



To Be Wronged

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1st Corinthians 6:5-13

How do we respond to one another? How should we respond? How should we fight? It is hard enough to respond appropriately to one another when all is going well. It is so much more difficult when one of us gets our nose out of joint. Civility, love, unity, peace, harmony, and self-control are that much harder to achieve in face of the least bit of provocation or disagreement. When we feel we have been wronged, what is our best response?

We have established norms for transacting business meetings in our country, in our church, and around the world which are based on Robert's Rules of Order. Few have ever read the structure of this pattern of rules for carrying out business, though we are familiar with the major points. We may be less familiar, however, with the origin of the rules in question, and, subsequently, their purpose.

The rules were written by a Brigadier General of the Army Corps of Engineers, Henry Martyn Robert. I am told he wrote the rules in order to keep arguments civil and orderly. There is much good from that, but there is also room for worry. We proceed to do business according to rules constructed to limit, organize, and keep a corporate fight civil. Even civil, however, the rules were apparently established for warring factions at odds with one another. Ground rules for fights do not necessarily encourage unity, peace, and harmony. They determine winners and losers, not what is the best outcome for the body as a united whole.

In today's national politics, there is talk of gun control legislation in Washington. Many take sides in the national debate as though there were no middle ground, as though mine were the only relevant position, as though any competing opinion is a personal attack and a declaration of war. In so much of our venting, something grave is amiss. There is an absence of civility. There is an absence of honest dialogue. There is an absence of taking the time to listen to the concerns of others and value them as meaningful participants in a national dialogue.

Rather than look upon a contrary voice as that of a neighbor, a friend, a person with as much right to be wrong as we grant ourselves, we look upon each other with distrust. We see others as competitors in a no-holds-barred struggle to the death. We declare compromise a failure. We define listening to opposing views as a sign of weakness. We act as though we were too insecure to enter into dialogue, for we cannot to separate our ideas and opinions from our identity and worth. We act as though we were afraid that upon being wronged, our lives would fall apart without the promise of hope.

The church of Corinth had seemingly reached the limit for disagreements, divisions, and discord. They struggled on so many issues it is hard to imagine that Paul's letters could have had any effect upon the life of this body. They were not acting as a body. They were not acting as though they had given their allegiance to Christ Jesus. They were giving little to no evidence of the gospel in the ways they related to one another and responded to each other. Most of us would have given up on Corinth as a hopeless case. It would have been easier to simply start over in Corinth than to deal with the myriad problems that beset the church.

Paul was not ready to throw in the towel. He valued the individuals and families in the faith community too much to give up on them. He hardly recognized a semblance of gospel faith in so many of the excesses they had come to display, but he took the time to remind them of the unity to which they

had been called in Christ Jesus. Perhaps in his introduction he was reminding himself as much as this church, but he insisted that they had been called into confident trust in Christ, and in Christ to unity beyond all their differences and disagreements. He was unwilling to let them go without reminding them of the claim Christ Jesus laid upon them.

Giving up on others is easy. Writing people off as though they were bad investments of our time and energy is just too simple. It requires little courage. It requires little faith. It requires little value be given to others. It is a focus on ourselves and our personal issues. Paul was unwilling to settle for what would be easy for him. He was too concerned with the good of the believers in Corinth and the larger picture of the gospel in the region.

Disagreements among believers had risen to the level of some taking others to court. They were concerned with rights and privileges. They were worried with advancing personal issues, preferences, and standing. They were consumed with issues that simply had nothing to do with Christ. They left the gospel out of the picture of their patterns of relating to one another. They followed the patterns of the world all around them, allowing society to dictate standards of conduct and setting Christ aside.

Their disagreements were bad enough. They went a step further, however, bringing their disagreements to the attention of others who did not know Christ Jesus. Then they asked outsiders to intervene in search of solutions. Paul was beside himself with the state of affairs in Corinth. They were acting as though the gospel had no bearing on their lives outside questions of eternity and spirituality. They were acting as though spirituality could be divorced from the way they related to one another. They seemed to have lost the concept of a life placed in submission to the will, priorities, and character of Christ Jesus. Selfish desire and ambition clouded their thinking and diverted the course of their lives from the very gospel and Lord they claimed.

Paul's question at this point is somewhat startling. Wouldn't it be better to accept being wronged or defrauded than to ignore the primacy of the gospel? Is it not better to "turn the other cheek," to use Jesus' words, than to escalate disagreements and cast aspersion on the gospel? That is a tough enough issue to manage, but Paul continues. Worse yet, you are the ones defrauding and wronging others, both without and within the church! They were not simply taking their disagreements outside the church for arbitration; they were actively living as instruments of injustice while claiming service to Christ Jesus!

Injustice as practiced at Corinth finds its place here alongside a list of other notable categories of sin. Just as those other impure actions and attitudes should have been set aside as unbecoming a people called by Christ Jesus, their injustice should also be set aside as unfit for a transformed people. They had been set free in Christ, but not to live wantonly. Rather, they were to make transformative decisions based on the grace of God flowing in their lives. All should be placed under the Lordship of Christ.

Personal issues are contrary to the purposes of Christ Jesus. To hang onto wrongs committed against us is petty and disruptive not only to others, but to ourselves. As Paul called the Corinthians to get over themselves, so we also must set aside issues regarding our sense of being wronged. Rather than fighting fairly, Jesus refused to fight. We are called to respond to others in wholly different ways. We are called to set self aside and look upon others as persons for whom Christ died. We are to respond to them, even when acting as aggressors, according to Christ Jesus' response to us. While we were yet sinners and enemies, Christ died for us. When will we learn to apply the same manner to our living and response? Are we ready to be wronged, yet still love? That is the example set before us by the one we call Lord.

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