

Series - Be Wise

Date/s - 7 July 2019

Scripture - Lawsuits, Grievances and Disputes- A Case of Gospel Amnesia  
(1 Corinthians 6:1-11)

Speaker - Pastor Joachim Tan

### Welcome [15 min]

You may want to look up the following websites for *icebreakers* suitable for your cell.

[www.thesource4ym.com/games/](http://www.thesource4ym.com/games/)

[www.christianitytoday.com/smallgroups/articles/icebreakersbeyond.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/smallgroups/articles/icebreakersbeyond.html) < go to LEAD, click on ICEBREAKERS >

### Worship [15 min]

You may select songs like "This I Believe (The Creed)", "Living Hope", "I Stand In Awe", "I Have A Song" or "Worth It All".

### Spiritual Objectives

At the end of the cell discussion, cell members will:

1. Understand that how we respond to a conflict reflects to the world our love for God and one another; and
2. Commit to handle and resolve conflicts within the family of God in love.

### Word [45 min]

Pastor Joachim preached a sermon on 1 Corinthians 6:1-11, which speaks about lawsuits and disputes within the Church.

Pastor Joachim opened his sermon by explaining that the subject matters of the disputes Paul was referring to in the passage, most likely concerned land and monetary assets, and thus, we should interpret 1 Cor. 6:1 in the context of legal disputes over civil (and not criminal) matters. Pastor Joachim further shared that it was most likely that these disputes were among the wealthy and power aristocrats within the church of Corinth, as they possessed a great number of property - members were suing each other over such matters, some even resorting to filing civil lawsuits against one another. Such crisis fractured the congregation and contributed to the growing factionalism and divisiveness within the Corinthian church, which in Paul's view brought dishonor to God. Proverbs 6:16-19 tells us that God detests "a person who stirs up conflict in the community".

Pastor Joachim set out some further background to these conflicts:

- The litigious culture within the church of Corinth was not aligned with the prevailing Jewish culture and its convictions. There was a saying within the Jewish culture then, which goes "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.'"
- The filing of lawsuits must have shocked the apostle Paul- being a Christian, he could not imagine brothers suing brothers, because **the whole principle of the Christian community was the principle of love and forgiveness** [John MacArthur].
- The Christians were "enjoying their new freedom in Christ but had forgotten about the new life they should live in Christ."

Pastor Joachim then shared three principles, to keep in mind when resolving disagreements and conflicts within the Church:

- First, we recognise that we have an incredible future destiny.
  - o Drawing from various scripture references in 1 Cor 6:2-3, Matthew 19:28, Revelations 3:21 and Daniel 7:27, Pastor Joachim explained as the church and people with a future authority over the New Heaven and the New Earth, we should be able to work things out among ourselves.
  
- Second, we recognise that we have a spiritual obligation towards one another.
  - o From passages in 1 Cor 6:7-8, Matthew 5:38-40 and Colossians 3:12-13, we see how it is better to suffer wrong and be exploited, rather than do wrong and behave in an unchristian-like manner.
  - o Nothing in the Christian life is more important than forgiveness - our forgiveness of others and God's forgiveness of us [John MacArthur]. Our disputes and disagreements cannot be larger and greater than the need for unity in the Body of Christ.
  - o Submitting to the judgment of non-Christian authorities by petitioning to have claims adjudicated by the courts, will contradict the message of the gospel, and compromise our witness to unbelievers. The world will never know we are His disciples, if we hate and do wrong to each other. Let us instead practice the most excellent way, which is to love (see scripture references in John 13:34-35, 1 Cor 13:1-13).
  
- Third, we recognise that we have a transformed new life in Christ.
  - o Matthew 5:23-24 counsels us to resolve our grudges and be reconciled with our brothers and sisters, before we worship God.

Pastor Joachim ended his sermon by encouraging members of the congregation to not just "forgive and forget", but to go one step further to be reconciled with those within the church who have hurt or offended them.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. **What do you think may have been some motives behind members of the church in Corinthians filing civil lawsuits against one another? Do you think such motives and issues are still prevalent in our day and age?** [10 min]

**Leader's Notes:** *This is a recap question. Members can spend some time discussing how, in a Christian worldview, the motive and purposes of litigation - not just the legal merits of a dispute - should be scrutinized. We live in a litigious society, just like in Corinthians. Sadly, it is the case that often times, pride, greed, power and revenge are the real driving forces behind lawsuits. These basic human tendencies have not changed over time.*

*The modern hyper-individualistic culture has also led to an increased emphasis on individual civil rights and freedom. We should remember that as Christians, we live in two spheres, with their own set of rights and obligations. While we are citizens of our society on earth, we also have a heavenly citizenship, and the latter should take priority over the former. And as Christians, as Pastor Joachim taught, we are called to owe each other a debt of love, and lay our rights down for the sake of others.*

2. **Read through 1 Corinthians 6:7-8. Paul was not worried about believers being treated unfairly, but rather, was more concerned how discord within the church will be exposed to and perceived by non-**

believers.

