

Iglesia de Carne

Studies in First Corinthians

Text

First Corinthians 6:1-11

Topic

Paul was upset because believers were suing their brothers in Jesus Christ

Title

“The Sues Brothers”

Naruto was just an anonymous macaque living in the jungles of Indonesia. One day in 2011 the photogenic primate happened upon a wildlife photographer's unattended camera and snapped a "monkey selfie."

Naruto may have just been *monkeying around*. But it became a matter of *monkey business* when PETA got involved.

PETA, which stands for “People for Putting Naked Actresses on Billboards,” filed a lawsuit on behalf of Naruto asserting that the monkey should enjoy copyright protection on the selfie. The organization hoped to use the proceeds from the picture to benefit the animals.

In 2017, PETA and the photographer settled. The photographer agreed to donate 25% of future revenue from the photo to groups that protect crested macaques and their habitat in Indonesia. Both sides also asked the 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals "to dismiss the case and throw out a lower court decision that said animals cannot own copyrights."

We call this a “frivolous lawsuit.” It never should have come before a judge in the first place.

There was at least one lawsuit involving believers in Corinth that should never have come before a judge. In verse six we learn “brother goes to law against brother.”

It was worse than frivolous. It was (according to verse seven) “an utter failure. There isn’t 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 is wrong, however, for two believers to go to the secular court and submit their civil matter before a judge.

The context of First Corinthians 6 is civil legal disputes, not criminal prosecution. A Christian may look to a secular court to prosecute anyone (including Christians) who committed a crime against them.

What should we do rather than sue? I’ll organize my comments on Paul’s instruction around two points: #1 When You Are Wronged, You Should Prioritize Your Testimony Before The World, and #2 When You Do Wrong, You Should Ponder Your Testimony Before The Lord.

#1 When You Are Wronged, You Should Prioritize Your
Testimony Before The World
(v1-6)

A brother here in our fellowship called me at home because there was someone at the building who said he had something to give me. The guy got on the phone. I grew suspicious when he wouldn’t tell me what it was. I finally wore him down: **He had been sent to serve me with a subpoena.**

It was a case of a Christian suing another Christian.

I knew both parties and had urged both sides to meet and let other believers judge. The offender refused to meet, and the saints - in this case the church board - did absolutely nothing.

I want to tell you, I was sick to my stomach, being dragged in to their mutual failure to act biblically.

I hope you haven’t noticed, but lawsuits between Christians are on the rise:

- If you are a supporter of Gospel for Asia, you know they just came through a lawsuit brought against them by professing believers. It was frivolous.

- A well-known pastor in Chicago brought a multi-million dollar lawsuit against a Christian credit union. I read that he abandoned the suit once he realized some things that might make a monkey out of him were likely to surface in discovery.
- Jerry Fallwell, Jr., head of Liberty University, has been the subject of growing public criticism by former employees. He was recently quoted, “I’m not going to dignify the lies that were reported yesterday with a response, but I am going to the authorities and I am going to civil court.” He added that Liberty has hired “the meanest lawyer in New York” to pursue civil cases.

It’s not that the litigants are unfamiliar with these eleven verses in First Corinthians. They are reinterpreting them to ‘suit’ their situation.

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

When you become a Christian, God declares you “righteous” on the basis of Jesus’ death on the Cross. The judges were men who had not been declared righteous by God. They were nonbelievers.

Whatever “matter against another,” it could have been, it should have been, brought before the “saints.”

You might think that the “saints” are not qualified to judge certain matters; that the courts would do a better job.

1Co 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?

Let me make a general observation before commenting directly about this verse. The apostle Paul seems always to, in the present, be thinking about the future. His counsel on lawsuits is grounded in future events; in unfulfilled prophecy. He was looking forward beyond the rapture... beyond the Great Tribulation... to the one thousand year Kingdom of God on the earth.

We ought to approach our lives in the present as futurists. We are living here, but are looking forward to the city whose builder and maker is God.

It doesn't just correct our attitude towards lawsuits; it corrects our attitude about everything.

We who are saved in the church age will rule and reign over the world with Jesus. We are enabled now to rule on matters among us.

Paul refers to the lawsuit or suits among the Corinthians as "the smallest matters." He doesn't mean the matters were insignificant, or that saints are only to judge small things. He means that, by comparison to what and who saints will judge in the future, *everything is a small thing*.

Too often an offense gets blown out of proportion. You become convinced something must be done. We put too much weight on this life and not on what is coming.

"Are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?"

It's a sarcastic rhetorical question. We *are* able to judge all matters between Christians.

