

Legal Dispute Among Christians



1 Corinthians 6:1-8 TEXT, EXPOSITION AND PRACTICAL HELPS

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THE MORAL LAXITY IN THE CHURCH, 1 Corinthians 5:1-6:20

A Case of Legal Dispute, 1 Corinthians 6:1-8

1. The legal dispute should be settled by saints (1 Cor. 6:1).
2. The saints have the highest exalted authority (1 Cor. 6:2).
3. The standards of Christians are different from the standards of the world (1 Cor. 6:4).
4. The great Christian principle: the believer ought to suffer wrong rather than do wrong (1 Cor. 6:6).

I am going to take the liberty of providing you with the version of the Bible known as the **The Message** to allow you to see more clearly what **1 Corinthians 6:1-8** is saying to us today.

1 Corinthians 6:1-8 (MSG)

¹ And how dare you take each other to court! When you think you have been wronged, does it make any sense to go before a court that knows nothing of God's ways instead of a family of Christians?

² The day is coming when the world is going to stand before a jury made up of Christians. If someday you are going to rule on the world's fate, wouldn't it be a good idea to practice on some of these smaller cases?

³ Why, we're even going to judge angels! So why not these everyday affairs?

⁴ As these disagreements and wrongs surface, why would you ever entrust them to the judgment of people you don't trust in any other way?

⁵ I say this as bluntly as I can to wake you up to the stupidity of what you're doing. Is it possible that there isn't one levelheaded person among you who can make fair decisions when disagreements and disputes come up? I don't believe it.

⁶ And here you are taking each other to court before people who don't even believe in God! How can they render justice if they don't believe in the *God* of justice?

⁷ These court cases are an ugly blot on your community. Wouldn't it be far better to just take it, to let yourselves be wronged and forget it?

⁸ All you're doing is providing fuel for more wrong, more injustice, bringing more hurt to the people of your own spiritual family.

(1 Corinthians 6:1-8) Introduction--Legal Disputes: this passage deals *only with disputes between Christian brothers*. It says nothing about going to court against unbelievers, the heathen.

Note that Paul uses a progressive argument. He progresses from question to question, building reason upon reason until he reaches the great Christian principle itself: “the believer ought to suffer wrong rather than run the risk of doing wrong”.

1. **Question 1: Do you dare go before the unjust world instead of saints to settle legal matters between Christian brothers (v.1)?**
2. **Question 2: Do you not know your high and exalted authority (v.2-3)?**
3. **Question 3: Do you choose unbelievers as judges who have no standing in the church (v.4)?**
4. **Question 4: Is there not a wise man in the church (v.5-6)?**
5. **Question 5: Why not give in—suffer being cheated rather than running the risk of cheating a brother (v.7-8)?**

1. (1 Corinthians 6:1) Legal Suits— Court— Justice: the first question—do you dare go before the unjust world instead of saints to settle matters between Christian brothers?

The thought in the Greek is forceful: How dare you—you who are the saints of God—go to law before the unjust of the world!

Believers are not to be disputing and arguing over rights and authority over the things and possessions of this world. They are to be working and using what they earn for Christ and His cause to reach the masses of humanity who are lost and dying from starvation, disease, poverty, and sin.

This was not the case within the Corinthian church, however. The church was divided, and there were apparently some who had sought legal judgment against some others. Whether the judgment involved rights within the church or actual property, or some dispute over some matter between two or more individuals is not known. There was simply a problem of legal dispute, and the opposing parties had sought secular judgment.

Note that the two conflicting parties were believers; the secular judges were unbelievers. Note also that the secular judges are called "the unjust." This does not mean that the world's judges were legally unjust, that is, that the believers might not get a fair trial. It is only referring to unbelievers as a class of people who are unjust or unjustified before God. It is contrasting the church with the world, the believer with the unbeliever. Believers are to settle their disputes between themselves within their own Christian society and be governed by the life of Christ and the law of God. **In God's eyes it is wrong for *believers* to go to law against each other before the world's judges.**

There are at least three reasons why it is wrong.

