



1 CORINTHIANS

1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-11

INTRODUCTION

In 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, Paul rebuked the church for its failure to deal seriously with the sin of the sexually immoral man in their midst. He concluded by saying that churches are responsible to pass judgment among themselves. In 6:1-11, Paul expands on this topic and rebukes them for “outsourcing” judgment to unbelieving courts.

MAIN POINT

Disputes between believers should be handled within the context of a local church with gospel principles.

REFLECT

Matters of sexuality dominate 1 Corinthians 5-7 which can make this section on litigation feel a bit out of place. Christians suing one another is something that needs to be addressed, sure, but why here?

In chapter 5 Paul argued that believers should render judgments among themselves, knowing that even a little bit of leaven (unrepentant sin) will grow to infect the whole church. Churches ought to uphold the name and character of Christ among those who claim to be his disciples and not concern themselves with judging those outside the church (5:12-13). This leads to a broader principle: churches are responsible and equipped to handle *all* kinds of disputes among their members.

So when Paul hears that believers in Corinth are taking each other to court, delegating the church’s role to unbelieving judges, he’s irate. He takes it for granted that “grievance[s]” will happen in the church (v. 1), but like in chapter 5, he’s bothered by

how the church has mishandled these grievances and compromised their witness to the surrounding culture.

Paul proceeds to remind them (“do you not know” – three times in this section) that although Christians should not judge unbelievers now (5:12), at the end of time they will help judge the unbelieving world as well as angels. Note the contrast: “If believers will participate in something as weighty as the end-time judgment, then how is it that they cannot judge everyday matters pertaining to this life?”¹ With thick sarcasm Paul marvels that among this church that thought itself so wise there is no one wise enough to settle everyday disputes (vv. 5-6).

For the sake of brotherly love and for the gospel, Christians should “rather suffer wrong” and “be defrauded” than to sue each other (v. 7; Matt. 5:39-42; 1 Pet. 2:23). No one “wins” by going to court. For a culture (and church) obsessed with asserting its rights, this must have been hard for the Corinthians to hear. But Christlike love must be willing to forsake one’s rights for the good of others (see Phil. 2:5-11).

In selfishly clinging to their rights, the Corinthians were behaving just like the world around them that had no share in the Kingdom of God (vv. 9-10). They were conforming to the very lifestyle they had come out of and were now destined to help judge at the end of time. Using the strongest possible terms to contrast the Corinthians’ former way of life with their new life in Christ, Paul urges them to become what they are (v. 11).

- Why is it difficult to “turn the other cheek” when you feel you’ve been wronged, even by another believer?
- Why should disputes between Christians be handled within the church? In what way are secular courts not adequate for such disputes?
- How would you articulate the contrast between your former way of life and your current standing before God? Spend time thanking God for his mercy on you.

MEMORIZE

1 Corinthians 6:11 – *“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.”*

¹ Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, p. 143