

# 1 Corinthians 6:1-8

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[ 0 : 00 ]     One of you has a grievance against one another. Does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? 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? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life?

So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you who is wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers?

But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong?

Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud, even to your own brothers. This is the word of the Lord. As we have been traveling through 1 Corinthians together, we saw in the first four chapters a long argument about wisdom and folly.

[ 1 : 13 ]     According to Chloe's reports, the Corinthian church had stunted their growth into spiritual maturity by being proud, competitive, ostentatious people.

The chief symptom of which was division. They had sought after the wisdom of the world, and they had taken to measuring their own value and the value of each other's according to the ways of the world.

They had forsaken God's true wisdom, the folly of the cross, and subsequently, Paul and his gospel as well. So starting with chapter 5 last week, Paul turned to specific examples.

In last week's text, we saw an argument about one man's sexual sin and the underlying problem of the church's tolerance of that sin. Like a child who doesn't know any better, they had taken to something of which they should be ashamed, something they should be ashamed of, and had become proud of it.

So as we turn to chapter 6, verses 1 through 8, we see a second specific example and a second underlying church-wide problem. If you have your Bible with you, we'll be looking at 1 Corinthians 6, 1 through 8.

[ 2 : 31 ]     Three points. A further example, another underlying problem, and a radical remedy. First, the example shows in verse 1.

When one of you has a grievance against one another, does he dare to go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Apparently, some of the Corinthian Christians had been taking other Christians to the secular courts.

I want to be clear about what this is and what this is not. First, this is not an argument that all matters of dispute should be kept internal to the church.

For example, say a particular church has a problem with pedophilia, the extent of which is largely unknown. This is not an argument for keeping criminal problems an internal matter.

This section of scripture far too many times has been used to cover up serious crimes. And in matters of criminal procedure, Paul is willing, in Acts 28, for example, to appeal to the secular authorities against his Jewish brethren.

[ 3 : 38 ] And in Romans 13, 1 to 7, he very much affirms the secular criminal justice system. But in 1 Corinthians 6, however, he uses the language of civil lawsuits.

Second, he is clearly referring to lawsuits among believers. While the courts were secular, and possibly even the council were secular, the parties in the suits were Christians.

He specifically refers to the parties as brethren in verses 5 and 6, and then again at the end of verse 8. Third, these are trivial matters.

These are small matters. The least important or insignificant matters. Paul has actually already used this word trivial back in chapter 4, verse 3.

We saw in that verse that Paul viewed it as a small matter, a trivial thing, that the Corinthian church should judge him inadequate because he, in weakness and without pretense, he preached a crucified Christ.

[ 4 : 39 ] In fact, there, he added a somewhat otherwise unconnected phrase. It would be a small thing that he should be judged by any human court, which actually lays a groundwork for our text.

When he says that the Corinthian church is incompetent to judge trivial matters in chapter 6, verse 3, I think he may have, using some irony, had their judgment of him in view.

So what exactly is the underlying problem? It seems to be a matter of attitude, a matter of how little they value each other.

We see this first in Paul's emphasis on the extent to which the Corinthian church will go to gain an advantage. Three times. Three times he mentions that they are taking trivial matters to secular courts rather than trying to work it out themselves.

Verse 1. Go to law before the unrighteous. Verse 4. Why do you lay the cases before those who have no standing in the church? Verse 6. And that before unbelievers.

[ 5 : 42 ] There are a limited number of reasons why someone would prefer to take an opponent to the secular court to litigate a dispute over working it out internally.

Very few reasons. Knowing that the bulk of cases in the Roman civil court system, actually if not all by definition, are fundamentally matters of monetary damages, and given what we have seen of the Corinthian church's propensities in the first five chapters, and what we will see of them later in this letter, the most intriguing reason is that of advantage.

They use the court system to their advantage. This is particularly evident in Paul's choice of word in verses 7 and 8, defraud, and we're going to come back to that.