1. Believers who settle differences before the world reproach and damage the name of Christ and the testimony of the church. There is no disputing this fact. It happens every time; there is no escape from the terrible tragedy: **the name of Christ is always hurt when believers *carry their differences* before the world.**

Thought 1. The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith (trust), meekness, and self-control; and it is the fruit of the Spirit that is so desperately needed by the world. But what the world receives from *disputing Christians* is anything but love and the fruit of God's Spirit. There is a devastating difference between the testimonies of peace and conflict, joy and tension, love and anger. Just picture the scene, the awfulness of the scene as God sees it: two believers, two people who really trust God, *standing before* a judge who rejects and rebels against God. And they are asking him to judge between them instead of asking God or some Christian leader to help them see the matter clearly. Just imagine what God thinks of the two conflicting brothers!

2. Believers who settle differences before the world fail the Lord and fail Him miserably. How? They fail to govern their affairs by the *life of Christ and the law of God*. They go before unbelievers who do not govern affairs by the law of Christ nor by the law of God. Believers are to live by Christ and His Word, not by the standards and rules of the world. Believers are to salt and permeate the world, not the other way around. Believers are to be the standard for the world; they are not to accept and live by the standards of the world.

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" ([2 Cor. 6:17-18](#)).

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" ([Galatians 6:2](#)).

3. Believers have both the Holy Spirit and Christ-centered leaders to help them determine God's wisdom. Every genuine believer is indwelt by the Spirit of God, and has leaders within his church who can give him spiritual counsel. God has given His Spirit to His people for the very purpose of guiding and teaching them. He has also given spiritual leaders for the same purpose. It is God's will for believers who have conflicts to seek the guidance of His Spirit and church.

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" ([James 1:5](#)).

"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" ([John 14:16-17](#)).

"But the comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" ([John 14:26](#)).

"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his....For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" ([Romans 8:9, 13](#)).

"Which thing also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" ([1 Cor. 2:13](#)).

"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" ([1 Cor. 6:19-20](#)).

"But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him" ([1 John 2:27](#)).

Thought 1. The church and its believers must begin to live as God and His Word instructs. **A different life-style must be seen;** a Christian life-style of love and purity, care and concern, discipline and godly justice must be held up ever so highly for the world to see. It is the only conceivable way the world can ever see real love and godly justice and have its desperate needs met. In particular the leaders of the church and its believers must surrender their lives and give all they have to live as God instructs. They are especially held accountable to see to it that the love and wisdom of God are ministered to His people.

"Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" ([Romans 13:8-10](#)).

2. (1 Corinthians 6:2-3) Reward— Believers, Position: the second question—do you not know your high and exalted authority?

These two verses state clearly that believers are to judge *all disputes* between themselves. They are to judge "the smallest matters" ([1 Cor. 6:2](#)) and the "things that pertain to this life" ([1 Cor. 6:3](#)).

There is one supreme reason believers are not to go before the world for judgment:

- a. Believers are to judge and govern the world. In fact, they are to even judge and govern angels in the next world.

Therefore, conflicting believers lower themselves, lose their dignity as saints, and walk out of their exalted position when they secure a verdict from the world.

1. The word "**judge**" means the right and power to govern, administer affairs, rule, hold authority, supervise, oversee, and judge. This glorious right and power is to be given to the believer when Christ returns to rule and govern the whole universe. Paul is telling believers that they shall direct and oversee the world and angels. Christ told the apostles that they shall govern and oversee Israel ([Matthew 10:28](#)). The assignment of responsibility, duty, and work is taught throughout Scripture. There is to be *judging*, that is, governing, supervision, and oversight throughout eternity. All this activity and responsibility is, of course, for and under Christ.

For some unknown reason we so often picture *eternal life* as some dreamy sleep or semi-conscious type of existence or some future existence that puts us on a fluffy cloud. Eternal life is often pictured as floating around in an eternal state of inactivity. Why man cannot accept the simple statement of Christ that life is to be eternal is difficult to understand. Eternal life is life that goes on and on. There is, however, one basic difference: life shall be perfected, perfected in body, mind, and spirit. It is life lived in the midst of a new heaven and earth (perfected)—life lived before Christ and responsible to Christ in all that is assigned ([John 3:16](#); [John 5:24](#); [Romans 8:19-23](#); [2 Peter 3:9-18](#); [1 John 5:11-13](#); [Rev. 21:1](#)).

