

“When we are to Judge”

1 Corinthians 6:1-8

INTRO:

To some people the most important verse in the Bible is **Matthew 7:1** *“Judge not, that you be not judged.”* From this statement made in the Sermon on the Mount, these people conclude, wrongly, that a Christian must never at any time or under any circumstances ever judge another believer or any other individual. The major problem with this thinking is that the Bible sometimes clearly commands us to judge someone or something.

The Apostle Paul told us in **1 Corinthians 5:12** that we are responsible before God to judging folks inside the local church. He said,
“For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?”

The expected answer to the question is yes. We are going to find out the Corinthians were not doing this. Not only did they fail in judging in the case of the erring brother, but they also dropped the ball in the situation that Paul outlines in **Chapter 6**. In our text we find their reluctance to judge was related to three errors in their understanding:

- I. An Ignorance of the Believer's True Position (v. 1-3)*
- II. An Ignorance of the Importance of the Church (v. 4-6)*
- III. An Ignorance of the Ruling Principle of Love (v. 7-8)*

I. An Ignorance of the Believer's True Position (v. 1-3)

A. *“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?”* We get a real sense from the tone of Paul's first question that he is very upset with them that this has happened. Literally Paul asked, are you really insolent enough to take matters in the church family and go to law with it and not to your fellow saints? The expected answer was, yes. The Corinthian believers failed to understand the true position of all believers in Christ.

1. It is helpful to recognize that it was a common thing in some areas of the old Greek world to take people to court.
2. In fact, in Athens that litigation had become a kind of challenge and entertainment. One ancient writer claimed that in a manner of speaking, every Athenian was a lawyer.

B. Paul told the Corinthians they should not be taking *“spiritual family matters”* into the public courts. Instead, fellow believers should be able to settle the difficulty. The reason we do not need the court because of who we are as believers. Paul shows us our true position in Christ by way of two questions. First, in v. **2** he asked, *“Don't you know that the saints will judge the world?”*

1. We might honestly respond to this by saying, *“No, I didn’t know.”* Evidently, Paul had taught them clearly this truth.

2. Although we may not understand to what Paul is referring, there is an indication in **Revelation 2:26-27**;

“He who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations— ‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’”

Most likely this ruling and judging of the world must take place in the millennium. Paul's desire was not to raise an issue on the end times but to underline a point. If we, the saints of God, are going to judge the world, then it only follows that we should be able to pass judgment on the smallest matters. This is a greater to the lesser argument. One who is qualified to sit on the United States Supreme Court should be more than qualified to serve as a Justice of the Peace.

C. The second rhetorical question Paul used highlight who we are as saints is in **v.3**.

“Don’t you know that we are going to judge angels?”

1. Once more when Paul asks this question we will have to answer, *“No.”* Obviously, Paul had taught this reality too. Because of this letter, we also now know of this truth. Which angels are these which we one day will judge, the good angels, or the fallen angels? It is not evident to us.

2. The point that Paul made is a simple one. Even without legal training, we who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, with the Word of God as our standard and the Spirit of God as our guide, are infinitely more qualified to judge in "family matters" of the local church than the most learned unsaved judge.

II. An Ignorance of the Importance of the Church (v. 4-6)

A. While forgetting how qualified our fellow believers are to judge in these matters is one thing; the Corinthians had overlooked the importance of the Local church in the mind of God.

1. **V. 4** can be translated a couple of different ways. We can translate it as an imperative as the NIV does.

“Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges, even men of little account in the church!”

Paul then is using sarcasm to drive home his point. The KJV also follows this pattern.

2. **V. 4** also can be translated as an interrogative as NKJV does.

“If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge?”

3. The local church is extremely important to the Lord who created her. He put the local church in authority over us His sheep. He has charges us with the task of resolving disputes and sin between brothers (**Matthew 18**). Quite often we fail to see the local church as having authority over us, but it does. Someday when the Lord returns He will hold us accountable for whether or not we have submitted to the authority that God has vested in His church.

B. In v. 5 Paul describes the shame of their actions and what their activities said about them.

“I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers.”

1. The believers in Corinth needed to understand the magnitude of their sin in taking disputes to the world and not submitting them to their brothers and sisters in the church.

2. The sting in his next statement comes from the fact that this church has prided itself on its sophistication and wisdom. They were up on all the latest philosophy and thought themselves so erudite, yet they could not find even one person who was wise enough to pass judgment between these disputing brothers! Instead, they let this dispute go before those least qualified in the sight of God to settle the issue, unbelievers.

III. An Ignorance of the Ruling Principle of Love (v. 7-8)

A. ***“Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!”*** The fact that they filed lawsuits meant that no matter who won, they and the church already lost. They sinned against God’s design for His church and they sinned against each other.

B. The last question sound strange to us in the twenty-first century. ***“Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?”*** We too steeped in the wisdom of this present age. We adopt the “looking out for number one” philosophy of life. So, we do not understand that Paul is simply outlining the demands of the Christian principle of love.

1. You already know about the description of divine love in **1 Corinthians 13**. As Paul describes the agape that proves we are indeed spiritually mature, he writes;
“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

2. The love on display in the Corinthians was a love that sought its own at another's expense, and the expense of the reputation of God's church. Love does not let people walk on you, but it also does not go to court to get redress against a brother in Christ. The difficulty is to know when to confront and when to endure. **Romans 12:19–21** can be helpful.

“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore if your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

It is shocking for us to read Paul's advice in **Vs.7 and 8**. In the sight of God it is better we follow Paul's counsel. The cost to the glory of God and His local church is far too high to do other.

Application:

1. We learn that in the age to come, we will have high responsibilities to go along with our blessings. We will help judge the world and angels.
2. The most important lesson that we learn here is that God's church is not to be marginalized at the corner of our lives. The church must be central to the life of a believer. In the sight of God, the church has very real and very important authority.
3. Finally, we learn that God expects us to operate in Biblical love toward our brothers and sisters in the Lord. If material disputes cannot be solved by the church, it is better to suffer loss than to go to secular court to seek redress.