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

There are fallen angels. We believe one-third of the angels followed Satan in his pride and rebellion against God. Some of these fallen angels are already incarcerated. In the end, they will all be sentenced to the Lake of Fire - to the place "prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41).

We're not told exactly how we will participate in this final judgment of fallen angels. That isn't the point. The point is, if in the future we will judge supernatural beings, how much more are we capable already to judge the small matters of "this life."

Way back in the late 1980's, a couple in our fellowship bought their first Hanford home in a new tract. After moving in, the house smelled dank. The carpets were wet. It was coming up from the ground, through the concrete slab.

After many attempts to resolve the matter, they were going to sue the builder. He was a Christian, attending another church. I arranged a meeting with him and his pastor. At first he was resistant, because of the threatened lawsuit. But after applying biblical pressure, he did what was right and took action to resolve the faulty construction.

It can happen. The saints *can* resolve civil issues without the courts.

1Co 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?

A more literal translation of verse four is, "If then there are questions to be judged in connection with the things of this life, why do you put them in the hands of those who have no position in the church?" (BBE).

If you go to court, you might get a Christian judge; but even then, you can't expect to be judged by a biblical criteria. He's not going to abandon state law and issue a ruling from Deuteronomy.

Let's assume you don't get a Christian judge:

- He or she isn't going to pray about your matter. The nonbelieving judge has no concept of asking God for wisdom to decide the case. There will be no cutting babies in two.
- He or she doesn't seek Scripture to apply to your case. The judge isn't going to appeal to you to obey God's Word.
- The judge isn't being led by the Holy Spirit. He or she cannot receive a supernatural word of wisdom, or word of knowledge, that could resolve the matter.

When you really stop to think about it, taking your matter outside the church, to a nonbeliever, is as dumb as a left-handed monkey wrench. You cut yourself off from all spiritual help.

So - what are some of the reasons Christians give for suing other believers?

1. I call one “the principle of the greater good.” The offended party or parties claim that it would do more harm to not sue. They are forced to sue, for the greater good. Trouble is, I can justify almost any lawsuit as being for “the greater good.”
2. In the lawsuit I was subpoenaed in, one statement used to justify suing was that “people won’t tell the truth until they are under oath.” In other words, Christians are liars until they swear on the Bible in court. The plaintiffs therefore convinced themselves suing was not just permissible - it was necessary to get to “the truth.”
3. One pastor I know teaches that the prohibition on lawsuits only applies to believers who attend the same fellowship.
4. It’s been suggested that our understanding of these verses needs to mature because our culture has become so much more complicated.
5. Another line of thought is that the church can declare the accused offender “not a Christian,” clearing the way for him or her to be sued as a nonbeliever. Convenient.

I just don’t see that kind of wiggle room in Paul’s words. What he said was blunt, straightforward, and impossible to misunderstand.

1Co 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?

This is definitely sarcasm. In our previous studies in First Corinthians, we’ve mentioned that the believers were trying to integrate worldly wisdom with the Word of God. They boasted about their wisdom. But now, in the act of filing a lawsuit, it was shown that their wisdom was deficient. They were acting like there was no one in the fellowship wise enough to make a judgment in the smallest of matters.

1Co 6:6 But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!
They were quarreling before the unbelieving world. Their lawsuits had gone viral.

Think about it. The believers in Corinth had heard the Gospel and been saved. God the Holy Spirit indwelt them. They had come behind in no gift. Like any other believers, they were sharing their faith in Jesus. The Lord was being presented as having power to save. He was God Who can heal both physical and spiritual afflictions. The future was written in advance by Him, and was advancing toward its culmination. Believers need not fear death, because absence from the body meant being present with Jesus in Heaven. We could go on-and-on.

And while that was their testimony - **they behaved as if Jesus couldn't solve everyday problems.**

The priority ought to be our testimony *to* the world, and *in* the world. Who will nonbelievers think Jesus is if we sue one another?

A lawsuit against another believer is a declaration that Jesus fails us in everyday matters. If wet carpeting can't be resolved, how can Jesus possibly be trusted in the weightier matters of salvation and eternal life?

Every lawsuit brought by a believer against another believer ought to start with a disclaimer: "I declare that I do not trust Jesus, or His saints, to rule on my behalf, so I am going to behave no differently from a nonbeliever and demand my rights according to man's laws, not God's. My greater good is more important to me than the glory of God. I am knowingly abandoning my testimony that Jesus has power to help me in my daily life."

