

## Series on First Corinthians

By Doug Hamilton

### Chapter 6:1-11 “The Big Decisions: Settling Disputes”

Chapter 6:1 Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?

- Paul is dealing with something that was quite different in the Jewish tradition than the Greek system. The Jews felt it always to be much better to handle issues of law within the spiritual family. The Greeks however were a very litigious people that prided themselves in the courtroom. We must remember that these were a people that thrived on higher intellectual exchange, which in return caused them to embellish the atmosphere of the courtroom. William Barclay writes the following in his commentary on 1 Corinthians.
  - *If there was a dispute in Athens, the first attempt to settle it was by private arbitrator. In that event, one arbitrator was chosen by each party, and a third was chosen by agreement between both parties to be an impartial judge. If that failed to settle the matter, there was a court known as the Forty. The Forty referred the matter to a public arbitrator, and the public arbitrators consisted of all Athenian citizens in their sixtieth year; and any man chosen as an arbitrator had to act whether he liked it or not under penalty of losing his rights as a citizen. If the matter was still not settled, it had to be referred to a jury court, which consisted of 201 citizens for cases involving small sums of money and 401 for cases involving larger amounts. There were indeed cases when juries could be as large as anything from 1,000 to 6,000 citizens.*
- This was the normal process for these people. The first steps of this process sound like the church discipline that should have been taken against the fornicator in the last chapter, but was not. It would seem to go well with the last verse of the last chapter “*But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.*” They have become paradoxical in applying the right steps in the wrong ways. They had brought their litigious ways into the church and it could not go unaddressed.

We will use this text to attempt to sort the issue of when to use the church to settle and issue and when to use the courts. There are sometimes when church members must go to court, such as the following:

- When a felony behavior that must be mandatorily reported.
- When a brother or sister will not listen to the church or be guided by the principles of Christianity.
- When there is an issue of spousal abuse that requires a restraining order or some other legal protection such as custody of children.
- When there is a case of insurance companies that require court intervention to settle a financial liability.

If we really wanted to heed the advice of the scriptures, particularly here, then these five steps should sort it out for us.

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### Five Reasons to Not Take Your Fellow Saint to Court

#### 1) It proves the church as incompetent.

1 Corinthians 6:2-3 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent *to constitute* the smallest law courts? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life?

- Paul makes reference to the saints judging the world. This is drawing from the Messianic passage in *Daniel 7:22 until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom.* On that Great Day of Judgment, our mere salvation and the path that we took to have it will be an indictment against the world and of the condemned angels as well. Paul referred to this as if they already knew it, which they did.
- Notice that he uses the term “the smallest law courts”. In another version it refers to it as “trivial” matters. These are not matters that are big, but trivial in size and in comparison to the bigger picture. This is referring to civil and not criminal in the language of it. These are simple matters that are well within the resolution of the church family.
- What does it look like when two little kids at the dinner table are arguing over who received the most food in a portion? What does it look like when two individuals are arguing about a trivial matter? The word is called incompetency. When two people in the church cannot solve a trivial matter among themselves, it makes the whole church look like we are incompetent. If it makes the church family look incompetent, then it is best not to do so.

#### 2) It submits the church to a lesser authority.

1 Corinthians 6:4 So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church?

- There are many principles that we as the church hold to than that of the world. We are to aim high in morality for every area of life, inclusive to business, friendships, family and citizenship. At least this is what Jesus has been telling us and since He is the authority of the religion that bears His name, so be it. Issues like:
  - Avoiding all appearance of evil.
  - Loving our neighbor as ourselves.
  - Honesty knowing that the God of truth is watching over us.
- These are inner guiding principles that are not codified as laws in courts, but principles in heart. A judge is bound by certain things of the law and certain mercies of extension. They are often not on the same page of the church. They are guided by specific laws and we principles of righteousness. This is why our laws often do not coincide with what is being taught in the church.
- WHY WOULD WE WANT TO UNIVERSALLY SUBJECT OURSELVES TO SOMEONE WHOM WILL NOT USE OUR SAME STANDARDS OF CODE OF CONDUCT? If it is submitting the church to a lesser authority, then don't do it.

#### 3) It publically demonstrates division in the church.

1 Corinthinans 6:5-6 I say *this* to your shame. *Is it so, that* there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, <sup>6</sup> but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?

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- The key phrase in this text is “*and that before unbelievers*”. This is a cutting phrase that goes to the core of the issue. What does the church family look like to the outside world when we cannot decide issues ourselves? We look divided and weak. We make the church family look divided and in need of worldly assistance to solve our spiritual problems. We truly look DIVIDED.
- This is to our shame Paul states. If it publically demonstrates division in the church, then don’t do it. Do everything you can to head that off with the other brethren or the elders of the church. Find someone in the church that you can reach out to to solve the matter in the least damaging way.

### Court Commits Same “Error”

- A citizen of Tel Aviv once went to court against a stone mason who refused to chisel A.D. dates on his father’s gravestone. The court referred the case to the Rabbinate (the highest religious body) for an opinion. The Rabbinate rejected the citizen’s appeal, saying that the Christian-Gregorian calendar was unacceptable since it was based on the birth of Jesus. The court, however, overturned the Rabbinate’s opinion, noting ruefully that the rabbis’ statement was dated 1972! The Jewish calendar was 5733 then.

#### 4) It destroys humility among the church members.

1 Corinthians 6:7-8 Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? <sup>8</sup> On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. *You do* this even to *your* brethren.

- One of the great attitudes that allow the church to function properly is humility. *Philippians 2:3-4 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; <sup>4</sup> do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.*
- Putting others first and yourself second is the attitude that has drawn people to the family of God for centuries. It is what we teach others in the church. It is also something that we sometimes have to do when we have been wronged by taking the loss. We cannot win every time down here on earth and must exercise humility.

### Court Could Not Give Mercy

- Judge Kaufman presided at the trial of the Russian spies, the Rosenbergs. They were charged with and convicted of treason against the United States and sentenced to death. In his summation at the end of the long and bitter trial, the lawyer for the Rosenbergs said animatedly, “Your Honor, what my clients ask for is justice.” Judge Kaufman replied calmly, “The court has given what you ask for—justice! What you really want is mercy. But that is something this court has no right to give.”

#### 5) It blurs the line between the kingdom of God and the world.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Or 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 effeminate, nor homosexuals, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

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- Paul now takes the step that he did in the last transition of chapter 5:10 by putting this specific sin in with generalized sin altogether. The point is that Christ has forgiven us of all our sins with the expectation of not living in them anymore. If we selectively choose one sin over another, then we have once again blurred the line between the church and the world.
- If taking a brother to court makes the church and the world look alike, then don't do it.

### Wiser Judge

- Supreme Court Justice Horace Gray once informed a man who had appeared before him in a lower court and had escaped conviction on a technicality, "I know that you are guilty and you know it, and I wish you to remember that one day you will stand before a better and wiser Judge, and that there you will be dealt with according to justice and not according to law."