

# LOVE OR LITIGATION

## 1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-8

The United States of America is the most litigious country in the world. Roughly \$310 billion - or 2.2% of our gross domestic product is spent yearly on lawsuits.

*Half the money goes for legal fees. Half the money is paid out in damages.* But it's mind-boggling, we spend \$1000 per citizen annually to resolve our legal disputes.

And maybe more a problem than the lawsuits themselves, is **the fear of litigation**. When was the last time you went to a swimming pool that had a real diving board? Why are new playgrounds today void of slides and seesaws, and swings where you can *catch air*?

People and governments are afraid of injuries and lawsuits. *The fear of getting sued* is spoiling our fun.

This is why manufacturers try to defend themselves from litigation by attaching warning labels to products. They often go overboard identifying potential dangers.

In fact, there's a watch dog group that tracks the wackiest warning labels and awards annual prizes...

For example, on a bag of **Iron-On Decals**, a warning reads, “Do not iron while wearing shirt.” Tell me, *who’s going to iron on a decal while they’re wearing the shirt?*

Here’s a warning on a **Letter Opener**, “Safety goggles recommended.” Safety goggles to open a letter?

And I love this one, it’s a label that appeared on a **Small Tractor**, “Avoid Death.” *Look at the pic? I’m sure all operators need reminding not to get crushed to death.*

But this got me thinking, what if we allowed the fear of litigation and lawsuits to invade our church, *and we went overboard with warning labels? What would it look like?*

Imagine, the worship leader wearing a sticker on the back of his shirt, “Beware of occasional off-key vocals.”

If the nursery runs out of blue diapers... “Pink diapers on boy babies does not cause gender confusion.”

Or you walk in on a Sunday morning and your seat has the label, “Air conditioning may cause frost bite.”

Or you look real close at Pastor Sandy’s pulpit and the label reads, “Though the jokes may not be funny, they are definitely not hazardous to your health.”

Or what if this warning appeared in the bottom corner of the announcement sheets, “[May cause paper cuts.](#)”

Or last but certainly not least, a warning label, “[This church is not responsible for over-exuberant hugs.](#)”

Imagine, a church focused on lawyers, legalities, and threats of litigation. What kind of fellowship could they enjoy, or witness could they have to their community?

Well, once again, welcome to the Church at Corinth!

Paul begins Chapter 6 by addressing another problem that was occurring among the believers in Corinth - they were suing each other in the local court. The church had more of a reputation *for its litigation*, than *for its love*.

We’ll read the entirety of our text, verses 1-8, and then go back through it verse by verse... The title of today’s message is “[Love Or Litigation.](#)” 1 Corinthians 6:1...

[Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?](#)

[Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?](#)

[And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?](#)

If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge?

I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!

Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!

Last week we studied chapter 5, and how shocked Paul was to find a man in this church who was shacking up with his stepmom. Well, here's a situation equally appalling. You pick up on Paul's outrage in verse 1...

**“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?”** *How dare you!* I can't believe what you're doing. *What are you thinking?* How idiotic can you be?

Why would members of the family of God - the Church of our Lord Jesus - feel compelled to lay out their grievances with each other in a secular court? Christians

in Corinth were filing civil lawsuits against each other in the Roman courts to be decided on by pagan judges...

*How dysfunctional had this church become?*

For Christians to admit their inability to settle their own disputes - and have to air out their dirty laundry before the unbelievers - was nothing short of shameful.

The Church shouldn't turn to the world for help. It's the world that should be running to the Church for help... for answers... for love... for the keys to unity...

Apparently, no one in the Church at Corinth was concerned for the glory of God... no one was looking out for the reputation of the Church and its Savior...

The Christians in Corinth were all about themselves. *Their rights... their welfare... their pride... their justice.*

Understand the issue at hand. Paul and the NT isn't condemning the use of laws, and lawsuits, and courts.

Actually, Paul was well acquainted with the Roman tribunal. It was in Corinth that he stood at **the Bema**, *the town's judgment's seat*. Acts 18 tells us Paul was acquitted by Gallio, the Roman pro-counsel. It's ironic Paul had been, where he tells the believers not to go...

There were times when Paul looked forward to his day in the pagan courts.