**What truths can we learn from this passage, about the relative importance of our personal rights, weighed against the corporate witness as the church? [10 min]**

**Leader's Notes:** *A relate question. Paul seems to imply, through this passage, that evangelism is a far more important and crucial goal, compared to securing personal justice. In a lawsuit, even if a Christian wins the fight for his individual rights, the Kingdom loses in terms of reputation, and witness.*

*What can then motivate us to surrender our personal rights? 1 Corinthians 6 must be read in context of the earlier passages in 1 Corinthians 1-4. As Christians, we should live in a manner considered to be "fools for Christ"- not as the world lives, but as Christ did. As Paul put it in chapter 4, "Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat" (Chap 4 vs. 12-13). Love covers a multitude of sins. We who are justified in God's eyes through the work of Christ, can "joyfully accept the plundering of our property, since we know we ourselves had better and lasting possessions" (Heb 10:34). In fact, when we are taken advantage of, we have an opportunity to demonstrate the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ by responding rightly. We can rest assured in the knowledge that God, in His ways and timing, will make rights all wrongs done to us, and restore our wrongful losses. We can leave our vindication in His sovereign hands.*

**3. Pastor Joachim mentioned some wise words from Elder Lee Ee Yang, who shared from his experience as a litigator, and a proprietor of his law firm:**

- Church community is a family, and we should settle disputes within the family as much as possible, as far as it depends on us.
- The aim of the court is not to restore the relationship, but to ascertain who is right and who is wrong. Often times once disputes reach the courts, the relationships are over.
- The Bible teaches us to lay down our rights, not to enforce them. The court's role is to enforce rights. Hence, we should go to the family, for restoration, and not for rights-see Romans 13:8-9.

**Spend time reflecting on this sharing. In contrast with how the world perceives and resolves conflicts, how do you think reconciliation looks like in the spiritual family of God? What is the role of the church? [10 min]**

**Leader's Notes:** *A reflect question. As believers, when we are wronged or mistreated, we should be motivated to respond in love, and seek reconciliation, rather than demanding our rights and justice. This contrasts with what the world believes in and teaches. We have a daily choice to make: do we choose to follow the world (human wisdom) or the Word (God's wisdom)?*

*Another takeaway is the important role which the church and its leaders play in the resolving of conflicts between members. According to Paul, Christians should be able to judge simple and ordinary earthy matters, because of God's wisdom and Spirit in us- we are also given wisdom from the bible to deal with problems, instead of having our disputes be adjudicated by unbelieving secular judges. The Church should facilitate the peaceful and respectful resolution of disputes between members, in a manner that is more compatible with Christian principles.*

**4. What are practical steps I can take, to address personal grievances or disagreements I have within my spiritual family?**

**Leader's Notes:** *A response question. Not many Riverlifers will get into a lawsuit or court dispute, but*

*many of us will experience a disagreement or conflict at some point or another, with someone within our spiritual community. It is important that we learn to resolve these disputes well, in the most godly and loving way possible. Pastor Joachim shared on 1 Cor 13:1-13 to remind us on the attributes of the most excellent way – Love. He exhorted us to love one another as what Jesus commanded in John 13:34-35.*

*We can use some helpful pointers from Pastor Joachim’s sermon, to change our pattern of thinking. For instance, vital questions we can ask whenever we encounter a disagreement with a fellow Christian, could be, “Is my dispute or disagreement larger and greater than the unity and love in the body of Christ?” or “Is my dispute or disagreement worth the cost towards the body of Christ?” We must remember that we have a corporate obligation to God’s kingdom, and the resulting social impact or petty litigation in open court can be very damaging to our witness as a whole.*

*If time allows, members can pray corporately against a litigious spirit within the church, and for unity both within Riverlife and with the local Church body.*

### Works [10 min]

Let’s pray:

1. Every RiverLifer will resolve conflicts and seek reconciliation within the family of God in love.

### Announcements

1. **We Belong** \*\*\*

RiverLife Conference

23- 24 Aug 2019

Sign up online at [www.riverlife.org.sg/webelong](http://www.riverlife.org.sg/webelong) by Sun, 4 Aug

**Church Vision:**

“A radiant disciple-making church catalysing Kingdom transformation in our communities and the nations.”

**Mission:**

We exist to make disciples who behold Christ and reveal Him.