

The unfolding of your words gives light.

## The Temple of God

### An Exposition of 1 Corinthians

<sup>6:1</sup> Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints<sup>a</sup>? <sup>2</sup>Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to *constitute* the smallest law courts<sup>b</sup>? <sup>3</sup>Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life<sup>c</sup>? <sup>4</sup>So if you have law

<sup>a</sup> **6:1 Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?** The word “dare” is a fitting translation here. The word is actually the first word in the verse in Greek. Paul is saying that it takes a good deal of nerve to trust unbelieving judges with church business.

This likely refers to civil lawsuits. Church members are sinners. Sometimes they do not pay their bills. Sometimes they get bitter because someone owes them money or otherwise wrongs them. The solutions to this kind of trouble are in this text.

This text does not teach us to concern ourselves primarily with what the world thinks of the church. There is a difference between fearing man and caring enough to maintain a good reputation. Fear of man focuses on man’s judgment as authoritative. Instead we should view public opinion—when it is correct—as a reflection (though dim) of what God has already said.

For example, the immoral man in the Corinthian church was doing things condemned by both God and the pagans. It is not wrong for the church to consider a watching world in those circumstances. Paul’s concern for the reputation of the church at Corinth with outsiders moved him to teach the church to think the same way:

- Paul did not take a salary from the Corinthians and publicly gave up other preferences for the sake of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).
- Paul urged the church to give God the glory inside and outside the church with an evangelistic end in mind (1 Corinthians 10:31-33).
- Paul urged the church to exercise gifts that communicate the gospel to unbelievers who might enter their assembly (1 Corinthians 14:23-25).
- Paul pointed out that their sin and lack of sobriety had kept outsiders from learning of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:34).

Whatever connection, if any, there is between this matter and the immorality of the previous chapter, the two hold one application in common. Small private matters become large public matters when they are not dealt with biblically.

<sup>b</sup> **6:2 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts?** There will be a judgment when Jesus returns and the Church is going to participate. Paul’s words may be a reference to what Jesus told the disciples after saying that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom:

Then Peter said to Him, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?” And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Matthew 19:27-28

Jude spoke of a similar judging role for the saints. He quoted the apocryphal book of Enoch to describe the future ministry of the saints over those who are “outsiders”:

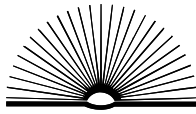
*It was also about these men that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the*

*The Epistle of 1 Corinthians  
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courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church<sup>d</sup>? <sup>5</sup>I say *this* to your shame. *Is it so, that* there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren<sup>e</sup>, <sup>6</sup>but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers<sup>f</sup>?

<sup>7</sup>Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded<sup>g</sup>? <sup>8</sup>On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. *You do* this even to *your* brethren<sup>h,i</sup>.

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ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.” Jude 14-15

<sup>c</sup> 6:3 **Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life?** What makes a believer competent to judge is not academic training or superior intellect. The point is that the “matters of this life” are trivial next to the cosmic magnitude of the future judgment. Why should the church outsource that which is God’s business?

<sup>d</sup> 6:4 **So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church?** There are two main ways this verse can be translated and understood. One, as we have here, asks why the people are appointing judges whose worldview stands opposed to that of the church. While this is a legitimate interpretation, I think the NIV brings out what Paul was saying:

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

Paul does not urge the church to find any old mediator in the church. He uses hyperbole in saying that even the simplest man in the church is better than taking church business to an unbeliever. Jethro urged Moses to find faithful men to share the load of judging (Exodus 18). So must we.

<sup>e</sup> 6:5 **I say *this* to your shame. *Is it so, that* there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren.** This same use of “shame” is found in 1 Corinthians 15:34, in the context of the church’s flippant living to the detriment of outsiders. Earlier (4:14) he said he did not wish to shame them. Shame is not always a bad thing. Paul is justified in saying *shame on you* because of the severity of the offense. Brothers were being defrauded and the community was missing the opportunity to see genuine justice in action.

<sup>f</sup> 6:6 **but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?** An incorrect attitude that can come from this statement has caused churches and others ministries to hide scandalous behavior from the authorities. Evil behavior, when hidden for fear of damage to a ministry, serves to wrong more people do even more damage to the ministry. When there is criminal activity in the church the perpetrators should be brought before the public authorities. But the matter Paul addresses here is very different.

This refers more to civil suits like those that involve money. It is certainly not an insult to governing authorities or lawyers. Paul made it very clear that he believed public authority is ordained of God (Romans 13).

<sup>g</sup> 6:7 **Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?** How important is winning a case or even a simple argument? To defraud is to take what does not belong to you or to keep for yourself what belongs to another. Paul used the word in the next chapter (7:5) to urge married couples not to withhold physical affection from each other. Paul asks if it might be better to miss out on your rights in order to accomplish a higher objective. Remember what the Lord Jesus taught about “going the extra mile”?

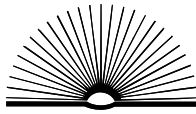
<sup>h</sup> 6:8 **On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. *You do* this even to *your* brethren.** This casts a very different light on arguments. This is your brother or sister, not your

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enemy. Soon these things will no longer matter. We tend to spend a lot of emotion and energy on what may last a lifetime while minimizing the importance of what will last forever. One Bible teacher summed up this perspective well:

Far better to live as though eternity were a reality and now is just a breath than to live as if now were a reality and eternity was a myth. -Alistair Begg

<sup>i</sup> 6:1-8 There have been many church scandals in recent years that have become national news. Some of those matters ought to be national news. However some matters are family matters. Just as you do not call the police when your three-year-old throws his sister's doll in a puddle. Non-criminal matters in the church should usually be handled in the family.

Why the church should mediate its own disputes:

1. Our reputation with outsiders does matter.
2. There is a fundamental difference between believers and unbelievers.
3. Little matters become big when they are not handled biblically.
4. God has equipped His church with competent judges.
5. You are showing that you trust God when you trust His servants.
6. You honor God when you sacrifice short-term gain for a higher cause.

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