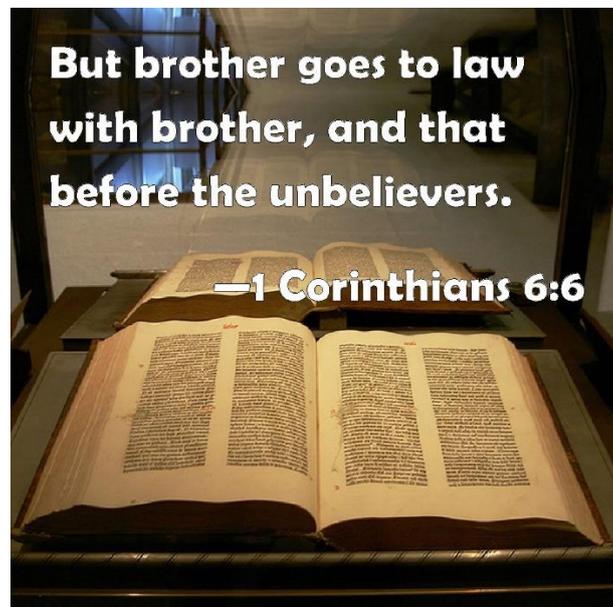


**Bible Study**

**DRAFT**

# **The Real Meaning of 1 Corinthians 6:1-11**

**By Craig M White  
Version 1.2**





## ***The Real Meaning of ICorinthians 6:1-11***

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### Associated Readings

- *A Genuine Minister with the Heart of a Shepherd? Or Fudging it?*
- *Are Ministers Priests or Elders? Questions and Answers.*
- *Church of God History. Tending to the Past. Preserving for the Future.*
- *Do Ministers sit on Moses Seat?*
- *Herbert W Armstrong and the Reform of Church Governance.*
- *Synagogue and Church: Comparative Structures.*
- *Was Peter the Leading Apostle?*
- *What is Inspiration?*
- *What is Justice? The Biblical Requirement for Neutral Judiciaries.*

## **Abstract**

This Bible study explores the real interpretation of 1 Corinthians 6:1-11, emphasising Paul's rebuke of Corinthian believers for resolving internal disputes in secular courts. Drawing on historical context, the author argues that early Christian communities, modelled after first century synagogue structure, incorporated impartial judicial systems (bet din) for civil matters which is essential for righteous Biblical governance. The study critiques modern abuses in Churches—such as bias, slander, and perjury—highlighting the absence of neutral panels and courts, which forces members to secular recourse despite Paul's ideal of internal arbitration by "wise" saints destined to judge the world and angels.

Commentaries from scholars are surveyed, affirming the passage's focus on civil (not criminal) disputes. Basic principles advocate Matthew 18 conflict resolution, forgiveness, and Godly mediation, but permit legal action for serious abuses like defamation, victimisation or harassment when church mechanisms fail or are corrupted by bias and slander. A proposed tiered court system—local, regional, and top-level—with neutral, diverse juries, training, appeals, and anti-perjury safeguards is outlined to ensure justice, impartiality, and adherence to Biblical mandates. Ultimately, the study calls for restorative processes to prevent flock scattering, affirming secular courts' legitimacy (per Romans 13).

## **Introductory Comments**

Nobody wants to go this far, but there are times people being harassed and intimidated have to pursue their God-given rights when the internal system of the group breaks down. This is often the case when there is bias, prejudice and beliefs that ministers have always have to win, no matter the consequences such as the scattering of the flock.

In the Bible study *What is Justice?* It was demonstrated that impartial courts are found throughout the Bible, but this principle has been sadly lacking in the Churches of God.

In this follow-up Bible study, we explore the necessity of having courts in fulfillment of the Scripture under discussion (1 Corinthians 6:1-11):

“When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?

Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases?

Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!

So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church?

“I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?

To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?

But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (ESV)

The importance of understanding this is due to:

- Abuses.
- Slander campaigns crippling and undermining members.
- Some ministers acting like the medical profession, closing ranks against the innocent party.
- For decades some ministers have stated and practiced that “God backs up government (ie themselves)” and that any attempt to shine a light on their activities is wrong and is as if one were attacking Christ Himself!
- Some claim that they do not have to be trained at this or that as they are “above the law of the land” and inspired. This inspiration from God eliminates training and reading (including understanding and execution) of their own manual and other policies and even church culture. “We are inspired and don’t have to follow church policy” they have claimed. Yet they accept payment from the very group that hired them!

