

## Trivial Cases Before Unrighteous Judges Are Very Damaging

1 Corinthians 6:1-8

*This portion comes at the following point in the outline.*

- II. Paul's response to reports of division (1:10-6:20).
  - A. A church divided, internally and against Paul (1:10-4:21).
  - B. Sexual immorality and litigation: how Paul's authority, the gospel, and the wisdom of God apply to real issues (5:1-6:20).
    1. The incestuous man (5:1-13).
    2. Lawsuits against each other (6:1-11).
    3. Sexual immorality with prostitutes (6:12-20).

### Introduction

*After dealing with the matter of the incestuous man and church discipline, in chapter 6 Paul brings up two more issues: suing one another and visiting prostitutes. He may be working through the things he has heard about from Chloe's household (1:11), before he deals with issues the Corinthians have asked about in their letter (7:1).*

*In verses 1-8, he addresses lawsuits among believers. There seem to be multiple cases of disputes within the Corinthian church community, and some of the believers are suing each other in the secular court system.*

*The Corinthians have made a mess of things by neglecting their responsibility to judge. They have failed to judge sin within the church by not disciplining the so-called brother (5:11-13). Here, they have failed to take responsibility for judging disputes within the church, choosing instead to involve secular courts.*

### Verses

<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? <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! <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? <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!

### Questions

1. General.
  - a. What are your initial observations, thoughts, or questions about the passage?
  - b. How would you briefly describe the passage?
    - Paul rebukes the Corinthians because of their practice of settling disputes between each other in secular courts rather than within the church. He bases it in our future rule with Christ, the assumed wisdom of at least some in the church, and most of all, the way of grace that should mark believers, both the offender and the offended.
2. Specific Verses.
  - a. The issue is pretty straightforward. What do verses 1, 4, and 6 say is happening? Though there are no details in the verses (except maybe "defrauding" in vs. 8, so possibly property or money), can you think of any examples of what this might look like in real life?

- Read the verses.
  - There could be several examples.
- b. For the sake of the length of the study, to understand the whole passage, here's a summary of some of the specifics Paul addresses:
- 1) Vs. 1, 4, 6 - The Corinthians are taking disputes to secular courts, and this is not right.
  - 2) Vs. 2-3 - We will participate in the final judgment and share in Christ's rule (2 Ti. 2:12; Re. 20:4). This informs our ability in the church setting to settle disputes. We aren't "there" yet, but God gives us wisdom and discernment now, for we have the knowledge of God, the mind of Christ, and the presence of the Spirit.
  - 3) Vs. 5 - The specific way to deal with this is with wise and discerning people in the church.
- c. Discuss if you think Paul is comprehensively forbidding any sort of secular court when two Christians are involved.
- Criminal cases could be one example. Others could be when every other option has been exhausted. Yet, as the ESV Study Bible says, "It is clear that disputes between believers need to be handled with the utmost care, in a wise and godly manner before the watching world, whenever possible under the disciplinary authority of the church, and with the objective counsel of mature Christians."
- d. Read Matthew 18:15-20. How does this relate to the passage?
- Matthew 18:15-20 has a few similarities. It is a sin of one believer against another. Also, the way to handle it is within the church, which connects to this passage and the reality of spiritual wisdom and discernment.
- e. Verses 7-8 apply the gospel to the circumstance. What does Paul say here that pertains to either party?
- Brothers or sisters in Christ should not be doing what the offending parties are doing here, because of who we are, and because of our testimony. We should not sin against others, and we should respond with grace and wisdom when sinned against.
- f. Discuss why you think litigation within the church is so destructive.
- These answers are taken from "1 Corinthians for You," by Andrew Wilson.
  - Vs. 1 (implied) - the disunity and pain caused when one person takes another to court, and the other church members get drawn into taking sides, is incalculable.
  - Vs. 2-4 - It implies that the judgments of unbelievers are more valuable than the judgments of the church, when in reality the reverse is true. Surely a matter like this - and we are not told what it is, but it could be a wealthier member throwing their legal weight around at the expense of a poorer one - is within their capability. Yet here they are, outsourcing judgment to people "whose way of life is scorned in the church" (1 Corinthians 6:4). Paul cannot believe it.
  - Vs. 5-6 - It brings shame as the world sees all the church's dirty laundry. Given how wise you all are, Paul says with more than a hint of sarcasm, you would think that someone might be wise enough to sort this all out (vs. 5). Instead, you are airing all your squabbles "in front of unbelievers" (vs. 6) and showing them just how divided and selfish you are.
  - Vs. 7-8 - Suing each other shows that you care more about being vindicated in court, with the money or social reward which that brings, than you do about your brothers and sisters. Surely, Paul is saying, if you were looking at this through the lens of the cross, you would rather be cheated than divided. Isn't it better to be defrauded in worldly terms than defeated in spiritual terms? You are so concerned not to lose out to a wrongdoer that you have become wrongdoers yourselves.
- g. Practically, what steps could you take if you had a dispute with a fellow believer - either within your church or denomination or outside of it??
- There will be different answers.