

## Overcoming Greed 1 Corinthians 6:1-11

Churches, and individual believers, who fail to confront greed will bring shame on themselves and shame on the reputation of Christ. But churches, and individual believers, who protect the vulnerable from the strong, who choose gratitude over greed, who give freely of all that they have, will exalt the gospel and the name of Christ in this world.

Our topic this morning is not lawsuits. I know it may look like this passage is about lawsuits, but it's not. As we dig into the cultural context of this passage, I think it will become clear that the topic is greed, and once again, the Corinthian church has failed to deal with the sin of greed in its midst.

If you think about the whole catalog of potential sins, greed isn't generally viewed as such a bad thing (there are a lot of sins that are much worse).

Christmas time when kids were babies; lay them on floor and surround them with presents. They didn't really understand what's going on. As they grew older, they got greedier. Generosity from others was not always met with gratitude but with more greed. I was troubled by their greed. But what bothered me at least as much was their inability to hide their greed in front of others. Now they have grown up; they have matured; which means they can hide it better. In other words, they are becoming more like me.

Greed isn't such a bad thing. In fact, in some circles, it's a good thing.

Gordon Gekko (played by Michael Dougllass in *Wall Street*, 1987)

"Greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures, the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms; greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge, has marked the upward surge of mankind and greed, you mark my words, will not only save Teldar Paper, but that other malfunctioning corporation called the U.S.A."

Fictional character, but represents an underlying philosophy in our world.

"Greed, envy, sloth, pride and gluttony: these are not vices anymore. No, these are marketing tools. Lust is our way of life. Envy is just a nudge towards another sale. Even in our relationships we consume each other, each of us looking for what we can get out of the other." Jon Foreman, lead singer of Switchfoot

Biblical values are different because God is different. The church should be different. God loves to give. God gives sacrificially. He is the opposite of greedy. Greed is condemned in the Bible because it is anti-God.

The biblical concept comes from a word that means, "to have more"

- To be discontent with what God has provided and to grasp for more.
- Breaking any of the 10 commandments is a form of greed. Taking something that is not yours, or failing to give something that you are obligated to give.
- Greed is anti-God because God gives. John 3:16
- Sir Frederick Catherwood, British politician/writer (son-in-law of Martyn Lloyd-Jones). Greed is the logical result of the belief that there is no life after death. We grab what we can while we can however we can and then hold on to it hard.

The gospel changes everything. Hope that transcends this life; possessions; money.

- Church, everything about us should reflect that future hope.
- Greed reflects a heart that doesn't trust God

***Why do I think this paragraph is about greed? Let's look at the cultural context.***

### **1<sup>st</sup> Century Context**

1. The matter was civil, not criminal

- Romans 13. Paul urges submission/respect for the criminal prosecution authority of government.
- End of Acts. Life threatened. He made use of the Roman legal system.
- Here using the specific, technical language of civil lawsuits

2. Civil courts were corrupt

- Cicero. "...the courts will never convict any man, however guilty, if only he has money. "
- Dio Chrysostom (1<sup>st</sup> c. AD Greek writer and philosopher) complained, In Corinth there are "lawyers innumerable perverting justice."
- Apuleius (2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD writer) described judges as "gowned vultures"
- Juries were stacked with wealthy; judges were for sale; lawyers put on a show
  - Those of inferior status were prohibited from prosecuting "superiors."
    - Poor were not taking wealthy to court to get justice
- Petronius, *Satyricon*. "Of what avail are laws to be where money rules alone, and the poor suitor can never succeed? ... a lawsuit is nothing more than a public auction...."
- James 2:6

3. Civil courts were public – see picture of city

- Form of entertainment. Social elite brought trivial cases to prove rhetorical skills

4. Christians were harming Christians in corrupt, public courts

- If a believer genuinely wanted justice, the corrupt, public civil courts were not the place to go.
- If you genuinely wanted justice, the only place to go was to fellow Christians.
- The very fact that Corinthians were suing one another proves that they did not want justice but wealth, status and power
- Wealthy Christians were taking from vulnerable Christians
- Equal status Christians were battling one another for worldly status in court

**Let's put this in our modern social and legal context**

1. Our legal system is sound

- It is not fundamentally corrupt
- Perfect? No. Responsible to keep our legal system accountable
- I don't think Paul would have hated lawyers or told lawyer jokes

2. Church should still settle matters privately

3. Believers can use the courts for justice not greed

- You can bring a suit for almost anything; other person forced to hire lawyer to defend self; often easier to settle out of court, and the damage is done
- Families torn apart by lawsuits over inheritance
  - Sometimes justice; often greed. I have seen Christians walk away for the sake of the family. Greed destroys families.

