

1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-11

INTRODUCTION

I was watching the news this week when a Journalist with a Sunday paper was describing how an article of his gets printed in a newspaper that he works for. After writing an article it is edited and corrected by the editors and then it goes to the newspaper's legal team who read it to see if anyone could object to what was written and sue the paper.

I thought that it is a sign of the times when before anything appears in print it is inspected by a legal team. That is because we live in a society that is increasingly looking for opportunities to sue because in many ways litigation is easy money. Well the society of Corinth was no different from our own. We have seen this in so many ways already and it was so similar to ours in this area of litigation.

Now the church at Corinth was failing to live up to its name because it was full of strife, it was divided and it was immoral. In many ways the church had lapsed into so many of their previous sinful ways that it was increasingly difficult to distinguish the church from the rest of pagan society at Corinth. The church at Corinth was so like its society that its light was becoming dimmer. Paul now addresses another area where the church was so like its society, it is this area of litigation. The Corinthians were always taking one another to court.

If a dispute was not settled privately then the courts sorted it out and the Corinthian believers had been so used to arguing and disputing and taking one another to court before they were saved that they carried on these selfish attitudes and habits after their conversions. Paul writes to the church because it was wrong to take fellow believers to court and totally unnecessary.

Paul gives three reasons why it is wrong to take litigation against fellow Christians.

1. IT IS WRONG BECAUSE OF WHO WE ARE (vs. 1-6)

The words "a dispute with another" translate three Greek words, which were commonly used to indicate a lawsuit. So it is clear that the Christians at Corinth were taking lawsuits against one another and going to a court of law to settle their disputes. In other words they were hanging their dirty washing out in public for all to see. Those who judged their lawsuits were unbelieving people and therefore what sort of witness was that having upon the unbelievers who heard their case. Paul is asking the church how this can be. This is not even a one off incident that Paul is thinking about for the word translated "dare" (v 1) is in the present tense indicating that this was a continual practise.

Now Paul's concern is not that believers would get an unfair hearing in the public courts with unbelievers judging their cases. They may well have received fair hearings and correct judgements from the unbelievers but Paul is concerned because the Christians at Corinth seem to have so little respect for the authority and ability of the church to settle its own disputes.

Christians are members of Christ's body, the church and they are indwelt with the Holy Spirit therefore is the church not able to judge and settle cases of dispute within the church? It is simply inconceivable that Christians should take one another to court when the church is empowered and equipped by God the Holy Spirit to settle matters of dispute. All the resources needed to settle any dispute reside within the membership of the church of Jesus Christ.

Surely when Christians take one another to court where unbelievers reside then it is a confession that the church is lacking in something needed to settle these cases.

Also when Christians go to court with other Christians then surely they are more concerned with revenge or gain than they are with the unity and well being of the church of Jesus Christ. Disputes between Christians should therefore be settled by and among Christians, for if we who have wonderful resources in Christ cannot settle a dispute then how can we expect the unbelievers to do so?

Paul insists that Christians and the church are always able to resolve disputes within its membership. Because if we are one day going to judge the world and the angels (vs. 2-3 cf. Matthew 19:28 and Jude vs. 14-15) with Christ, then surely there is no case too hard for the church to settle here on earth.

But the Christians at Corinth are forgetting who they are, they are 'saints' equipped with the Holy Spirit, we have the word of God therefore why do Christians need to go to court against other Christians. Is God not able to enlighten the church over matters of dispute through his word and by His Holy Spirit? In fact Paul goes as far as to say that the weakest and most insignificant member in the church (if that is what the disputed phrase means), is more competent to judge cases between Christians than unbelieving judges. If that person possess the Holy Spirit which he does and has the word of God in his possession then what else is needed to settle disputable matters between God's people (v 4)?

Therefore Paul is ashamed of the behaviour of those in the church at Corinth for by the fact that they are going to the courts says to the world that there is nobody in the church at Corinth who is capable of hearing and resolving disputes between fellow Christians. Of course that is not true for every Christian has the Holy Spirit and the word of God and the wisdom of God therefore there are no matters that cannot be resolved.

By settling our own disputes within the church, the church is clearly testifying that we have all the resources that we need to settle disputes. It also says to the world that we value love and unity between Christians more highly than winning our case in a secular court of law.

