

Lawsuits between Christians

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

When you get a letter that's only 13 sentences long, and some of them fairly brief, you might call it short and sweet. But you can hardly call a letter that begins with the words **"Dare any of you"** particularly sweet.

No, Paul was upset, and you couldn't blame him.

As we have been studying the book of 1 Corinthians, it has become painfully evident that the assembly had caved in to worldly influences.

And there could hardly be a more sinful place to emulate than the Greek city of Corinth.

One of its landmarks was the temple of Aphrodite, with a religion that blatantly promoted sexual immorality.

And in tandem with the sins of the flesh, there was a profusion of worldly philosophies.

Even today, the teachings of the Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle are the dubious foundation of our Western philosophy.

Yes, sin and worldly philosophy had formed a toxic mix, and now it was seeping into the church.

And not only had the world entered the church, but the church had entered the world.

And by that I mean there was sin in the assembly, sin that had been unchallenged, and sin that was now the talk of the town.

1 Corinthians 5:1-2 **"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles."**

Yes, **"It is actually reported,"** or as the King James translates it---**"It is reported commonly."**

What a testimony!

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And now, as we begin Chapter 6, the Christians are fighting each other *in public*.

No wonder Paul began this chapter with the words---**"Dare any of you!"**

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Now, I don't want to give the impression that 1 Corinthians is anything less than the inspired Word of God.

Nevertheless, as is often the case, not only does God use the hand of the writer, but He also uses his heart.

Yes, Paul was upset, and there would be no beating around the bush.

In fact, he covered this whole situation in a mere 8 verses.

1 Corinthians 6:1-8 **"Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?"** 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? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? If then you have

judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? 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? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! 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? No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and *you do these things to your brethren!*"

So, there you have it, believers should settle their differences between themselves.

And having read these 8 verses, I can
announce a closing hymn and we can all go
home early.

Or perhaps, as is so typical of the friendly
people in Heidelberg, we can spend a
little more time visiting.

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Well, maybe that wouldn't be a good idea.

You see, if we take a second look, we will
find that there is a great deal more in
these 8 verses than we first expected.

For one thing, it's a little perplexing how
Paul handled the situation.

Wasn't he blaming the wrong people?

Let's look at V1 for instance---"**Dare any of
you, having a matter against another, go
to law before the unrighteous, and not
before the saints?"**

Yes, it's the unfortunate brother that has
already been ill-used who is under fire.

Was that fair?

And then Paul turns his attention to the assembly!

V5 **"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?"**

So it appears that the only one that wasn't in hot water was the man who caused the trouble in the first place.

Well, actually, we really don't know if he was the problem.

At this point, it's just a matter between two brethren.

Maybe they're both wrong.

However, assuming that there was a guilty party, why wasn't Paul focusing on him?

Actually, he was focusing *on him*, but not in the way you might expect.

Now I've got you thoroughly confused,
haven't I?

So, let's go back to the beginning and take
it slowly.

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First of all, I think we can assume that if
someone has been offended, then there
must have been an *offender*.

And I think we know Paul well enough to
realize that he wouldn't excuse such a
trespass.

No, he wasn't excusing the offender; he was
simply dealing with a more serious
offence.

He was dealing with a brother who had hauled
up a fellow believer before the local
magistrates.

So what's wrong with that?

Well, it's wrong for a variety of reasons,
which we will discover in a few minutes.

First of all, in his anger, he has forgotten Jesus' words that were spoken in the upper room.

John 13:34-35 **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."**

The flip side of the coin, and the one the Corinthian believers seemed to be on, is found in 1 John 2: 9, **"---He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now."**

But you say, What if my brother really wronged me; don't I have any recourse in the matter?

Well, yes, you do.

And the very One Who said **"love one another"** has been very specific about that.

In Matthew 18:15-17 Jesus said---"**Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. "But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'** "And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector."

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So, let's look at the implication of each of these steps in detail.

First of all, Jesus said "**if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.**"

And the operative word here is *alone*.

No, your first thought shouldn't be
retribution.

It should be *reconciliation*.

True, your brother has wronged you.

He might have acted in jealousy, greed, or
even hate.

There might be money involved, and that's
serious.

And you can take the word of a Scotchman on
that who doesn't give his brass away that
freely.

