

So Sue Me



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1 Corinthians 6:1-8

One of the most important tasks and greatest challenges of a pastor is clearly showing the connections between the gospel and everyday life, so that people can specifically and intelligently bring the gospel to bear on both their thinking and conduct. Most people know the gospel, but they don't know how it filters down into their lives, they think it is just the start, and then they move on to greater things, when the gospel actually is the whole road of a Christ centered life. The implications drawn from what the gospel is and does have far reaching effects, totally encompassing the Christian with a new priority in any event. The teacher of God's Word is supposed to draw the lines, connecting God's Word and way to our way of life.

The passages in the bible are not disconnected facts that we can use when we need them, or disregard when we think we don't. No, they are connected to Christ by way of His character, and just because we believe in God and

have received Christ doesn't mean we can just ignore the rest of scripture. Paul and the entire bible, really, command us to be renewed in our minds, not conformed to the ways of the world but transformed into Christlike character.

This causes us to keep looking to God's grace for the power to accomplish His will. Thus the gospel becomes *functionally* central to the individual Christian and to the local church, and not just a "say a prayer, believe in Jesus and I go to heaven" method. Being a Christian doesn't just give us a "get out of hell free card"; it informs and shapes our worldview, our behavior, our pattern of thought, life, and desire.



There are specific, concrete doctrinal implications of the gospel; or, as Paul puts it, "doctrine that conforms to (i.e., takes its shape from) the glorious gospel" (1 Timothy 1:10-11). These gospel truths bring the gospel to bear particularly on the mind; they are useful in renewing the mind so that our thinking is more and more shaped by the truth of the gospel.

Ultimately, all Christian behavior should flow out of the gospel; the gospel is not only to renew our minds, but to inform our conduct too. The gospel is the truth of our salvation, and it brings with it many subordinate truths, applications of the gospel mindset. Scriptures provide many examples of this gospel informed living. Our passage today is just one example. It has huge implications, not only for the matter at hand, legal disputes, but also in principle as to why the local church, and each Christian's vital membership into a local church, is so important. One aspect of the gospel, an indicative

of it, is that as believers we are all now adopted into the family of God. As such, our behavior towards one another is different in some ways than it was before. Let's look at our text and see how it informs us, in practice and in principle.

1 Corinthians 6:1 – *When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?*

Paul clearly says in this verse that it's wrong for a Christian to be looking to sue another Christian in the secular courts. Now before you get all

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worked up and start giving me exceptions, realize that I'll cover those in a moment, and stay with me. Paul isn't talking about never going to trial, or just letting everything go, he is talking about a mindset, an attitude. He is speaking of acting in

accordance with gospel truths, which he will go on to explain.

It is not that Paul never had any disputes; godly people can disagree. Paul had to confront Peter in Galatia, (Galatians 2:7-15), but Peter later joins in strengthening the churches of Galatia as well (1 Peter 1:1). Paul may have severe differences with people but he aims at reconciliation, as we see with Barnabas (Acts 11:22-30, 13:1-3, 15:36-40 / 1 Corinthians 9:6) and John Mark (nephew / cousin of Barnabas – same as gospel of Mark / Acts 12:25, 13:13, 15:36-40 / Colossians 4:10 / 2 Timothy 4:11). So Paul isn't saying that he doesn't expect disputes, certainly he does. It is that he expects them

to do other than they had been doing. He expects them to take care of matters without having to involve the unbelievers.

First, notice the word “dare”. That word implies that such an action is an affront to God and to the body of Christ as well. Christians ought to be able to manage their own conflicts without going into secular courts. He doesn’t say don’t dare to go to law at all. Notice that Paul says “instead of the saints”. As Christians we will have disputes, we will have to sort out the legalities, but we have a right way and a wrong way to settle conflicts, and as the family of God we settle family business in house. I would refer you to our sermon from Philippians 4:2-9 entitled “The Way of Peace” for a biblical model of dealing with disputes in the church between members. Of course if one person is a Christian and the non-Christian takes you to court, well, that is another matter, you have no choice, in a sense.

The point here is that when we are dealing with two professing Christians, instead of going to the secular court system, we need to entrust our case with the church. Family matters should be dealt with “in house”. Now that doesn’t mean that the two parties have to hash it out alone, or that one is automatically let off the hook if they cannot come to an agreement. No, it doesn’t mean you just have to let it go, it means instead of going to secular court, you have another place to go, before the church. You try and work it out together, and then if you need help you go to the church for mediation. If a professing Christian tries to claim these verses as justification of why you cannot have any recourse against them, and then they won’t submit to the church and its diligent judgment and due

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process, then that person is only trying to use the bible as a means to avoid responsibility. If I were that person's pastor, I would doubt the validity of the person's faith, and I would most certainly take disciplinary action against them.



Paul is talking about being real, not just saying that we believe in Jesus for our salvation and then living just like we used to. No, we have different way now. The gospel means our salvation and it also means we as brothers and sisters are one in Christ (verse 17) and that we will all be together forever in heaven, and so that has implications for how we live here on earth.

