



1 Cor. 6:1-8
Of Lawsuits and Judgment

NKJ 1 Corinthians 6:1 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?

2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?

3 Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?

4 If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge?

5 I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?

6 But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!

7 Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?

8 No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!

One of the things that I often have to remind people in marriage counseling, is that a battle that we “win” against our spouse is inevitably actually a loss. That is not only because we may have the cold comfort of celebrating our “victory” by sleeping on the couch, but because in fighting the battle to the bitter end in first place, we have totally forgotten the fact that we are one flesh and that we have actually been waging war against part of our own body. When two parts of the same body wage war against themselves, no matter who wins, the body loses. That which we should love and cherish has become the subject of our antagonism. Such a victory actually has more of the sting of a self-inflicted wound.

So when members of the body of Christ sue one another, regardless of who wins, the body of Christ in a very real sense has suffered a loss the moment they enter the courtroom.

Now as important as it is to address this subject, we may wonder, why did Paul bring it up here? I mean he has just been talking about the need for church discipline against a specific member of the church, and then the need for church discipline generally, which they weren’t exercising in Corinth. But then he goes and shows them that while they weren’t interested in exercising the kind of judgment the church *must* exercise in order to safeguard the peace and purity of the church, and the honor of Christ and the gospel, he rebukes them because they were more than willing to go outside the church in order to obtain judgment in civil matters against their brethren.

In all likelihood, the members of Chloe’s household, who reported the sad situation in the church in Corinth to Paul had told him that not only was there a notorious case of sexual immorality going on in the church, but that one or more highly contentious lawsuits had been brought by members of the church against one another.

Paul is equally concerned about this situation as it also shows the dreadful immaturity and imbalance in the church and how wrong their thinking about themselves as a church was. Just as a husband and wife going at it hammer and tongs are clearly not thinking of themselves as one flesh, one body, so a church that on one hand allows the continued existence of a possible fatal sin infection and then attacks the other members in court, is also not thinking of themselves as one body, they have fallen into the terrible error of thinking of themselves as a collection of autonomous people with their own rights.

This is one of the biggest problems in our own day as well. I remember being told in a practical theology class in seminary, that when people join the church you should get them to sign a legal waiver indicating their willingness to submit to church discipline. And I thought “*you’re kidding right?*” I need to get CHRISTIANS to sign a waiver saying they’ll submit to the third mark of the church. But no the lecturer said, it is increasingly common that once church discipline has been initiated and a person has been excommunicated that they turn around and *SUE* the church in the public courts for defamation of character.

We live in a hyper-litigious society. People run into one another in a minor fender-bender, and the person they bumped is fine, and then a few months later they suddenly have a pain and suffering lawsuit on their hands. You cannot even have people spill hot coffee in their own laps without a major lawsuit on the grounds that the cup did not bear a warning that hot coffee may cause pain if poured on one’s lap.

But litigation is nothing new. I was speaking with a fellow in seminary who used to do archaeological digs in Israel and the fertile crescent, and he said one of the things that disappointed him most on these digs was that they would find tablets covered in Akkadian lettering, or shards of pottery people had written on, and here he is hoping it’s a historical account of some ancient battle or some major work of ancient literature, and the prof would come over and examine it and say, “it’s a bill” or even more commonly it’s a civil legal document. “*So and so is required to pay the sum of two oxen and a chicken for damages caused by his negligence.*” I began to wonder, which came first the court or the lawsuit?

The Greeks were famously litigious, and they had their own equivalent of “the ambulance chaser” lawyer and I’m not sure of this but they probably had their own version of “*Have you been injured in a chariot accident?*” ads.

Now its bad when members of the world enter into hyper litigation and seek to use the courts to defraud or to grab or revenge themselves but we can expect that kind of self-seeking and materialistic attitude from worldlings. *I’m looking out for #1 is the general rule.* But in the church we should be dying to self and putting our brothers and sisters ahead of ourselves, suffering injury ourselves before we injury others!

But perhaps you are thinking, wait a minute, we live in a fallen world, and disputes are bound to arise amongst the members of the church, Christian employers and employees, a failure to keep a contract and so on. Are we not allowed, if we have been cheated or financially harmed to bring a brother or sister in Christ to court?

Paul says, that our first thought shouldn’t be to drag a believer before unbelievers in the secular courts for judgment, such an action brings contempt on the gospel amongst outside the body, and is not a patient bearing of injuries. ***Rather in the matter of a dispute between believers, is it not possible to***

settle the matter via arbitration within the church? You are the Saints, the redeemed is there really no one among you worthy to judge the small matters of this present passing world?

Paul brings up the fact that in the final JUDGEMENT the members of Christ's body those who have been Justified by Faith Alone and United to Him, will be seated with Christ and will render judgment with Him over those who have not been united to Him. He goes on to state that they will even judge the fallen angels:

Rev. 20:4 And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

Since you are to take part in this most important judgment, one that will have eternal consequences, then the least esteemed or gifted member of the church should be able to judge between you. Is it really the case that there isn't even one person *in the church, one wise man*, who can settle these matters. Can we not accept the judgment of a wise brother or sister in Christ?

Is that not better than dragging one another into the public courts? In fact Paul says it would be better to suffer loss. It is better to err on the side of being cheated yourself, than to cheat another:

Matt. 5:40 "If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. 41 "And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.

What then should we do?

1) ***We should be willing to suffer loss***, and incredibly hesitant to sue even unbelievers. Certainly no Christian should ever be guilty of the McDonalds coffee case. We should *never* ever use the misuse the courts for revenge or a get rich quick scheme versus others. If we use the courts to obtain money we didn't really have a right to, as is the case with insurance fraud, we have committed theft pure and simple.

Brothers and sisters, let us remember that Christ was not zealous for the maintenance of his own rights, but rather laid them down for our sakes and went to the cross and suffered shame and humiliation for our redemption. Should we not be willing to die to self, to take up the cross and follow his example regarding the little and fleeting things of this world.

2) In matters of brother vs. brother over a potential civil law case, if we cannot bear the loss, ***we should be willing first to submit to the arbitration of the church***, our primary – example - PEACEMAKERS MINISTRIES

3) If we do enter court, and that is not entirely prohibited in order that justice might be served, especially against unbelievers, ***We should be sure this is our final recourse and we should do so maintaining a zeal not to transgress the commandments of God -***

"I acknowledge, then, that a Christian man is altogether prohibited from revenge, so that he must not exercise it, either by himself, or by means of the magistrate, nor even desire it. If, therefore, a Christian

man wishes to prosecute his rights at law, so as not to offend God, he must, above all things, take heed that he does not bring into court any desire of revenge, any corrupt affection of the mind, or anger, or, in fine, any other poison. In this matter love will be the best regulator. If it is objected, that it very rarely happens that any one carries on a lawsuit entirely free and exempt from every corrupt affection, I acknowledge that it is so, and I say farther, that. it is rare to find a single instance of an upright litigant; but it is useful for many reasons to show that the thing is not evil in itself, but is rendered corrupt by abuse: First, that it may not seem as if God had to no purpose appointed courts of justice; Secondly, that the pious may know how far their liberties extend, that they may not take anything in hand against the dictates of conscience. For it is owing to this that many rush on to open contempt of God, when they have once begun to transgress those limits; f338 Thirdly, that they may be admonished, that they must always keep within bounds, so as not to pollute by their own misconduct the remedy which the Lord has permitted them to employ; Lastly, that the audacity of the wicked may be repressed by a pure and uncorrupted zeal, which could not be effected, if we were not allowed to subject them to legal punishments.” - Calvin