

Should You Ever Sue Another Christian? • By Dr. David O. Dykes  
1 Corinthians 6:1-8

## INTRODUCTION

In 1986, I attended the Southern Baptist convention meeting in Dallas, Texas. It was one of those brouhahas with almost 54,000 messengers, by far the largest in the history of the Southern Baptist convention. There were some decisions made by the chair, Charles Stanley, and by some of the parliamentarians with which some of the messengers disagreed. So after the convention was over a couple, Mr. Mrs. Robert Crowder from Birmingham, Alabama, brought a lawsuit against Charles Stanley, some of the other officers, and the parliamentarians of the Southern Baptist Convention. The Southern Baptist convention had no other resource than to hire an attorney, James Gunther in Nashville, Tennessee. And there were several courts that turned down the suit, but the Crowders kept appealing it to a higher court until finally a court said that basically a civil court has no jurisdiction over an ecclesiastical matter.

That lawsuit costs us as the Southern Baptist Convention \$400,000 of cooperative program funds. Now to put that in perspective, our church is one of the leading cooperative programs supporting churches in America. Last year, our church gave a little over \$400,000 to the cooperative program. It's as if for an entire year, all the money that we gave for evangelism and missions went down the drain for a court case, a lawsuit brought by one couple, a Baptist against some other Baptists. Is it right for a Christian to sue another Christian? I called a prominent law firm Friday. You might be surprised to know that as of last Friday, there have been 2,546 civil lawsuits filed in Smith County!

And this is a very conservative estimate, but each case has about \$5,000 in legal fees. That means that in Smith County alone in 1994, there have been 12.5 million dollars spent by citizens for lawsuits. Now, how many of those are between Christians? Well, we don't know, but let's just assume maybe half or, or even a third. We're talking 6 million spent by Christians this year against some other Christians. I think that money could be invested in the Lord's work a lot better way.

Let's see what the Bible has to say about it because it does address this topic. Paul gets very upset with the church. First Corinthians 6: 1-8 says:

If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord's people? <sup>2</sup>Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world,

are you not competent to judge trivial cases? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!<sup>4</sup> Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you ask for a ruling from those whose way of life is scorned in the church? <sup>5</sup> I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? <sup>6</sup> But instead, one brother takes another to court—and this in front of unbelievers! <sup>7</sup> The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? <sup>8</sup> Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers and sisters.

“Dispute” is a word that means a legal matter with another. This is some of the strongest language Paul ever employs. In Corinth, when there was a legal dispute between two people, there was a very highly structured way that this was to be addressed. Let's say you had a dispute against another person. You were to enlist an advocate, and it didn't have to be a legal expert. And the other person would get an advocate. And then those two advocates would enlist a judge, again not a legal expert but a neutral third party that both advocates would agree upon. They would go to this impartial judge, present their cases, and he would rule. If they were not satisfied, then later they could take it to what we might call a grand jury of 40 men in every municipality. And it had to be settled at that time. To Paul, Christians were really blowing it big because they were taking legal disputes before a judge and appointed judge who is not a Christian and advocates who may not be Christians. Paul says, “You're airing your dirty laundry before unbelievers, blowing your testimony, and hurting the church.” So, he says, don't do that.

Even though the legal structure is not identical in America to that of Corinth, there are some principles that really do apply. Now, there are some of you who may have had to take some kind of legal action against another Christian. Perhaps someone is taking legal action against you, or maybe something you're considering it right now. You need to consider what God's word says about your behavior in a situation like that.

## **I. THE REBUKE AGAINST BELIEVERS**

Paul says, “I am ashamed of you.” I think what Paul didn't say is at least as important as what he did say. **1. Paul didn't say it's wrong to use the legal system**

First, he didn't say it's wrong to use the legal system. He's not saying it's wrong for you to bring a lawsuit against a company that has wronged you. What he's talking about is one believer bringing a lawsuit against another believer. Let's say some company has wronged you. This is not saying that you should not take legal recourse against them. In fact, Paul himself used the legal system of his day in Acts

chapter 22. Paul is about to be flogged by the Romans, and Paul looks up and says, "By the way, is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen?" Paul knew it wasn't legal. It was illegal for a Roman citizen to be whipped. And the soldier backed up and said, "You mean, you're a Roman citizen?" Paul said yes. The soldier said, "Excuse me. I got to go see my boss." He went to see his boss. That boss went to see his boss. Finally, it made it all the way up to the head guy. And he comes down there to Paul. Can't you picture Paul, stretched out, bare-backed, reading to be whipped? The boss says, "Are you really a Roman citizen?" Paul said yes, I was born a Roman citizen. Now there were only three ways to become a Roman citizen. Your father had to be a Roman citizen. Or you could buy Roman citizenship, which was very expensive. Or it could be bestowed upon you by the emperor.

