

# Do not have lawsuits against other Christians

1 Corinthians 6:1-11

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***<sup>1</sup> When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?***

Paul is writing back to his spiritual children. If you remember, the Apostle Paul had been used by God to start this church in Corinth. He had now been in Ephesus for three years and had received word of multiple problems that this young congregation was having. As we have mentioned in past weeks, there was division, false teaching, drunkenness, sexual immorality, and now some of the brothers were even taking others in the church to court. For Paul this was unthinkable.

The Jews traditionally did not take their issues to a secular court when seeking to resolve a grievance with another Jew. In every city that had over 11 Jewish men, you could have a synagogue. The synagogue would serve as their court. The Jews believed that within their Jewish “family” they could handle their own issues between one another. They believed that God’s Word was sufficient for everything that they would need. Some Jews even believed it to be blasphemy to go to court against another Jew, because it would be a declaration that God was not sufficient for their problem.

It is interesting that the Roman and Greek world often allowed this Jewish process. The Jews were allowed to settle their own cases amongst themselves.

This permissiveness was at times passed on to the Christians as well, since they were seen as merely a sect of Judaism. The Christians were given the freedom to solve their own cases amongst themselves. Because of this, these Corinthian Christians had no reason to go to a pagan court to sort out the grievance that they had against each other.

Like the Jews, the Christians believed that God's Word was sufficient to meet all of their needs and to lead them into life and godliness. With Christ this truth was even more pronounced. The Word of God was sufficient, but it was no longer the Word written on a parchment; in Christ, the Word of God was written on their hearts. In Christ they had every resource to come to a God-honoring solution.

One of the main reasons to take another Christian to the pagan courts was that you were more likely to get a vindictive judgment that would allow one to take advantage of another. If you submitted your case before believers and God's Word, one may not receive the selfish verdict that one desired. Instead they may receive a ruling that was more based on love, grace, forgiveness and reconciliation.

The Greeks and Romans had their own processes for solving grievances. The first process was a private arbitration. Each party was given a private arbitrator. These two persons met with a neutral third party. The three were supposed to resolve the problem. If these three could not resolve the problem, then the case was turned over to the Forty. The Forty assigned two public arbitrators. These two would be selected from the city citizens who were 60 years old. They were expected to be prepared to serve the city in this capacity of public arbitrator the duration of their 60<sup>th</sup> year. Any man chosen had to act as a public arbitrator, whether he liked it or not.

If the public arbitrators were not able to bring a resolution and the case involved less than 50 euros, then it would be referred to a jury court which was made up of 201 citizens. If the case involved over 50 euros, then the jury would be made up of 401 citizens. There were some cases where the jury could be as large as 1,000 to even 6,000 citizens. The juries were made up of citizens of the city who were over 30 years of age.

Because of this process, in a Greek city every man had become a lawyer of sorts. He had very likely listened to and even decided many cases, even as a jurist. For the Greeks, court cases were so common that they became a source of entertainment and rhetoric. The Greeks were famous for their legal processes, and this type of filing grievances and seeking damages from another was a part of the Greek culture. It was an antagonistic and selfish culture that sought to win at all cost, regardless of the loss of the other party.

This was the problem. Some in the church of Corinth had put their faith in Jesus, entered into the church family, but then brought the Corinthian culture in with them. When they had grievances against another member of the church, they were taking them to the pagan courts to prove their point and make them pay. Others were bringing in their culture of drunkenness, others their culture of sexual immorality, others their culture of division and insecurity. When we bring the culture of the world into the church, the church will lose its power and any possibility of being set apart for the glory of God.

Yes, we each have been affected by the cultures that we come from, but once we become part of the family of God we become part of a new culture, a biblical culture, an eternal culture. A culture that is determined by God's Word and the Holy Spirit working within us. We have now become a

citizen of heaven, a part of the family of God. The Word of God begins to filter and convict our ways of living and ways of thinking that must be put aside. In the church we are a people of God that are supposed to be shaped into a biblical culture. God is doing something new in our midst. Some of the characteristics of our past culture will be permitted to enter, because they are in line with the Word of God. Other characteristics of our past culture will have to be put aside, because they are not in line with the culture that God is creating in the midst of His people. For this to happen in our church we must each realize our new identity is not in the country we come from, the education that we have, the amount of money in our bank account, or the color of our skin. God is doing something new in us and this will require that the culture that we cling to is the culture of Christ. This was one of the main problems of the Corinthian church.

