Growing in Grace; Growing in Community: Life Lessons on Maturity with the Corinthians

***Conflict: How should Christians settle honest differences?*** 1 Corinthians 6:1-11

 Apparently ancient Corinth had become a small claims court haven. And once again the Corinthian Christians went right along with their culture. The idea seems to have been, “If it’s legal, we should be able to do it,” or “No one is going to take away my rights.” Sound familiar? But Paul explains to these worldly-wise believers that going outside their own family of believers for ‘justice” was wrong on two counts: first, it was unnecessary, and second, it was unwise. Through a series of questions, the answers to which are obvi-ous, the Corinthians’ behavior is exposed for what it was: abandoning the brotherhood for the sake of gain.

❖ Christians must not settle their everyday differences in the public arena. . .

It is preposterous even to suggest it! v. 1

It is a shame to do it. v. 5

It is a loss even if you “win.” v. 7

It is not fitting, for you should accept a loss rather than publicly fight a brother. v. 7

❖ Since the church is fully equipped to handle such conflict in house. . .

The church is an assembly of “holy ones.” v. 1

 The church will judge the world and angels. vv. 2, 3

The church has wise people competent to judge. vv. 4, 5

The church is a family, or brotherhood. vv. 6, 8

❖ For believers even now are participants in God’s Kingdom.

An evil lifestyle demonstrates exclusion from the life of God. vv. 9, 10

The church is a community of the purified who have been forgiven these sins. v. 11

**Growth Principle #7: The spiritually mature Christian treats conflict as a family matter, and settles**

 **disagreements respectfully and, in so far as possible, “in house.”**

**The Corinthians’ culture reminds us of our own, reminding us that. . .**

***1. All that is legal is not necessarily Christlike.***

Our culture has taught us to pursue our rights, but Jesus teaches us to lay down our lives for others. While we must establish boundaries in order to preserve our health and sanity, we must also seek the restoration of sinners and relationships. This is a legitimate tension to experience and resolve, but it is often not an easy one. We should seek wisdom from the Body of Christ, and seek reconciliation in Him.

***2. There can be, and often are, serious differences between true believers.***

 Paul never suggests that the “plaintiff” has no legitimate complaint. He simply says, “Handle it in house, and be willing to bear the loss, when possible. Apparently these cases were comparable to what we see in our small claims courts (v. 2). In such cases, love and common sense should carry the day and both parties should submit to friendly arbitration and negotiation rather than adversarial justice. See the Peacemaker’s insert for a good summary on the Christian’s way of reconciliation.

***3. The legal system may be used, but should not be abused.***

 Paul is not talking about criminal cases, felonies, or attacks on one’s livelihood. He is not suggesting that you should let an embezzler go free, nor “take a loss” that would bankrupt your business just because the criminal or client was a believer. Civil authority and courts are to be respected (Romans 13), and there is a place to plead one’s rights, as Paul was quick to do when his imprisonment for the gospel hung in the balance. Acts 16:35-40; 25:8-12

***Going Deeper--For Growth Groups:***

1. How does our pride interfere with “taking the loss” when settling a conflict? Why is it so important to win?

2. How can we discern between times when we should let a conflict go, versus pressing our point? Why is it so important to submit our case to other, wise believers who can weigh in on the conflict?

3. Have you ever walked away from a conflict because you were afraid of making it worse? Have you ever helped two believers to reconcile when the situation looked hopeless? How was it done?