

# Civil Christianity

## 1 Corinthians 6:1-11

### INTRODUCTION:

**JOKE:** A doctor, priest and lawyer had a wealthy friend on his deathbed. The wealthy man tells them "I know they say you can't take it with you but I'm willing to try. I'm going to give each of you duffel bags with 5 million in **cash** in each bag and at my funeral I want each of you to put it in my grave". Sure enough the wealthy man passes and the 3 friends meet up at the funeral.

The **Doctor**, looking downcast, says "listen guys, I feel so guilty. But I used the money to start my new practice, build my new home, and take a much needed vacation. The money is gone.

The **Pastor** said "I too have a confession to make. My church was falling apart, my flock was leaving and I had to compete with the new mega church down the street, so I have also spent all of the 5 million dollars.

The **Lawyer** looks at both of them in disgust. "I'm so ashamed of both of you! He was our friend and you should have honored his wishes. It's just criminal what you men have done" He then walked up to the casket and slipped in a **check** for 5 million dollars.

As I have mentioned before, we have an abundance of lawyers in our congregation. While today's text applies to each of us, it may be of special interest to our brothers and sisters in the legal community.

**CONTEXT:** Remember that so far in our study we have seen how **WORLDY PHILOSOPHY** had crept into the church at Corinth. Last week we saw how **SEXUAL IMMORALITY** had crept in. Today, we see a third cultural phenomenon that was prevalent in the city of Corinth - a very public **JUDICIAL system**.

In the center of Corinth in the most prominent place, stood a large marble platform called the **Bema Seat**. The Bema is where all judicial meetings were held.



Courtesy of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports



Thousands would gather before the Bema. The Roman **PROCONSUL** would preside over the hearing. A local **TRIBUNAL** would serve as Judges. Lawyers would make their cases. Then the **JURY** was not made up of 12 honest citizens... but rather, every free adult male present... it became the place to be in Corinth. We try to avoid Jury duty, they all wanted to serve.

Legal proceedings turned into one of the favorite Corinthian pastimes. Far better than, Judge Judy. ***My favorite is Judge Frank Caprio... Caught in Providence. If you haven't seen it, look it up.***

Like our modern day courtroom proceedings... **David Garland says**, *The aim of ancient lawsuits was to prevail over another, and that usually involved an assault on the opponent's character.*

Now remember... the church at Corinth was very immature and filled with pride... it created the perfect storm.

So we see in the text...among the concerns raised by the men of Chloe's household - was the fact that it had become a regular occurrence for members of the Church at Corinth to settle their disagreements before the citizens of Corinth.

Thus, the whole community which they were trying to evangelize regularly observed them air their dirty laundry for all to see. As a result the **GOSPEL** was suffering derision.

So Paul raises a question in verse **6:1**:

**TEXT:** <sup>1</sup> When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?

That is a very strong statement - HOW DARE YOU!? Who do you think you are??? Risking the greater reputation of the Church by taking your grievances before the lost world.

**NOW, here are a few things he is NOT saying.**

1. **Paul is not saying, that the Justice System is bad.** GOD established the justice system by giving laws. He also delegated the enforcement of those laws to people.
  - To be a LAWMAKER is a Nobel profession.
  - It is honorable to be a JUDGE.
  - It is necessary and helpful for people to study the law and provide services as ATTORNEYS. May God give us intelligent and virtuous lawyers.
2. **Paul is not saying, that Christians should never go to court.** Paul himself made very wise use of the legal system by appealing to Caesar in Acts 25.

Our very redemption was meted out in human, man made legal system as Jesus

stood trial before Caiaphas, before Pilate, before Herod. It was only after Jesus was sentenced to death at the hands of mortal men that God executed the judgement due us all up His beloved Son.

Redemption itself is legal declaration. Our sin is imputed upon the Lord and His righteousness is imputed upon us, when we repent and believe. Then and only then are we declared - JUSTIFIED in the eyes of God.

So, please don't read this text and come away with the idea that JUSTICE is bad, or the legal system is bad. It's a very good thing.

PAUL IS SAYING:

## 1. Grievances will Happen -

Paul is not some Pious prude who is so disassociated from reality that he doesn't understand that people, even good people, will at times have serious disagreements.

**ILLUSTRATION:** I picked up the habit a while back of saying in a wedding ceremony, this bridal union has two glaring problems - the bride and the groom. Both sinner, both flawed, both unfinished in God's eyes.

The Bible teaches that we should not be shocked when we have disagreements, but we should be shocked if we do not.

If a man and a woman live together for 50 years and do not have a few serious conflicts... one of them is just not paying attention.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Occasionally, someone will say to me, "I would love to go to your church, but I can't. You see I did business with a guy down there and we had a bad falling out... so I can't go to church where he goes to church".

I'm sorry, but that's the dumbest thing I have ever heard.

- Will you dine in the same restaurant as the other fella?
- Will you vote for the same candidate as him?
- Can you live in the same city?

I would hope so, well if you don't let a grievance keep you out of those lesser things... why let it keep you out of church?

Grievances will Happen...

## 2. Some Grievances will Require a Third Party Mediator -

There are times when there is just an impasse. Two people see it differently. As a matter of fact, in the midst of a grievance and anger, our perspective is often clouded.

We hear things that were not actually said, we say things we don't actually mean, our memory can seem so perfect, but be so very flawed.