These sorts don’t seem to understand that they will perjure themselves in court, and yet deliberately prefer to misinterpret the Scriptures to suit themselves and the outcomes they pursue. They are self-willed and stubborn, refusing to recant.

Undertaking a proper process requires training, study, patience, guidance and, thus time. After all, justice is a process that should lead to a good and correct outcome. Not men coming to you behind closed doors claiming that they acts as ‘witnesses’ and you have to submit to their false accusations ‘or else’.

It is not necessarily about righting wrongs, but also about ensuring abuses are out in the open and don’t continue. That slander and such like against members are reversed so that the member is not given a bad reputation to other ministers and members.

Knowing this and experiencing the abuse of power, I wrote to a particular group in the late 1990s on behalf of so many, requesting that they set up impartial panels and courts to no avail.

## **Historical Background**

In the first century, Jewish synagogues served as versatile community centres that acted as centres for prayer, Torah study, social interactions, and local governance.

But they also included or hosted judicial functions. Local Jewish courts, referred to as *bet din* ("house of judgment"), played a crucial role in Jewish self-governance and often convened within synagogues to resolve internal conflicts. These courts addressed a variety of issues depending on their size and authority: smaller panels of three judges managed minor civil matters such as monetary disputes or oaths, while larger panels (for instance, 23 judges) dealt with more serious criminal cases, and the supreme Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem (comprising 71 members) oversaw significant religious, legal, and political decisions for the Jewish community.

Roman authorities generally allowed this Jewish judicial independence as part of a broader strategy of granting limited self-governance to subject populations, especially in internal religious, civil, and communal matters. This policy contributed to maintaining stability and also alleviating the administrative load on Roman governors by utilising existing local institutions. These included the high priesthood and Sanhedrin (which functioned under some Roman oversight, including the appointment of the high priest). Historical evidence exists for decrees issued by emperors Augustus (1 BC) and Claudius (41 AD) permitting Jews to adhere to their traditional laws and customs and even exempted them from specific Roman legal requirements (for instance, court appearances on the Sabbath). Roman intervention was limited to very serious crimes and capital punishment.

Following the Jewish revolts (66-70 AD), autonomy was severely curtailed.

As the Old Testament outlines an impartial court system and separation of arms of Government the synagogues practiced a Biblical court system with (supposedly) impartial judiciary. And given that the first century Church met within the synagogue at first until being forced out due their Christological stance, they adopted the synagogue model including a court system. Even some of the non-Sabbatarian groups have adopted this essential element of church governance.

Please take notice of this: the early Church's structure was based on the synagogue which you can read in the paper *Synagogue and Church: Comparative Structures*. This included incorporating impartial courts or judiciaries – you can read more about this in the study *What is Justice? The Biblical Requirement for Impartial Judiciaries in the Church*.

ICorinthians 6:1-11 **must** be read in this context. Because the early church had a court system with an impartial judiciary, they didn't have two ministers come into your home alone and brow-beat and frighten you for two hours or more, attempting to force you to admit to something you haven't done. Hearing lies and rumours from people who, often, you don't know who the accusers are. They then tell you not to breath a word to anyone about the visit as you are (supposedly) causing division if you do. You were not allowed to defend yourself – you had to admit to accusations. This is cultic behaviour and not becoming of ministers or a Church.

Based on the above, should not the Churches of God have:

1. panels to investigate issues.
2. courts to rule on serious problems and sins (including ministerial abuses).

If they don't, then what is a member to do? In the first century they had church courts; today we do not. What if there have been abuses, slander, defamation, victimisation, harassment, two-tier handling of people, wrongful excommunication, malfeasance, breach of contract and such like? There is no mechanism to handle these to ensure a happy church. In some circumstances the church should not handle these situations, but the courts should. In part due to legal requirements; and in part due to bias, prejudice and lack of impartiality. After all, churches and congregations do not revolve around a minister – they revolve around God the Father and Jesus Christ and Their commandments. The minister is there to point you to Them; to help and serve you; and to be fair and balanced.

Many do not understand that the early Church would have had courts and therefore do not understand ICorinthians in this context. However, one useful article is Daniel Akin's article/sermon *Why Christians Should Not Sue Christians In Civil Court* which should be read in this context.

