

PREFACE

The next issue of *Reflections by the Pond*, to be published on Tuesday (January 15), is all about how many believers have made God so small in their lives, reducing Him to something we keep in our back pocket, just in case of emergencies. He has been reduced, in so many Christians' lives, to someone we call upon only after all else has failed. Instead of being acknowledged by us as Lord over every aspect of our life, someone with whom we commune with on a steady basis, He has become little more than a spiritual 911 call—or worse, just a Get out of Jail Free card.

In a similar—and, of course, far superior way—Paul is and has been making the same case regarding the church, especially since Chapter Three, where he spoke of how the church is built up from the foundation of Jesus Christ. Just as I make the case about believers making the Lord God too small, the apostle is making the case that believers are making the *church* too small. They are thinking of it, in turn, as a social club, a diner, even a bar (11:20-22, 33-34).

Paul sees the church through eschatological eyes; his position is that the church should be organized and behave—and its individual members live out their lives—in light of the role it and they will play after the return of Christ. That is, knowing how important and powerful it *will* be, the church corporate should thus live now; knowing the role individual Christians will play in the End Times, each believer should thus live now.

- The Lord God is more powerful and majestic (yet at the same time more intimately personal) than we typically acknowledge.
- The church is given far more responsibilities by her Lord, both now and in the future, than she typically employs.
- Individual believers, through their relationship in Christ and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, possess far more strength and spiritual insight than they typically ever put to use.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:1-3

v1

The first word of Chapter Six in the Greek is “Dare” (as in the KJVs), which emphasizes Paul’s indignation over this situation. I seldom appreciate the very loose (and sometimes overly flippant) paraphrase by Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, but on this verse I believe he captures the true flavor of Paul’s outrage.

And how dare you take each other to court! When you think you have been wronged, does it make any sense to go before a court that knows nothing of God’s ways instead of a family of Christians?

Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor,

Taken by itself, the NASB “neighbor” is a little presumptuous, since the Greek (*heteros*) just means some one else, someone different. But we learn from vv5-6 that what Paul is referring to is a dispute between two Christian brothers

v6: ...but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?

The apostle is truly horrified by this prospect.

dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?

In a moment Paul will make his argument for why disputes between Christians are to be adjudicated within the church, rather than before civil authorities. Before we examine that, however, I would like to suggest another reason for keeping it within the family, so to speak—which gets back to what we have discussed previously.

This fallen world in which the church dwells is always looking for evidence to bring against it—any sign of weakness, any sign of trouble brewing, any sign of hypocrisy. The more often the church addresses and settles disputes between its citizens, the fewer the opportunities for the world to demean it. But, of course, the more substantial reason is given by the apostle.

before the unrighteous

Christians and Jews alike referred to themselves as “the righteous,” so they would naturally call anyone outside the faith as “unrighteous.” The word used here (*adikos*) means “unjust”—or unjustified, as opposed to the *justified* in Christ. But the word can also mean dishonest, wicked, treacherous.

the unrighteous = *hoi adikoi* = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and <G1349> (dike); **unjust**; by extension **wicked**; by implication **treacherous**; specially heathen :- unjust, unrighteous.

Paul could have used the word he did in Chapter Five: *exo*, translated “outsiders.”

Read 1 Corinthians 5:12-13.

By choosing to use the word *adikoi* here, Paul may be saying that not only are the civil judges on the “other side of the door” of the church, but that they cannot be trusted to render an honest verdict. We will see in a moment that there is a far more important reason why Christians are not to permit civil authorities to settle their disputes with each other.

saints = *hagios* = **sacred** (physical pure, moral blameless or religious, ceremony **consecrated**) :- (most) **holy** (one, thing), saint.

Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world?

Read Daniel 7:21-22.

Read Daniel 7:25-27.

The “He” that begins v25 refers to the Antichrist. The phrase “time, times, and half a time” refers to the second three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation, called the Great Tribulation. Verse 27 makes clear that all kingdoms will be handed over to “the saints of the Highest One”—that is, Christ Jesus.