Rome took pride in its sense of justice. On occasion Paul relied on its legal system.

At the end of Acts, after being held unjustly by the Romans for two years, Paul used the Roman law for his advantage and appealed his case to the Caesar.

In Romans 13 Paul taught unequivocally that it was the government's right to judge in criminal matters.

As for civil disputes, Paul was also not opposed to Christians going to court, and using the jurisprudence of the day to right a wrong, or to address an injustice.

Today, if a company is guilty of violating the public's trust, or if a business conspires to harm and defraud others; then there's nothing biblical to keep a Christian from going to court to rectify the trespass. In fact, there may be situations where it becomes a Christian's duty.

But we're talking *Christian versus Company*, or even *Christian versus non-Christian* - in Chapter 6 Paul speaks of believers in court against each other. The docket should never read, "[Christian versus Christian.](#)"

Realize, legal cases in most Greco-Roman cities were settled at the **Bema** - or the seat of judgment.

The Bema was a raised platform situated in the agora, or city center. The agora was the marketplace - it was where the city did the majority of its business.

It was here in the heart of the agora that judges heard cases and rendered verdicts. It was all quite public, and provided amusement for the crowds. It's amazing how entertaining a good legal contest can be.

Here's a quiz... [Can you name the most popular daytime television program in America?](#) It's been number one since 2010... The answer, "[Judge Judy.](#)"

People today go to court on TV before a judge and a national audience, and agree to a binding arbitration.

["Judge Judy"](#) outdraws soap operas and talk shows.

In fact, the whole genre has a huge appeal. There's "[Judge Mathis,](#)" "[The People's Court,](#)" "[Hot Court,](#)" "[Divorce Court](#)" with Judge Lynn Toler - who happens to be a retired municipal court judge from Cleveland.

*And you got to love Judge Lynn... (clip) "A full plate of tacky with a side of hot mess..."* Sounds like Judge Lynn was describing what was going on in Chapter 5, when the fellow was sleeping with his father's wife...

*Yet people are attracted to this kind of legal tabloid!* There's something about high-stakes litigation, and courtroom drama, that peaks the public's interest.

But this made the practice of Christians suing each other in pagan court all the more *appalling to Paul*.

By publicizing their disputes in open court the Corinthians were feeding the critics of Christianity more fodder for their skepticism. Each case put pettiness on display. Cross-examinations were designed to dig skeletons out of the closet - make believers look bad.

Every Christian has been gloriously saved. Our sins are forgiven and forgotten. But a lawyer's job isn't to trumpet that truth - he puts a person on the stand to grill them and document their mistakes. Rather than glory in your forgiveness, a lawyer highlights your sin.

And that's especially true of a divorce lawyer.

I'd imagine most "Christian v Christian" cases heard in Gwinnett County courtrooms aren't between business partners, or neighbors, or personal injury lawsuits - they're between husbands and wives.

Realize, when you file a divorce that has no biblical grounds, you sin in two ways - *you violate your marital vows*, AND *you take a fellow-Christian to court*.

In Corinth, whenever a case between two Christians was tried at the Bema - the



cause of Christ took another black-eye. It stained the witness of the church.

The same travesty happens today when believers take each other to court. The critics crow, *“Look at those Christians... they talk about loving each other, but they even can’t along... they’re all just hypocrites.”*

Paul further rebukes the Church at Corinth in verse 2, *“Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?”* If one day you’ll *rule the world*, can’t you *settle church squabbles*?

In Luke 19 - in *The Parable Of The Minas* - Jesus promised His servant, *“Because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.”* This simple parable has some far-reaching prophetic implications...

When Jesus returns to Earth at the end of the age He’ll establish His Kingdom, and reign for 1000 years. It’s named after it’s duration, *“The Millennial Kingdom.”*

And a host of miracles will accompany Jesus’ reign - *the lamb with lie down with the lion, a man 100 years old will be considered an infant, the earth’s topography will be restored to the garden paradise it once was...*

But the most surprising feature of His future kingdom are those who will help Jesus in its administration...

*That's you and me! Apparently, those who are faithful to Jesus now, will reign and rule with Him then!*

Jesus said, “**you were faithful in a very little.**” It don't take much. You're not called to save a world - just help a neighbor, witness to a friend, serve where you fit.