Akin presented an expository sermon, contending that Christians who take legal action against fellow believers in civil courts are in contradiction to the message of the New Testament. He underscores that such behaviour brings disgrace to the church and undermines its testimony to non-believers. He specifies that the passage pertains to civil disputes (such as grievances or complaints), **rather than criminal issues like abuse, which should be reported to legal authorities without delay.**

Akin broadens the implications of the text to encompass wider church conflicts, encapsulating Ken Sande's article from 10 November 2020, titled "20 Ways to Prevent and Resolve Conflict in the Church".

We shall see from this Bible study that Akin is correct.

Another article worth a mention is John Stevenson's *Christians in Court*. John Stevenson analyses ICorinthians 6:1-8, focusing on the troubling issue of Corinthian believers taking fellow Christians to pagan civil courts over minor disagreements, a behavior that Paul denounces as disgraceful and detrimental to church unity, especially in light of more significant matters such as sexual immorality. By referencing the historical context of Corinth's public legal system and contrasting it with Jewish synagogue arbitration to avoid suggesting any inferiority of God's law, Stevenson underscores Paul's insistence for the Corinthians' authority of saints.

“The Jewish way of doing things was somewhat different. The Jews believed that, since they were the chosen people of God, they ought not to take their disputes into pagan courts. They thought that to do so would be to imply that God’s law was inferior to pagan law. Thus among the Jews it was considered to be a form of blasphemy to take another Jew to court.

Roman law recognized this attitude of the Jews and so the Jewish synagogues were empowered to try any case and to pass any sentence upon a Jew as long as it did not carry a penalty of death.” (p. 1)

However, Stevenson calls for contemporary application: to endure wrongs for the sake of unity, but like many or most, does not understand the historical background and early Church structure.

Finally, let us consider the key themes of ICorinthians 6:1-8:

- Believers should refrain from suing one another - Paul admonishes the Corinthians for bringing their fellow believers before secular courts, which undermines their witness and reflects a deficiency in spiritual maturity.
- The ability to judge - Since believers will judge both the world and angels, they are undoubtedly equipped to resolve their own disputes, utilising internal mechanisms instead of relying on secular courts.

In the following verses he lists a number of sinful practices. These make one ineligible for inheriting the Kingdom of God. Having once engaged in these practices, the members must understand that they have been cleansed and justified by Christ, and this includes the sinner previously addressed.

## What Commentators Say

To ensure that this Bible study is thorough (though not a technical paper), it is important to include quotes from some commentaries.

There is an innumerable multitude of commentaries on the subject. Those that I have seen elucidate that Paul confronts the Corinthians regarding their tendency to litigate against one another in secular courts. He contends that believers, who are destined to judge both the world and angels, ought to settle their disputes within the community. Paul enumerates particular unrighteous actions--such as sexual immorality, idolatry, theft, greed, drunkenness, and slander--asserting that those who engage in these practices will not inherit the Kingdom of God. He underscores that such transgressions are indicative of individuals who are outside of Christ.

### **John Calvin's *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* (1546):**

Calvin sternly admonishes the Corinthians for their litigious nature, which is rooted in greed, leading them to bring internal church conflicts before secular judges. This action diminishes the gospel's dignity and subjects it to mockery among non-believers. He argues that since the saints are destined to judge the world and angels in the end times, they should certainly resolve minor disputes among themselves to maintain the church's honor and unity. Moving on to verses 9-10, Calvin lists various vices--such as fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate individuals, sodomites, thieves, greedy individuals, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners--as indicative of the widespread immorality and moral decay in Corinth.

### **Matthew Henry's *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (1706-21):**

Henry denounces the act of Christians dragging one another into pagan courts over minor disagreements. This practice distorts God's order, where saints are designated to judge the world and even angels, turning the church into a display of problems in front of non-believers and weakening its message. In verses 9-10, he lists the unrighteous--fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate individuals, those who abuse themselves with mankind, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners--as individuals whose persistent engagement in such sins excludes them eternally from God's kingdom.

