

- 1 ¶ Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?
- 2 Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?
- 3 Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?
- 4 If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church.
- 5 I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?
- 6 But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers.
- 7 Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather *suffer yourselves* to be defrauded?
- 8 Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that *your* brethren.

All matters are ultimately spiritual matters, and all our business ultimately is with God, for in Him we live, and move, and have our being. When men turn their trust away from God and His promises, they more and more look for their inheritance in this world. Lawyers benefit from this attitude, for the end result is a constant contending for vindication and reward, that brings men into litigation with one another. Our problems are always understood to be in terms of other people and things, rather than God, so we assign responsibility to things and to other people. How else do you explain why a man would sue the fast food chains because he has made himself overweight by eating too many hamburgers and fried chicken. Sue ‘em is the solution to the problems of life. Isn’t it interesting that a society that is based upon the freedom of the will increasingly renounce all responsibility.

You remember those terrible, yet marvelous events on the night preceding the crucifixion of our Lord. He had observed the Passover with His disciples. Judas had gone out and covenanted with the rulers of the Jews to betray the Lord into their hands, away from the multitude so that there would be no riot. He had withdrawn to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, taking with him the Three, Peter, James and John. He had agonized in prayer, while the disciples slept. After sweating great drops of blood, angels came and ministered to Him, provided Him with the great strength He would need to endure the agony of the next hours.

While He was yet in the Garden, the officers came, led by Judas Iscariot, and arrested Christ, who was identified by Judas, kissing him as a mark of identification. Peter, led by a misguided zeal, drew his sword to defend Christ—God bless Peter—many have no such zeal or courage. But Jesus rebuked Peter, saying, “Put up your sword. All those who take the sword will perish with the sword.”

Jesus was not saying that it was always wrong for Christians to take up the sword. No, the defense of our homeland and liberties is honorable and may be just. But we do have to recognize that if the Lord does not defend our homeland and liberties, then our warfare is in vain, for spiritual values cannot ultimately be gained by carnal means—nor can they be defended by carnal means.

Jesus was about to engage in labors that Peter could know nothing about. We are of the world, and worldly, and naturally only think of worldly things. Peter could not know that his petty sword would just get in the way of the great work that Jesus was about to do—what good would Peter’s sword to secure the great benefits of redemption and grace that would flow from the Cross? Peter surely would look back on his zeal with pain and chagrin, as he came to realize how foolish and petty he had been.

I have guns in my home. I make no secret about it. I would find it not wrong to use those guns in defense of my home against lawlessness and assault, if my home were invaded. But I am also certain that the prolifera-

tion of guns are not the ultimate cure for lawlessness and judicial chaos. That must come from the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice. The true weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but are mighty through God.

What has that to do with the subject before us? A great deal. This passage deals with the third great evil that was in the church at Corinth. There were divisions and strife among them; they tolerated the grossest sexual immorality. Paul asked them, “Are you not carnal, and walk as men?” When men get in the flesh, the results are predictable, for the flesh always brings forth the same fruit, as Paul tells us in the book of Galatians.

It was predictable that the Corinthians, who gloried in the flesh, who thought too much of men and their wisdom, who gloried in their parties and not in the Cross of Christ, would seek to use carnal and earthly means to accomplish their goals.

They really didn’t believe that the means given to us in the kingdom of God are sufficient to accomplish the goals. David as a lad had enough sense to realize that he could not wear the armor of Saul. It was ok for Saul to wear the armor, but David had another mission and operated on another level, a level that Saul could not understand. David would go against Goliath, but he would not wear Saul’s armor—and that would seem foolish to those who could not understand where David’s strength arose. He came against Goliath in the Name of the Lord—but that seems to abstract and irrelevant to the men of the world.

So the Corinthians, instead of glorying in the Cross of Christ, trusting God and the power of the Gospel, added their human wisdom and arts, and this trust in the flesh made them glory in outward things and led to the party spirit that so much afflicted them.