***If the context is so different, how do we apply this passage to our own lives? Focus on Paul's point: GREED. Greed in believers, and greed in the church.***

## ***How do we overcome greed within our church and within ourselves?***

### **1. We confront greed – 1 Cor 5:9-13**

- We're not dealing with sin in their midst
  - Ch. 5 – judge incest. Possible that man was rich, powerful; untouchable
  - Ch. 6a – judge greed
  - Ch. 6b – judge immorality
- Probably, in at least 2 of 3, the problem was partiality
- As a church, we will not show partiality. Money doesn't buy position, honor
- 6 – Paul reminds them that they have responsibility, authority and competence to deal with sin in their midst
  - Authority – 6:1-2
    - We will judge the world – Daniel 7:22; Jude 14-15 (angels, not humans); Mt 19:28; Luke 22:30; Rev 2:26-27; 19:14; 20:4
    - 6:3. We will judge angels – Ps 8:4-6; Heb 2:5-9
  - Competence – 6:1
    - Unrighteous v. saints
      - Not saying all non-Christians are as bad as they could be
      - Not saying all Christians live perfect lives
      - Our identity is fundamentally different from the world
    - 6:9-11
      - Your identity has ethical implications; qualifications
    - All possess the Spirit of God. God's Spirit is wisdom
    - 6:4. Imperative: Appoint those who are despised in the church as judges (sarcastic)
      - The world despises the church. Low rank can't bring cases against high rank. Low rank can't be on jury
      - The least qualified in the church are qualified
- Greed destroys families. You are a family.
  - You are responsible and qualified to clean up your house. Get busy.
- But what about you as an individual? What about me? Are you greedy?
  - 1 Tim 6:9-10

## ***We overcome greed within the church and within ourselves when...***

### **2. We defend the vulnerable – 1 Cor 6:5-8**

- Who is wronging/defrauding whom? Powerful over the vulnerable.
  - Paul would not have told the poor person to roll over and be wronged.
  - Paul told the church to protect the poor
  - Paul is telling the rich, "For the sake of argument, let's say you rich man were genuinely wronged. Go ahead and be wronged. You will survive, and the church will be better off."
  - Powerful aggressor needs to repent. Stop acting like the world.
  - In fact, the rich aggressor probably had not been wronged, but he was defrauding a vulnerable fellow believer.
- 6:5. "It is to your shame"
  - Shame and guilt and sarcasm are bad, right? Unless you are really guilty of something, then you should feel ashamed.
- Church unwilling to confront the rich and powerful
  - Lawsuits would never have gone to court if the rich were confronted about their greed and abuse of power.
- Church unwilling to protect and defend the vulnerable

- One of the key markers of spiritual health of a community is care for those who cannot care for themselves or protect themselves.
- Responsibility: justice for the poor; defend the orphan and widow
  - Ezekiel 34:11-16, 17-22
- When you give to those who cannot give back, it changes your heart
  - Luke 6:35. Jesus: expecting nothing in return

***We overcome greed within the church and within ourselves when...***

**3. We exalt the gospel**

- What makes you really frustrated or angry?
  - Modern politics? Greed and waste in government?
  - Little things set you off: getting cut off in traffic; person forges your name
- Knew I had met the right woman when I learned that what sets my wife off is when Christians don't care about the lost
- Loved status and wealth more than reputation of Christ through Church
  - Cared more about themselves than connecting lost to Jesus
- Our calling is to "adorn" the gospel – Titus 2:10
- How? John 13:35. ...if you have love for one another
  - Name for yourself by status or wealth
  - Name for Jesus by loving one another well
  - We don't attack and devour. We protect, defend and forgive.
- John 17:21
- Power Play. I assume many of you don't know what this is.
  - Don't have these in football, baseball, basketball
  - Hockey – guy comes off the ice; sometimes 2; 1-2 man advantage
  - 2 min minor; 5 min major
  - Offense can press and score a goal
- Gospel Power Play #1: when we, the church, love like family
  - "brothers" 39 times in 1 Corinthians

***We overcome greed within the church and within ourselves when...***

**4. We give freely – 2 Cor 8:1-5**

- Gospel Power Play #2: when we don't love our money, but we love to share
  - 1 Timothy 6:17-19
  - Practice gratitude
  - Practice giving

**Application**

One person you can give to, expecting nothing in return