

1 Corinthians 6:1-20

How to Sue in the Name of Jesus

We live in a society that is lawsuit happy. It has been reported that there are between 80 to 90 million lawsuits being filed per year in the world. That's about 150 per minute. America has also gone lawsuit crazy. We have seventy percent of the world lawyers and they are very busy. Two lawsuits caught my attention recently. The first involved a lady who ordered a small chili with cheese, onions at Wendy's, and when she ate it she found out that it was literally finger-licking good. Some people will do anything for money. She later was arrested for criminal charges. As of today, they still don't know where the finger tip came from.

The second story happened last June and it involved a NE Portland man who filed a lawsuit against Michael Jordan and Phil Knight, founder of Nike, because he has continuously been mistaken for Michael Jordan. Contrary to popular opinion; he does not want to be like Mike. The man stated in his lawsuit "I'm constantly being accused of looking like Michael and it makes it very uncomfortable for me," He is suing Jordan for defamation and permanent emotional pain and suffering. He's also suing Knight for defamation and permanent injury for promoting Jordan and making him one of the most recognized men in the world. He says for the past 15 years; he has been mistaken for Jordan nearly every day. You decide. Does he look like Jordan?

Bottom line: Our culture is lawsuit happy! The church at Corinth was also lawsuit crazy. They were suing each other right and left. From the tone of Paul's writing; it seems as if they were spending more time in the civil courts than they were at church. It must have been quite a sight on Sundays. Raising their hands and worshipping Jesus; and then telling their brothers and sisters in Christ; "Have a nice day in Jesus; see you in court Monday, you crook!" I can just see someone saying "Hey I prayed for John's lawsuit; that God would help him to prevail." You smile and say that was a great thing to do until you realize; "Hey wait a minute! He's suing me!" It is not a good thing when people in the church are suing each other. What bothered Paul even more was that grievances weren't handled in the church or among Christians; they were handled in the civil courts. The sight was bad: Christian brothers and sisters spilling their dirty laundry in front of unbelievers. Not exactly what Jesus had in mind when he said we are to be witnesses! So what do the Scriptures teach about lawsuits and Christians taking each other to court? That will be our focus today; let's read what Paul has to say in verses 1-4.

6:1 When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? 2 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? 3 Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! 4 So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church?

This section we will study today has many rhetorical questions. This first section has five. The main issue revolves around judging. Last week we mentioned that judgment is sometimes necessary when it comes to Christians—especially when someone is sleeping with their MOTHER. Paul gave a couple pointers on judging. The leadership in the church is to judge those that are involved with blatant sin. However, the church is NOT to judge those who are sinning blatantly and not Christians. That's God's job! The irony here is that the Corinthians—who aren't supposed to judge those outside the church—were going to non-Christians to make a judgment on their behalf in civil cases. It bothered Paul that the church never considered handling these matters within. Instead they sought resolution outside the church. In many ways, I think we tend to think like the Corinthians. If we have a grievance; the first thing we think about is going to the civil authorities; the last thing we consider is finding someone to be an arbitrator or mediator within the church. The end result is that we place our trust in people who don't tend to share our values and beliefs.

I'll paraphrase what Paul says to the church in contemporary language. Shame on You! Why do you seek help outside the church to present your grievances? If you are going to be judging the world and angels when Christ returns; can't you resolve your own grievances or find someone in the church to help you. You are making the church look pretty bad. We must appear incompetent to the world. Now some Christians have taken this passage to mean that Christians should never go to the civil authorities to file lawsuits if they are wronged.

The key to sorting whether to sue or not revolves around what Paul says at the end of verse three. He says they should be competent enough to try trivial cases? There are two ways in which Paul uses the word trivial. The first has to do with contrast. He contrasts the affairs of this world with eternity. In that sense the lawsuits of this world are trivial in comparison to the Final judgment. Therefore we should be competent enough to handle the affairs of this life. The second way trivial is used here is best understood by contrasting civil lawsuits with criminal ones. The church should not seek the civil courts when it comes to personal issues. Instead they should be sought only in criminal lawsuits, which incidentally are filed by a prosecutor. Here are some examples of trivial or civil matters.

- My Christian roommate bailed on me and left me with the six month lease. He even took the Veggie Tales
- A Christian brother sold me a Ford Pinto with a fish decal but he forgot to mention the reverse doesn't work. You should have seen my date when I told her to open her door and help me push us out of our parking space.