It also led them into a spirit of litigiousness and conflict. They were much too sophisticated and urbane to engage in fisticuffs on the steps of the church. That would be a very un-Corinthian thing to do, for Corinth was the most Greek of the Roman cities, and the most Roman of the Greek cities. They gloried in their sophistication and wisdom. No! they went to court. They would fight their battles, not with the sword, but with lawyers and worldly wisdom.

The three evils that we have seen in the Corinthian church spring from one ugly root: confidence in the flesh, and glorying in men, and not glorying in the Cross of Christ.

But let us come to the text.

I. How dare they pollute the Name of Christ, by taking their quarrels before the unjust? Unjust means those who men of the world, without grace. Paul had laid the ax to earthly wisdom and understanding, and has said that Jesus Christ is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. How could they, on one hand, glory in the wisdom of Jesus Christ, and then deny that wisdom by going before the unjust, before unbelievers.

But the root of the problem was their litigiousness and pettiness. They would have been wrong in cluttering up the church courts with such matters. It wasn’t even great and serious things that occupied the Corinthians, but petty things, smallest things, that the most ignorant Christian could have been able to solve.

This does not mean that the church is to erect a judicial system that is in competition with the state, for the state is the instrument of God, and serves as a protection against lawlessness and tyranny and chaos, but it does mean that most matters among Christians should be settled by arbitration—as Calvin says—and that even the most humble Christian could be able to decide the cases, and should be utilized. He doesn’t even

say bring these matters before the elders—no, most of the matters that occupied the minds of these quarrelsome, ornery, sophisticated Corinthians could be settled by the arbitration of ordinary Christians.

These were petty things. Note the difference between how Paul instructed the church to handle the discipline case in Chapter 5, and how he rebukes the church in Chapter Six. He doesn't say, “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” He doesn't even say to call the Elders together. No, these are such petty things, the person with the least reputation in the church could settle them. A simple Christian will be able to see through the sophisticated and stupid reasoning that your lawyers bring, and will be able to settle the matters between you on the basis of right and wrong.

II. What does it mean to “judge angels”? I don't really know. There are some possible explanations. It might mean that it refers to what Jesus promised to his disciples, that they would sit on thrones, judging the tribes of Israel. We know that Christ is the supreme judge of the earth, and that He will associate His people with Him on the day of judgment. Maybe it means that we are called to affirm the judgment upon the devil and all his works, and are called to affirm that judgment now, in rejecting the devils work and kingdom.

But I think it means at least this: Those who believe in Jesus Christ are citizens of a kingdom of peace and wisdom. Why should we be involved in petty quarrels with one another? Wouldn't it be better to lose the quarrel than to disrupt the kingdom of God? Our warfare is with principalities and powers, not with one another. I am sure that a spirit of righteousness and moral superiority filled the spirits of both sides of the quarrels in Corinth—that each party thought that great and important moral and spiritual things were at stake. You remember the disciples of the Lord: Jesus and his disciples had been rejected by a city of the Samaritans, and the disciples wanted to call down fire and brimstone—what greater moral purpose can you have than to oppose those who reject Jesus Christ? What greater purpose than to pull your sword to defend the Lord Jesus from and unjust arrest and trial? It is a good thing that Jesus Christ had not lost sight of his mission. His disciples would have rejoiced if the fire had fallen from heaven, but Christ and his mission would have been permanently discredited: for his mission was to save lives, not destroy them. Moses and the prophets had their job; Christ had His, and it was not the same job.

It certainly means that the ability to judge right and wrong should be put to a better use than being constantly involved in quarrels with your fellow Christians. Here is a funny contradiction: those who rejoiced in lawsuits and justice were not adverse to drag Christians before unjust tribunals. Go figure. Aren't there more important things to be concerned with than winning quarrels with your fellow Christian? What about spiritual warfare and the works of the devil? Why do we gather together? Why do we associate ourselves in the Name of Christ. To fight and contend with each other? Isn't it better to lose the quarrel than to sell out the vision before the ungodly?