2. IT IS WRONG BECAUSE WE ALWAYS LOSE SPIRITUALLY (vs. 7-8).

Taking our fellow Christians to court is wrong because we lose out spiritually by doing so. Even if we win our case in the law court we actually lose out spiritually. Lawsuits against a fellow brother and sister in Christ is always defeat in God's eyes. This is because his lawsuit says that he is selfish, that he is more concerned with his own rights than with showing love to his fellow believers.

Not only that but he is also clearly undermining the authority of the church and the ability of God's Holy Spirit and the Scriptures to speak on matters of disagreement. That means that although we might go to court and win our case we actually always lose out as a result. We lose out because we are doing something that God disapproves off and therefore He will never bless such an activity.

So what should we do if we simply cannot settle a disputed matter, well the Christian thing to do is to allow oneself to be wronged and cheated if necessary rather than take a fellow Christian to court. God will bless such an attitude. What Paul is saying is that it is far better to lose out financially than to lose out spiritually. Even when we are clearly legally right and even when it is clear that we have been wronged or cheated it is better spiritually to be wronged than to take a fellow saint to court.

We must leave the ultimate outcome of our wrong in the hands of Almighty God for we never lose out when we do the right thing by obeying God and his word. Even if we lose out materially, we

never lose out spiritually. However if we take a fellow Christian to court we might gain materially but we will lose out spiritually.

By allowing ourselves to be wronged by fellow Christians we are keeping the peace within the church and we are showing love to our fellow believers and we are keeping the unity within the church. But imagine the situation within a church when two Christians go to court against one another. There will be no harmony between them, little love will be shown and discord is certain not just between the Christians but in the local church as well.

Lawsuits leave people embittered and they break the cord of unity within churches. Therefore if matters can't be resolved between two Christians then get the church involved and if necessary suffer loss rather than lose out spiritually by bringing discord and disharmony into your relationship with other Christians and within the church.

3. IT IS WRONG BECAUSE OF THE CONTRAST BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND UNBELIEVERS (vs. 9-11)

Paul said in verse 1 that the church should take their cases of dispute to the church and not to the "ungodly." Surely it is better to have godly people within the church hearing your case than asking ungodly wicked sinners to hear it in a court of law. After all says Paul such people are not going to inherit the Kingdom of God because of their ungodliness and wickedness (v 9).

You are not going to spend eternity with those people but you are with those in the church. It is clear that there is a contrast between the church and the world. Perhaps the church has failed to understand this point. They have been so consumed with their rights and with their greed that they have not stopped to think about the differences between believers and unbelievers.

In fact their behaviour is more like what you expect from the unbelieving world than from the believing world (v 8). You can expect the unbelieving world to cheat and do wrong and take one another to court for they have no time for God but are self-focused. But you do not expect such behaviour from Christians within the church.

Yet in Corinth sadly there were Christians who were behaving like the unbelieving world especially in this area of litigation.

Paul is reminding them that they must behave differently because they are different (v 11). You can expect to find sexual immorality; idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, stealing, greed, drunkenness, slanderers and swindlers in the world but you do not expect to find such sins among God's people.

Yes it is true that before their conversion these sins were found within the lives of the Christians at Corinth (v 11). But now things are different they are changed people because they are washed, sanctified and justified by Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore by taking people to court and by doing things that encouraged people to sue was simply a denial of their new life in Christ. They are no longer unbelievers but they are now believers in Christ. Therefore they need to start living like it and one of the ways that they can show the difference between believers and unbelievers is by refusing to take a fellow Christian to court and by living as they should.

So there is no reason for a fellow Christian to even think about going to court. They can start living out their new life in Christ by simply being prepared to be wronged and cheated in order to obey God's word and in order to keep the unity and peace within God's church.

So let us be clear as we finish. We should not take our fellow Christians to court. If there is a dispute with another Christian in our church that cannot be resolved between us, then take the matter to the church. The church has all the resources needed for resolving our disputes. We have God's word and we have the Holy Spirit and we have the wisdom of God when we earnest seek it.

However at the end of the day it is better to allow ourselves to be wronged and even cheated in order to preserve the unity of the church rather than take a fellow believer to court.

Most of all it is very important that we live consistently so that no one has a reason to feel a grievance with us and therefore they have no reason to even think of taking us to court.

Finally let us be a people who not only claim to be Christians but who live consistent Christian lives before our fellow believers and before this ungodly world

Amen