

11. God's way over ours

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According to the webpage of the Federal Judicial Caseload Statistics 2017, the U.S. District Courts have 449,863 civil lawsuit cases, not including criminal cases, nor does this include the state and city courts. We live in a lawsuit-crazed society. In this country, there are 1.34 million lawyers.

What we see today is nothing new. In ancient Greece, home of the world's first democracy, the courts were brimming with activity. According to William Barclay, 20th century theologian and Greek scholar, "the ancient Greek people loved law suits. The law courts were one of their chief entertainments. In a Greek city, every man was more or less a lawyer and spent a very great part of his time either deciding or listening to law cases." It sounds like Washington, D.C.

Corinth, that was an international trade center and a metropolitan city, was known as the lawsuit capital of Greece. Unfortunately, the church in Corinth also became contaminated by the same obsession that still flourishes in Christian circles today.

In 2007, the founder of Calvary Chapels, the late pastor Chuck Smith filed a lawsuit against another Calvary Chapel pastor Mike Kestler of Twin Falls, ID over the Calvary Satellite Network. Did these two pastors know the Word of God? Of course, they did. They were teachers of the Bible. Did they obey 1 Corinthians chapter 6 from the Word of God regarding the lawsuit? Absolutely not. The study we are going to do is not about having a lawsuit or not. It is about putting God's way over ours.

A. SUE, SUE, SUE

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

Unbelievers of Corinth must have had a field day watching these Christians call each other to the witness stand. Unlike today's court room, the Greek judges sat in what was known as the "Bema Seat" of the civil magistrate, which was located in the heart of the marketplace. Because Greek culture found a good legal battle entertaining, anyone's lawsuit soon became public knowledge. We have a similar kind of thing on TV – "The People's Court" and "Judge Judy".

"Unrighteous" in this verse is literally unjust, in the sense of "not justified before God, not saved." It isn't that Corinthian judges were necessarily bad judges, but they were not believers of Jesus Christ.

In speaking of Christians taking other Christians to court, the apostle Paul does not specify any criminal cases because he teaches elsewhere that the criminal cases must be handled by the government.

Paul's anger against the Corinthian Christians had nothing to do with any mistrust in the courts' integrity or capability, nor was he against the government. But his concern is for the believers who use the public court system itself as a platform for their squabbles. When this happens, the witness of the church is weakened and unbelievers scoff and jeer Christianity, ultimately our Lord Jesus.

I am going to sidetrack here for a moment to talk about Christian divorce briefly. I am not going to in details because we will study them later in this Book.

If you and your spouse are both Christians, please do everything within your power to make your marriage work by recommitting yourselves to the Lord first and to one another. Unless you have a biblical reason for a divorce, you should not divorce. "I don't love him or her anymore" is NOT a biblical reason.

And even if you have a biblical reason to divorce your spouse, do your best not to go to court if it is at all possible.

B. DO YOU NOT KNOW?

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? 3 Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?

If the handwritten letter by the apostle Paul could give us sound, we could hear the apostle's voice literally shouting to the immature Corinthian Christians at this point.

After the Second Coming of Christ, after 1,000 years of the Millennium Period on earth, the Lord will judge satan and his cohort demons.

Revelation 20:9b-10 And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. 10 The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

As we'll reign with Jesus Christ, we will judge the world, and even judge angels. The idea of Christians judging angels is fascinating. It does not mean we will sit in judgment of faithful angels, but we will have a part in judging evil angels. You might even get to meet those pesky demons who made your life miserable all those years. You will be like a kid who stands in front of your big muscular brother while you stare at the not-so-tough-any-more-bully who bothered you every lunch time at school. Yes, the time will come. Stick with Jesus, you are on the winning side.

The apostle Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians of their future position as well as what they have in Christ now. Certainly we, like the ancient saints of Corinth, have the right and obligation to resolve our own problems.

The destiny of redeemed men and women, to one day be higher than the angels, and to even sit in judgment of them, must have been a source of great annoyance to a certain former archangel in heaven, Lucifer. He did not want to serve an inferior creature now, and did not want to have that inferior creature be raised up higher than even him one day. So, when he has rebelled against God, and is determined to keep as much of humanity as possible from even sitting in judgment of himself. We can imagine the perverse, proud pleasure satan takes over every soul that goes to hell: "They won't sit in judgment over me!"