Before we do, though, I want you to notice Paul's tone. It's one of mocking irony. He uses biting rhetorical questions and a chilling theological truth to demonstrate how backwards the Corinthians were.

As we've seen, he starts describing the problem in verse 1 and comes back to it in verses 4 to 7. But look at his digression, and I mean digression in the rhetorical sense, in verses 2 to 3.

[ 7 : 02 ] What he's saying is, As faithful Christians, O Corinthian church, you are to have the role of participating in the judgment of the world with Christ after his return.

And not just the world, but even the angels. How in the world can you be trusted with this elevated, serious, eschatologically significant task?

You can't even settle minor disputes among yourselves. Something of a side note. Notice in particular that this is referring to the final judgment.

Paul's warning about judging those outside the church by the standards of the church in this present day still holds. That warning we saw in last week's text.

Theologically, the idea of Christians participating in the task of judging the world in the final judgment coheres perfectly with what Jesus taught in Matthew 19:28. The followers of Jesus will have a share in his authority over the 12 tribes of Israel.

[ 8 : 22 ] Or as Paul puts it in 2 Timothy 4, I'm sorry, 2 Timothy 2, verse 12. If we have died with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him.

If the Corinthians are to have a role in the judging, the judging of the world and even the angels, how much more shameful is it that they should be found incompetent to settle trivial disputes in the church?

Let alone judge the sin that Paul implores them to stop tolerating in the last chapter. He asks a wonderfully insulting question in verse 5.

Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough? Remember that key word wise. We saw it in chapters 1 and 2. The Corinthians fancied themselves wise by worldly standards.

How wise they must have been. Paul brings his argument to a disquieting conclusion. Twice stated in the first half of verse 7 and the last half of verse 8.

[ 9 : 25 ] The questions. To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. What's he saying?

Because you can't manage to stop putting your own advantage first, Corinthians. That you have lawsuits at all is a mark in the loss column. In verse 8.

But you yourselves wrong and defraud even your own brothers. So what are we to do? What's the Corinthian church to do? Paul outlines a radical remedy in the first half of verse 7.

It's embedded there in those rhetorical questions. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? There it is. Simple.

It's beautiful. Suffer the wrong, he says. Be defrauded. It's not as if Paul has not been preaching a gospel of weakness of a crucified Savior.

[ 10 : 22 ] And here it is. This is the heart of the gospel applied. Jesus Christ suffered the most severe wrong a human can face. And we will recite it together in a moment. For our sake, he was crucified under Pontius Pilate.

He suffered death and was buried. Notice it's right there in the creed. He suffered at the hands of a secular authority. He submitted himself to judgment by the unrighteous and unbelieving. And to what end?

The Apostles' Creed actually adds that he descended into hell. Did he deserve it? No. Not at all.

Ought we to be grateful that he did it? Yes. If you don't believe that, now is the time. But if you do believe that, then here is the point.

If because of his sacrifice, we are to join our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in judging the world and the angels from thrones in heaven in that last and dreadful day, how is it that we think we can deny his sacrifice in this life?

[ 11 : 26 ] How is it that we can put our own advantage, whatever our legal rights, ahead of the welfare of our brothers and sisters in Christ? Why not suffer the wrong?

Why not rather be defrauded? Why not? Especially in the trivial things. Have we learned nothing from our Savior? So, what about Chicago in 2013?

What about Holy Trinity Church? I mean, look around you. Think about the people who will be here in an hour. How can you follow Christ into seeking the advantage of your brothers and sisters?

What trivial disputes, what grudges, what small advantages over your brothers and sisters can you sacrifice on the altar, on the table from which we are about to eat?

Jesus Christ died for me. Jesus Christ died for me. And he died for you. He defeated death that we might be together with him in eternity.

[ 12 : 24 ] What little exploitations of each other do we want to take with us? Let me pray. Our Father in heaven, we come before you in awe of the way your Son gave himself and suffered the wrongs of an unbelieving world for our sake.

Give us the strength and the true wisdom to honor that sacrifice and how we treat each other. I pray this in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Amen.