Imagine, all you have to do is find the few things Jesus wants you to do, and He'll reward you with ten cities. I'm counting on overseeing: [Honolulu](#), [Cabo San Lucas](#), [Bora Bora...](#) Or [Lilburn](#), [Between](#), [Conyers...](#)

But just think of it, you and I are going to reign with Christ! We're going to help manage a brand new world.

We'll provide guidance to folks who were born during the thousand years. It'll require wisdom, discernment.

So if one day you'll be passing out judgments and rendering decisions to cities on a redeemed planet, *why can't you solve the petty problems among yourself right now? Why drag a brother before worldly judges?*

Verse 3 takes it even further, “**Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?**” Here's a truth that truly boggles the brain. *Who knows the full extend of what **this** means?*

What amazes me, is that Paul talks like the ways and means of angels were common knowledge among the Corinthians? *“Do you not know that we shall judge angels?”* It's as if he's saying, *this is basic stuff.* Surely, you're an expert on angels. *You'll judge them one day.*

Paul must've taught the Corinthians a lot more while he was with them, than he wrote in his subsequent letters. Sadly, we don't have more thoughts on angels.

Yet there are some Bible truths we do know...

Psalm 8 tells us that man was created a little lower than angels, but will one day be exalted above them. From the outset our destiny was to soar above angels.

We were made a little lower. God wanted us to learn humility, but eventually we would be of a higher order.

Jewish legend has it that this is why Lucifer sinned, and revolted against God. He heard that one day, the little mud-dobbers, the lowly creatures God had made from the dust of the ground, would be exalted - man would share God's glory - be appointed over angels!

Satan couldn't stand the thought. He made it his mission to wipe out mankind. *The fall... the flood... the cross... Armageddon...* are all Satan's failed attempts.

Although he can't wipe out the whole of mankind, he can steer individual men to hell. In his commentary, my friend David Guzik writes, "We can imagine the perverse, proud pleasure Satan takes over every soul that goes to hell: *'They won't sit in judgment over me!'*"

In Hebrews 1:14 the Spirit of God also refers to the angels as "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation." Though Satan rejected this role, the angels who stayed loyal to God embraced this purpose. Their call today is to minister and serve the heirs of salvation - *that's us, believers in Jesus.*

I believe in guardian angels. The OT speaks of such. Psalm 91:11 tells us, "For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways."

Psalm 34:7, "The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them." I think an angel has camped out at on my bumper at times. I've had near-miss traffic accidents that in retrospect had to have involved some supernatural intervention.

We'll certainly judge the angels who rebelled against God. But we might also fill out a report card on our own guardian angels... Imagine, getting to heaven, and asking, "*Now Gabe, where were you on August 25, 2015 when I had that fender bender on Highway 78?*"

It reminds me of the wife riding in the car with her husband, "Aren't you driving a little too fast, dear?"

The husband counters, "*Honey, don't you believe in guardian angels? Ours will protect us.*" Imagine that, a speeding husband trying to get spiritual on his wife.

The wife replies, "Sure, I believe in guardian angels, but honey, you're going so fast you left ours miles back up the road." Apparently this wife believed that angels drive the speed limit, whether husbands do or not.

Exactly how, I don't know - but somehow we're going to judge angels. That's a heavy responsibility.

But all this highlights Paul's point... if the Corinthians' are going to judge *eternally* and *spiritually* shouldn't they be able to settle disputes in the here and now?

It's like a brain surgeon who trains for years to crack open a human skull and perform the delicate, high-precision, neurological handiwork of brain surgery. Yet he comes home one afternoon with a headache and doesn't know he can take two Advil and feel better.

He's qualified for surgery, but can't take an aspirin?

Yet this was the Corinthians - they'll one day judge super-powered, other-dimensional creatures like angels, but they couldn't resolve an argument between two housewives, or two feuding moms, or two men in the church squabbling over an agreement gone sour?

Again Paul reasons, **“If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge?”**

Here the apostle becomes sarcastic.

Earlier we saw that the Corinthians had looked down their noses at the heathen - they felt superior to the unbelieving crowd - they had separated themselves.

