

DISPUTES AMONG BELIEVERS

In the course of our jail ministry, a female inmate (professing believer) was struggling with how to deal with some unfair treatment from another inmate (also a professing believer) and requested counsel. This brief guidance from scripture was furnished.

1Co 6:1-8 If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? ²Do 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? ³Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! ⁴Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! ⁵I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? ⁶But instead, one brother goes to law against another-and this in front of unbelievers! ⁷The 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? ⁸Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.

This is written to *believers*. Believers ought to be able to resolve disputes with one another. After all, they agree on the foundation for resolution, the Word of God. If they have an honest disagreement over interpretation or application, or are unable to resolve the matter themselves for whatever reason, there ought to be brothers/sisters, then church leaders who can do so. These ought to be approached for resolution, rather than civil authorities and means. Going before secular, civil courts holds God up to mockery and publicly displays a damaging testimony about the lifestyle, ethics and lack of love and unity among believers. Rather than risk that damage and allowing God to be ridiculed, a believer ought to prefer to simply be cheated or wronged by his brother. God knows all about it and will reward or punish accordingly. This is easier said than done, but it must be done. If a wrong has truly occurred, the church should be able to arrange resolution between believers. If not, then perhaps one of the believers is no believer at all, and will be exposed as such and put out of the church accordingly.

2Pe 2:4, 9 and Jude 6 talk about the (fallen) angels being judged, and Mt 19:28, Lk 22:30, 2Ti 2:12 and Rev 20:4 speak of the saints judging with Christ. The matters under discussion in the passage above are relatively trivial in comparison to such great and profound responsibility. Therefore, we ought to be able to handle them ourselves. In fact, we ought to be ashamed to find ourselves unwilling or unable to do so.

The text further emphasizes this point, indicating that even those of smallest account who are true members of the church are more qualified and able to judge these matters than the world's system. Armed with, and applying the Word to the dispute, even a member of little stature is more equipped than an unbeliever with great worldly wisdom.

But, of course, the underlying problem is revealed in these verses. The "believers" are lying to, cheating and deceiving *each other*. The fact that they have the need for lawsuits at all indicates that Satan has gained a foothold over them.