Sadly enough, there are Christians who are like the German doctors before WWII. They used to say that they would consider the operation a success even if the patient died. In the same way, there are people who would consider themselves successful, if vindicated in their quarrel, even if the church is destroyed and its mission brought into disgrace before the ungodly.

Paul shames them—on the pettiness of the matters—petty, because they are earthly and have to do with earthly things. Shameful, because they were indirectly confessing that they were a bunch of fools, with no wise men among them.

Sidenote: I agree with Calvin, that it is not Paul’s purpose here to utterly condemn all recourse to the civil magistrates. What made it grievous in the case of the Corinthians were the following consideration: the desire to defraud their Christian brother; the fact that the judges were not Christians; the pettiness of the suits. As Calvin says: “This, however, does not hinder your distinguishing between the thing itself: Let us therefore bear in mind, that Paul does not condemn law-suits on the ground of its being a wrong thing in itself to maintain a good cause by having recourse to a magistrate, but because it is almost invariably accompanied with corrupt dispositions; as, for example, violence, desire of revenge, enmities, obstinacy, and the like.” The magistrate himself is a gift from God, as Paul tells us in other places. The main fault with the Corinthians was their contentiousness, which would have been evil, even if carried forward in a church court. The fact that their sin was displayed before the unjust simply made it far worse.

III. The words of Christ come to our memory at this point: What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his soul? What is the agitation about worldly things and worldly goals that stirred the minds and souls of the Corinthians, if it was not that they were acting like men of the world, as men who had no heavenly vision and mission. They were not voices crying in the wilderness; they were part of the wilderness.

With the flesh comes all sorts of agitation. The Apostle tells us in another place “Let the peace of God rule your heart and mind....” This is the peace that comes with trust, for faith not only is a certain knowledge, but it is a firm reliance on the promises of God. What are those promises: they are summarized in the first question of the Heidelberg Catechism:

Question 1: What is your only comfort in life and in death?

Answer 1: That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death,[1] am not my own,[2] but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ,[3] who with His precious blood [4] has fully satisfied for all my sins,[5] and redeemed me from all the power of the devil;[6] and so preserves me [7] that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head;[8] indeed, that all things must work together for my salvation.[9] Wherefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life,[10] and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live unto Him.[11]

Faith also teaches me to trust in the providence of God:

Q27: What do you understand by the providence of God?

A27: The almighty, everywhere-present power of God,[1] whereby, as it were by His hand, He still upholds heaven and earth with all creatures,[2] and so governs them that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink,[3] health and sickness,[4] riches and poverty,[5] indeed, all things come not by chance, but by His fatherly hand.

Q28: What does it profit us to know that God created and by His providence upholds all things?

A28: That we may be patient in adversity,[1] thankful in prosperity,[2] and for what is future have good confidence in our faithful God and Father, that no creature shall separate us from His love,[3] since all creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move.[4]

In the tract rack in the foyer, there is a pamphlet on the Peace of God ruling the heart. This peace of god will not only keep you from the party spirit that is of the flesh, the blindness that will tolerate all kinds of wickedness, but it will also keep you from the kind of agitation of spirit that will constantly embroil you in all kinds of disputes, including those that is suit happy.

To return to that terrible night when Peter drew his sword in defense of Christ. He did not yet understand the mission of Christ. Because men always must deal with God primarily, they are responsible to God. God will hold you and me responsible for our actions in the Day of Judgment. Jesus knew that, and he knew that the only way you and I could escape the wrath of that judgment day, the sins that we have committed before the holy eyes of God must be atoned for. This is the reason He went to the Cross. Peter would learn it later and write 1 Peter 2:24. Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

He took the responsibility for our sins upon His own shoulders—not blaming others. He did what Adam and Eve did not do, nor what the children of Adam have not done. It is the death of the Son of God which is the foundation for our peace.

No wonder Jesus said, those that take the sword will perish by the sword. If Peter had been successful with the sword and saved the life of Christ on that day, there would be no peace with God, men would be yet in their sins, and we would all perish. We would all have perished by Peter’s sword on that day.
Thank God

May God bless you.