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1 Corinthians 6

“Lessons on Lawsuits”

Pastor Gary Hamrick

In addition to the many things that the Corinthian church was doing wrong – divisions, sexual sin, drunkenness, quarreling – they had other problems. They were suing each other quicker than you can say, “Watch out, that’s hot McDonald’s coffee!”

When you hear someone say, “The Bible is just an old book for an old time, it’s not relevant today,” you have to come to the conclusion that they haven’t read the Bible. The Bible is absolutely relevant for any situation today. After all, when in the world has there been a time when people are suing each other like they’re doing today!?

A quick look includes these interesting facts: the U.S. has more lawyers per capita than any other country; there are presently more than 1.1 million practicing attorneys in the U.S.; the highest concentration of attorneys (25%) are located between New York and Virginia; and frivolous lawsuits alone are said to cost the U.S. \$200 billion dollars a year! So, when it comes to living in a very litigious society, what does God say to Christians about lawsuits?

It’s important to note that these guidelines from Paul have to do with civil suits, not criminal cases. Victims of a crime have every legal right to make their case and press charges. ([1 Peter 2:13–14](#); [Romans 13:4](#)) It’s also important to point out that Christians have the option whether or not to forgive the person(s) or press charges in criminal matters.¹ However, once the police are involved in a criminal matter there’s no turning back; the Commonwealth Attorney’s office decides whether or not someone is prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

Again, Paul’s counsel by inspiration of the Holy Spirit deals with civil matters: a) when it involves monetary compensation or restitution and b) when it’s within a persons power to take someone to court or not. Paul

¹ Pastor Gary told the story of the businessman who discovered that one of his employees had embezzled \$300,000 from his business. The owner decided to forgive the debt and not involve the police because he considered the hardship prosecution would have on the man’s wife and children. He fired the man, but he chose to forgive!

points out that the church at Corinth made four wrong assumptions about God, the church and the legal system.

Wrong Assumption #1

Judges in the world are more competent to arbitrate disputes between Christians than saints in the church (1 Corinthians 6:1–5)

1. Christians should respect judges who have worked hard to be appointed or elected to the bench, however, when it comes to disputes between Christians, a Harvard Law School degree is not what counts. What counts is having the wisdom of God to settle matters that sometimes can only be *spiritually discerned*. (Emphasis added) (1 Corinthians 2:14–16)
2. Paul is saying that Christians are competent to arbitrate disputes among themselves, especially so considering the fact that Christians are going to “*judge the world*” and “*judge angels*.” (1 Corinthians 6:2–3; Matthew 19:28; and Revelation 2:26)
 - a. **Jude 6** indicates the worst of the “*fallen angels*” have been kept in the Abyss until the time of the future judgment.
3. Paul’s rhetorical question is: “If you’re going to judge demons, can’t you judge between yourselves?”
4. **1 Corinthians 6:4–5** indicates that even the least capable people in the church are more qualified to judge disputes among Christians than the most capable judge in the world.
 - a. As a side note, this means that it’s not required for church leadership to have to arbitrate disputes – anyone in the church who is a believer can sit down with two brothers or sisters and give godly, wise counsel.

Wrong Assumption #2

Christians suing Christians won’t have any impact on their witness (1 Corinthians 6:6)

5. There will be an impact on a Christian’s witness because people will notice that there is a greater intent on extracting a pound of flesh than exercising forgiveness.
6. It’s amazing how much Scripture “un-churched people” know when Christians act like them!
7. It’s hypocritical for Christians to run to the courts and subject themselves to ungodly judgment when there is so much that Christians disagree with concerning the ways of the world, including: lack of faithfulness in marriage; lack of integrity in business; lack of honesty in speech; lack of loyalty in friendship, and the list goes on and on.
8. **1 Peter 2:12** says, “*Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*”

Wrong Assumption #3

We are entitled (1 Corinthians 6:7–8)

9. A primary reason people don't want to be wronged or cheated is because people believe they are entitled to be compensated!
10. The sense of entitlement in our culture can be seen in the "trophy generation," as Pastor Gary called it in his illustration about kids' participation trophies!
11. Entitlement runs counter to what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount in Luke 6:27–31:
"[b]less those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you."
12. Jesus is saying that Christians should be willing to be wronged without having to retaliate.
13. We are not entitled to anything, and don't forget that salvation and heaven are gifts from God that we don't deserve and can't earn!