***<sup>2</sup> Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!***

What made the issue of suing one another even more absurd was the fact that taking their cases before pagan courts implied that within God's people and God's Word the church did not have the resources to bring about a resolution. Did those in the church in Corinth not realize that we will sit with Christ on His throne (Revelation 3:21)? That he who conquers and who keeps His works until the end, to him He will give authority over the nations (Revelation 2:26)? That we will even judge angels? If they are to sit with Christ on His throne, somehow reign with Him over the nations and judge angels, then why would they ever need to submit themselves to malicious court cases against one another under the ruling of pagan judges who do not know the ways of God, the wisdom of God and the Spirit of God?

***<sup>4</sup> So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? <sup>5</sup> I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, <sup>6</sup> but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?***

Paul continues to present his case. Why are they taking their cases before worldly judges who do not know the wisdom of God? He then challenges them. Is there no one in their midst mature enough to help mediate between two believers and bring a God-honoring resolution? It appears not. Because of this they proceed to take each other to court, and to make matters worse, they go to court with unbelievers watching. This issue was initially only between people of the church, now it is becoming a stumbling block to non-believers, outside the church, who are observing the Christians taking each other to court.

***<sup>7</sup> To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? <sup>8</sup> But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!***

For them to have lawsuits against each other already showed that they had forgotten the gospel. They had forgotten the forgiveness, provision and reconciliation that is found in Christ. Self had raised its ugly head and fighting for one's rights had become more important than loving one another. Seeking to win and get one's way had trumped glorifying God in all things and showing the love of Christ to a dying world.

But how can this be in the family of God? As believers, we function on love and forgiveness, not revenge and recompense. As Christians we should prefer to suffer wrong than to come against another brother and ruin the testimony of Christ. When faced with the decision of fighting for our rights and ruining our testimony or being defrauded, we should be willing to suffer loss for the sake of God's glory.

If this is so, then why are we so vengeful when we have been wronged? Because we have forgotten the promises and commands of scripture. Die to self. Love your neighbor. Glorify God in all things. ***"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy"*** (Matthew 5:7). Vengeance is the Lord's. Only God is holy to judge. God is our Provider, Protector and the Love of our Souls. God is our Defender. At salvation we lay down all of our rights and trust Christ to be our Advocate and the Meeter of our needs. We no longer have to make a name for ourselves. We now rest in the care of our heavenly Father. We look at the log in our own eye before thinking of the speck in the eye of our foe. We see the value of things eternal, not on the short-lived present personal gain. We are dead and Christ is alive in us.

As Paul has made clear in the previous verses, there is no longer a need to bolster our significance or defend our own rights or win so that another loses. We are in Christ and He is in us. We are loved unconditionally, forever.

So why might the Corinthians have been taking each other to court? For justice! For honor! For financial benefit! For revenge! For vindication! But only Christ is righteous to judge this case and the two parties involved in it. For honor, but is not all glory to go to Christ? Are we not to decrease so that God will increase in our lives? For financial justice and provision, but ultimately is God not our Provider? Would He ever call us to defend ourselves in pagan courts for financial gain at the expense of His glory? For justice, but is not vengeance God's? Will He not have the final say in every case?

When we take our eyes off of Christ we stumble in so many ways. When we do not trust Him fully we return to the life of a homeless street child, fighting amongst ourselves and putting ourselves in the place of authority, judge and provider. But that is not right for the children of God. We are to live for God's glory, for the evangelism of the watching world and for the advancement of our own spiritual maturity.

The Bible does not say that we cannot be involved in any court proceedings. There are other times we might need to be involved in a court case with our work or for other reasons. Paul's main focus is that it should never be necessary when seeking reconciliation between two believers.

Paul then ends with two reminders.

***<sup>9</sup> Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.***

Paul reminds them that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul then gives a list of unrighteousness so that those who are taking their brothers to court can see the gravity of their sin. He speaks mainly in terms of identity. In Christ we are new, in Christ we no longer are known for what we've done, but by whose we are.

***<sup>11</sup> And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.***

The testimony of Christianity lay in its changed lives. Paul is reminding his listeners of who they were. Obedience is possible. For those in Christ, their sinful patterns are now being put away. They are now counted as righteous and can now trust in God to bring this righteousness to light in their personal lives.

May we each quiet our hearts. Wait on God's judgment. And trust that He will make all things right.

### **Discussion questions:**

- 1.** What in this lesson did you find interesting?
- 2.** Have you ever had a time that someone sinned against you and you had a difficult time reconciling with them?
- 3.** As a church we are to strive to have a biblical culture. Is there anything from your home culture that might need to be eliminated as we seek to make this possible?
- 4.** In 1 Corinthians 6:7 it says, *"To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you."* How would you say this verse in your own words?
- 5.** Paul suggests that his readers would *"rather suffer wrong"*. When we look back at verse 7 what does Paul mean by this phrase?
- 6.** What do you think God wants you to remember from this lesson?