

Judge for Yourselves

1 Cor 6:1-6

I. INTRODUCTION.

A. We live in a society where people will sue for absolutely anything.

1. No doubt, you've heard about Roy L. Pearson's suing Custom Cleaners.
 - a. Pearson is an administrative law judge in Washington, DC, who took a pair of pants to Custom Cleaners in May 2005.
 - b. He showed up a couple days later to collect his dry cleaning and low and behold the pants were missing.
 - c. As a result of the cleaner's failure to keep up with his pants, Pearson sued Custom Cleaners for \$67 million.
2. On February 27, 1992, Stella Liebeck, a 79-year-old lady from Alberque, NM had her grandson go through a McDonald's drive-thru so that she could get a cup of coffee.
 - a. In order to put crème and sugar in her coffee, Liebeck placed the cup between her legs and spilled the entire cup of coffee.
 - b. Because she was wearing sweatpants, Liebeck suffered third-degree burns on her thighs, buttocks, and groin.
 - c. She sued McDonald's and a jury awarded her \$2.9 million.

B. Roman society also liked to sue one another and our text this morning makes clear that the Corinthian Christians were caught up in that court frenzy.

1. From what we read in this text, it's apparent that some members of the Corinthian church were suing one another.
2. Paul has just been discussing sexual immorality and how the church needed to judge that and deal with it appropriately, he writes here that Christians shouldn't be taking one another to court, and then in the second half of this chapter, he returns to the theme of sexual immorality.
 - a. Many scholars, therefore, believe that there is a unity in chapters 5 & 6.
 - b. It is my conviction that the father and son up in chapter 5 are suing one another and Paul deals with that suit here in the text.
 - c. Whether or not the specific trial involved the man living with his step-mother and his father, there are several principles which are timeless in this text. We'll examine two of those principles this morning: WHY DO YOU JUDGE FOR YOURSELVES? & HOW DO YOU JUDGE FOR YOURSELVES?

II. WHY DO YOU JUDGE FOR YOURSELVES?, vv. 1-3.

A. If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints?, v. 1.

1. One of the reasons Paul mentions that Christians should not be taking their disputes to court is that they were going before the "ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints."
2. The Apostle refers to the judges in Roman society as "ungodly."
 - a. The Greek term for "ungodly" refers to those who are doing that which is unrighteous.
 - b. Judges in ancient Roman society were known for their injustice and wickedness.

- The famous philosopher and Roman historian Dio Chrysostom said about AD 100 that in Corinth there were “lawyer innumerable perverting justice.” While that statement comes fifty years or so after the writing of this Epistle, I still think it’s valid in order to see the view people had of the judicial process in Corinth.
 - In Roman society, the scales were greatly tilted toward those who were well-to-do; in fact, Roman law was written in such a way that the wealthy did far better than the poor at court.
- c. Is it not true that judges today are often ungodly?
- If you went before any judge in the country today, do you honestly believe that he or she would judge you based upon proper standards?
 - The problem is saying that, of course, is that sometimes judges are, in fact, Christians and not at all ungodly.
 - I know a very good Christian man who has served as a judge in Pike County ever since I’ve known him and you’d struggle to find a better man than he.
 - But, I would argue that even if we went before Larry for judgment, you might find ungodly judgment.
 - We need more Christian judges, and I don’t want anything I say here construed to mean otherwise; Larry would be honest and fair in all proceedings, and I don’t mean to imply otherwise.
 - However, the laws by which Larry judges are often ungodly.
 - Larry is a family court judge, and I’m sure there are times he has to act in divorce cases or custody battles which are consistent with the laws of Kentucky but not quite consistent with the Laws of God.
 - You know there are many judges who must do exactly that—a judge may be forced to let someone guilty off on a technicality or do render other judgments in keeping with man-made laws when he would far rather render judgment in keeping with divine precepts.
- B. Not only does Paul say that human judges are ungodly but he declares that the saints will judge the world, v. 2.
1. This is the second time in this broad context that Paul mentions Christians’ judging the world.
 - a. The first was in the previous paragraph where Paul says, “What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church?”
 - b. Here Paul says that, in fact, Christians will judge the world. Which is it, are we to judge the world or not?
 - I’m sure some liberal scholars would point to these two paragraphs and seemingly incompatible ideas and say, “Look, you can’t trust the Bible. Paul first says that Christians aren’t to judge the world and then he says just a couple of sentences later that they are.”
 - I’m convinced that if we keep both these sentences in context, they are quite easy to understand.
 - It’s not our role to judge the present world; if someone wants to live in sin apart from the Gospel, that is his or her business.
 - On the other hand, at the end of this world, we will judge the world.
 - In Greek, as well as in English, the first sentence in question is in the present tense (“What business is it of mine to be judging right now those outside?”), while in the second sentence in question, Paul uses the future tense (“The saints will judge the world.”).
- How will saints judge the world?

- Quite frankly, I haven't the foggiest idea how we will judge the world, for God hasn't revealed that to me. Scripture raises interesting questions such as this one, but God in his wisdom chose not to give us the answers.
- Yet, we know that we shall judge the world, for Scripture reveals that.
 - "I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge" (Rv 20:4).
 - Notice what Daniel witnessed: "As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom" (Dan 7:21-22).
 - In ANE thought, declaring that the saints would possess the kingdom would be the same as saying they would judge.
 - You see, the ancient idea of a king, was more than of a judge than anything else.
 - ✓ You recall why Solomon prayed for wisdom: "Give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" (1 Ki 3:9).
 - ✓ As an example of Solomon's great wisdom, you recall the episode where he judged between two prostitutes arguing over one child.
 - Thus, speaking of our reigning with Christ is equivalent to saying that we will judge alongside him.