Yes, he *has* sinned, but at this point in
time, there is still room for *repentance*.

You haven't gone to your friends and said,
Watch out for that guy. You won't
believe what he's done to me.

No, you've gone to him in love as a brother
and confronted him - both with the wrong
he has done - and your willingness to
forgive.

If he repents and makes it right, then no harm has been done.

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And then Jesus says---"**But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.**"

Again, this second step is aimed at *reconciliation*.

Perhaps he will think more seriously about his actions and repent.

If that happens, then the testimony of Christ hasn't been blemished, nor has there been discord sown in the assembly.

And then Jesus said, and, by the way, so does Paul, your *final* resort is the local assembly---"**And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him**

be to you like a heathen and a tax collector."

Yes, the assembly is your last resort, and the public courts are no resort at all.

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At this point I must hasten to add that Paul was talking about the unsuitability of public courts to settle differences between believers.

Under any other circumstances, he upholds the local authorities, and he encourages Christians to do the same.

Romans 13:1 **"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God."**

And when, as a Roman citizen, he had been falsely accused by the Jews and detained for two years without trial, and when his

life had been secretly threatened for a second time, he appealed to the highest authority in Rome.

Acts 25:10-11 **"I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know. "For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar."**

So, no, Paul doesn't forbid a Christian going to law against an unbeliever to obtain justice.

And certainly, we can't expect a non-Christian to honour the decision of a Christian assembly.

So, why was Paul so upset with a believer who had taken his brother before the public court?

Well, I don't think his primary concern was that an injustice might be done, although that would certainly be a possibility. And certainly the word "**unrighteous**" that Paul used in V1 might lead us to that conclusion.

However, the same word that is translated "**unrighteous**" in this verse is also used in Acts 24:15 where it simply distinguishes between the saved and unsaved.

And probably that was his real concern.

If you call upon an unbeliever to settle your differences, you might be surprised with the results.

He is not familiar with, nor does he have any regard for, the Christian principles that you hold so dearly.

And for this same reason, you may end up doing untold harm to your Christian brother that you never intended.

And don't forget, a judge's decision is final.

So wouldn't it be better to have your differences settled by believers who are the recipients of God's mercy, have a knowledge of scripture, and have a tender conscience towards God?

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And the other problem with settling your differences in a public court is the very fact that it *is public*.

And that would have been doubly true in the case of the Corinthian believers.

You see, Corinth was under Greek law, and the local judges sat in what was known as the bema seat, which was located in the heart of the marketplace.

As a result, any squabbles between Christians would be public knowledge. And the Greeks found a good legal battle quite entertaining.

You might say it would be like the Judge Judy court hearings that were so popular on television.

I can almost hear one of those wicked old Corinthian sinners nudging his neighbour and saying, *Well, the Christians are at it again!*

What a blight on the cause of Christ, and what a testimony for an assembly who was supposed to be known for its love.

No wonder Paul was upset!

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So, what was the alternative?

Well, Paul left no doubt about that!

If *reconciliation* on a private basis had become impossible, then they were to bring it "**before the saints.**"

Actually, there are three areas in which the assembly, under the leadership of the elders, should be involved.

The *first one* is in the case of an unrepentant believer who is engaging in gross sin.

1 Corinthians 5:3-5 **"For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) [this is Paul speaking] him who has so done this deed.** [and then here we have it] **In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a**

one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

And it would appear, from Paul's words "**when you are gathered together,**" that the whole assembly would be involved in such a serious matter.

Certainly the elders would always be in charge, as they are the overseers of the flock.

Secondly, and this would be the particular responsibility of the elders, the assembly must be kept doctrinally pure.

Titus 1:7-11 "**For a bishop** (or an elder, and then his qualifications are given there in detail.)

And then dropping down to V9---**holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who**

contradict. For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain."

And *finally*, there is the situation that Paul was dealing with in this chapter, namely, the settling of personal disputes between believers.

In this case, it doesn't appear that Paul expected the entire assembly to be involved.

Notice his question in 1 Corinthians 6: 5---

"is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?"

So, although the elders would be ultimately responsible, Paul doesn't seem to be

against the appointment of a single individual, known for his wisdom, to act on their behalf.

