



CHARIS-MATTERS

STUDIES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Text

First Corinthians 6:1-11

Topic

The believers at Corinth were exercising their right as Roman citizens to file lawsuits against one another when they ought instead to have been doing what is right in God's eyes

Title

"Judges? We Don't Need No Stinking Judges!"

Introduction

Our nation's leaders are holding confirmation hearings for the nominated justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. Politics aside, we are blessed to live in this great country that follows the rule of law.

In one of the exchanges between the nominee and the senators she was asked about various judicial philosophies. At issue is how she views and therefore how she would interpret the founding fathers' intentions regarding the Constitution of the United States.

It got me thinking about how we as Christians interpret our Father's intentions and instructions in the Bible. We ought always approach His Word as inspired, authoritative, infallible, and inerrant.

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Being submitted to His Word, we have a unique judicial philosophy. **We are never to bring lawsuits against another Christian in open court.** Period.

The basis for all this is that the testimony of the church and of individual Christians is far more important than their legal wranglings with one another. Sure, we believe in the rule of law. But we'd rather display the rule of love. Lawsuits between believers don't 'suit' the love we should be showing one another and the world.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Keep Lawsuits Out Of The World And In The Hands Of The Church, and #2 Keep Love That Suits The Church In The Eyes Of The World.

#1 Keep Lawsuits Out Of The World
And In The Hands Of The Church
(v1-8)

Nothing that Paul said, and hopefully nothing I say, should give you the impression that there is anything wrong with courts and judges or the legal system in general. We are not told to avoid it because it is corrupt or unfair.

It's just wrong for two believers to go to court and submit their lawsuit before a judge. It's not the way God instructed us to resolve disputes.

The apostle Paul was pretty upset that saints in Corinth were suing one another.

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

"How dare you," Paul said. They knew better but chose to ignore the fear of the Lord.

The word "unrighteous" wasn't describing an individual, nor was it a blanket assessment that the nation's courts were corrupt. It's a synonym for the

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world. Even if there are Christians in the legal system, it is still “unrighteous” in that it is the world’s system and not God’s.

God has His own system and it involves the “saints” in the church.

1 Corinthians 6:2 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?

Paul was looking forward to the return of Jesus to rule and reign over the earth. After His Second Coming Jesus will set up a kingdom on this planet that will last for one thousand years. The “saints” - you and I - will be involved with Him in ‘judg[ing] the world’ during that Millennial Kingdom.

What are you looking forward to? I suggest that what you are looking forward to can be seen in what you are living for. Let’s pull out all the stops and live in a way that proclaims the Lord is coming.

If I am going to “judge the world,” then I ought to be able to figure out smaller matters right now without the help of the world.

1 Corinthians 6:3 Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?

Several passage in Scripture speak of evil, fallen angels who are already incarcerated awaiting their final judgment. We will participate with Jesus in judging them and all the fallen host of Heaven.

Beginning in verse two and continuing here in verse three Paul was addressing the entire church and not just those involved in the lawsuits. If you’ve got a problem, take it to the saints.

1 Corinthians 6:4 If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge?

Paul called these disputes “judgments concerning things pertaining to this life.” They are not insignificant but they must be kept in perspective. “Only one life, will soon be passed; only what’s done for Christ will last.”

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“Those who are least esteemed by the church” who “judge” is another reference to the legal system as a whole, not any individual within it. No matter how fair and equitable it might be, no matter that God ordains laws and governments, we have a better way of living. We have our own resources for resolving disputes.

1 Corinthians 6:5 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?

There is perhaps a hint of sarcasm here. If you've been with us for our previous studies you know that the believers at Corinth prided themselves on their wisdom. Yet Paul pointed out that, for all their supposed “wisdom,” they couldn't find even one “wise man among” them who could act as an arbitrator in a dispute!

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

They were acting as if Jesus had nothing to do with their disputes over money and property. They seem to have viewed their possessions as if they belonged to themselves and not to the Lord. So when something seemed to put their worldly possessions in jeopardy, they acted like the world rather than going first to the Lord.

One author called this your ‘wallet's witness.’ Martin Luther once said, "There are three conversions a person needs to experience: The conversion of the head, the conversion of the heart, and the conversion of the pocketbook." Greg Laurie wrote the following:

It is worth noting that money is such an important topic in the Bible that it is the main subject of nearly half of the parables Jesus told. In addition, one in every seven verses in the New Testament deals with this topic. The Bible offers 500 verses on prayer, fewer than 500 verses on faith, and more than 2,000 verses on money. In fact, 15 percent of everything Jesus ever taught was on the topic of money and possessions - more than His teachings on heaven and hell combined.

To protect their wallets the Corinthians were going to court “before unbelievers.” What should they have done? What was the godly remedy?

