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The Power of the Were – 1 Corinthians 6:1-11

- I think we would all agree this morning that many words are inherently powerful...
 - in some cases you can say just a single word, or a short phrase, and it calls up a flood of ideas and emotions...
 - for example, if I said words like – holocaust, or slavery...or on the positive side of the ledger...words like freedom, or victory, or love...just a few letters put together and the impact is significant...
- The Bible tells us that's the case when we read verses like...**Proverbs 18:21 - Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.**
 - words are powerful, for sure...
 - now, please think about that from the perspective of biblical Christianity...if I asked you to make a list of words or phrases that might just be a few syllables but immediately impact you in a deep and meaningful way---what words would you choose?...
 - my guess is that for many it would be the cross, the shed blood, my sin, forgiveness, Jesus loves me, holiness, the empty tomb, joy, peace, love, brothers and sisters, the Scriptures, church, hope...
 - here's another word I would like to encourage you to add to our list of favorites...ones that are powerful and that move us deeply...the word "were"...
- in fact, that's what I'd like to speak to you about today --- **The Power of the Were...**
- with that in mind, please open your Bible to 1 Corinthians chapter 6...page 132 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- our theme this year is **Taking the Next Step...with Joy...**
 - we're working our way verse by verse through the book of 1 Corinthians...
- before we dive into this passage together, let me just say a word or two about where we're heading in our Sunday morning studies, and also a bit about the context of 1 Corinthians 6...
- as you know, next Sunday is Easter...and we're going to be looking at the second half of 1 Corinthians 6 which contains a great statement about the power of the resurrection of Christ...
- after Easter, we plan to break away from 1 Corinthians for the following 7 weeks...
 - we've found that the weeks after Easter are a great time to have special outreach series that give you a natural opportunity to invite your friends and acquaintances to church...
 - it is also a good time for those who have attended the Passion Play downtown to consider getting involved in church...
 - so we try to put special emphasis on this time of year by offering a series on a topic that is of unusual interest to people in our culture...
- this year's series is called **Who Are You?...Coming to Grips with Your Identity...**
 - here's what's behind that – I am becoming more persuaded all the time that many of the challenges men and women face are rooted in part wrong ways of thinking about themselves...
 - we all have a lens through which we view ourselves...and that impacts the choices we make each day...it impacts the words we say, our thoughts and our emotions...
 - it certainly affects the way we respond to the people around us...and the circumstances God chooses to bring into our lives...

- and to be blunt – many times the lens through which we view ourselves is patently false...and as a result, the thoughts and words and actions that proceed out of that wrong view of self are invariably going to be wrong as well...
- to complicate matters...we live in a world that often encourages us to adopt a way of thinking about ourselves that is contrary to Scripture...
 - for example, you're not successful unless you drive a particular kind of car, or live in a certain kind of house, or wear a particular kind of clothes...or look like some airbrushed model in a magazine...
 - see the world is trying to squeeze you into its mold...
 - and if you adopt that kind of lens as the way you view yourself...the resultant choices will take you down the wrong path for sure...
- then there's the issue of the people in your life...for good or for ill, are contributing data to the way you think about yourself...
 - some of you grew up in homes where you were never good enough...it was always about your performance and you never measured up...you weren't as good as your brother, or your sister...why can't you just be like _____?....
 - or you're stupid, or you're lazy, or you'll never amount to anything...
 - we could tease that out in a dozen different ways [both positive and negative], but those kind of shaping influences can have a significant impact on the shade of lens through which you think about yourself...
- Thankfully there's also the issue of what the Scripture says about you...there is such a thing as a biblical lens...a biblical way of thinking about oneself...Coram deo – before the face of God...
 - and the goal of this series is to examine what Scripture says about the lens through which we should answer the question...who are you?...and how should that biblical information impact the way you relate to God and others...
 - please be in prayer for that series and begin inviting your friends who may not have a church home to come along with you as we study the Scriptures together...
- now, let's shift gears and say something about the context of the verses we're going to be studying today – 1 Corinthians 6:1-11...
 - if you know your Bible, you probably already thought – oh yea, that's the place in the Bible that teaches that Christians should not take one another to court...
 - that's true...but there's a larger context involved, and a more significant point that should not be lost in all of this...
- the Corinthians were living in a society that loved to be involved in lawsuits...
 - that tendency is not just some current phenomenon at all...
 - in the city of Athens, one ancient writer even claimed that every Athenian was a lawyer...
 - and what he meant by that was, everybody is involved in some kind of lawsuit all the time...it was a form of challenge and even entertainment...
 - so they had a system of private arbitration, and then a court of 40, and then even the possibility of jury trials composed of literally hundreds of jurors...
 - in Athens, every citizen had to serve as a public arbitrator during his sixtieth year of life...
 - taking one another to court was a natural part of life...
- we know that the Jews wanted no part of that...they were allowed by the Romans to have their own courts and could impose any punishment short of death...