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However, even in an extreme case when someone has to be put out of the assembly, there needs to be room for repentance and reconciliation, as outlined in 2 Corinthians 2:5-8.

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So, let's take a few moments to consider the qualifications of the local assembly that would equip them for such matters.

First of all, the Lord Jesus is the Head of the church.

And not only that, but He has promised, "---
where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

Also, the church is the only body on earth which is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, which, of course, includes the gifts of the Spirit, such as *wisdom* and *knowledge*.

Wouldn't wisdom and knowledge be beneficial in such cases?

And, as I have already mentioned, there is the solid framework of the Word of God that would provide the basis for sound judgment.

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And then Paul adds another dimension to the evaluation of the local assembly.

1 Corinthians 6:2-3 **"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? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?"**

Actually, I'm not convinced the Corinthians did know that, but Paul certainly thought they should.

And not only that, but **"Do you not know"** is an expression he used 10 times in this book, and 6 times in this very chapter.

In each case, he draws attention to an important *truth*, and then he makes an *application*.

For instance, he said ---**Do you not know that you are the temple of God---that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?---that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?---that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you---that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize,**" and so on, and then in each case, he makes the appropriate application.

Kind of like when your children are being
very wasteful and you say, *don't you know
that stuff costs money?*

Of course they know it costs money, and
that's why they should stop *wasting* it.

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So I'm not sure the Corinthian believers did
know they would judge the world and
angels - and possibly we don't know that
either - or at least haven't *thought*
about it that much.

Perhaps, as we look around at our brothers
and sisters this morning, we don't
realize the unusual *future* that awaits
them, and indeed that is ahead of *us*.

However, Paul definitely assures us that
this will be the case, and Jesus alluded
to such a possibility in one of His
parables.

I won't take time to read it all now, but basically it involved a nobleman who went into a far country to receive a kingdom. In his absence, he entrusted his servants with an equal amount of money to do business with.

Unfortunately, one of them did nothing at all, so we'll pass him by.

However, let's listen to the conversation that ensued between the Lord and his *faithful* servants.

It's found in Luke 19: 16-19---**"Then came the first, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned ten minas.' "And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.'**

As we all know, a parable is an *earthly* story with a *heavenly* meaning.

So, what is the meaning here?

Well, Jesus was teaching a very important principle.

It is the principle that faithful service will be *rewarded*, and in this case, *greatly* rewarded.

Can you imagine---*10 cities!*

Now, it's true that works are of no value in gaining our salvation.

That has already been accomplished by the finished work of Christ.

However, works *are* important, and *good* works will be rewarded.

And you will notice that the operative word in Jesus' parable was "**faithful**"---
"**because you were faithful in a very little**"

So it's not the talents and opportunities that the Lord has given you that determines your rewards, it's how faithful you have been in *using* them.

Of course, that which will be rewarded must also be *evaluated*.

And there will be a time for that also.

2 Corinthians 5:10 **"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."**

And as we will discover in just a moment, part of those rewards will involve a place of responsibility and authority in Christ's millennial kingdom, and throughout eternity.

Yes, just like those servants who were given authority over 5 or 10 cities, faithful

Christians will be put in places of
responsibility.

Oh, while I'm thinking about it, let me make
a small request.

If you happen to be put in charge of
Heidelberg----if you find yourself
completely in charge of the little
village of Heidelberg----don't put a
roundabout in the middle it.

1000 years is a long time to make people go
around in circles!

But seriously, our present performance,
under the direction of the Holy Spirit,
will determine our *future rewards* and
responsibilities in Christ's coming
kingdom.

I'm sure the disciples wondered about that,
but Peter was the only one who had enough
nerve to ask the question:

Matthew 19:27-28 **"Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."**

Yes, there will be rewards for faithful service.

And the disciples won't be the only ones to have a position of authority in His kingdom.

Listen to Jesus' words to the assembly in Thyatira:

Revelation 2:24-27 **"Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will**

put on you no other burden. "But hold fast what you have till I come. (This is Jesus speaking) "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations-- 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels' -- as I also have received from My Father;"

Hold fast till I come, overcome and keep My works until the end.

That sounds like works doesn't it?

Yes, it does, but not for salvation.

It is the record of those to whom Jesus

"will give power over the nations."

