grace.

Sometimes it means giving up our rights—even though we could hang on to them.

It's living with open hands—believing that Jesus is Lord and His way is best. And as we do—we are changed.

-Do you really believe that Jesus is Lord of all? That you don't have to demand attention; that you don't have to prove you're right; that you don't have to get your piece of things—force others to do what **you** want? Would you **let** Him be Lord? Would you let the final courtroom of the universe—over which He presides—make things right if necessary?

-There may be a place in your life this morning where you feel so helpless—and your situation feels so absolutely **hopeless**. And you need **Him** to be in charge. What you're doing--grasping and clutching—trying to control—flailing away isn't working. Would you release your grip—and give **Him** space to be Lord? Think about that as we close with this song.