

I CORINTHIANS: HANDLING BELIEVERS' PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

IV. Handling Legal Conflicts Between Believers

(1 Corinthians 6:1-8)

I. Introduction

- A. The people Paul disciplined in Corinth lived in a city that was known for its immorality, alcoholism and worldly pursuits (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians: The City of Corinth," p. 1619), so the formidable influence of the city's culture on the Corinthian believers left Paul addressing "(a)berrant beliefs and practices of an astonishing variety" in his letters to them, Ibid.
- B. However, in a vision Paul received from God as he ministered at Corinth in Acts 18:10b NIV, God told him, "I have many people in this city," so Paul was to keep on ministering regardless of the trials he faced there.
- C. This epistle is timely for us who face our own decadent culture today, so we view 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 on handling legal conflicts between believers for our insight, application and edification (as follows):

II. Handling Legal Conflicts Between Believers, 1 Corinthians 6:1-8.

- A. In introducing his comments on legal conflicts between believers, Paul used the verb *tolamao*, "bring oneself, presume," that translated in 1 Corinthians 6:1a would be, "Can any of you bring himself to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?" (Arndt & Gingrich, *A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T.*, 1967, p. 829)
- B. Paul was appalled at the degree of wrong in such action, and he explained why in 1 Corinthians 6:2-6:
 - 1. First, we believers in Christ will judge the world, what will be based on our spiritual union with Christ and will occur in the Millennial Kingdom at Christ's Second Coming to the earth, 1 Corinthians 6:2a; Ibid., Ryrie, fn. to 1 Corinthians 6:2. Dr. Ryrie alluded to Matthew 19:28 (Ibid.) where Jesus revealed that His disciples would be sitting on twelve thrones in the Millennium judging the twelve tribes of Israel. It thus seems that the rest of the Church will possibly be judging in precincts of their own former earthly nations as well! Nevertheless, Paul argued that if the whole world would be judged by his believing readers in the Millennial Kingdom, they should not consider themselves unworthy to judge the smallest matters among themselves in this life, 1 Corinthians 6:2b.
 - 2. Second, we believers will also judge angels, 1 Corinthians 6:3a. We know from 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 that some fallen angels, what we now call "demons," will stand to be judged in the end much as Satan himself will be judged and cast into the lake of fire in Revelation 20:10, and thus we believers will have a part in that judgment due to our spiritual union with the Son of God, Jesus Christ. It may also be possible that we will have a part in judging godly angels in terms of their rewards for service to God (cf. Hebrews 1:13-14). Regardless how we will judge angels, Paul's point is that if we will judge them, we certainly should be qualified to judge matters that pertain to one another as believers in this life, 1 Corinthians 6:3b.
 - 3. Thus, Paul expressed dismay that his believing readers at Corinth who had legal cases between them in matters of this life were not setting forth even the least esteemed in their number to judge these cases, and he asked if there was not a single wise man among them who would be able to judge his brothers in Christ instead of going before unsaved court officials with cases of believer against believer, 1 Corinthians 6:4-6.
 - 4. [Another reason why believers should not go to court against one another is the matter of Christian testimony: if we go to court before the unsaved, all of the sinful weaknesses in believers are only manifested before the lost legal world, what can only hurt the testimony of the local church!]
- C. Actually, the very fact that his believing readers were taking their legal cases against one another to civil courts was itself a spiritual failure before the case was even heard in court, for the motive in suing a fellow believer was itself one of greed or selfishness, itself sin, 1 Corinthians 6:7a (*Bible Know. Com., N. T.*, p. 515). It would be better for a believer to let himself to be wronged and defrauded by another believer than to take him to court to try to gain a selfish advantage over him by a legal battle, 1 Corinthians 6:7b-8. [Also, letting oneself be wronged instead of going to court against another believer better protects our testimony before an onlooking world that is all too eager to cast blame at Christians, cf. 1 Peter 2:15.]

Lesson: *We believers in Christ must not air our grievances against one another before the world's courts, for our future as judges of the world and of angels makes it imperative that we handle our own judgments within our own community, or to let ourselves be defrauded to avoid sinning in greed and hurting our testimony before others.*

Application: *(1) May we not go to court against other believers. (2) If a fellow believer has wronged us, may we settle the issue in the local church, (3) or, if such a settlement is not possible, may we let ourselves be defrauded.*