More serious trivial issues include

- Work or business issues involving Christians
- Real Estate lawsuits involving Christians
- Divorce between Christians

These are all personal issues between Christians. Before you consider going to civil court you should try to work these out first in the name of Christ.

Criminal offenses are another issue. They are not trivial. They include:

- Murder
- Rape
- Manslaughter
- Terrorism
- Child Molestation
- Physical Assault

These are crimes intended to purposely hurt or injure. If you are a victim you don't have to confront your attacker and say can we just pray about this and work this out by ourselves or with a Christian brother. These are not trivial issues. What Paul has in mind are trivial issues. Let's read on.

5 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, 6 but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? 7 To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? 8 But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!

In chapter four, Paul bagged on the Corinthians, and then said, he did not write those things to shame them. Not here. Paul writes to shame them. This is obviously a big deal to Paul. He cannot understand why they could not find someone wise to settle their disputes. Eligible people could include an elder, a pastor, or someone that is a Christian brother or sister that is respected by both parties in the church. If the case is too big for those folks; then a Christian Mediator should be sought. Virtually any dispute that is not criminal can be settled here.

- Divorce
- Child Custody
- Business and Consumer Disputes
- Car Accidents
- Landlord/Tenant, Construction, and Real Estate
- Insurance Claims

There are also some great benefits in Christian Mediation. The most important being that is less expensive and resolution is quicker. When you take a Christian to civil court; you have to pay attorney fees and the process is drawn out, which means you spend more. I'm not trying to do an infomercial; but the reality is that people often forget about mediation is an alternative to taking someone to court. In mediation; you have a mediator draw up the paper work and work through the issues. Mediators are neutral in that they do not represent any parties. They are used when two people can't resolve their issues on their own.

Here's the most important part from Paul's perspective. You should not have to air your dirty laundry before unbelievers. This is important from a Christian perspective because we are called to be witnesses to those that don't know Christ. If you go to court and are just nasty to each other before unbelievers, your faith loses its witness. You never want to be a Christian brother or sister that loses their witness. This is especially true in Christian divorce where character assassination is prevalent. Paul goes so far as to say it would be better to suffer wrong than damage your Christian witness before others. Translation.

- If you seek full compensation for the Pinto that doesn't have reverse; it would be better to work out something where you don't get all your money back for the sake of the Christian relationship. Besides you bought a Pinto!
- It would be better to settle for less than to go to a civil court where you would probably win everything.

You might think. "What are you talking about? I don't want them to get anything. I'm the one getting the raw end of the deal here! That might be true. But if you take them to court without negotiating first; there is probably little chance that you will spare the relationship. It is better to negotiate with someone than to try to squeeze out every cent they have. Things are never more important than the relationship. If you still have a problem with that try to remember that Jesus suffered wrong so that you could have a relationship with him and the Father. If he would have went to court and filed a lawsuit; he would have won. But he suffered wrong and did not demand a trial because the relationship was more important to him.

Paul said for Christians to have lawsuits is already a defeat for them. He's rather they suffered wrong than defraud a brother or sister in Christ before the civil authorities.

Now here are some hypothetical issues that Christian ultimately ask.

- What if a lawsuit is filed against me by another Christian? The first thing you should is find out if the other party would be willing to resolve this case with a mediator outside of court. If they are not willing; consider the stakes. If they are too high then get a lawyer and defend yourself. The key is trying to avoid court. Sometimes you can't.
- What if an unbeliever files a lawsuit against me? Same principle. Try to work out a compromise through a mediator. If this does not work; defend yourself and go to court.
- What if someone has committed a criminal crime. You have no choice but to go to court. Paul is referring to trivial grievances filed by Christians.

Paul's heart is simple: He doesn't want us to go to the civil authorities because we are God's chosen people. We already have the truth in us. We have the Holy Spirit. We have the resources to settle matters among ourselves without calling in the civil authorities. Now this doesn't mean Paul doesn't have any respect for civil authorities or think they are worthless. In Romans 13; he tells the Romans we are supposed to be in submission to our civil authorities. I had one guy tell me that he does not pay taxes because he doesn't believe in it. I responded by saying it doesn't matter what you believe in as a Christian; what matters is what God says about issues like taxes and the government. If Jesus paid taxes to Caesar; you need to pay taxes to Uncle Sam. Civil authorities according to Romans 13 are God ordained. They have power and we are in submission to them except when we are told we cannot worship Jesus. The issue here is not our governing authorities; the issue is bothering the courts with trivial issues that should be resolved in the church.

