

WHEN YOU'VE BEEN WRONGED

When Christians Go To Court

Lesson 6

“My Dad trusted My Brother to be the executor of his will because my brother is an attorney,” began a letter read on a radio station sent by a person we will call Michael. “My dad told me he was leaving about \$300,000. My brother says that I am going to get about \$10,000 or \$20,000, because he says everything else is fees and taxes, and all the rest. When I want to see the books, he’s so defensive.”

As the letter went on it became evident what Michael’s dilemma really was: “My wife has cancer, and I don’t have money to send my kids to college; we’re in a desperate situation. I know my dad intended that I should get my fair share. What should I do? I want to sue him.”

Michael is a Christian. And his brother claims to be one too.

Another man told a story that he owed a Christian organization \$300,000. He was not disputing that fact. But his business had gone belly-up, and he got into some serious financial trouble. He was trying to figure out how he could pay off his debt, trying to work something out, when suddenly he was served with papers and a lawsuit was in progress.

Two years later he said, “Up to now I have paid \$250,000 in legal fees. They have spent about \$250,000 in legal fees.” That’s half a million dollars. Let’s remember that the dispute was over \$300,000. But some people are so consumed with destroying others that they are willing to end up with less money, if only they can make sure that their perceived enemy gets his “just deserts.” Now, these folks are Christians, or at least that’s what they say.

Then there’s that celebrated story from the news about a woman who was disciplined by her church for adultery. She was not denying the adultery. But instead of humbling herself, accepting responsibility, and complying with the terms of church discipline, she decided to sue the church for an abuse of her civil rights.

Our obsession with individual rights and a litigious society have joined forces to make suing one another standard fare. That woman felt right at home admitting her adultery yet protested through a court of law the discipline of the church of which she was a member.

Why is America such a litigious nation? We now live in a culture that exalts individual rights even as it accepts a decline (and corruption) of personal morals and integrity. Put the two together and you have a recipe for incredible lawsuits.

In the news, recently was a case of two sets of parents who went to court after their children, playing in a sandbox, got into a big argument. Yes! This is a true story. In the past, the parents would work these situations out, when character was important. But today without character they cannot even settle such minor matters. Today we need a law for everything, and God help us if we don't get what we believe to be our individual "rights."

The Bible clearly outlines the involvement of Christians in the courtroom. As we will see, when we seek out our own justice when personal injury occurs, we ignore God's ability to obtain eventual justice and our need to forgive. We need to look at what the Bible says about legal action among and by believers after an offense.

AVOIDING LAWSUITS: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

The apostle Paul specifically addressed this issue of disputes in 1 Corinthians Chapter 6. Apparently, some Christians were falling prey to shortsightedness and suing each other in courts of law. And in this passage Paul provides several excellent reasons why believers should avoid pursuing fellow believers in civil court. Let's take a close look at the passage.

If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgement instead of before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother goes to law against another—and this in front

of unbelievers! 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? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers. (1 Corinthians 6; 1 – 8 NIV)

Paul outlines clear advice on the same reasons believers should avoid going to court against one another. They are compelling and ring true in this age of rampant lawsuits. There are at least three major reasons we as Christians need to pay attention to what the Word of God is saying in 1 Corinthians 6. They are as follows;

- **Our Witness to the World**
- **A Rejection of Secular Values**
- **Respect for the Authority of the Church**

PUTTING INTO PRACTICE

In relationships among believers, every means, short of lawsuits, should be pursued in trying to resolve a conflict. Paul's point is clear: In matters of personal injury or loss, we should be willing to suffer wrong, believing that God keeps the books and He will make the final decision on the matter, if not in this life, then in the life to come. This is proof of our trust that the Judge of all the earth will do right.

Of course, when a crime has been committed and the state has a compelling interest to intervene, Christians should cooperate with the authorities, whether the offender is a Christian or a non-Christian. There might also be instances in which we ourselves have not been injured, but we take legal action to protect the rights of others. In such instances where the situation is unclear, we must seek godly advice from church leaders.

Should a Christian ever sue an employer or hospital? The late Larry Burkett, both a Christian lawyer and author wrote "corporations and businesses are entities controlled or solely owned by persons, but they appear to have no rights under biblical guidelines, except by prevailing law. So, it's not unbiblical for Christians to sue corporations to require them to meet their legal obligations." He went on to say that if a Christian sues a hospital, it should only be done for

hospital costs, rehabilitation, compensation, etc. “However, suing for damages to punish the hospital or physician should never be pursued.” Clearly, no Christian should ever seek revenge (Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:17 – 20).

Burkett also cautioned that even if we think we have the “right to sue,” that does not mean that we should exercise that right. He concluded with this question: “Finally, if we really believe that everything belongs to God, the question remains, “Do I trust God or do I just say that I trust God?”

Of course, we have every right to defend ourselves when someone brings a lawsuit against us, even as Paul defended himself against unjust accusations. When falsely arrested or mistreated, he appealed to Roman law to gain his freedom and to affirm his rights (Acts 16:35 – 37; 22:25; 25:11). Yet even here, the Christian views things differently: Justice denied on earth earns great rewards in heaven if endured for the sake of Christ. (See James 5:1-9 and 1 Peter 3: 14-16.)

In the case of personal injury or loss among believers, though, resolution outside of the courtroom is preferred.

Next Week; The Privilege of Suffering Wrong

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