Wrong Assumption #4

God can't take care of injustice

14. The feeling for many is that they have to take it to court because God can't do anything about it!
15. Consider what Peter says about Jesus in **1 Peter 2:23**: *"When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."*

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read **1 Corinthians 6:1–8** to provide an overview for this study.
3. Read and briefly discuss the unusual lawsuits Pastor Gary mentioned.
 - a. Judge Sues Dry Cleaners for Losing His Pants
June 2007: A Washington D.C. judge, Roy L. Pearson sued Custom Cleaners in NE D.C.

for losing a pair of his grey dress pants. Korean immigrants, Jin and Soo Chung, who own the drycleaners offered to pay Pearson \$12,000 but Pearson refused and sued them for \$67 million. A judge ruled against Pearson and he has since lost his job as a judge when a D.C. panel refused to reappoint him at the end of his term.

b. Man Sues Homeless for \$1 Million

January 2007: Karl Kemp, owner of a ritzy antiques store on Manhattan's Madison Avenue, sued four homeless people who congregate in front of his shop because they scare off potential customers. The amount of the suit: \$1 million, payable apparently in shopping carts full of aluminum cans.

c. Man Sues Wife for Donated Kidney

January 2009: After Long Island doctor Richard Batista was slapped with divorce papers from his cheating wife, he decided he'd had enough and sued her for the return of a gift he'd give her eight years prior: a kidney. If that wasn't feasible, he'd "settle" for \$1.5 million.

d. Girls Sued for Baking Cookies

July 2005: Two well-meaning teenage girls in Durango, Colorado decided one summer night to bake cookies for their neighbors. They packaged the baked treats in plastic wrap with a heart-shaped message wishing the recipients a good night. When they knocked at the door of Wanita Renea Young, however, the woman became so terrified that someone was outside her house at 10:30 PM that she suffered an anxiety attack and successfully sued the girls for \$930 to cover a trip to the emergency room. Her request for money to cover pain and suffering was denied.

e. Man Sues because Women Didn't Materialize

In the 1990s, Anheuser-Busch, the producers of Budweiser, ran a series of ads in which two beautiful women come to life in front of two truck drivers drinking Budweiser. A Michigan man bought a case of the beer, drank it, and failed to see two women materialize. He sued the company for false advertising, asking for a sum in excess of \$10,000. Thankfully the court dismissed the suit and the man remained penniless and dateless.

4. Read and discuss [1 Peter 2:13–14](#) and [Romans 13:4](#) regarding criminal cases.
5. Read the following recap about Dr. Jean Twenge's book and Professor Joshua Foster's Narcissistic Personality Inventory to provide some background for a discussion on the pervading sense of entitlement in our culture.
 - a. Dr. Jean Twenge, a psychology professor at San Diego State University, examines the generation of Americans born after 1970 in her book, "Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled — and More Miserable than Ever Before." Twenge argues that younger people are more self-assured than their parents, but they are also more depressed. She bases her argument on 14 years of research, placing much of the blame on the self-esteem movement of the last few decades.

According to Twenge, these young people were raised on a daily regimen of praise and flattery from their baby boomer parents and from teachers who embraced a self-esteem-boosting curriculum that included activities like the Magic Circle game. Never heard of it? In this game, one child a day is given a badge that says, "I'm great." The other children then take turns praising the "great" child, and eventually these compliments are written up and given to the child for posterity.

At the University of South Alabama, psychology professor Joshua Foster has done a great deal of research using a standardized test called the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI). The NPI asks subjects to rate the accuracy of various narcissistic statements, such as "I can live my life any way I want to" and "If I ruled the world, it would be a better place." Foster has given this personality test to a range of demographic groups around the world, and no group has scored higher than the American teenager. Narcissism also appears to be reaching new highs, even within the Entitlement Generation, among American college students. Another national study involving the NPI, conducted by Twenge, shows that 24 percent of college students in 2006 showed elevated levels of narcissism compared to just 15 percent in the early 1990s.²

- b. What is it about entitlement that runs contrary to the gospel message?
6. Spend time talking about these questions every Christian should ask before they consider entering into the process of a lawsuit.
 - a. Is the other person a Christian?
 - b. Can the church arbitrate this situation?
 - c. How will this affect my witness?
 - d. Should I take the higher ground and forgive the debt?
 7. When you consider the following information, how important is it for Christians to “count the cost” of a lawsuit?
 - a. The average cost of legal fees incurred for someone to defend himself or herself in a personal injury lawsuit is \$10,000.00.³
 - b. It takes at least a year to resolve most lawsuits, and delays of three to five years are not uncommon.⁴
 - c. Only 3% of civil cases actually go to trial; 97% are settled out of court at tremendous expense.⁵
 8. Close your time by allowing everyone in your group to: understand that a godly Christian who has a grasp of the Scripture is more adequate to act as a mediator in a dispute between Christians than any judge in the secular court system; recognize the fact that there is a big impact in a Christian’s witness when they bring a suit against another Christian, or another person for that matter; reject the common perception that entitlement is their *right*, and understand that entitlement runs contrary to the Gospel (We can’t earn nor do we deserve salvation or anything else, for that matter! Everything is by God’s grace and mercy!); allow room for God to work out the details of judgment, in his time and in his way.

²http://www.boston.com/news/globe/magazine/articles/2007/09/30/the_new_me_generation/

³ http://74.125.113.132/search?q=cache:GYAPwsYdIu4J:www.thomas.gov/cgi-bin/cpquery/%3F%26sid%3Dcp109ujWc2%26refer%3D%26r_n%3Dhr123.109%26db_id%3D109%26item%3D%26sel%3DOT_74670%26+average+cost+to+defend+yourself+in+a+personal+injury+lawsuit&cd=5&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us

⁴ <http://www.occala.org/facts.html>

⁵ http://justice.uaa.alaska.edu/forum/21/3fall2004/b_civilus.html