The Roman soldier set Paul free in a hurry. Paul utilized the legal system another time. When Paul was standing before Festus, he said, "I appeal to Caesar," which was his legal right as a Roman citizen. So what I'm saying is Paul wasn't saying don't ever use the legal system. What he is speaking against is one Christian suing another Christian in a secular court.

## **2. Paul didn't say unbelievers are unfair**

This is not a statement against unbelievers. He's not saying that you won't get justice in an unbelieving court. And that's true in America. We really think that our system of justice is as fair as it can be. Paul is not saying anything about the fairness or unfairness of our legal system.

## **3. Paul is not saying secular courts are corrupt**

He is not addressing secular courts for their fairness/unfairness or how corrupt they are/aren't. Sometimes we make jokes against lawyers. And we try to say that they're shysters and things like that. Paul doesn't say don't use the court system because these people are corrupt. No, he's saying they may be fair. The whole issue is Christians taking their lawsuit before an ungodly secular court. That's the rebuke that he makes.

## **II. THE REASONS NOT TO SUE A BROTHER**

He gives some very important reasons why one believer should not Sue another believer.

### **1. You lose your position of honor**

When you take a believer to court, you've already lost. In verse seven, that's exactly what he says. He says the very fact that you have lawsuits among you means that you have completely been defeated already. He says, you've already lost. You may not lose the case, but you've already lost. Let me tell you what you've lost. Number one, when you take another Christian to court, you've already

lost your position of honor. You are lowering yourself. In verse two, Paul asks: “Don't you know that the saints are going to judge the world?”

That word “judge” means literally “to rule.” Who are the saints? We sometimes think of saints like Saint John, St. Mark, St. Christopher, etc. Those are people who are canonized by the Roman Catholic church. But I want to remind you that the Bible teaches that all believers are saints. There are only two kinds of people in the world. Those who are saints and those who ain't, right? Either you are a saint or you're not. And if you are a Christian, you're a saint. The Bible says that one day we'll rule the world. Now what's that talking about? It's talking about the millennial reign of Christ from the book of Revelation, What else does Paul say about a saint's position of honor? He says in verse three that we will judge angels.

The Bible says that God made us a little lower than the angels. When you become a Christian, in a sense you are elevated, and we will have spiritual authority over angels. He says why in the world, then, are you submitting your position of authority to those who are unbelievers?

## **2. You lose your source of authority**

If you are a Christian and you're committed to live by the Bible as your source of authority, the moment that you go and take another Christian to a secular court, you're immediately taking this source of authority and laying it aside. You're giving up this source of authority and going by the statutes of that state or that county or that nation. You're under a different source of authority. The Bible teaches that Christians ought to live by the Bible. Did you know that it ought to be our main basis of authority? And whenever you take someone to court, you're setting this basis of authority aside. You don't expect to go into some secular court and say, “The Bible says...” You'll be laughed right out of that court.

## **3. You lose your testimony to the lost**

Verse 6 says one brother goes to law against another brother in front of unbelievers. The main reason that a Christian should never take another individual Christian to a secular court is because it blows the Christian testimony. What did Jesus say? He said by this shall all men know that you are my believers....that you have a “God loves you” bumper sticker? If you wear a cross around your neck? Is that what he said? No. If you love one another.

My heart is grieved by all the arguing and the bickering and the fighting that's going on in the Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist General Convention of Texas through the years. You know why? Because the newspapers love to pick up on this. And it's juicy, sensational journalism. Those people out there who aren't Christians look at that and they say, “That's just a bunch of Baptists fighting again.” That blows our testimony. It ruins our testimony. And I tell you, it grieves my heart. And I believe it grieves the heart of God. I really do. Whenever you take another believer to court in front of unbelievers, what about the love you're

supposed to have for that believer? What about the forgiveness you're supposed to have toward that believer?