C. JUDGMENT ON THE JUDGES

1 Corinthians 6:4-5 If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? 5 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?

What Paul is saying here is that the least of the body of Christ is better than the unbelieving judge of the world, because that person has Christ in him.

Paul is not putting down unbelievers. He just wants to show that the unsaved don't have the spiritual insight available to believers. Asking an unbeliever for godly advice is like seeking marriage counseling from someone who's been divorced several times or entering a writing contest with judges who cannot read. The idea is not only absurd, but it's shameful.

The Corinthian Christians were proud of what they thought was their "wisdom." But their actions are showing that there was not a wise man among them.

It is wrong for Christians to take their civil suits to court. However, sometimes there are suits that are required by law to settle certain issues. That is not what Paul was referring to. It seems that the church members were at each other's throats, trying to get their way in the courts. The members suing each other had already lost. Even if some of them won their cases, they had caused a far greater loss in their disobedience to the Word of God. I am glad to see that there is a trend in our churches today for Christian lawyers to act as arbitrators in civil cases, and help to settle these matters out of court.

D. THE RIGHT WAY TO RESPOND

1 Corinthians 6:6-8 But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! 7 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? 8 No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!

The Corinthians were just like modern Americans: addicted to their own "rights." But in clinging to their rights so fiercely, they had already shown utter failure.

It would be better to accept wrong. It would be better to let yourselves be cheated than to defend your "rights" at the expense of God's glory and the higher good of His kingdom. Paul was calling this man to do something hard to do: to give up what he deserved for the higher good of God and His kingdom. But the man who was wronged should not think Paul was asking him to take a loss. No one who accepts wrong for the sake of God's glory will be a loser. It is a matter of trusting God who can bring good out of bad, if we trust Him to handle all things in our lives.

Genesis 50:20 But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.

There is no place for dishonest dealing by Christians, but how much less place is there for dishonest dealing among Christians. How many unbelievers have rejected the things of God and the fellowship of the saints because of dishonesty and cheating among Christians!

The bottom line of this court dispute among Christians was caused by lack of love among them. One guy cheats the other one for the sake of a little advantage for himself, the other gets ticked off by the matter, wants to sue the cheater instead of exercising the love of Christ. They were ignoring the second most important commandments of God's law: Loving our neighbors as ourselves. Better to lose money or possessions than to lose a brother and lose your testimony as well.

Please remember this at all times: What we learn from the Word of God should override what we want to do as long as we live, because it has the Final Authority; it has the Absolute Truth; and it is the voice of God.

E. THE REMINDER

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, 10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

The Word of God is so good. After the Lord chastises us through the apostle Paul, He also reminds us who we are in Christ by reminding us our position in Him to our inheritance. The point that our Lord is making here is that when we fight with fellow believers over earthly things, we cheapen our heavenly riches and act like unbelievers, who will never have such a blessing and legacy.

Just because it seems the right thing to sue another brother or sister in Christ in your mind, it doesn't mean that the Bible says OK. Just because the current society accepted fornication, adultery, and homosexuality as normal, it doesn't mean that the Bible says OK.

Those things what we are used to are behind us because we are no longer the same people. We are a new creation in Christ Jesus. If you are born again Christians, our sins were washed away by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. When the Father in heaven sees us, He sees the purity and holiness of Jesus, not sinners.

When we put our trust in Christ, we were made righteous positionally. God declared us righteous by justifying us because of the life and death of His Son. But justification also marks the beginning of sanctification – the process of our becoming righteous practically, being set apart to God by the Holy Spirit to grow out of sin and more fully in Christ.

We will never be perfectly sanctified until heaven, but we will move toward perfection. We will change. We will, by the power of the Holy Spirit, conform more and more to the will of God and live lives that are pleasing to Him.

Sin will always be present with us in this life, but its influence over us will be lessened over time in the process of sanctification.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) A lawsuit is permissible when the issue does not involve a local church or fellow Christian.

2) A lawsuit is permissible when our motive is not pride, but justice.

3) Please remember this at all times: What we learn from the Word of God should override what we want to do as long as we live, because it has the Final Authority; it has the Absolute Truth; and it is the voice of God.