

# A CASE OF LEGAL DISPUTE

## 1 CORINTHIANS 06:01–08

### ***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.

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

### ***Another Outline: A Case of Legal Dispute***

1. The legal dispute should be settled by saints (v. 1).
2. The saints have the highest exalted authority (v. 2).
3. The standards of Christians are different from the standards of the world (v. 4).
4. The great Christian principle: the believer ought to suffer wrong rather than do wrong (v. 6-8).

### ***I. 1 Corinthians 06:01 Legal Suits Before Secular Court***

The first question — do you dare go before a secular court 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 ungodly of the world!

Believers are not to be disputing and arguing over rights and authority nor 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.

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Note that the two conflicting parties were believers; the secular judges were unbelievers. Note also that the secular judges are called “the ungodly.” 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 ungodly 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, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness (trust), gentleness 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.

**2 Cor 6:17-18** “Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.” “I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”

**Gal 6:2** Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.

3. Believers have both the Holy Spirit and Christ-centred 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.

**James 1:5** *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.*

**John 14:16-17** *“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever — the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”*

**John 14:26** *“But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”*

**Rom 8:9, 13** *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ... For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

**1 Cor 2:13** *This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.*

**1 Cor 6:19-20** *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.*

**1 John 2:27** *As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit — just as it has taught you, remain in him.*

**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.

**Rom 13:8-10** *Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow-man has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.*

## II. **1 Corinthians 06:02–03 Knowledge of Believer’s 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 trivial cases” (v. 2) and the “things of this life” (v. 3). There is one supreme reason believers are not to go before the world for judgment:

=> 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 (Mt. 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 (Jn. 3:16; 5:24; Rom. 8:19-23; 2 Pet. 3:9-18; 1 Jn. 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 “if you are to judge the world” are literally “is being judged.” The rule and reign of the believer is an absolute fact.

*Mat 19:28* Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

*Mat 20:23* Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.”

*Luke 22:30* “So that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

*John 5:22* “Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son.”

*Rom 8:17* Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

**Eph 2:6-7** *And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*

**2 Tim 2:12** *If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us.*

**Heb 2:5-9** *It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. But there is a place where someone has testified: “What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honour and put everything under his feet.” In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*

**Rev 2:26-27** *To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations — ‘He will rule them with an iron sceptre; he will dash them to pieces like pottery’ — just as I have received authority from my Father.*

**Rev 20:4** *I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.*

**Rev 21:1** *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.*

**Isa 1:26** *“I will restore your judges as in days of old, your counsellors as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City.”*

**Isa 65:17** *“Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.”*

**Dan 7:22** *Until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favour of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.*

### **III. 1 Corinthians 06:04 Choosing Unbelievers as Judges**

The third question — do you choose unbelievers as judges? In the Greek this sentence is emphatic: the unbelievers are...

- as nothing in the church.
- of no account in judging matters in the church.
- not held in high esteem within the church.
- 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!

#### **IV. 1 Corinthians 06:05–06 No Wise Men in the Church?**

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.

*1 Cor 3:3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?*

*1 Cor 6:6 But instead, one brother goes to law against another — and this in front of unbelievers!*

*1 Cor 12:20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body.*

*Phil 4:2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.*

#### **V. 1 Corinthians 06:07–08 Suffer Being Wronged**

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 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:
  - => The parties themselves suffer pain, tension, anger and an innumerable list of other hurtful emotions.
  - => The church suffers the loss of its testimony for Christ and the pain of being known as hypocritical.
  - => 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 behaviour of believers before the world?

=> 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!

**Luke 6:29** *“If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic.”*

**Rom 12:17** *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.*

**Gal 5:22-23** *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

**1 Pet 3:9** *Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.*

**Lev 19:18** *“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord.”*

**Prov 20:22** *Do not say, “I’ll pay you back for this wrong!” Wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you.*

**Prov 24:29** *Do not say, “I’ll do to him as he has done to me; I’ll pay that man back for what he did.”*

2. Some of the Corinthian believers were guilty (v. 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 out rightly; 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.

**Mat 23:25** *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.”*

**Prov 16:8** *Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice.*

**Prov 21:6** *A fortune made by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapour and a deadly snare.*

**Jer 17:11** *Like a partridge that hatches eggs it did not lay is the man who gains riches by unjust means. When his life is half gone, they will desert him, and in the end he will prove to be a fool. ■*