### **III. THE RESPONSE OF A MISTREATED BELIEVER**

How should you respond when you have been mistreated? Paul explains in the last part of verse seven. You're not going to like it, but this is what the word says. It says, "Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?" You may not like it, but he says it is better for you just to be cheated. It is better for you to be wrong than for you to blow your testimony by taking another individual believer to court in a lawsuit.

So how should you respond?

#### **1. Be willing to surrender your rights**

Everybody's going around demanding their rights. He says you're better off to be cheated. Go ahead and surrender your rights. I want to tell you that's exactly what Jesus Christ did when he came to planet earth. Did you know that he surrendered his rights here? He was in heaven, co-equal co-eternal with the Father. And the Bible says in Philippians chapter two that he did not see that as something to be grasped. When the Father said to go to planet earth, he did not say, "Father, I've got my rights. I demand to stay here with you in heaven and not go down there to earth and suffer and experience humiliation and pain and death and crucifixion. I know my rights." He surrendered his rights. The Bible says he humbled himself and took on the form of a man and became obedient as a servant. Even to the point of death, he gave up his rights. Have you noticed today that in America, everybody's demanding their rights? Every group is demanding their rights. Sometimes you'd better surrender your rights. You're walking down a sidewalk and a car leaves the road and starts coming down that sidewalk toward you. You do have the right of way, and you can stand on your rights. But you'd be dead. That's just as good as being dead wrong, right? Sometimes you need to surrender your rights and give up your rights.

Charles Stanley tells the story of two businessmen in his church who started a business. And they had some kind of little partnership agreement that they wrote up for the arrangement. One man put the money in. He was a silent financial backer. The other man put the brains and the sweat into it. He was a managing partner. And for two years, this managing partner built this business and devoted his life to this business. After he'd been working in it for two years, one morning, he went to the office and his key would not fit the door. He called his partner. He said, my key won't fit the door. And the partner said, "I've changed the locks and you're no longer in the business." And the friend said, "What do you mean? We're partners. I've been working in this business for two years." But the other guy said, "I don't want you anymore. Get out."

The managing partner went to see an attorney who was also a Christian and showed him this partnership agreement. And this attorney who was a Christian said, "Yes, I do believe that you probably can win in a court of law. But as a Christian, my advice to you is what the Bible says in 1 Corinthians six. And I advise you not to take him to court. You could probably win, probably demand your rights, but I advise you as a brother not to do it. So this man surrendered his rights and didn't sue him.

He got some job making just a fraction of what he was making with this first company. About a year later, he got a call from a man he'd never heard of before. And this man said asked his name and asked if had been the managing partner of that company. The man said yes, but the other man hung up. He wondered what in the world that was about!

The next day, he got another call from this same man. This time he said, "I just want you to know that I've talked to some people, and I understand what happened with your former company. Now, I understand that you were a partner in this company along with the man who did you wrong. But I want you to know that I have just bought that company, and I have negotiated a deal that you will receive half of the proceeds of the sale of that company. This week, you'll receive a check for \$2 million in the mail."

God has a way of equaling the score. God has a way of working things out. If it doesn't even happen in this life, that's okay. Isn't that what Paul says? He says it's better for you to be wrong. It's better for you to be cheated. I had a personal experience in this with a man in one of the churches that I served in Alabama. He was one of these rough around the edges, kind of good ol' boys, but he really got saved and fell in love with Jesus. He owned a building supply company and, and he came to me because there was a contractor who owed him several thousand dollars for building materials that he hadn't paid. And he tried to get this money, but this guy never would pay him. The guy who owed him the money was also a Christian and was active in some little country church. And this man came to me wanting to take this guy to court and get his money. I showed him what the Bible said in 1 Corinthians six. And I said, "I know he owes you the money. It's rightfully yours. The Bible says you shouldn't take another brother to court. And so I advise you not to sue him." He agreed not to because this guy was really committed about doing what the Lord wanted him to do. He didn't sue him, but he got four or five big strong fellows to go out to a house that this contractor was building. They walked up and started loading all the tools in their trucks. Then the guy who came to see me said, "When you pay me my money, I'll give you your tools back. He didn't Sue him, but he stole his tools!"

Christians ought to have some way to work things out. How do you respond when you have been wronged by a believer when you've been mistreated?

