

## Lesson 21

# Why Not Rather be Wronged?

So if you have such matters, do you appoint as your judges those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame! Can it be that there is not one wise person among you who is able to arbitrate between fellow believers? Instead, brother goes to court against brother, and that before unbelievers! As it is, to have legal disputes against one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves do wrong and cheat—and you do this to brothers and sisters! Don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God's kingdom? Do not be deceived: No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or males who have sex with males, no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit God's kingdom. And some of you used to be like this. 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 Corinthians 6:4-11.

## Introduction

The church at Corinth faced a litany of problems and with systematic precision, Paul deals with them one by one as we go through his first letter. Bad attitudes toward one another reigned. Often filled with envy and criticism toward their brothers and sisters, the members of the church at Corinth took advantage of one another. When disputes rose to a serious level, matters were taken into the local secular court system where these matters were adjudicated before pagan judges. Can you imagine the impression this would have made on those in the world who observed the church carrying on this way in these matters?

Much like modern America, litigation was commonplace. If Corinth could have had its own Court TV, it certainly would have, as going to court was seen as a way to challenge your rivals. Some even looked at it as real-life entertainment. Every Roman citizen over the age of 30 was eligible to serve as a juror. Most Corinthians would have been involved at some point in their life in a court case – either as someone in a lawsuit, an arbitrator, or as a juror.

When a problem arose that could not be solved, the first course of action in the legal system was to send the matter to a public arbitrator who was over the age of 60. If that failed, the case proceeded to the next level, which was a jury trial, made up of several hundred or several thousand jurors. Again, can you imagine the unfavorable impression that those in the world would have had of the church and its members as they drug each other to court over matters that could have been settled internally?

All of this was a very public manifestation of their carnal or worldly attitudes. And like many of the other items Paul wrote them to correct, the apostle pointedly deals with this, to get them to think more seriously about their great need for serious heart transformation. As you read these verses, you can get a feel for Paul's shock, disbelief, and righteous anger at them making themselves a public spectacle.

## Disputes Among Christians Should be Settled Internally

Disputes and problems will come up between brethren. We are all human. We all sin, against ourselves and each other. But what a blessing it should be for us to consider that when these problems arise, we are

surrounded by God's people who possess the truth of God's word, spiritual wisdom, love for justice, equality, and understanding. Why would we ever choose to have a civil matter settled by a person in the world? Such a decision could reveal a bitter heart or a desire for punishment and revenge, rather than preserving the unity we enjoy inside the body. When an issue arises, it needs to be settled internally. If God's sons and daughters, with the help of the Spirit cannot resolve a dispute, why would we ever expect someone outside of Christ to do it? Paul says:

So if you have such matters, do you appoint as your judges those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame! Can it be that there is not one wise person among you who is able to arbitrate between fellow believers? 1 Corinthians 6.4-5.

Handling matters in the way they did, revealed an absence of love in the heart of some of the believers in Corinth. They were acting just like the world.

While discussing these general principles, it is important to remember that sometimes there are things that come up where disputes cannot be handed internally. Broken marriages that end in divorce are required by the state to be litigated in the court system. Child custody matters or other similar situations are subject to going to court. While there are obvious exceptions, the general expectation is not to go to law with a brother or sister *at all*.

## Those Who Go to Law Lose Either Way

No matter what the outcome of the litigation may be, to go to law with a fellow Christian is a defeat before it even begins. It does not matter if one comes out on the other side a winner, many damaging effects come upon the unity and reputation of the church.

Instead, brother goes to court against brother, and that before unbelievers! As it is, to have legal disputes against one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? 1 Corinthians 6.6-7.

The injury is church, and not just to the one who lost in court. Instead, selfish actions are on full display, as one pushes through to satisfy their wants, rights, and ego. When the world sees this, inquirers are left to wonder why they would ever want to be a part of a body where people treated one another that way.

### ***Why not rather be wronged?***

The spiritual damage done by handling disputes in this way is so great that Paul says it would be better for one to suffer personal financial loss than to suffer the great spiritual loss by taking a fellow believer to court. Even if a person is legally justified, the greater victory might be simply to choose to be wronged or cheated . . . rather than bring dishonor to the church.

The principal Paul teaches here is very much in line with Jesus' teaching in the sermon on the mount:

But I tell you, don't resist an evildoer. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. As for the one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to the one who asks you, and don't turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you, Matthew 5.39-42.

And note how Jesus set the example for us:

For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He did not commit sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth; when he was insulted, he did not insult in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten but entrusted himself to the one who judges justly, 1 Peter 2.21-23.

One final passage showing us how Paul illustrates an application of Jesus' teaching is Matthew 18.21-22:

Then Peter approached him and asked, "Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? As many as seven times?" "I tell you, not as many as seven," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven.

To better describe what the godly expectation is, Jesus goes on to teach the parable of the unforgiving servant, who was personally forgiven of an insurmountable debt only to refuse to forgive another slave for a very small amount. When the king found out about what the unforgiving servant did, he had him turned over to the jailers to be tortured. To that Jesus says,

So also my heavenly Father will do to you unless every one of you forgives his brother or sister from your heart."

We have been forgiven of so much by our heavenly Father. Part of our new nature and transformation is a forgiving heart where we practice forgiveness. Even if we suffer wrong, God can take that and turn it into something good for us and for His glory.

## **Bitterness and Resentfulness Must be Defeated**

The Christians at Corinth were far away from the basic principles of Christianity. In fact, they were behind prominent the prominent thoughts of the noted Greek philosophers of their day: Plato once said that it was better to suffer wrong than to do wrong.<sup>68</sup> But far greater than their refusal to suffer wrong was their actual practice of doing wrong.

Instead, you yourselves do wrong and cheat—and you do this to brothers and sisters! 1 Corinthians 6.8.

Actively defrauding another person should never be a practice among God's people . . . inside or outside the church. Here, not only were these Christians ignoring God's moral standard, but they were also hatefully and bitterly injuring their brothers and sisters! These were the kind of things that characterized the world, 6.9-10, and were to be put away. Such character was never to be a part of the identity of God's sons and daughters who have been *washed, sanctified, and justified*, 6.11.

## **For Thought and Discussion**

1. What is the problem Paul addresses in the first part of 1 Corinthians 6? Why was this a problem?

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<sup>68</sup> "Then of these two, doing and suffering wrong, we declare doing wrong to be the greater evil, and suffering it the less." Gorgias 509C. Plato. *Plato in Twelve Volumes Translated by W.R.M. Lamb*. Vol. 3. Medford, MA: Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1967.

2. What negative reasons can you think of why Christians should not sue each other in court?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. If they are not to go to court, what is the solution?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Is it practical to think that elderships and mature men in the congregation can settle disputes? How could something like this be accomplished?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What about suing unbelievers?