Read Revelation 2:25-28.

The details of these passages remain vague about the literal roles Christians will play during the End Times—some even claim that the Daniel prophecy refers not to saints, but to angels. Nevertheless, God’s word makes clear that the saints will be given roles of responsibility, and Paul insists on seeing the church from the perspective of the End Times; he sees the church (as well as individual believers) as an eschatological entity possessing an eternal importance that is sadly missed by most that are in the church. Our idea of the church—both local and universal—is far too small, too casual, too unimportant.

If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts?

While the NASB in the second question of v2 is a perfectly good literal translation, it doesn’t help us in seeing Paul’s overarching point. The other popular translations focus not on the “court,” but the legal action itself. Thus the ESV captures well the alternate interpretation shared by our other popular versions:

And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases?

Notice how the emphasis on “trivial cases” rather than “smallest law courts” ties in to vv7-8, below.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:7-8.

In other words, Paul is not stopping with his injunction against taking their disputes to civil courts; he is just as exercised over their disputes in the first place!

Gordon Fee: [He is] trying to shame them for having lawsuits at all. Such matters are “trivial”; they add up to zero in light of the coming eschatological judgment. People who do such are simply after the wrong things; they altogether miss the meaning of their present existence as the people of God, people who live in the present by the values of the future.

(we will return to that last line)

Do you not know that we will judge angels?

There are a number of different interpretations for this statement that believers will judge angels—some of them fanciful. God’s word nowhere states that Christians will pass judgment and/or punishment on “good” angels.

judge = *krino* = properly to distinguish, i.e. **decide** (mentally or judicially); by implication to **try, condemn, punish** :- avenge, conclude, condemn, damn, decree, determine, esteem, judge, go to (sue at the) law, ordain, call in question, **sentence to**, think.

There is general agreement that this speaks of the redeemed judging the fallen, evil angels that aligned themselves with Satan.

Read Jude 6.

Read 2 Peter 2:4, 9-10.

David Guzik offers a fascinating perspective on this.

Guzik: The destiny of redeemed men and women, to one day be higher than the angels, and to even sit in judgment of them, must have been a source of great annoyance to a certain high angel in heaven. He did not want to service an inferior creature now, and did not want to have that inferior creature one day be raised up higher than even he. So, he has rebelled against God, and is determined to keep as much of humanity as possible from even sitting in judgment of himself. We can imagine the perverse, proud pleasure Satan takes over every soul that goes to hell: “They won’t sit in judgment over me!”

How much more matters of this life?

Our common translations make this a separate sentence, but grammatically it flows together as one: “Do you not know that we will judge angels, not to mention everyday affairs?” (Fee) The phrase translated “matters of this life,” or “things that pertain to this life,” is just one word in the Greek.

biotikos = from a derivative of <G980> (bioo); **relating to the present existence** :- of (pertaining to, things that pertain to) this life.

There is nothing typically pejorative in the word, but Paul uses it here to reinforce his position that the believers in Corinth are disputing over trivialities. Of course they (and we) must deal with the “matters of this life,” but as people who belong to a different age, these things are not to become so significant that they result in disputes, even *lawsuits*, among believers.

CONCLUSION

Flesh being what it is, disputes between believers will arise, and when they do, they should remain in the church. But let us conclude by returning for a moment to that last line from Fee's quote: We are to be "people who live in the present by the values of the future." I can't think of a better, more succinct definition for a Christian. Fee is not proposing an original thought; this is precisely the point Paul is making in this passage, in this letter—indeed, in every letter of his in the canon. It is the point Jesus made in his prayer in John 17.

Read John 17:13-19.

This is what is meant by living "in Christ" (4:17); living, speaking, and walking "by the Spirit" (12:3, Galatians 5:16-25). In Christ we are a new creation, a new type of being, with an extraordinary, supernatural future ahead of us. And as Paul has repeatedly said, we are to live as who we are.