## **2. Seek personal reconciliation**

You should always seek to go to that person who has wronged you and say, “I believe that I've been wronged. And I believe that it is a legal problem that I could take you to court over. But as a brother of yours in Christ, I am trying to obey what the Bible says. And I don't want to take you to court. Is there some way we can settle this without going to court?” Just address this with them, and talk with them. Isn't that what Jesus said to do?

He said in Matthew 18, “If you bring your gift to the altar and there you remember that any brother has something against you, leave your gift there and go to that brother and be reconciled unto him.” If somebody has committed a crime against you, trespassed against you, you go to them personally. If they won't hear you, what do you do? Take them to court? No, try taking another believer or two with you to that person. In my ministry as pastor, I had been brought into a situation between two Christian individuals. It was basically a legal matter, a financial matter, and they had a disagreement over it. I acted as a mediator between the two, and we tried to work it out. They asked me what was fair, and I advised them in writing what I thought was right to do. On two occasions, believers settled things out of court without having to take a brother to court. What if they won't listen? Well, there's one final attempt that every Christian ought to try to make.

## **3. Seek Christian arbitration**

Did you know that there is a legal process that you can go through without taking someone to court? There will be a court-assigned arbitrator who will decide a matter between two parties who disagree. In Birmingham, Alabama, one of those largest Presbyterian churches in America is Briarwood Presbyterian church. It's a huge, godly church that is Presbyterian Church of America and very biblically conservative. They have taken 1 Corinthians 6 so literally that they offer what's called a Christian arbitration ministry. Once a week, they have those in the legal profession who volunteer their time to be Christian arbitrators between two Christians. You don't have to be a member of that church to come and present your case for Christian arbitration. These two individuals sign a paper saying that they will agree to the arbitrator's decision. And this has prevented many Christians from having to go before a secular court with their legal disputes.

## **CONCLUSION**

It really boils down to whether you're going to obey God's word. Are you going to do what you think is best for you? Are you going to demand your rights? You have some rights as an American and thank God for those rights. But sometimes we surrender those rights so that Jesus Christ can be glorified. I think the Bible teaches that it always ought to be the very last resort. If at all possible, a Christian should never take another individual Christian to a secular court and sue them. And I think

that when you do that, the testimony of Jesus Christ will be improved and the church will be edified.

## OUTLINE

### INTRODUCTION

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“By the way, is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen?” Paul knew it wasn't legal. It was illegal for a Roman citizen to be whipped. And the soldier backed up and said, “You mean, you're a Roman citizen?” Paul said yes. The soldier said, “Excuse me. I got to go see my boss.” He went to see his boss. That boss went to see his boss. Finally, it made it all the way up to the head guy. And he comes down there to Paul. Can't you picture Paul, stretched out, bare-backed, reading to be whipped? The boss says, “Are you really a Roman citizen?” Paul said yes, I was born a Roman citizen. Now there were only three ways to become a Roman citizen. Your father had to be a Roman citizen. Or you could buy Roman citizenship, which was very expensive. Or it could be bestowed upon you by the emperor.

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How should you respond when you have been mistreated? Paul explains in the last part of verse seven. You're not going to like it, but this is what the word says. It says, "Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?" You may not like it, but he says it is better for you just to be cheated. It is better for you to be wrong than for you to blow your testimony by taking another individual believer to court in a lawsuit.

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Christian, my advice to you is what the Bible says in 1 Corinthians six. And I advise you not to take him to court. You could probably win, probably demand your rights, but I advise you as a brother not to do it. So this man surrendered his rights and didn't sue him.

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Christians ought to have some way to work things out. How do you respond when you have been wronged by a believer when you've been mistreated?

## **2. Seek personal reconciliation**

You should always seek to go to that person who has wronged you and say, "I believe that I've been wronged. And I believe that it is a legal problem that I could

take you to court over. But as a brother of yours in Christ, I am trying to obey what the Bible says. And I don't want to take you to court. Is there some way we can settle this without going to court?" Just address this with them, and talk with them. Isn't that what Jesus said to do?