### **John Gill's *Exposition of the Entire Bible* (1746-66):**

Gill criticises the Corinthians for turning to secular courts for disputes among brethren, deeming it dangerous and disgraceful. He believes they are choosing the unjust over the just, thereby bringing the Church into disrepute. This is particularly troubling given that saints, endowed with divine wisdom, are capable of resolving earthly issues as a precursor to their eschatological duty of judging the world and angels. In verses 9-10, he elaborates on a list of vices that represent all unregenerate lifestyles: fornicators (those who are sexually immoral and impure), idolaters, adulterers, effeminate individuals, abusers (sodomites or those engaging in unnatural desires), thieves, covetous individuals (greedy extortionists), drunkards, revilers (those who are verbally abusive; slanderers; scandalous abusers), and extortioners (swindlers). None of these individuals--without repentance - will inherit the kingdom of God.

### **Adam Clarke's *Commentary on the Bible* (1810-26):**

The litigious nature of the Corinthians are described as a carnal and worldly attitude that is unworthy of saints who are meant to judge angels and the world. He finds it dishonourable for them to seek judgments from non-believers on issues that the church should address internally with fairness and love.

### **Albert Barnes' *Notes on the Bible* (1834-1857):**

Barnes condemns the act of brother suing brother in front of non-believers as a disgraceful reversal of God's desire, where saints--who are meant to judge the world and angels--relinquish their responsibilities. He promotes the idea of enduring wrongs or fraud as the true Christian way, reflecting Christ's humility. In verses 9-10, Barnes asserts that the unrighteous cannot attain salvation or inherit the kingdom.

**Ellicott's *Commentary for English Readers* (1878):**

Ellicott elucidates that "unjust" refers to heathens while "saints" pertains to the Christian community, positioning the admonition against lawsuits (vv.1-8) as a significant ecclesiological impropriety: believers, who are heirs to eschatological judgment over both the world and angels, tarnish their calling by bringing their disputes before outsiders.

***The Pulpit Commentary* (1880-1919):**

This Commentary depicts verses 1-8 as a strong condemnation of intra-Christian legal disputes in pagan courts, which may not only fail to achieve justice but also undermine the unity and testimony of the Church. Saints--who are to be the future judges of the world and angels--should exemplify wisdom and patience in settling their disagreements, even choosing to endure wrong rather than cause scandal.

**Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (1987):**

Fee consolidates 6:1-11 into a single pericope, interpreting the lawsuits (vv.1-8) as indicative of unregenerate conduct that brings shame to the community and contradicts the eschatological calling of the saints to judge both the world and angels. He advocates for internal arbitration that embodies Godly wisdom instead of succumbing to worldliness.

**Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (2000):**

Thiselton's exegetical rigor presents verses 1-8 as a critique of "rights-based" litigation that undermines the church's eschatological priority--saints judging the world and angels-- inviting derision from pagans, while promoting arbitration rather than adversarial justice.

The above sources encompass a variety of evangelical, reformed, and denominational viewpoints. In the main, they distinguish between civil and criminal contexts to affirm that the passage does not prohibit legal action for abuse, defamation, robbery or other serious crimes.

They show that this Scripture does not imply that we should refrain from utilising the secular court system. After all, did not Paul hold the Roman justice system in some esteem? Notice that Acts 18 recounts that in the city of Corinth during Paul's stay, the Jews brought him before the proconsul because he has accused him of treason for preaching a religion that could undermine Rome. Gallio listened to the accusations and ruled that it was a minor matter which did not belong in court. Thus, Paul himself benefited from the impartiality of Roman justice (when it was practiced). In Romans 13:4, Paul clearly indicates that secular civil law courts are legitimate and necessary.

**David Guzik's *Enduring Word Commentary* (1996):**

*"A. Instruction regarding lawsuits among Christians1. (1) Paul denounces their recourse to the pagan law courts in disputes among Christians.*

**Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?**

a. **Dare any of you** is strong wording. Paul simply can't believe what these Corinthian Christians are doing.

b. **Having a matter against another:** Apparently, one Christian believed he had been wronged by another, and sought justice in the local courts (**go to law before the unrighteous**).

i. The local judge sat in what was known as the “*bema*” seat of the civil magistrate, located in the heart of the marketplace. Because Greek culture found a good legal battle entertaining, anyone’s lawsuit soon became public knowledge.

c. **Unrighteous** is literally *unjust*, in the sense of “not justified before God, not saved.” Why are the Corinthian Christians trying to find *justice* from those who aren’t *justified* before God?

i. Paul is using the term **unrighteous** in a religious sense, not a moral sense. It isn’t that Corinthian judges were necessarily bad judges, but they were not Christians.