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Well, there are two remedies. We've already seen one: Let other believers judge the matter. Keep it in the church family. Go to the leadership God has raised up and lay out the dispute, then abide by their ruling.

What if that fails to resolve the dispute? Well then you've got to take it to the next level.

1 Corinthians 6:7 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?

For believers to submit themselves to the world's legal system is "an utter failure." Instead one of them ought to "accept wrong" and "let [themselves] be cheated."

Really? That can't be right, can it? Yes it can and it is. It is the witness of your wallet that being like Jesus and preserving the testimony of the church out in the world is of higher value to you than the things of this world which are perishing.

1 Corinthians 6:8 No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!

You've been wronged or cheated by a brother or sister in the Lord. When you respond by suing them in open court you are acting just like them. You are wronging them, cheating them, acting as if it meant nothing to be a Christian.

On the surface we learn that we are not to take our disputes to the world. It ruins our testimony. It says to the world that even though God is sovereign and almighty, He can't solve our pettiest problems. He can save us, He can give us eternal life; but He doesn't know anything about day-to-day affairs. *It's just ludicrous!*

The thing I ought to value more than my wallet is my testimony before the world and the testimony of Jesus Christ before the world.

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As a principle this is helpful and instructive in situations that do not involve lawsuits. I ought, for example, to only speak well of my brothers and sisters to those in the world. If there are disputes I should keep them in the family so the testimony of Jesus is not hurt. I should work hard to guard my testimony and the testimony of the church.

And that brings us to our second point,

#2 Keep Love That Suits The Church In The Eyes Of The World

(v9-11)

When I worked as a salesman I was taught to never diss the company. Sure, we made mistakes; but to speak poorly of the company or one of its employees only served to create an ill impression in the mind of my client.

We need to be protective of other believers, and of the church, for the sake of the Lord. If we are all about the love of Jesus Christ it betrays that love to expose members of the family to shame and scorn.

This next set of verses contrasts those still out in the world, the nonbelievers, with the saints. The contrast does two things:

1. It reminds us as believers that our testimony is crucial to bringing the good news of salvation to those who are perishing in their sins.
2. It reminds us we have been forgiven by God of so much sin that whatever is done against us pales in comparison.

1 Corinthians 6:9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?...

Paul could not get his mind off of the future. The Lord is gone to Heaven to prepare a place for us. He's coming back to take us there. Afterwards we will help Him in the kingdom He establishes on the earth. After that we will enjoy a glorious eternity in a place built with precious minerals and jewels.

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If on the way to getting there we are defrauded of something in this life, so what? Of greater importance are the souls of the “unrighteous,” of the nonbelievers.

1 Corinthians 6:9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,

1 Corinthians 6:10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

Wow. Corinth was Sin City! This is quite a description of the nonbelievers surrounding the church at Corinth.

He listed their representative sexual sins:

- “Fornicators” refers to the sexual sins of the unmarried.
- “Idolaters” in this context refers to the practice of having sex with the priests and priestesses in the pagan Temples.
- “Adulterers” refers to the sexual sins of those who were married.
- “Homosexuals,” as translated here, may refer to the practice of having sex with young boys.
- “Sodomites” refers to homosexual behavior.

He next listed their representative societal sins:

- “Thieves” were those who stole from others.
- “Covetous” indicated an insatiable appetite for the things of this world.

Then there were these social sins:

- “Drunkards” means given over to wine and described those who were abusing various substances.
- “Revilers” means abusive.
- “Extortioners” are those who are violent in their relationships.

These sins were listed to make the following point:

1 Corinthians 6:11 And such were some of you...

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The believers had been saved from out of the world, forgiven these sins, empowered to live for Jesus Christ. Maybe filing a lawsuit against another believer isn't as bad as some of the sins listed but the point is that you are choosing to act as a worldly person and to go back to the world and submit yourself to their judgment. If you are a nonbeliever you've got to wonder, "What good is being a Christian?"

1 Corinthians 6:11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

These are all things already accomplished for you the moment you are saved:

- You were "washed" means all the penalty of sin was removed and you have a permanent position before God.
- You were "sanctified" means you were set apart from the world as God's unique possession.
- You were "justified" means God was just in washing and sanctifying you because it was done by grace through faith in Jesus, thus preserving both His holiness and His justice.

God the Father did all this through the "name," or by the authority of, Jesus. It is applied in your life by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Bottom line: A believer has cheated you, has defrauded you. Do you take him or her to court?

No. That is how the world operates - the world you've been saved out from. You've got a better way. Let the church decide, keeping the dispute out of the world. Or just go ahead and be wronged. Exercise your right to be wronged! Jesus did and we benefit from His grace by receiving eternal life.

You are working on building a testimony. Live for the future and not for this world's goods. Love is what suits you as a believer.

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