He said in Matthew 18, "If you bring your gift to the altar and there you remember that any brother has something against you, leave your gift there and go to that brother and be reconciled unto him." If somebody has committed a crime against you, trespassed against you, you go to them personally. If they won't hear you, what do you do? Take them to court? No, try taking another believer or two with you to that person. In my ministry as pastor, I had been brought into a situation between two Christian individuals. It was basically a legal matter, a financial matter, and they had a disagreement over it. I acted as a mediator between the two, and we tried to work it out. They asked me what was fair, and I advised them in writing what I thought was right to do. On two occasions, believers settled things out of court without having to take a brother to court. What if they won't listen? Well, there's one final attempt that every Christian ought to try to make.

### **3. Seek Christian arbitration**

Did you know that there is a legal process that you can go through without taking someone to court? There will be a court-assigned arbitrator who will decide a matter between two parties who disagree. In Birmingham, Alabama, one of those largest Presbyterian churches in America is Briarwood Presbyterian church. It's a huge, godly church that is Presbyterian Church of America and very biblically conservative. They have taken 1 Corinthians 6 so literally that they offer what's called a Christian arbitration ministry. Once a week, they have those in the legal profession who volunteer their time to be Christian arbitrators between two Christians. You don't have to be a member of that church to come and present your case for Christian arbitration. These two individuals sign a paper saying that they will agree to the arbitrator's decision. And this has prevented many Christians from having to go before a secular court with their legal disputes.

### **CONCLUSION**

It really boils down to whether you're going to obey God's word. Are you going to do what you think is best for you? Are you going to demand your rights? You have some rights as an American and thank God for those rights. But sometimes we surrender those rights so that Jesus Christ can be glorified. I think the Bible teaches that it always ought to be the very last resort. If at all possible, a Christian should never take another individual Christian to a secular court and sue them. And I think that when you do that, the testimony of Jesus Christ will be improved and the church will be edified.

## OUTLINE

### INTRODUCTION

In 1986, I attended the Southern Baptist convention meeting in Dallas, Texas. It was one of those brouhahas with almost 54,000 messengers, by far the largest in the history of the Southern Baptist convention. There were some decisions made by the chair, Charles Stanley, and by some of the parliamentarians with which some of the messengers disagreed. So after the convention was over a couple, Mr. Mrs. Robert Crowder from Birmingham, Alabama, brought a lawsuit against Charles Stanley, some of the other officers, and the parliamentarians of the Southern Baptist Convention. The Southern Baptist convention had no other resource than to hire an attorney, James Gunther in Nashville, Tennessee. And there were several courts that turned down the suit, but the Crowders kept appealing it to a higher court until finally a court said that basically a civil court has no jurisdiction over an ecclesiastical matter.

That lawsuit costs us as the Southern Baptist Convention \$400,000 of cooperative program funds. Now to put that in perspective, our church is one of the leading cooperative programs supporting churches in America. Last year, our church gave a little over \$400,000 to the cooperative program. It's as if for an entire year, all the money that we gave for evangelism and missions went down the drain for a court case, a lawsuit brought by one couple, a Baptist against some other Baptists. Is it right for a Christian to sue another Christian? I called a prominent law firm Friday. You might be surprised to know that as of last Friday, there have been 2,546 civil lawsuits filed in Smith County!

And this is a very conservative estimate, but each case has about \$5,000 in legal fees. That means that in Smith County alone in 1994, there have been 12.5 million dollars spent by citizens for lawsuits. Now, how many of those are between Christians? Well, we don't know, but let's just assume maybe half or, or even a third. We're talking 6 million spent by Christians this year against some other Christians. I think that money could be invested in the Lord's work a lot better way.

Let's see what the Bible has to say about it because it does address this topic. Paul gets very upset with the church. First Corinthians 6: 1-8 says:

If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord's people? <sup>2</sup> Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! <sup>4</sup> Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you ask for a ruling from those whose way of life is scorned in the church? <sup>5</sup> I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? <sup>6</sup> But

instead, one brother takes another to court—and this in front of unbelievers!  
<sup>7</sup> The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? <sup>8</sup> Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers and sisters.