- the reason we know that detail so well is because it became an issue during the crucifixion of Christ...
 - the secular courts didn't want to try Him because there was clearly no credible legal charge...
 - the Jewish courts didn't want to try him because they didn't just want to condemn Him, they wanted to kill him...
 - that illustrates, among other things, that those who were living under the Old Testament had no interest in having cases among themselves tried in a secular court...and they were so vehement about it that the Romans just allowed them to have their own system...
- now, where did the Corinthians fit into that?...the answer is, they kept living just like they had before they came to Christ...
 - as unbelieving people, they solved their problems by hauling one another into court...and having it out publicly with the goal of winning....defeating the other party...
 - after they came to Christ --- there was no measureable difference in the way they handled that part of their life...until Paul got hold of them in 1 Corinthians 6...
 - but please keep in mind as we read – this is about a whole lot more than taking people to court --- this is about whether Christians handle life differently than those who don't know the Lord...this is about whether there's really any "power in the were"...
- **read 1 Corinthians 6:1-11...**
- we're talking this morning about the power of the were, and with the time we have remaining, let's look for **Three reasons were is such a powerful word.**

I. The Power of the Were Means You Can Handle Disputes with Fellow Believers Differently.

- the passage is quite clear...

A. Do not "go to law before the unrighteous."

- and several reasons are given...

1. They are of no account in the church – v.4

- that is not meant as a statement of disrespect...or to suggest that the work they do in the world is unimportant or illegitimate...
- however, secular courts often have a different set of values...and a different approach to right and wrong and what constitutes ultimate fairness...
- now just to be clear, we have some wonderful judges in our community, and we should pray for them and submit to them whenever possible...
- one of our judges this past summer secured a grant and hired an intern to develop a database of faith based resources to serve people in our community...and that database was even hosted on our county's computer system...
- so the last thing we would do is develop a disrespectful or unappreciative stance toward the secular court system...
- I received a letter this week from our county's prosecuting attorney thanking the community center staff for the great job they recently did in hosting a week's worth of training events on various forms of gang violence and policemen from around the state came, and a well attended public meeting was held for people in our community that week --- we are happy to serve them...
- but that is work with people in community...many of whom admittedly do not know the Lord...

- in those cases, you need the government...which the Scripture says in places like Romans 13 was instituted by God Himself to put down evil...
- **Romans 13:4 - for it (government) is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.**
- so what we're saying this morning is not some anti-government rant – but remember, any time we study the Bible, we always carefully consider the context---this isn't talking about what to do about problems in the world, this is talking about what to do with problems in the church...
- and Paul says, secular judges are of no account in the church...

2. It is shameful to do so.

- **v. 5 – I say this to your shame...**if you have any question about God's view of this matter, you need go no further than that...

3. You are going before unbelievers?

- **1 Corinthians 6:6 - but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?**

- now you might say – well, what other alternative is there?...well, Paul answered that too, didn't he?...

B. Take unsolved problems between believers to wise people in the church.

- so there's overlap between the information in this chapter and what we studied in chapter 5 last week...
- when there's a problem between you and another person, you should go and speak to them privately...and try to solve the issue using biblical principles of communication...and the goal is repentance, and forgiveness, and reconciliation, and restoration of the relationship...
- but if that cannot be achieved, then you need to get a few more spiritual people from the church involved...
- and you might say – does that ever actually happen?...sure it does...
- we sit down with people in our church family who are having some sort of business dispute, or personal disagreement...and when that happens the leaders of our church are functioning very similar to a court...we hear the evidence that is presented and make a determination based on the principles of Scripture...
- and frequently those can be delightful times of honoring God and solving problems together...and Paul gives several reasons why godly people in the church ought to be able to function this way...