Here Paul is saying, why are you asking the people you **“least esteem”** to judge your disputes? If you don't think the unbelievers are good enough to eat with, why do you depend on them to sort out your grievances?

He says in verse 5, **“I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?”**

Isn't there one wise brother among you who has enough discernment that you can trust him to decide a settlement? Surely, the Corinthians had a *Judge Judy*?

Again, Paul is so astonished, **“But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!”**

Notice, the “family words” Paul uses, “**brother goes to law against brother...**” Really think about the awful environment this had created in the Church at Corinth?

I’ve seen blood families go to war with each other in court. And seldom does a family survive a legal battle intact. When a fracture is this deep and goes this far it’s hard to heal. A permanent rift ends up the result.

This is what was happening in the Corinthian church.

If this occurred today in a church, the litigants would move on to one of the 100 other churches in town. But in first century Corinth the city had but a single church.

Imagine sitting down in church on a Sunday morning, and three rows in front of you is the guy who’s suing you - who’s got you in court. If he gets his way he’ll take the shirt off your back and food out of your kid’s mouth. *Do you think that kind of atmosphere would interfere with your worship experience? I think so!*

This is why Paul says to the Corinthians this can’t continue. Obviously, you’re unable to settle these disputes on your own. It’s time someone intervened.

Isn’t there “**one wise man among you**” able to judge?

Of course, Paul is being facetious. There were many who could judge! In 1 Corinthians Paul 16 mentions a few Corinthians by name - men he respected - of whom he had high regard... **Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus**. Others are noted in different places...

In fact, in 16:15 Paul says of the household of Stephanas, “**they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints - that you also submit to such...**”

Stephanas was one of many men in the church at Corinth mature enough to judge among them. The Corinthians need to submit themselves to these men.

And there have been occasions in our church when wise men have been asked to arbitrate in disputes among our members. It wasn't easy for them. It put a target on their back, and set them up for criticism.

They ran the risk of making people unhappy and turning friends into enemies... But they stepped up to arbitrate. *For the love of God - for the love of His Church - out of concern for its reputation* - they served.

And even those who *at the time* disagreed with their ruling, I'm sure *that over time* they've come to appreciate their sacrifice and respect their decision.

Part of the issue was the Corinthians running to the courts... but another side of the problem may've been the unwillingness for anyone in the church to risk



upsetting folks and mediating a conflict... It's a credit when wise believers agree to help in these matters.

But when that doesn't happen - when Christians take the easy way out... When people sit back, "who am I to get involved" - Or they jump the gun, "We'll just sue..."

Paul writes, "Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another." Again, note his strong language - it's "*an utter failure.*"

If it gets all the way to a secular court... if no one is there for *arbitration*... or if the plaintiffs aren't open to *mediation*... then everyone loses. *There is no winner!*

Oh, the judge might find in someone's favor, but that doesn't make them a winner - not with two Christians. Both are losers. *The Church has lost. Christ has lost.*

Here's a preferable outcome...Verse 7, "Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather *let yourselves be cheated?*" Paul is saying, it's better for you to be personally defrauded - take a hit to your own wallet, or to your pride - than it is to disgrace the name of Christ by hauling a brother before a secular court.

A Christian should be willing to *suffer personally*, before he allows the Body of

## Christ to *suffer publicly*.

Hopefully, it doesn't come to this - the church leaders should assert themselves and offer some kind of arbitration... but even if they don't, a Christian should love the Lord and His Church enough to see the big picture - to absorb the blow - to put the glory of God and the reputation of the Church ahead of himself.

There's been times when I've been taken advantage of by people who call themselves Christian - even folks who've attended our church. I've done business with Christians who didn't hold up their end of the deal...

It's interesting, over the years, I've learned when people start dealing with the pastor they act strange.

They forget it's business. Maybe they're trying to do me a favor, so in their minds I should be happy with what I get... Or they think I'm spiritual so it shouldn't bother me if it takes longer than promised. *“Remember Pastor Sandy, one of the fruits of the Spirit patience!”*

I'm thinking, *“Remember to honor your word.”*

On a couple of occasions when things went sour I thought about what recourse I could take... I've read 1 Corinthians 6 before, so I knew I couldn't sue, *but maybe I could talk to a lawyer and get him to apply a little pressure...* yet after

thinking it through, I've always decided to *just... let... it... go...* It's just not worth it.