Paul simply does not want the courts to judge on issues that are personal in nature because those should be reserved for the church. We share the same values and beliefs and that is an important factor when it comes to making a verdict. In reality; we are righteous before God; those outside the church are unrighteous. Why allow the unrighteous to decide our personal disputes. Paul concludes by hammering this point hard.

9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

The curious thing about this list is that in the previous chapter Paul told the church they are not supposed to judge those outside the church who are sexually immoral, idolaters, greedy, and swindlers because you would have to leave the world. His point was that the church is not to judge them; that is God's responsibility. Instead the church is to judge the sexually immoral, idolaters, greedy, and those that are swindlers who claim they are Christians. Here Paul uses a similar list to describe people who God will judge. He will judge those who practice being sexually immoral, idolaters, homosexuality, thievery, drunkards, and swindlers without showing any kind of remorse. The key word is remorse. If there is no conviction these folks are not likely saved; which means there no regard for God. The hard reality is that these people will not inherit the kingdom of God. That is why we must associate with them. They need to see Jesus in us. They need to experience the power of the Holy Spirit.

I realize this is a sensitive passage. Many of us know sexually immoral people, adulators, homosexuals that fit the criteria for practicing this lifestyle. I want to suggest to you that each one of these people are no worse of a sinner than the next. There is no hierarchy when it comes to the worst sin. Sin is sin in God's eyes. The key issue here is conviction, remorse, and repentance. Whether you are a thief or an adulterer, or a homosexual.

I realize there is growing opinion that homosexuality is an inherited trait. It doesn't seem fair if a person is born a homosexual. You must understand this is not my opinion; this is what God says in the Bible. I wish there was scientific evidence that clearly validated the existence of a gay gene; but there is not. I wish God's word did not include homosexuality but it does. Before I was a Christian there were a few times I actually partied with some gay friends. Went to Capitol Hill in Seattle to eat at a gay restaurant. Went to a dance club where I danced with my gay friends. Went out to eat breakfast afterwards and had some fantastic conversations—many revolving around them trying to find self-worth. I spent hours talking to folks who were once married and had kids—but are now gay. I talked to guys who never were attracted to the opposite sex. I even had a person tell me that the apostle Paul himself was gay. I didn't know, I never read the Bible. I only knew that if someone were willing to stretch biblical truth in order to justify their lifestyle then it is something they spend a great time thinking about. But Paul was not a homosexual. He taught against practicing that lifestyle. The interesting thing here is the way he concludes. The church in Corinth knew first hand about practicing immoral lifestyles because some of them were adulators, sexually immoral, and homosexuals before they met Christ. But then Christ changed them.

11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

God has the power and ability to wash you from your sins, justify you as a Christian, and to sanctify you in the Spirit. Sanctification is just a big word that means in the course of your faith you become more like Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the one who dwells inside you and allows you to be transformed to become like Christ.

This Friday we will have Duan Walker of Mid-Valley Fellowship share a little about his ministry and how God has transformed his life and the lives of others struggling with the desires of homosexuality. He is an example of someone who has been washed and it is his desire to see others who want to follow Christ in this area also are changed. He has quit a good paying job in corporate America to dedicate himself to this cause. That's how the body of Christ works. Key people in the church commit themselves to investing in the lives of others and watching Christ transform lives.

The thrust of this section is that we should know our standing before the world. We have been made right with God and we have the truth of God. We have great privilege in this world. Consequently, we are God's representatives here on earth. If we want to be good representatives then we are going to have to learn how to handle our disputes amongst ourselves because we share Christ as our common denominator. Our witness to the culture is how we work through things in Christ and how our lives are different since we have come to know him. In the end, a witness is not someone you call to the civil courts to defend your case; our witness is the way we live our lives and share Christ. Always be conscious when you are in the presence of an unbeliever. You represent an important link in the chain that could lead them to Christ. How you handle conflict, grievances do matter. How you live your life matters. In the end, people need to see Jesus in us.