2. (2-6) *Why Christians are fully capable of judging their own matters, and it is wrong to go to heathen law courts in disputes among Christians.*

**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!**

a. **The saints will judge the world... we shall judge angels:** Christians should be fully able to judge their own matters because of our *destiny*. As we reign with Jesus Christ, we will (in some sense or another) **judge the world**, and even **judge angels**.

i. The idea of Christians judging angels is fascinating. It does not mean we will sit in judgment of faithful angels, as if we could penalize them for letting us down or not being there, but we will have a part in judging evil angels.

ii. How great is God’s destiny for redeemed men and women! “Is there any statement in the apostolic writings in certain senses which has more definite and tremendous implication of the union of the saints with their Lord?” (Morgan)

iii. The destiny of redeemed men and women – to one day be higher than the angels and to even sit in judgment of them – must greatly annoy a certain high angel in heaven. He did not want to serve an inferior creature now, and did not want that inferior creature to be raised up higher than even he. So, he rebelled against God, and is determined to keep as much of humanity as possible from sitting in judgment of *himself*. We can imagine the perverse, proud pleasure Satan takes over every soul that goes to hell: “*They won’t sit in judgment over me!*”

b. **Are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters:** If Christians are being prepared right now for such a glorious destiny, why do the Corinthian Christians allow those **least esteemed by the church** (that is, the secular judges) to decide disputes among Christians?

c. **Is there not a wise man among you:** The Corinthian Christians were proud of what they thought was their “wisdom” (1 Corinthians 1:18-31), but their actions showed that there was **not a wise man among** them.

d. **Brother goes to law against brother:** By his actions, Paul showed he was not against all legal action. In Acts 22:25 and 25:10-11, he appealed to Roman

courts for his rights. However, Paul knew it was wrong when **brother goes to law against brother**.

i. It is important for Christians to settle disputes among themselves according to God's principles. This can be done either through the church, or through Christian arbitration. But today, even as in Paul's day, there is no reason for Christians to sue one another.

ii. Does this mean that it is permissible for Christians to sue non-believers who wrong them? This is an important question in our age where people are so ready to sue. Paul certainly does not bring up this specific issue, and he does not say matters between Christians should be unresolved – only that they should be settled in the proper arena.

iii. Paul does not say that Christians should have their own court system to handle *criminal* law. In Romans 13:3-4 Paul says that it is appropriate for the state to handle criminal cases. Christians should, however, be able to handle *civil* cases among themselves. "Those in a religious community who *will not* submit to a proper arbitration, made by persons among themselves, should be expelled from the Church of God." (Clarke)

3. (7) *Paul rebukes the man who had been wronged: why not accept the wrong?*

**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?**

a. **It is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another:** The Corinthians were just like modern Americans: addicted to their own "rights." But in clinging to their rights so fiercely, they had already shown **utter failure**. Just by going to court against your brother, you already lose.

b. **Why do you not rather accept wrong:** It would be better to **accept wrong**. It would be better to **let yourselves be cheated** than to defend your "rights" at the expense of God's glory and the higher good of His kingdom.

i. Paul called this man to do something hard: to give up what he deserved for the higher good of God and His kingdom. But the man who was wronged should not think Paul was asking him to take a loss. No one who accepts wrong for the sake of God's glory will be a loser.

ii. Ideally, the church should have settled the dispute. But if the church failed to do so, Paul asked the man to trust in God, not in secular judges and lawsuits and courts.

iii. Paul didn't say, "Why not suffer wrong instead of confronting the problem?" Instead, he said, "Why not suffer wrong instead of bringing your dispute before unbelievers?"

4. (8-11) *Paul rebukes the man who had done the wrong: do you realize how serious your sin is?*

**No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren! Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.**

a. **You yourselves do wrong and cheat:** There is no place for dishonest dealing *by* Christians; how much less place is there for dishonest dealing *among* Christians! Many have rejected the things of God and the fellowship of the saints because of dishonesty and cheating among Christians.

**b. Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?** Paul speaks strongly to the brother who did the wrong. “Don’t you realize how serious your sin is? The only thing you may ‘gain’ from cheating your brother is eternity with the unrighteous!”

This also does not suggest that believers are forbidden from filing criminal charges, even against another believer. His statement in verse 7, “Why not rather suffer wrong?” implies that these were civil, not criminal, matters. Paul does not detail any criminal cases because he teaches in other passages that such matters must be addressed by the state (Romans 13:3-4).