*For one, I still want to be their pastor.* And if they've cheated, it's all the more reason they need a pastor.

*And two, why make it messy?* They'll start talking, and accuse me of this or that... and it just damages people's opinion of the Church. We don't need that.

The lesson, not only for a pastor, but for any Christian is *it's never just business, it's always about Jesus!* We are the only Bible some folk will every read.

Here's how we should think when we're defrauded by a brother or sister, and there ends up to be no recourse... It's not that you avoid taking them to court. It's that you're appealing your case to **a Higher Court.**

Your trusting God to deal with the injustice His way - to right a wrong His way - to take care of you His way.

Leonard Sweet is an author and popular Christian speaker. He tells the story of an encounter he had in Phoenix, Arizona. The university chaplain picked him up at the airport in his new Ford Ranger pickup truck.

Sweet had just sold his Dodge pickup and was mourning its loss. Their love for pickups created an instant bond between the men. One of them mentioned a bumper sticker he'd seen, *"Nothing is more beautiful than a man and his truck."* They laughed and agreed.

Two days later, the man was taking Sweet back to the airport. As he climbed into the truck he noticed some scratches on the passenger door. He asked *"what happened?"* The chaplain explained, *"My neighbor's basketball post fell and scratched my truck."*

Sweet was upset, *"This truck still smells new."*

The chaplain added, *"What's worse is my neighbor doesn't feel responsible for the damage."* Sweet was up in arms. He asked, *"Did you contact your insurance company? How are you going to get him to pay for it?"*

That's when the chaplain said, *"This has been a real spiritual journey. A lot of prayer and soul-searching..."*

*My wife and I discussed hiring an attorney, but it came down to this... I can either be in the right or I can be in a relationship with my neighbor. Since my neighbor will probably be with me longer than the truck, I decided I'd rather be in a relationship than be right.*

Besides, trucks are meant to be banged up. I got mine initiated a little earlier than I expected.” And this is the attitude Paul is expecting from the Corinthians...

What’s more important possessions or people - our rights or relationships?... Possessions that will wear out in a few years, or people who’ll last forever?

So what if I die right, I’d rather die with people around me who love me... What matters more my own personal agenda or our collective witness to the world?

Ten-thousand years from now what will be more important God’s glory and the reputation of His Church, or the couple of hundred bucks you might’ve been awarded by the court. A million dollars would not be worth smudging the reputation of our Lord Jesus!

Again, God has a myriad of ways to recoup your couple hundred bucks, but it’s far more difficult to undo the damage you might do in the minds and hearts of the people who are watching your life. Don’t succumb to either *pettiness* or *pride*. Trust God and love others.

Paul says in verse 8, “No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!”

This was truly a shame. You'd hope the scenario discussed in verse 7 would never happen. This would be purely hypothetical. God forbid a Christian would "*do wrong and cheat...*" another Christian.

Rather than take advantage of "*his brethren*" - when a Christian does business he should go out of his way to be fair - she should go beyond what's expected - not because they have to, but because they want to...

We should be known for *love NOT litigation*.

I think the best illustration of all this is a marriage...

There is no perfect marriage. Every married couple has their squabbles and spats. At times they might even need outside help in settling their disputes...

But what they don't need is to air their dirty laundry.

The worse thing for a marriage is for the husband and wife to hash over their spouse's problems in public. A wife shouldn't chat up her hubby's faults at the ladies brunch. A husband should protect his wife's reputation in the eyes of others. *Don't add to the tension...* Address the problem, don't make it worse!

And the same lesson applies in a church.

There is no perfect church. Christians are redeemed people, but they're still people. *We've been perfected, and we're being perfected* - both are equally true.

This means we'll have our squabbles and quarrels. At times we might even need help in resolving them.

But we should make every effort to be discreet.

Let's be respectful of one another, and mindful of Christ and His glory. We can settle our disputes in-house. *We should keep the dirty laundry in the family.*

The church should mediate its own clashes. It's a bad witness when we seek this lost world for its help.