1. Because Christians will one day judge the world.

- **1 Corinthians 6:2 - Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? [and the argument is] If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts?**

- Paul goes on to say that...

2. Because Christians will one day judge angels.

- **1 Corinthians 6:3 - Do you not know that we will judge angels? [and the argument there is] How much more matters of this life?**

- the point is – if the gospel has really changed us...if there truly is “power in the were”, if now we have the Holy Spirit resident inside of us, and the inspired Word of God in our hands...certainly we can sit down together and iron out whatever difficulties may exist between us...
- now I realize you may have some questions – let me try to address a couple of them...

C. Possible questions.

1. I thought the Bible says we are not supposed to judge one another?

- **Matthew 7:1 - Do not judge so that you will not be judged.**
- here's a great example of how important it is to interpret a verse in its context...
- because to understand what that verse means, all you have to do is keep reading...
- **Matthew 7:2 - For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.**
 - the point isn't – don't ever judge – it's don't ever judge unfairly, in a manner in that you would not want to be judged yourself...
 - well, what does that mean?...what's our rule?...keep reading...
 - because the next verse talks about getting the log out of your own eye first...
 - but to what end?...so that you can help them with their speck...in other words, so that you can judge them properly...which is why the text ends with...
- **Matthew 7:5 - You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.**
 - so there's no conflict here between 1 Corinthians 6 and Matthew 7...
 - the Bible doesn't say that you should never judge...it says that you should never judge improperly, or inappropriately...you also might wonder...

2. Should we ever use secular courts?

- the answer to that is, yes...
- this passage is talking about relationships between people in the same church...
- now, when the issue is between 2 Christians who are members of different churches, we would try to mediate that between the leaders of the two churches...some churches are willing to participate in that level of problem solving, others don't want to get involved in such matters...
- so a Christian may have to take another person who says he/she is a Christian to court if they are not under the same local church authority...
 - we also use secular courts if there is some threat of child abuse or neglect...we are legally bound to do that and have clear policies in place on those matters...
 - there are also times that a person may have to take out a restraining order against an abusive spouse or person...those are generally emergencies and they may have to be in place as matters are sorted out by leaders of the church...but the general principle is, believers should not take believers to court...
- now, one of the objections to all of this is....well, I might not win the case...

C. Losing the case is better than losing your testimony.

1. Why not rather be wronged? – v. 7

2. Why not rather be defrauded? - v. 7

- you're not going to hear that in a secular court...but that's the overall point...when you trust Christ as Savior and Lord...the way you think about life is entirely different...it's the power of the were...
- for example, we've had disputes arise between business owners in our church with church members who used their services and were dissatisfied in some way...and sure there's disappointment in that, and often some hurt, and things can be a bit emotionally charged...no one likes feeling like they've been cheated or mistreated in some way...
- but I can think of plenty of times when men and women on both sides said to us...my testimony for Christ is more important than money, and the unity in the body is more important than me winning...so I'm going to submit myself to whatever group of men and women my church leaders call together to mediate this matter...and whatever decision is made, I will joyfully abide by it...and I'll leave the ultimate judgment up to God...

- and some of those same people will be worshipping and serving together today...because of the transforming power of the were...such were some of you, but you can handle disputes differently...
- now, please be sure to stay on point – if you just sent out a tweet that said, what a jip, Pastor Viars just said we can't sue one another...you missed the point...there's great hope here, because you can have such a different view of your possessions, and the importance of getting your way in this life...that the way you approach and solve disputes with other people is entirely different...
- lawsuits can make a person bitter, and angry—in fact they often mar a person forever even if they win...God's way is different, and God's way is better...
- now, how does verse 9 fit into this?...

II. The Power of the Were Means that Heaven Is Not For Everyone.

- the passage could not be any clearer about this either...