Many churches understand the truth about I Corinthians 6. This includes the Jehovah’s Witnesses (refer to their paper *Summary of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Relevant Religious Beliefs and Practices*, p. 16, footnote 32). This document indicates that 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 “is relevant solely to civil disputes and does not pertain to possible criminal offenses,” thereby explicitly permitting the reporting of crimes such as sexual abuse, assault, significant theft (robbery), or murder to secular authorities without contravening Paul’s advice.

Various groups publish articles from their perspective. One example that you can find online is Paul Archbald “Taking a brother to Court. 1 Cor. 6:1-10 on legal disputes between brethren”, *Faith in Focus. Magazine of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand*, August 2012, pp. 12-14.

## **Basic Principles on the Subject**

As we have seen, the Bible instructs that lawsuits among believers (including elders) should not take place in secular courts for minor or general issues, as believers are destined to judge both the world and angels. It is evident that ideally, disputes among believers ought to be settled with the assistance of wise believers, since secular courts are ill-equipped for such issues (1 Corinthians 6:5-6).

Paul outlines several reasons for addressing disputes within the church:

- Secular judges do not possess the capability to adjudicate based on biblical principles and Christian values.
- Believers might approach secular courts with inappropriate motives.
- Public lawsuits involving Christians can damage the church's reputation.

As believers, we are called to exemplify love, and forgiveness, resolving conflicts without resorting to the world’s court system. The church should have wise, godly leaders proficient in conflict resolution, guided by His spirit, to address disputes.

Paul, however, does not make mention of what to do if there are no wise men with such capacity. One can only assume that the Church would have had courts in place for such matters.

And what are wise men? They can only be those of sufficient age and thus maturity to undertake such a serious task. After all, how does wisdom come about? Does God ‘zap’ it into us via the spirit or is it the spirit working with one who has the humility to be trained? The process to wisdom starts with asking God for this gift and having a knowledge of God’s Word on the subject; this is followed by understanding which comes from training. This then leads into wisdom – the capacity to put into practice the understanding and knowledge one has gained over time.

Some just ‘don’t have it’ and one has to resort to external specialists such as Peacewise and such like.

Of course one must utilise Matthew 18:15-17 which outlines the steps for resolving conflicts within the church – this is a court system approach. With due process based on a policy that all know and must follow. It must be one that is impartial and just which is difficult when the church culture and tradition has been where elders have to always win and are always backed up. Or their decisions are biased against those they dislike and are proclaimed as coming directly from Christ Himself! This is cultic and ungodly.

To make matters worse, some have stated that they are above the law of the land (and they don’t mean that is when there is conflict between the law of God and that of the land).

Should these steps of Matthew 18:15-17 prove ineffective, legal action against a fellow believer or elder may be contemplated as a final option. Or where there is no impartial system in place. Especially in cases where the elder is belligerent, lying and scattering the flock by abusing members.

However, any decision to pursue legal action must be carefully weighed against Biblical principles, including forgiving one another (Matthew 6:14-15). Seeking justice or rectification of a wrong or the powerful desire to address abuses and the scattering of the flock is Biblical.

Too often conflicts and disputes frequently evolve into battles of determination (Grant Osborne, *Life Application Bible Commentary: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, p. 78). The initial concerns become obscured by the prevailing win-or-lose mentality that dominates. The stubbornness and refusal to change course or apologise because “I am an inspired minister of Jesus Christ” and “church government always backs me up” is a recipe for disaster. Yet they just don’t care as their job is secure, and they can continue offending the members and get away with it – until they face the magistrate.

Matthew Henry in his *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament* wisely comments:

“Christians should never engage in lawsuits till all other remedies have been tried in vain. Prudent Christians should prevent, if possible, their disputes, and not have courts of judicature decide them, especially in matters of no great importance.” (Vol. 6, p. 516)

If one has followed Biblical principles, sought God's guidance through prayer, and received sound spiritual counsel but find no other resolution, legal action may be appropriate. Proceed with caution, prayer, and reliance on the holy spirit’s guidance.

We should all reflect on these spiritual and practical questions to guide our decision.

## **Guide for Panels and Courts**

How do we implement a system that is just? Is not justice a very important concept to God and does He not highlight this throughout the Bible? The article *What is Justice?* discusses all of this.