And again in Revelation 3: 21 Jesus says---

"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."

And with all this in mind, Paul encourages Timothy to *press on*.

2 Timothy 2:11-12 **"*This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.*"**

---not deny our salvation, but our *rewards*.

If Peter had been killed that awful night when he said **"I do not know the Man,"** he wouldn't have lost his salvation.

However, if he had continued to deny his Lord, if Satan had been able to sift him as wheat, he would have lost out on a great many *rewards*.

And that's why Jesus assured Peter---**"But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail."**

So then, there are *rewards* for faithful service.

And, yes, we really are *in training for reigning*.

And that's what Paul was referring to when he asked the question---"**Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?**"

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But what did he mean when he said---"**Do you not know that we shall judge angels?**"

Well, there's no doubt that the angels who followed Satan in his rebellion will be judged.

And there's no doubt that they are aware of it.

Remember the response of the two demon-possessed men in Matthew 8: 29---"**And suddenly they cried out, saying, "What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?"**"

Before what time?

Before the time when Jesus will judge the fallen angels (or demons) that were active in Satan's kingdom.

And apparently we will be involved in some way, for Paul asked the question---"**Do you not know that we shall judge angels?**"

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And then, having pointed to both of these facts, he draws his conclusion:

1 Corinthians 6:4-7 **"If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? (No doubt referring to the local judges) 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? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! Now therefore, it is already**

an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another."---and we'll stop right there.

So then, under the inspiration of God, Paul has examined the entire matter and gave his verdict---"**Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another.**"

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But, what if everything goes wrong?

What if, after you followed the proper procedure, you didn't get the justice you expected?

Is it now time to strike out and let the chips fall where they may?

Paul says no.

In fact, he had some very severe words to say to anyone who would contemplate such an action.

It's a pretty bitter pill to swallow, but
here it is:

Picking it up in the middle of verse 7---

**"Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why
do you not rather *let yourselves be
cheated?* No, you yourselves do wrong and
cheat, and *you do these things to your
brethren!*"**

Yes, the time has come to set priorities.

Is there a price that can be placed upon the
testimony of Jesus Christ and the
reputation of the local assembly?

Is there any issue that is worth turning
away a lost soul from the way of
salvation?

No, not one!

We must surrender our *rights* to the very One
Who took the punishment we so rightly
deserved.

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In closing, I would like to relate an incident in the life of the late Harry Ironside.

Do we all know who H. A. Ironside is?

For those who don't, Harry Ironside was born in Toronto to John and Sophie Ironside, who were identified with the Plymouth Brethren.

Both John, who was a bank teller, and his wife Sophie, were tremendous soul winners.

John would spend his evenings at street meetings, in the halls and in theaters, and on Sundays he would hold services in the park.

In the providence of God, John died at 27 from typhoid when his son was just two years old.

At the time of Harry's birth, he had been set aside as dead, while they turned

their attention to his dangerously ill mother.

40 minutes later, a nurse detected a pulse, and told the doctor, who ordered the infant to be put in a tub of hot water.

Harry recovered to become one of the greatest Bible teachers we have ever seen, and the author of over 80 books.

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Ray Stedman recalls an incident in Harry's life that his friend told him about when they were traveling together.

When Harry was a boy of about eight years old, his mother took him to a meeting of the Brethren.

They were discussing some sort of difficulty among themselves.

Evidently one of the members was convinced that a terrible injustice had been done to him by others in the assembly.

Young Harry didn't know what their differences were, but it was clear that the company was deeply disturbed.

And he will never forget how one man stood up, and shaking his fist, said "I don't care what the rest of you do, I want my rights, that all. I just want my rights."

There was an old Scottish brother, half deaf, sitting in the front row.

He cupped his hand behind his ear, and said "Aye brother, what's that you say?"

The man answered "Well, all I said was, I want my rights, that's all."

The old man replied, "*Your rights brother, is that what you want, your rights?*

Well, the Lord Jesus didn't come to get His rights, He came to get His wrongs, and He got them."

Harry said, he would never forget how that fellow stood transfixed for a little while, and then he dropped his head and said to them all---"You're right, brother.

You're right.

Settle it any way you like."

And in a few minutes, the whole thing was settled.