When Paul describes the Roman judges as unrighteous, he is not suggesting that they are unjust in their judgment. The term simply means non-Christian in contrast to the saints, the believers who are part of the family of God. Paul is saying why are you, the justified, trying to find justice among the unjustified? You say you trust Christ but not those He has entrusted His life to?

This passage and its implications about nominal Christianity speak volumes. The principle derived from God's character applies. For example, it should be obvious to Christians that they cannot just claim, "God hates divorce", etc., etc, when a man beats his wife, uses all the money to buy drugs, abandons her for days on end, and then won't submit to church discipline. Then that man wants to believe he can claim scriptural warrant? Preposterous! If the man willfully does these things, he may have a problem

and may be able to be rehabilitated, brought to repentance, and restored, reconciled, etc. The man or woman is not free in the Lord to divorce without consent of the church. However, if a person won't even submit to God's way through the process of a restorative church discipline model, he is either fooling himself, or lying to God and us about his supposed conversion to Christ. He would then be considered an unbeliever and be rightly charged with abandoning his wife.

This is what Paul was talking about in 1 Corinthians 6 and 7, he is describing the fact that although these people may have been believers, they weren't acting like it; they were still



caught up in resolving things like unbelievers. They were not living out the implications of the gospel, of being a part of the body of Christ. The scriptures are replete with the idea that we must not use the bible as a cloak for sin, and also that we must not use the bible as some sort of justification for our wanting to do things our way first and appealing to the Word of God second, as some sort of defense mechanism. Paul contests this ill-informed logic in verse 12 of chapter 6.

Paul is not saying that the secular court system is entirely bad, or that being a lawyer is somehow ungodly. No, far from it, because Paul appealed to and benefited from Roman justice as seen in Acts 18. Paul's concern here is more specific. His concern is the arrogance that Christians show when they make the dirty laundry of their internal struggles public. These

Christians don't care what other people think. Justice was dispensed in Corinth in the public square or the marketplace. So when someone hauled a brother or sister into court there, they weren't just settling a dispute. They were holding the church itself up to public scrutiny and ridicule.



Paul is not saying this is only an individual matter, however that there will come times when true believers have to have some mediation. Paul is not saying it is strictly up to the grieving parties to settle the issues all alone, no, he is saying that the church instead of the secular courts become the place of mediation. The decision by these

Christians to go to court reveals how little respect they have for the church's authority and ability to settle its own disputes.

Of course, in today's climate of people who think they are Christians but do not actively, vitally belong to any church, this becomes extremely problematic. With no church discipline in place, or marginal "professing" Christians as one or both of the "combatants", it is therefore difficult to avoid some scenarios. This is true especially when someone is a professor and wants to use this as some sort of shield. It doesn't mean that the two parties must work it out without the oversight of the church. Paul is saying that Christians should settle their disputes in the light and oversight of the church; in other words, the elders and congregation are the church court, as it were.

This passage cannot be used like some try and use the “you have to forgive me” bible backup for their obvious, willful injustice. It is amazing how many so called “Christians” have no interest in doing the will of God in their daily lives, but who somehow become bible scholars when it suits their agenda. These types of people will be far worse off on judgment day than your garden-variety pagan. They took the name of the Lord in vain.

Now if the dispute happens and these involved parties in fact DO belong as vital members of church, but two distinct churches, or denominations, well, then, it may mean that the elders of both churches should meet, and anyway, you see how messy it can get. Paul I’m sure knew this, but he was speaking out against the propensity of the Corinthians to rush into these



matters without giving consideration to their brothers and sisters in Christ. To look to the secular way before even considering the church way is to dare to deny the means God gives us as Christians.

It depends on the individual case. The principles are the same, but the situations are not. Of course, like other matters of living the gospel, those looking for a way out will abuse this. God knows our hearts, and He knows our willingness to do the right thing or not. Many will just try and do what they think they need to in order to get around God’s will or subject themselves to the controlling influence God, His Word, and His people over their lives in any form, fashion, or degree. They would trust unregenerate people (not that all in the judicial system are, some lawyers are actually saved! We ought to have as many Christian lawyers, judges, and legal personnel as we can, they are the ones who have a greater wisdom) and

secular means to settle their claims, as if they believe that the secular world would be impartial, when actually, the enemy of our souls is involved more directly when he might have a chance to besmirch the Christian witness. Satan loves to see Christians sue one another!



1 Corinthians 6:2-4 – *Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church?*

We have in the body of believers all the resources necessary to settle disputes-truth, wisdom, equity, justice, kindness, generosity, and the mind of Christ, according to the scriptures. If we have this tremendous privilege of

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spiritual judgment in the future, and that ministry we're going to have will be based on principles of understanding, wisdom, and justice that we have available now in the Scriptures, then we can certainly trust them for handling disputes among ourselves right in this life.