“Dispute” is a word that means a legal matter with another. This is some of the strongest language Paul ever employs. In Corinth, when there was a legal dispute between two people, there was a very highly structured way that this was to be addressed. Let's say you had a dispute against another person. You were to enlist an advocate, and it didn't have to be a legal expert. And the other person would get an advocate. And then those two advocates would enlist a judge, again not a legal expert but a neutral third party that both advocates would agree upon. They would go to this impartial judge, present their cases, and he would rule. If they were not satisfied, then later they could take it to what we might call a grand jury of 40 men in every municipality. And it had to be settled at that time. To Paul, Christians were really blowing it big because they were taking legal disputes before a judge and appointed judge who is not a Christian and advocates who may not be Christians. Paul says, “You're airing your dirty laundry before unbelievers, blowing your testimony, and hurting the church.” So, he says, don't do that.

Even though the legal structure is not identical in America to that of Corinth, there are some principles that really do apply. Now, there are some of you who may have had to take some kind of legal action against another Christian. Perhaps someone is taking legal action against you, or maybe something you're considering it right now. You need to consider what God's word says about your behavior in a situation like that.

## **I. THE REBUKE AGAINST BELIEVERS**

Paul says, “I am ashamed of you.” I think what Paul didn't say is at least as important as what he did say.

### **1. Paul didn't say it's wrong to use the legal system**

First, he didn't say it's wrong to use the legal system. He's not saying it's wrong for you to bring a lawsuit against a company that has wronged you. What he's talking about is one believer bringing a lawsuit against another believer. Let's say some company has wronged you. This is not saying that you should not take legal recourse against them. In fact, Paul himself used the legal system of his day in Acts chapter 22. Paul is about to be flogged by the Romans, and Paul looks up and says, “By the way, is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen?” Paul knew it wasn't legal. It was illegal for a Roman citizen to be whipped. And the soldier backed up and said, “You mean, you're a Roman citizen?” Paul said yes. The soldier said, “Excuse me. I got to go see my boss.” He went to see his boss. That boss went to



see his boss. Finally, it made it all the way up to the head guy. And he comes down there to Paul. Can't you picture Paul, stretched out, bare-backed, reading to be whipped? The boss says, "Are you really a Roman citizen?" Paul said yes, I was born a Roman citizen. Now there were only three ways to become a Roman citizen. Your father had to be a Roman citizen. Or you could buy Roman citizenship, which was very expensive. Or it could be bestowed upon you by the emperor.

The Roman soldier set Paul free in a hurry. Paul utilized the legal system another time. When Paul was standing before Festus, he said, "I appeal to Caesar," which was his legal right as a Roman citizen. So what I'm saying is Paul wasn't saying don't ever use the legal system. What he is speaking against is one Christian suing another Christian in a secular court.

## **2. Paul didn't say unbelievers are unfair**

This is not a statement against unbelievers. He's not saying that you won't get justice in an unbelieving court. And that's true in America. We really think that our system of justice is as fair as it can be. Paul is not saying anything about the fairness or unfairness of our legal system.

## **3. Paul is not saying secular courts are corrupt**

He is not addressing secular courts for their fairness/unfairness or how corrupt they are/aren't. Sometimes we make jokes against lawyers. And we try to say that they're shysters and things like that. Paul doesn't say don't use the court system because these people are corrupt. No, he's saying they may be fair. The whole issue is Christians taking their lawsuit before an ungodly secular court. That's the rebuke that he makes.

## **II. THE REASONS NOT TO SUE A BROTHER**

He gives some very important reasons why one believer should not Sue another believer.

### **1. You lose your position of honor**

When you take a believer to court, you've already lost. In verse seven, that's exactly what he says. He says the very fact that you have lawsuits among you means that you have completely been defeated already. He says, you've already lost. You may not lose the case, but you've already lost. Let me tell you what you've lost. Number one, when you take another Christian to court, you've already lost your position of honor. You are lowering yourself. In verse two, Paul asks: "Don't you know that the saints are going to judge the world?"

That word "judge" means literally "to rule." Who are the saints? We sometimes think of saints like Saint John, St. Mark, St. Christopher, etc. Those are people who are canonized by the Roman Catholic church. But I want to remind you that the Bible teaches that all believers are saints. There are only two kinds of people in the

world. Those who are saints and those who ain't, right? Either you are a saint or you're not. And if you are a Christian, you're a saint. The Bible says that one day we'll rule the world. Now what's that talking about? It's talking about the millennial reign of Christ from the book of Revelation, What else does Paul say about a saint's position of honor? He says in verse three that we will judge angels.