2. The rule and reign of believers is a fact. It is a fact so sure and certain that the Bible speaks of it in the present. The words "**the world shall be judged by you**" are literally "**is being judged.**" The rule and reign of the believer is an absolute fact.

"And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" ([Matthew 19:28](#)).

"And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father" ([Matthew 20:23](#)).

"That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" ([Luke 22:30](#)).

"For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" ([John 5:22](#)).

"And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" ([Romans 8:17](#)).

"And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" ([Ephes. 2:6-7](#)).

"If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us" ([2 Tim. 2:12](#)).

"For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak. But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" ([Hebrews 2:5-9](#)).

"And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father" ([Rev. 2:26-27](#)).

"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" ([Rev. 20:4](#)).

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away" ([Rev. 21:1](#)).

"And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counselors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city" ([Isaiah 1:26](#)).

"For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind" ([Isaiah 65:17](#)).

"Until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom" ([Daniel 7:22](#)).

3. ([1 Corinthians 6:4](#)) *Church, Problems*: the third question—do you choose unbelievers as judges?

In the Greek this sentence is emphatic:

The unbelievers are.....

1. as nothing in the church.
2. of no account in judging matters in the church.
3. not held in high esteem within the church.

4. of no standing in the church.

The unbelievers do not live by the life of Christ nor by the standards of God. How then can they stand before believers and judge matters in *the spirit of Christ and by God's standards*? Just think how far these Corinthian believers had fallen from their exalted position given them in Christ! Just think how far some believers and churches have fallen in our day from their exalted position in Christ Jesus our Lord!

4. (1 Corinthians 6:5-6) Church, Problems: the fourth question—is there not a wise man in the church?

The need is for shame and embarrassment. Anyone who would walk off from an exalted position and turn away from the wisdom of God in order to secure advice from a person with no standing in God's government needs to be shamed. The question is dramatic and pointed: is there not a single wise man among you? No, not even one that can arbitrate and give a simple judgment when conflicts arise?

The thrust is twofold:

1. There is no excuse for conflict among brothers, for believers going to law against one another.
2. There is especially no excuse for conflicting brothers going to law before the unbelievers of the world.

"For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" (1 Cor. 3:3).

"But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers" (1 Cor. 6:6).

"But now are they many members, yet but one body" (1 Cor. 12:20).

"I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord" (Phil. 4:2).

5. (1 Corinthians 6:7-8) Church, Problems: the fifth question—why not give in? Why not suffer being wronged and cheated rather than running the risk of wronging and cheating a brother?

Note two points.

1. The word "fault" means defeat. The very fact of engaging in legal disputes is a defeat, clear evidence of hurt and damage. Just think of who is hurt and damaged when believers engage in legal disputes:
 - a. The parties themselves suffer pain, tension, anger, and an innumerable list of other hurtful emotions.
 - b. The church suffers the loss of its testimony for Christ and the pain of being known as hypocritical.

- c. The unbelievers suffer by being turned off by those who profess love, joy, and peace, and yet who show the very opposite. They suffer having their opportunity to be saved erased even more. How many unbelievers have been doomed because of the irresponsible behavior of believers before the world?
- d. Christ suffers because His people are not holding high the banner of His witness, but rather are causing it to be distasteful and cursed.

What an indictment against any believer who causes so much suffering!

"And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also" ([Luke 6:29](#)).

"Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men" ([Romans 12:17](#)).

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)).

"Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing" ([1 Peter 3:9](#)).

"Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the LORD" ([Leviticus 19:18](#)).

"Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the LORD, and he shall save thee" ([Proverbs 20:22](#)).

"Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work" ([Proverbs 24:29](#)).

2. Some of the Corinthian believers were guilty ([1 Cor. 6:8](#)). They wanted their rights and more. They wanted some of the things which their brothers had; therefore, they went after them. **Note:** they did not steal them outrightly; they sought them by legal means. They used the legal system of the world to *defraud* their brothers. The world called it legal, but it was cheating and stealing to God. It was sin, a terrible injustice.

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess" ([Matthew 23:25](#)).

"Better is a little with righteousness, than great revenues without right" ([Proverbs 16:8](#)).

"The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death" ([Proverbs 21:6](#)).

"As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool" ([Jeremiah 17:11](#)).