In the ordinary cases of life, the point is that if two Christian parties can't agree between themselves, they ought to ask fellow Christians to help settle the matter for them, and then be willing to abide by their decision. This is another reason why the idea of "you don't have to go to church" is such a

demonic, yes I said demonic, lie. God has given and structured the church so that it can take care of these things, but when people don't believe in the authority of the church, they destroy part of the foundation for their lives. The truth is that mavericks have authority and responsibility and accountability issues. You cannot expect to have authority with God's people (by using God's Word) if you will not accept the authority of the local church. That is simply nonsense, and the whole New Testament testifies to the fact that vital membership in a local church is a non negotiable as a way of life for the Christian.

1 Corinthians 6:5-6 – *I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?*

Paul laments that the Corinthians are so immature that it seems as if there is no one mature enough to handle these things. We had ought to be maturing in our Christian life, growing in grace and the knowledge of God, so that we may use our biblically informed conscience and scriptural principles to help mediate if necessary. In this life, there will always be problems and disputes, disagreements and vigorous debate, even among believers. The question is will we step up to the plate and develop our lives according to Christ so that we don't have to run to court over every little thing?



Now if we are required to answer a charge or to testify, we have to respond, because as Christians we live under the law of the land just as much as anyone else. There are times when we need legal clarification of different kinds of agreements such as contracts, real estate deals, and



insurance coverage. There are some things that only a court of law can provide interpretation of. Sometimes, tragically, the quarrels or disagreements between Christians over financial issues and property issues get so tangled that they do have to have a secular court step in to render an expert legal

judgment.

In a criminal matter, a believer may need to sign a complaint against another believer who has broken the law, because sometimes failure to do so would condone the lawlessness. Any time that a Christian is being divorced by his or her spouse, the law requires a secular court to be involved. That may also be the case for child abuse, spousal abuse, financial irresponsibility, or child neglect. In those kinds of situations a parent or spouse may be forced to seek court protection.

But with all those exceptions to the principles of 1 Corinthians 6, going to court should always be seen as the last resort. The exceptions do not negate the rule; they prove its use. And our motive must be to glorify God, never to gain selfish advantage. We must be concerned about the cause of Christ in the life of the other party; that must be central. Reconciliation, restoration, redemption, repentance; think about it.

1 Corinthians 6:7-8 – *To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud--even your own brothers!*

So now you see where we need good strong churches in order to keep in step with the gospel when we are in disagreement and have disputes with other believers. However you might now say, "Well okay, we should settle these things in church not in court, but there aren't any good churches around, that is why we don't belong to one, and we couldn't possibly let it go then. Well, actually yes, that IS what Paul is saying, to let it go. You see, if you don't have a church, you are losing out on your opportunity to get this thing solved in a Christian manner, because Paul says if you cannot work it out there, you should just let it go.



Paul is saying that the believer who demands their legal rights in the face of this apostolic counsel always loses the case in God's sight. What becomes visible in that individual is their own selfishness, and also the fact that by demanding their rights in a court of law, they are basically saying that they don't believe God with his power and wisdom can work in the circumstances to accomplish his will. They trust the court system more than God himself.

Paul says, "Not only do you not bear it, you return fire, looking to inflict wrong".

Paul's point is that it's better to lose financially than to lose spiritually. Even when we're clearly in the right legally, we don't always have the spiritual or moral right to insist on it in public court. If we've been wronged or defrauded, we're called to forgiveness, not bitterness. If our fellow believers can't convince the brother to make things right, we're better off to suffer loss and injustice than to bring a lawsuit. Paul is only expanding the word Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:38-40). These hard words are absolutely contrary to the standards of the world that we live in today. When we're deprived wrongfully, we're to cast ourselves on the care of God, who will work for our good and for his glory. We can pray to the Lord who can change hearts and deal with injustice. We must not trust the legal system to do that, because it won't. When we aren't willing to lose something for the sake of Christ we have already lost.

Have you ever been tested in the area of losing something for Christ's sake? Sometimes we need to just let it go, to show mercy and so receive mercy from Christ (Matthew 5:7). All who are godly in Christ will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12), but most just try and find every way out of it they can. They don't have to worry about failing a test they don't have to take. Many will never submit to discipline, either from the church, or in some degree to the scriptures themselves. They never give up the right to be the final arbiter, and this is the glaring problem in many so-called Christians. They say one thing, but they actually believe another, and it will eventually

show itself as true that they were false. The gospel truth is that submitting to God means that we also have to submit to one another.

However, most people don't want to submit themselves to God's people. They want the gospel to get them out of hell, but they are willing to put others through hell for their own self-interest. They haven't enjoyed the Christian life because they won't die to themselves. They want everything easy; at every point they want support and praise. Then, when some trouble comes, as it inevitable will, and an ungodly but attractive alternative presents itself, they have no moral center on which to depend. They had never, for the sake of Christ, made a decision that cost them something; and they aren't about to start now. However, real professions of faith manifest themselves in a principal death to self-interest, in a principal commitment to the cause of Christ and His gospel. What is normal for a true Christian is taking up one's cross and following Jesus; we lose our lives but we gain all the more (John 12:24). Let us consider one another as we consider what Christ means to us (Philippians 2:1-11).