The Bible says that God made us a little lower than the angels. When you become a Christian, in a sense you are elevated, and we will have spiritual authority over angels. He says why in the world, then, are you submitting your position of authority to those who are unbelievers?

## **2. You lose your source of authority**

If you are a Christian and you're committed to live by the Bible as your source of authority, the moment that you go and take another Christian to a secular court, you're immediately taking this source of authority and laying it aside. You're giving up this source of authority and going by the statutes of that state or that county or that nation. You're under a different source of authority. The Bible teaches that Christians ought to live by the Bible. Did you know that it ought to be our main basis of authority? And whenever you take someone to court, you're setting this basis of authority aside. You don't expect to go into some secular court and say, "The Bible says..." You'll be laughed right out of that court.

## **3. You lose your testimony to the lost**

Verse 6 says one brother goes to law against another brother in front of unbelievers. The main reason that a Christian should never take another individual Christian to a secular court is because it blows the Christian testimony. What did Jesus say? He said by this shall all men know that you are my believers....that you have a "God loves you" bumper sticker? If you wear a cross around your neck? Is that what he said? No. If you love one another.

My heart is grieved by all the arguing and the bickering and the fighting that's going on in the Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist General Convention of Texas through the years. You know why? Because the newspapers love to pick up on this. And it's juicy, sensational journalism. Those people out there who aren't Christians look at that and they say, "That's just a bunch of Baptists fighting again." That blows our testimony. It ruins our testimony. And I tell you, it grieves my heart. And I believe it grieves the heart of God. I really do. Whenever you take another believer to court in front of unbelievers, what about the love you're supposed to have for that believer? What about the forgiveness you're supposed to have toward that believer?

## **III. THE RESPONSE OF A MISTREATED BELIEVER**

How should you respond when you have been mistreated? Paul explains in the last part of verse seven. You're not going to like it, but this is what the word says. It

says, "Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?" You may not like it, but he says it is better for you just to be cheated. It is better for you to be wrong than for you to blow your testimony by taking another individual believer to court in a lawsuit.

So how should you respond?

### **1. Be willing to surrender your rights**

Everybody's going around demanding their rights. He says you're better off to be cheated. Go ahead and surrender your rights. I want to tell you that's exactly what Jesus Christ did when he came to planet earth. Did you know that he surrendered his rights here? He was in heaven, co-equal co-eternal with the Father. And the Bible says in Philippians chapter two that he did not see that as something to be grasped. When the Father said to go to planet earth, he did not say, "Father, I've got my rights. I demand to stay here with you in heaven and not go down there to earth and suffer and experience humiliation and pain and death and crucifixion. I know my rights." He surrendered his rights. The Bible says he humbled himself and took on the form of a man and became obedient as a servant. Even to the point of death, he gave up his rights. Have you noticed today that in America, everybody's demanding their rights? Every group is demanding their rights. Sometimes you'd better surrender your rights. You're walking down a sidewalk and a car leaves the road and starts coming down that sidewalk toward you. You do have the right of way, and you can stand on your rights. But you'd be dead. That's just as good as being dead wrong, right? Sometimes you need to surrender your rights and give up your rights.

Charles Stanley tells the story of two businessmen in his church who started a business. And they had some kind of little partnership agreement that they wrote up for the arrangement. One man put the money in. He was a silent financial backer. The other man put the brains and the sweat into it. He was a managing partner. And for two years, this managing partner built this business and devoted his life to this business. After he'd been working in it for two years, one morning, he went to the office and his key would not fit the door. He called his partner. He said, my key won't fit the door. And the partner said, "I've changed the locks and you're no longer in the business." And the friend said, "What do you mean? We're partners. I've been working in this business for two years." But the other guy said, "I don't want you anymore. Get out."

The managing partner went to see an attorney who was also a Christian and showed him this partnership agreement. And this attorney who was a Christian said, "Yes, I do believe that you probably can win in a court of law. But as a Christian, my advice to you is what the Bible says in 1 Corinthians six. And I advise you not to take him to court. You could probably win, probably demand

your rights, but I advise you as a brother not to do it. So this man surrendered his rights and didn't sue him.

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- 2. Paul didn't say unbelievers are unfair**
- 3. Paul is not saying secular courts are corrupt**

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- 1. You lose your position of honor**
- 2. You lose your source of authority**
- 3. You lose your testimony to the lost**

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