A. The unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God.

- one of the greatest errors out there is the notion that we're all God's children, and we're all going to heaven...maybe not Hitler, or some rapist or serial killer...
- but God is simply a God of love and He'll bend the curve as far as He has to in order to make it possible for Joe Six-pack to make it in on the basis of his own righteousness...
- the problem with that view is that it runs right smack into the doctrine of the holiness of God...and by that standard...**Romans 3:10 - as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one;"**
- that's why the events we commemorating this week are so important...we needed a perfect sacrifice...an unblemished lamb who would die in our place, and someone who possessed divine righteousness that could be placed on our account...
- Paul will later tell the Corinthians...**2 Corinthians 5:21 - He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**
- and I realize that many men and women think they are doing God a favor by suggesting that everybody will go to heaven...and they find verses like 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 to be embarrassing...
- the truth is the exact opposite...this demonstrates that the blood of Christ is powerful enough to transform a person from any behavior that is displeasing to Christ...
- the principle is – the stronger your belief in the transforming power of the blood of Christ, the clearer your understanding that genuine believers will have a changed and changing life...
- your bar of expectation is high because of the power of the were...

B. This is not an exhaustive list, but an exemplary one.

- it's not like a person can say---well, I'm not a fornicator---check, I'm not a thief---check...OK, I can earn my way to heaven because I escaped this list...
- what Paul is trying to tell the Corinthians is---just like Christians should be different than unbelievers in the way they handle potential court cases...that difference should be reflected in all sorts of areas of life...
- and when the change is not there...that person has every reason to question whether he/she genuinely knows Christ...
- **2 Corinthians 5:17 - Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.**

- now, you may have a question about the issue of homosexuality since it was specifically addressed in this text...
- you could attend here for months and never hear me mention that topic because it is not in the text...however, I'm not going to ignore it because it is such a hot button issue in our culture...
- we believe God created human sexuality and that it should be celebrated and enjoyed within the boundaries of monogamous marriage...
- in fact, that topic, sexual fidelity and enjoyment and fulfillment between a man and wife is the subject of 1 Corinthians 7...and we plan to study that early in the month of June...so mark your calendars...
 - but sexual expression outside the boundaries of monogamous marriage is sinful and displeasing to God...whether it is homosexuality, or extra-marital affairs, or pornography on the internet...
 - now, someone might say – but aren't people supposed to act on their feelings, shouldn't they do what comes naturally...
 - I sure hope not...in fact, please do me a favor...when it comes to human sexuality, please don't make the highest value---being true to yourself, or doing what feels natural...
 - we don't have enough counselors and counseling offices on this campus to deal with the fallout from that kind of folly...
 - the point of Scripture is that the gospel can help you submit your desires to the Lordship of Christ...and there are all sorts of things that you might really want to do today in many areas of life that you should not do...that you need to put to death...
- we had an event several years ago over on campus where a person gave a testimony about how God was helping him overcome homosexuality and I was asked to pray at the end and I simply read these verses before I prayed and some of the people in attendance came unglued...and we even had some well-meaning Christians saying, we shouldn't say that people struggling with homosexuality can change...
- they were trying to do God a favor...let's not take that position because it will upset people or make us politically incorrect...
- what they don't understand is how offensive that is to the power of the gospel...
 - it's the power of the were...heaven isn't for everyone...it's for those who have genuinely repented of their sin and trusted Christ as savior and Lord and one of the ways you can tell that's occurred is that there's a changed and changing life...
- and that is the point of verse 11...

III. The Power of the Were Means You Really Can Change.

- Paul could say to the men and women in the Corinthian church, after mentioning fornicators, adulterers, thieves, drunkards, etc...
- **v. 11 – such were some of you...**
 - and don't you love the rest of the verse?...
 - **1 Corinthians 6:11 - ...but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.**
 - question #1 – are you sure there's been a definite time in your life where you went from “are” to “were”?....
 - question #2 – do you have the level of confidence in the power of the gospel that you are identifying whatever about you is displeasing to Christ and seeking to put it in the “were” column?

- question # 3 – Are you thankful for the many people around you whom God is changing?

- [thank those working on the passion play – encourage folks to invite others...

Gordon Fee -- For Paul there is to be the closest possible relationship between the experience of grace and one's behavior that evidences that experience of grace. Paul himself is as concerned as anyone that the latter (right behavior) should not be perceived as coming first or as leading to the former (the experience of grace). But those who concern themselves with grace without equal concern for behavior have missed Paul's own theological urgencies. It is precisely for these reasons that the warning texts in Paul must be taken with real seriousness. Security in Christ there is, to be sure, but it is a false security that would justify sinners who have never taken seriously "but such were some of you." That is to whitewash the sinner without regeneration or transformation; Paul simply would not understand such theology.