#2 When You Do Wrong, You Should Ponder
Before The Lord
(v7-11)

Your Testimony

Finish this sentence: "You have the right to remain..."

We live in a great country. We have civil rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States.

We are simultaneously citizens of Heaven. Based on our heavenly citizenship, there is another way to finish that sentence. It goes like this: "You have the right to remain... **wronged.**"

Jesus most certainly exercised His right to remain wronged. Everything about His Crucifixion was wrong. He gave up His right to act like God in His incarnation. He did it in humility, in order to be the Savior of the whole world - especially those who believe.

The apostle Paul certainly exercised his right to remain wronged. He was terribly persecuted. When he did claim his rights as a Roman citizen, it was to further the Gospel, never for personal gain or comfort.

He told the believers in Corinth to remain wronged rather than initiate lawsuits.

1Co 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?

By "utter failure" Paul meant that even if you won the lawsuit, you had lost what was much more important - your testimony of Jesus.

I cannot stress this enough. **Christian vs. Christian in court is a failure and by it the parties destroy their testimony.**

Most believers who file a lawsuit will say it was their "last resort." The problem with that statement is that Paul said it wasn't a resort at all - not even a last one.

"Accept wrong... Be cheated." What does that mean in the Greek??? It means to accept wrong and to be cheated.

The last few weeks we've been encountering the principle that it costs you something to be a believer.

Accepting wrong, and being cheated, is something it might cost you to be a believer who refuses to sue another believer.

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

Paul turned his attention to the offender. It was incredible to him that a believer would “wrong and cheat” anyone, let alone the members of their spiritual family.

If thus far it seemed like the offender(s) were getting off too easy, Paul issued a severe warning in the closing three verses.

1Co 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,

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

1Co 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.

The place to start is with the phrase, “and such were some of you.” It indicates a radical difference between the world and the church.

- The world was outside, where nonbelievers are characterized by awful, evil behaviors.
- Inside the church there is grace, mercy, forgiveness, and love for one another.

When we talk *The Omega Man*, I'm thinking Charlton Heston, not the Will Smith remake. (Nothing against Will Smith; but Charlton Heston was the Man!).

He survived a global pandemic that turned everyone else into murderous nocturnal albino mutants.

He lived atop a fortified apartment building equipped with an arsenal of weaponry. Inside, he was safe; outside was carnage.

It's a typical SyFy or horror film device - just outside the house or building or city is terror and destruction that must be kept out at all cost.

It's a biblical idea. In the Revelation we read,

Rev 22:14 Blessed *are* those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.

Rev 22:15 But outside *are* dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.

Paul's comments are based on this understanding that the church is the fortified building in the midst of the world.

The believers he was addressing (and he definitely understood them to be saved) were now safely fortified and should not allow their former fleshly behaviors to enter.

Verses nine and ten are a reminder that the "unrighteous," i.e., nonbelievers, will not be in Heaven. He then lists some of their behaviors - things that are typical of the flesh. They do these things, Why? **Because they are not saved, and are dominated by the sin nature.**

I don't think we need to spend time describing each behavior. It isn't the individual behavior that needs to change; it's the individual.

I think we should note that Paul is mentioning these behaviors alongside of filing lawsuits. It was just as much evidence of the flesh as anything on the list.

Nonbelievers have no power to change without the promised Holy Spirit. Get saved and God will effect change from the inside out.

Then the responsibility is to guard against yielding to your flesh. Don't be the one who brings the horrors into the church.

1Co 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.

Gordon Fee writes,

The previous list is what the wicked are like still, and because of that they will not inherit the kingdom. Now in Christ Jesus you are something different, so live like it. Stop defrauding, living in sexual sin, etc., because you are no longer among those who do.

Can a believer really act these ways? Sure can; the Corinthians were believers who were acting those ways. If pressed, we say that a person who *persists* in these behaviors must be unable to overcome them and is not born again. It is therefore a for-real warning.

Paul described life inside:

- “You were washed” - At the Cross we see that Jesus “loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood” (Revelation 1:5).
- “You were sanctified” - At the Cross “we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*” (Hebrews 10:10).
- “You were justified” - Also at the Cross we are “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24).

It anticipates you being face-to-face with the Lord at His Reward Seat. Do we really think cheating and wronging a brother or sister, or suing those who have wronged you, is going to survive His fiery scrutiny on that day? You don't want that monkey on your back.

It's like I said last week: Be what you already are:

- Be a person who exercises the right to be wronged.
- Be a person who has left the behaviors of the old sin nature outside the blood-bought church.