C. Saints will also judge the angels, v. 3.

1. Again, I do not presume to know what God has not revealed, but in some way we will not only judge the world but angels.
2. Because we are going to judge the world and angels, Paul asks, are you not competent to judge trivial cases?, v. 2.
 - a. Here's Paul's argument in a nutshell: "You are going to judge the world and angels, you'd better get used to the idea of judging" and
 - b. "Since you're going to be judging such serious things, don't you think you can decide among yourselves trivial cases?"

D. What are we to take away from this text?

1. We never, ever air our dirty laundry in front of the world.
 - a. In any group, there are going to be disagreements, but Paul says those disagreements are better settled "in house" than taking them outside the church—he says, "Dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints?"
 - b. Can you imagine if in fact this case was about the man living with his father's wife?
 - His father sued him and unbelievers heard this case.
 - Can you imagine what people would think about the Corinthian congregation? You talk about airing dirty laundry in front of others!
 - c. Can not the same sort of thing occur among us today?
 - We're in a business deal together and you take more of the profits than we agreed; you damage my car in the parking lot and refuse to pay for the damages; or any number of other things.
 - I sue you and it gets **ugly**, accusation flow on both sides. But, people know we're both members of this congregation. Can you imagine the harm that could be done to this church?

2. When there are disputes among us, we are to “practice” the judging we’ll do at the end of time by settling the disputes among ourselves.

III. HOW DO YOU JUDGE AMONG YOURSELVES?, vv. 4-6.

- A. Paul doesn’t tell us how we’ll judge the world or angels, but he does outline how we should decide cases in the church: “If you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church!” v. 4.
 1. Paul seems to be using a good bit of irony in this passage, for only those of the highest classes of society were appointed as judges in the Roman world.
 2. Paul is saying, “This society won’t let people of little account judge cases between them, but you’re different. Even those of little account will judge the world and angels; therefore, they are competent to judge cases between you.”
- B. Paul then asks a rhetorical question: “Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers?” v. 5.
 1. The Corinthians, as we noticed in the first four chapters, prided themselves on their wisdom, and Paul is saying, “Since you claim to be so terribly wise, surely there are some folks there in the congregation who are wise enough to settle disputes between you.”
 2. Here’s what we need to take away from this text:
 - a. When we have disputes with one another, instead of taking one another to court, we need to appoint men in the congregation to serve as the jury.
 - b. Since the elders are charged with watching out for the welfare of the congregation, it seems logical to me to have them on any jury the church may need to have.
 - Obviously we cannot exclude others from the congregation from such a jury, for Paul does not say in this text that either the elders must be on the panel or that it can only be the elders.
 - In staying with Scripture, we have a lot of leeway in establishing such a jury.
 - c. Obviously, the jury would serve as the only court in such a case; we would not have the right to seek redress from government courts if we didn’t like the verdict.
 - d. I have never seen such a jury empanelled in a congregation, and I’m sure you haven’t, either.
 - Honestly, that is probably a very good thing, for, in my own experience, I’ve never seen a case where such a jury was needed.
 - Quite frankly, I pray that I never see such a jury in the church, for I pray it’s never needed.
 - However, this is the Word of God just as much as those texts which say we’re to baptize for the remission of sins or sing in worship or have male spiritual leadership. If we’re to be the people of God, we need to obey this text as much as we seek to obey those other texts.

IV. SOME QUESTIONS.

- A. I know if I were sitting in the pew this morning and hearing something totally foreign to my experience, I’d have some questions I wanted answered. I’ve asked some this week myself. Let’s think of some of those questions.
- B. What if there is a criminal case?
 1. What if someone commits a crime against another Christian? What should we do in such cases—should we have a jury in the church determine judgment?
 2. Absolutely not, for criminal cases are the proper domain of civic courts.

- a. God did not give governments nearly the power they take in the modern world, but he clearly placed in their hands judgment for wrongdoing.
 - b. About governmental rulers, Paul writes to the Romans, "If you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer" (Rm 13:4).
- C. Second question: Do I have the right to sue a non-Christian or a corporation?
1. Absolutely. Paul's words here have to do with taking a fellow believer to court.
 2. Nothing in this text prevents our taking people to court if need be. Obviously, the whole point of this text is, If you can avoid going to court, do so. I'd say most people who have been involved in court cases in the past would say the same thing. However, there are times when it might be unavoidable.
- D. There is another question that is more difficult to answer: What is another believer sues me? What should I do in such cases?
1. The first thing I would say in such a case, and this is difficult, try to keep it from going to trial.
 - a. I understand most attorneys might ask for a psych evaluation if we said, "I want you to speak to the other attorney and see if we couldn't drop this suit and take it before the church."
 - b. Yet, are we to be people of this world or people of the divine kingdom?
 2. Another thing which needs mentioning is another statement Paul makes in this passage: "Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?" (v. 7).
 - a. It would be far better, according to Paul, to settle disputes even when we have done nothing wrong and to give in that it would be to take it to trial.
 - b. These are indeed difficult words, but if we're to be the people of God, we must seek the way of God, not our own way.
 3. If everything fails, I would assert that we do have a right to defend ourselves in court.
 - a. Even then, I believe there are principles of Scripture we need to follow: we must be honest in all things, we must seek reconciliation not retaliation, and we must pray earnestly for the other brother.
 - b. Indeed, the way of the cross is difficult and far from easy, but if we are to honor God, we must seek that way. Is that the way you're seeking in your own life?