Ecclesiastes provides a guiding principle:

“If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official (eg a minister) is watched by a higher (higher officials or bodies), and there are yet higher ones over them (ie the ruling body).

But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields.”  
(ESV)

### **Fair Church Court System**

A just church court, often referred to as a religious tribunal, addresses spiritual, behavioural, belief-related, or relational matters within a church community. Its purpose is to uphold fairness, justice, and adherence to the church's regulations (such as policies, pastoral handbook and even culture – particularly as relating to elders as they are paid by the organisation). This framework includes impartiality, clarity, and justice.

### **Key Values for Fairness**

To maintain fairness, the court system or panel should:

1. **Select Neutral Members:** based on their expertise (such as policy, legal or theological knowledge) and ensure they have no personal connections to the case. Anyone with a conflict of interest must recuse themselves.
2. **Incorporate Diverse Voices:** Blend elders and non-ordained members to prevent any single group from dominating and to represent the entire community.
3. **Adhere to Clear Rules:** Implement a system presuming the accused member is innocent until proven guilty.
4. **Ensure Openness and Accountability:** Maintain records of all proceedings, conducting private sessions only when necessary (for example, in sensitive situations). Facilitate appeals for multiple reviews.
5. **Provide Training and Oversight:** Educate all participants in fair decision-making and allow higher church authorities to oversee the process.
6. **Jury:** it is important and a safe-guard, for a jury of non-ordained members to be appointed.

### **Proposed Court Levels**

A tiered system begins with local resolutions and escalates for larger or appealed cases to mitigate local bias.

1. **Local Court** (ie at local congregational level)  
Working principles as above.
2. **Regional Appeals Court** (ie national level)  
Working principles as above, but it consists of unbiased men not familiar with the case (or the minister involved).
3. **Top Church Court** (Council of Elders appointed body)  
Working principles as above.

### **Perjury outlawed**

There has been a way that has been used for a very long time to influence the outcome of church investigations and rulings including talking with other ministers about the accused, tampering with records, obstruction, manipulation, malicious change to facts. And most popular has been coercion and fear tactics; collusion; refusing to have the accused's witnesses present;

misrepresenting facts. All this is done to sway the results, and this is criminal in the Bible and unethical to say the least.

## Conclusions

Now that we have examined the various Commentaries and Scriptures on the subject, what may we conclude?

Paul introduces a new instance highlighting the pride and arrogance exhibited by the Christians in the Corinthian church. It appears that at least one member has taken legal action against another in a secular civil court due to a disagreement. Paul expresses his outrage regarding this matter.

Engaging in competitive lawsuits was a prevalent and common practice during that time. However, it was not always conducted fairly. Those who were wealthy or well-connected within the community held an advantage over others. The bribery of judges and jurors was widespread. In nearly all instances, the parties involved would not only argue for the validity of their positions but also attack each other's character. Consequently, those involved in lawsuits would often become social adversaries.

The subsequent verses reveal that Paul views it as a tragedy for fellow believers in Christ to find themselves in such a predicament. It is disgraceful for brothers and sisters in Christ to resort to unrighteous, non-believing judges rather than seeking resolution among fellow born-again Christians.

Paul's reference to the term "unrighteous" carries two significant implications. Primarily, he indicates that these secular authorities are not Christians and have not been made righteous through the blood of Christ. Furthermore, many of these Roman judges were corrupt, contributing to the widespread unfairness associated with civil courts of that era. Paul himself had been literally dragged before a court in Corinth by Jewish religious leaders (Acts 18:12-17), which turned out to be more favourable for him than most of his encounters with Roman judges.

Paul does not advocate that a Christian should never submit to the authority of a human court. In fact, he teaches the contrary in Romans 13:1-7, emphasising that Christians are to abide by the laws of the land. These verses pertain specifically to civil lawsuits, not criminal cases. Additionally, he does not imply that Christians can never, under any circumstances, pursue legal action against someone claiming to be a believer; his mention of "trivial cases" in the passage suggests that certain matters may indeed require court involvement.

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## ***The Real Meaning of ICorinthians 6:1-11***

**By Craig M White**

**History Research Projects  
GPO Box 864, Sydney, Australia 2001  
[www.originofnations.org](http://www.originofnations.org)  
[www.friendsofsabbath.org](http://www.friendsofsabbath.org)**

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**Can a Christian **sue** someone?**