

# Christians and Conflict

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**1 Corinthians 6:1-11 (NKJV) “Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?<sup>2</sup> 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?<sup>3</sup> Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?<sup>4</sup> If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge?<sup>5</sup> 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?<sup>6</sup> But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!<sup>7</sup> 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?<sup>8</sup> No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!<sup>9</sup> 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,<sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.<sup>11</sup> 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.”**

One fallacy often believed is that Christians will never experience conflicts with one another—that Christians always walk in love and harmony. Unfortunately, that is not true. While believers are saved, they are not fully sanctified in their character. God is still forming each of us into the image of His Son Jesus. Until this happens, Christians will continue to have conflicts. Paul said, “Dare any of you, having a matter against another...” So the issue is not whether or not Christians will have conflicts with one another, but how should Christians handle their conflicts with one another?

Be honest—it is easy to love one another when we get along. The test of love comes when we don't get along and when we don't agree. These are the times when our love and principles are tested. How we handle conflict affects not only the parties involved but our families, the church, and the work of God.

Paul addressed the matter of conflicts in the church at Corinth. Although these believers had come to faith in Christ, their minds had not been renewed to the ways of Christ. Rather than submit to the law of love, Christians dragged each other into secular and pagan courts to settle their issues. In doing so they were 1) subjecting themselves to a system of law and justice that was contrary to the Word of God, 2) airing their problems before the world, 3) marring the reputation of the church, 4) bringing reproach to the Name of Christ, and 5) placing stumbling blocks before the lost.

Paul insisted that Christians must settle their conflicts “before the saints”, i.e. before the church. Unfortunately, the carnal pride of partisanship and self-preservation prevented them from seeking out wise arbiters in the church to help settle their issues according to the Word of God. By going outside the church, they attempted to obtain through secular courts results that

were not allowed by God's law. Hardened insistence on personal rights causes Christians to ignore the reconciling work of Christ on the Cross, the law of love, and the humility that fosters forgiveness, reconciliation, healing, and restoration.

Why should believers settle their issues among other believers? It is because they are the most qualified to judge because they uphold God's standards of justice and righteousness: *"Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?"* Not only this, but Christians will also one day judge the angels: *"Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?"* Christ is even now establishing His kingdom among God's people in the church. One day this world and angels will be judged by the saints.

Since believers will one day judge the world and angels, Paul insists they are well qualified in this present life to judge "the smallest matters". The church is, in effect, the earthly court God intends for issues to be settled among Christians. The Jewish people have operated this way for centuries. In the days of Christ the Jews lived under a dual court system. One was secular based upon Roman law. The other was Jewish—based upon Jewish and religious law. This Jewish court was called the Sanhedrin. The Romans allowed the Jews to settle religious and cultural issues within their own courts according to their own law. Since then Jews have settled their differences privately or in the synagogue court, refusing to go to pagan courts because it implies that God, His laws, and His people are not competent to solve every problem.

For the same reasons, Christians should not settle conflicts in secular courts: *"If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge?"* Since the saints are much more qualified to make righteous judgments in this life and will judge the world and angels in the age to come, it is inconceivable that Christians would subject themselves to unbelieving judges who hold an unbiblical world view, who preside over secular courts, and whose judgments are based on secular and even pagan laws.

Secular judges have no legitimacy in the church. So how should believers seek to settle conflicts between themselves? Jesus gives us the steps toward reconciliation in Matthew 18:15-20. First, believers should try to settle their issues privately. When they can't settle things privately, they must seek out two or three wise arbiters within the church who can help settle their issue. If this step does not get results, then the issue should be brought before the church (eldership) so that a final decision can be made. Once a final decision is made by the church, the ruling is binding as from the Lord. When Christians settle their issues in this way, it bears testimony to the glorious kingdom of our Lord.

It is a shameful thing when believers settle their conflicts in unbiblical ways: *"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?"* The fact that Paul had to address this issue was a shameful indictment against the church. Paul used sarcasm to point out that the issue was not whether there was anyone in the church who was wise, but that a lack of humility and submission to God's Word prevented them from seeking out someone in the church to preside over them.

Paul takes things a step further. When it comes to being wronged by another believer, it is best to take the high road of accepting wrong rather than to take the low road of going to secular courts: *"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?"* Taking quarrels between Christians into secular courts is an utter Christian failure

before the trial even begins. The reason is stubborn pride that refuses to let go of a matter and insists upon fighting for rights at any cost. There is a higher road that will glorify Christ. That road begins at the Cross of Jesus.

In Christ, winning comes by losing, grace comes through humility, and strength comes in times of weakness. We have the ability to do what is right but we do not have ability to control our own justice. Rather than fight evil with evil, we must overcome evil with good (Matthew 5:39-40). Life is not fair, but God is just. Therefore, as believers we must entrust our souls into the hands of God who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:23). In fact, some issues are just not worth the fight. After all, what does it profit to win your case but lose your brother, your testimony, people's respect, the church unity, and to bring reproach on the Name of Christ? What does it profit to win the battle but lose the war?

Until Jesus returns, Christians will continue to experience conflicts. Christians will offend and be offended. We can't control what happens to us, but we can control how we respond. When conflict occurs, if we walk in love, do things God's way, and seek to exalt Christ, we never lose.