**ILLUSTRATION:** According to Dr. Ken Eisold, "We tend to think that memories are stored in our brains just as data is stored in computers. Once registered, the data is put away for safe-keeping and eventual recall. The facts don't change.

But neuroscientists have shown that each time we remember something, we are actually reconstructing the event, reassembling it from traces throughout the brain.

Psychologists have pointed out that the brain has a self defense mechanism that causes us to suppress memories that are painful or damaging to our self-esteem.

As a result, our memory of a difficult event is very often skewed and unreliable.<sup>1</sup>

So, it can be very helpful to bring in an impartial third party to mediate a conflict. As a matter of fact, this can be a sign of great spiritual maturity.

You see it requires:

- HUMILITY - I am imperfect and open to the possibility that I am wrong.
- TRUST IN YOUR FELLOW MAN - I will entrust this situation to someone that I believe has the potential to be impartial and honest.
- FAITH IN GOD - Ultimately, you are putting it in God's hands no matter the outcome.

So, Grievances will Happen...Grievances will at times require mediation...

### **3. The Church is the Best Place for Christians to Settle Grievances with other Christians**

<sup>2</sup> Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world?

At the final Judgement, Jesus Christ will sit Supreme and He will delegate some of the cases to His followers.

**Revelation 3:21**

***<sup>21</sup> 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.***

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hidden-motives/201203/unreliable-memory>

**Matthew 19:28**

<sup>28</sup> And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Can you imagine, the day may come when your Sunday school teacher makes a Judgement about the Eternal Destiny of Johnny Cochran, Thergood Marshall, Rudy Giuliani. We will judge the world... therefore...

And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases?

Do you see the logic... if we will judge matters of eternal significance... shouldn't we be able to judge disputes over construction contracts?

<sup>3</sup> Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!

Consider the fact that one day the demons of hell may stand trial before some of you. You may decide how much reward is due to the ArchAngel Gabriel.

How much more should you be able to judge the affairs of this life.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Even in the point Paul is making here... he is playing the part of a Lawyer. In latin this is called, “Argumentum a fortiori”. It is to argue the lesser from the greater.

Jesus did this when he said, “Consider the lilies of the field, clothed better than Solomon. If your heavenly Father will cloth them which are here today and gone tomorrow.. how much more will he clothe you?”

So recognize the irony... Paul is using a legal maneuver to argue against taking people to court. Don't you love the Bible?

<sup>4</sup> So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? <sup>5</sup> I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers,

## **4. When you take a Brother to Court, the Watching World is Lost, even if you Win**

<sup>7</sup> To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? <sup>8</sup> But you yourselves wrong and defraud— even your own brothers!

In high school we would say, “Can you just take one for the team????”

- Perhaps you were asked to run block in football... knowing it was going to be very painful. But you take one for the team.
- Perhaps you were asked to take a foul in basketball... knowing it was going to be your fifth and you’d have to set out the game.

The win for the team is more important than your personal stats. Take one for the team.

Occasionally, it’s better to just take a loss rather than try to argue it out. I think that is the main point Paul is making.

Absorb the hit... take the loss... for the good of the Gospel. I think that is why he says what he does next.

<sup>9</sup> Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> 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.

Do you see what Paul is doing? He is reminding this congregation given over to frivolous lawsuits of all kinds... The ULTIMATE legal proceeding has already taken place.... Jesus lost... you won.

He paid a debt he did not owe, so that you wouldn’t carry a debt you could not possibly repay.

Was it easy? No he had to absorb an eternities worth of hell in a finite amount of time.

He took one for the team... he took one for you...

So would it hurt you to take one for our team?

#### PRACTICAL APPLICATION:

1. If you must go to court, try to do so unemotionally - humbly receive the verdict whatever it may be.
2. If possible, consider mediation. It may be that we pull together three or four deacons to help serve as arbiters in conflicts. Prior to that meeting, both parties would contractually agree to abide by the ruling of these men and accept the outcome.

3. If it seem inappropriate for members in this congregation to mediate, we can seek members from a like minded church to serve us in this manner.
4. When possible... let it go. It is the glory of kings to overlook a matter.

### **CONCLUSION/INVITATION:**

A Pastor told of a situation where two men in the church had a contract. If memory serves me, it was a construction contract. The first brother paid upfront for the construction, but then he claims the builder did not finish the job. The builder argued that yes, the job was completed as agreed.

These two men were believers, they believed the passage before us today.

They brought it to the Pastor. The Pastor wisely sought mediators from another congregation, because he wanted both men to be able to look at him as in their corner.

Prior to the hearing, everyone agreed to abide by the decision of these third party mediators.

The guys came together, presented their case. Then the brothers decided that the work was not done as promised and they ruled in favor of the first man.

The met with the builder and broke the news to him. He broke down in tears and shared how he was in severe financial trouble and did not know how he would ever pay back the other brother.

When they shared the news with the first brother, they also shared the financial hardships of the builder. All a result of economic circumstances beyond his control by the way...

The first guy asked to see the builder... he thanked the men for the ruling... then he said, "brother, I have been forgiven much... it seems only right that I forgive you as well"

In the end, the builder completed the work, he went above and beyond everything requested.

Christ was honored, the community was spared the embarrassment of these guys fighting it out... and I imagine... it was good for the souls of both of these brothers as well.