

## Judging Angels - 1 Corinthians 6:1-8

**Introduction** - The purpose of the church is to permeate the world with the gospel (Matt 28:18-19). In the Old Covenant, judging referred to taking responsibility for and ruling over. In that sense, Paul wants Corinth to understand that the church is about to experience an eschatological change. She is going to judge the world and even the angels (vv2-3); she is going to inherit the kingdom of God (vv9-10). Instead of preparing for that, growing into maturity, the church is airing its dirty laundry before the world and letting it judge her. It was time to grow up.

**Overview** (vv1-8) - In chapter 5, the Corinthians were rebuked for allowing a high-handed, unrepentant sinner to intermingle with the saints in the communion of God's people. In 6:1-8, the Corinthians are rebuked again, this time for intermingling with unbelieving judges when two Christians were in dispute. Paul is indignant that, in civil disputes, one Christian is taking another Christian to an unbelieving court and judge (v1, 4, 6). He argues from the greater to the lesser: If you are going to judge the world, can you not judge the simple matters of this life (vv2-3)? Earlier, the Corinthians boasted in their wisdom, so Paul throws it back at them to their shame (v5); they can't seem to find one wise man to judge their own matters. The dispute is one level of failure, but the fact that they would turn to unbelievers for the adjudication of the dispute is what enrages the apostle (v6). And so first, in vv1-6 Paul is insisting that when there is a legitimate dispute, Christians ought to be able to settle them in courts that are thoroughly God-fearing and faithful to the law of God. In vv7-8 he makes clear that no matter the outcome, if using pagan courts, it is a defeat for both parties with the church as a whole becoming the real loser. Verse 7 literally is, "...you go to law against yourselves." And so, Paul challenges the Corinthians to allow themselves to be wronged and cheated rather than use an unrighteous and cheating court.

**The Christian Work of Judging** - A lot of confusion exists in this passage among Christians who interpret it to mean that a Christian should never take another Christian to court. Part of the misunderstanding is due to a lack of vision for the church in the world. If the civil courts are Christian, as they have been at previous periods in history, there would be no problem with having such cases heard. That is where they would belong. "*Do you not know that the saints will judge the world,*" and not the other way around?

Solomon, the first "*son of David*" got it right when he prayed to God for wisdom to judge the people (1 Kings 3:6-9, Psalm 72:1-2). The idea of judging is not being used in the sense of the Last Judgment (nor is it in Corinthians), but with the idea of ruling over (as in the judges in the book of Judges). Solomon is praying that he would do so with maturity, discerning between "*good and evil*." The church is to grow up and be the kind of people that provide the best judges for resolving disputes of all civil matters.

**SideTrack: An Example of How this Has Gone Terribly Wrong** - Civil courts handle disputes between individuals and/or businesses, where one party sues another party and asks the court to award monetary damages, change a party's legal status, or order the parties to do or stop doing something. Our civil courts are principally wicked and unbelieving today and yet we turn to them when they refuse to use biblical law in determining grounds for divorce, property distribution and custody rights (considering biblical grounds as to who has been wronged). Instead, it is all about who has hired the shrewdest attorney. Read vv5-6 again.

**SideTrack: Another Twisting** - On the other hand, when a crime has been committed, the alleged perpetrator often squeals "*1 Corinthians 6...don't call the cops!*" Criminal offenses should be handled by the state, even if it is unbelieving (Rom 13:1-7). To ignore this (as churches often do) is to invite all kinds of disaster and shame.

**You Will Judge Angels: A Little Angelology** - Angels show up four times in 1 Corinthians. Twice they seem to be observing the new community of Christians (4:9, 11:10 - as though they were spectators to the drama of human salvation - Eph 3:10, 1 Pet 1:12). One time their "tongues" are mentioned (13:1) and here we are told that we "*will judge angels*." The word "angel" occurs over 200 times in Scripture, and similar created beings appear under other names, such as living creatures, cherubim, seraphim, and principalities and powers. Two of them appear by name, Gabriel and Michael. Angels are vast in number considered in

“hosts,” “legions,” and “thousands.” In most cases, angels are created beings, with the one exception of “the angel of the LORD” who often is understood to be a divine theophany. Angels do not live in familial covenants and do not reproduce as we do which may be the reason that when some of the angels fell, they fell as individuals, not in a federal head, as humans fell in Adam. We learn little about their nature, and only a bit more about their work, from Scripture. They are God’s attendants, standing in His presence, worshiping God day and night. They guard against sanctuary intrusion, first in Eden, later by their symbolic presence in the tabernacle and temple. They are messengers to mankind, bringing the Word of God to men and announcing great acts of salvation.

**The Big Switch** (Heb 2:5-9) – The writer of Hebrews is telling us that Psalm 8 presents two stages of history: man lower than the angels and then man crowned with glory and honor, above the angels. The book of Hebrews applies this first to Jesus. It was as though the angels were drill sergeants, lower in status than an officer, but in charge for a time. With the ascension of Jesus (and the forthcoming end of the Old Covenant Temple) everything was about to change. Jesus, and His body, the church, reign at God’s right hand even over the angels (Eph 1:20-23, 2:6). And while we don’t see all things in subjection to Christ, we are to “see” Jesus reigning through the preaching and living out of the gospel.

The first century Corinthians were not getting this. We’re not doing a much better job in our day (although the church has in the past). Personal application: conduct your affairs in a way that shows clearly, both to the church and to the world, that your primary loyalty is to the family of God’s people, even with their sins and shortcomings. Believe and live the truth: Jesus has won! Act like it.

*Dave Hatcher – July 8, 2019*

---

### *Notes for Little Saints*

**In your own home, if you are having a disagreement with your brother or sister, do you think you should go to your neighbor’s house to settle the problem?**

**Who should you go to?**

**In the same way, this passage is correcting the Corinthians who were taking their disputes (among Christians) to unbelieving judges instead of to the family of the church. Often this was done because one of the parties believed that they could cheat their brother and win their argument.**

**What does Paul say this does to our Christian witness to the world (v5)?**

**We are supposed to be growing up as Christians, and as the church, to judge/rule the world (v2). Who else will we judge? (v3)**

**There was a time when the angels were over mankind. But now Christ rules at God’s right hand, and we rule with him over all of creation. We must grow up and act like it. Read Hebrews 2:5-9**