

A Deeper Right

1 Corinthians 6:1-11

If Christians are going to know, live, and do business together, conflict will happen. When it does, we need to handle it faithfully, remembering who we are and whom we serve.

Pick a Judge

It's not the injustice between Christians that shocks Paul, but that one would dare take it before non-Christian judges and not the saints (v1). "Saints" are not famous dead believers, but living Christians who have been washed of their sins by Jesus (cf. v11). Do you know you'll judge the world and angels? If the Corinthians knew, they were forgetting. This puts the small things in this life into perspective (v2). "Judging" in this sense means ruling and governing, which is what we are doing in Christ's kingdom (Matt. 19:28; Lk. 22:28ff; Dan. 7:22; Heb. 2:5-8). The Holy Spirit leads us into maturity to distinguish between good and evil, and to go outside the church for a civil dispute against another believer shows a lack of understanding and desire to obey the Lord. It's important to distinguish here between civil and criminal matters. Paul is talking about personal disputes, civil litigation, and not criminal offenses, which ought to be taken to the state, which even if unbelieving, is God's deacon (Rom. 13:1-7). Churches that ignore this distinction and fail to report crimes are courting disaster at best. Christians who take others to court before unbelievers bring shame upon themselves (v5). The issue isn't the presence of a court or judge, but of a non-believing one. Paul willingly stands before judges and wisely uses his civil power and privilege (Acts 16:37-39, 25:10-12). But with disputes among Christians, it would be better to pick anyone with wisdom in the church to judge than to go before non-believers. For this to even be possible we need to orient our lives to God and His people.

Ripped Off like Jesus

Paul assumes the person suing has a legitimate matter against someone (v1), and yet to go to court for is an automatic failure (v7). Better to just take the wrong, get cheated, than to do wrong and cheat the brethren and tarnish the testimony of the church (v8). We should remember that Paul referenced these things as the "smallest matters" (v2). Suing is not the same as being sued, though we should still avoid it if possible. Since extortioners will not inherit the kingdom of God (v10), litigious "Christians" who bring frivolous lawsuits ought to be disciplined by the church, and then it wouldn't be two believers in court, but one. But after all of our efforts for charity, clarity, clear contracts, and best intentions, we should have already counted the cost and be willing to be wronged: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). We are Christians (cf. Philemon 18).

Free to Love

Jesus personified money as mammon, which comes from an Aramaic word meaning

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wealth or profit: “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24). Money is the kind of god that demands all from the greedy, that “takes away the life of its owners” (Prov. 1:19). Christians who stray from their faith in this way “[pierce] themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Tim. 6:10). It might seem like Paul takes a random left turn in verse 9 to suddenly be talking about all those who will not inherit the kingdom of God. He warns us not to be deceived because sin is subtle and always makes sense to one committing it. The word for “fornicators” is *pornoi* and means any unlawful sexual activity. Idolatry is devotion and trust to anything or anyone that is due to God. Adultery is breaking a marriage covenant. “Homosexuals” and “sodomites” mean the active and passive partners in homosexual relationships. Stealing, coveting, getting drunk, verbal abuse, and ripping people off are all sins that must not characterize Christians. Paul makes us take a step back to ask: what describes my life? Who am I? This is not a checklist for salvation, but a description of the normal slavery to sin that a Christian is freed from. Those who live at home in these sins will not inherit God’s kingdom. “And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (v11). These things are all God’s doing. Washing is cleansing from sin in the blood of Christ, and the waters of baptism seal, confirm, and remind us of this (1 Pet. 3:21; Rom. 6:3). Being sanctified is to be set apart for good works, not ruined by our past. And we were justified, declared righteous by the Father by grace through faith alone so our salvation is unshakeable, rooted in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. So great a salvation makes these sins and conflicts look so petty and small. We become less concerned about WHAT THEY OWE ME and more focused on the how we can bring the love and grace of God into the situation.