



# Team Disputes and Distinctiveness

## Topic

Reconciliation

## Theme

Believers should reflect Christian character in their Christian family relationships and in their personal conduct.

## Desired Learner Response

The learner will be consistent in reconciling with other believers with whom he disagrees.

## Materials

- Resources 1 and 9

## Scripture Focus

1 Corinthians 6

## Summary

The Corinthian Christians acted like unsaved people by suing one another in court. As God's redeemed people, they were called to settle their differences within the church family and to glorify God in every area of life.

## Outline

### I. Resolving Disputes (6:1–11)

- A. A shameful practice (6:1–7a)
- B. A selfless principle (6:7b, 8)
- C. A sobering point (6:9–11)

### II. Maintaining Distinctiveness (6:12–20)

- A. Maintain godly purity (6:12–18)
- B. Maintain a godly ambition (6:19, 20)

## Memory Verse

*"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?"  
(1 Corinthians 6:2).*

## GETTING STARTED

### Lawsuit Protection

**ASK:** What steps have you taken to protect yourself from lawsuits? (Q1)

**ASK:** How would you respond if someone in the church sued you? (Q2)

Members of the church at Corinth were suing each other and taking their cases to civil courts. Paul called their practice shameful and encouraged them to maintain their distinction as Christians in society so they might have strong testimonies for Christ.

### Brother v. Brother

**ASK:** Did you ever wish you could take a sibling or perhaps a parent to court when you were growing up? What were the circumstances?

**ASK:** How do you think taking a family member to court would have reflected on your family name?

Familial lawsuits are bad for the family name! And living with each other during and after the lawsuit is not too pleasant either.

Paul addressed the Corinthians in a negative context yet again. They were suing each other and giving the body of Christ in Corinth a bad reputation.

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Quarrels occur in even the most loving families, but they must not be allowed to rip the home apart. They must be resolved so the family can continue to function as a loving unit. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul addressed the church family at Corinth and provided guidelines for solving internal disputes and sustaining the church family's distinctiveness.

### I. Resolving Disputes (6:1–11)

#### A. A shameful practice (6:1–7a)

**READ:** 1 Corinthians 6:1. **ASK:** In settling disputes between believers, what advantages does a believer have over an unbeliever? (Q3) *The believer has the Holy Spirit and God's Word as his guides.*

Lawsuits were common in the Greek culture at Corinth as they are today. When Corinthians became Christians, however, they gained an opportunity to resolve disputes with one another in a conciliatory and godly manner. Instead of employing this opportunity, they preferred the old system of scratching, gouging, and biting one another—spiritually speaking—in front of unsaved magistrates (6:1; cf. Gal. 5:15). Who would believe such combatants belonged to the same team of believers in Christ?



**ASK:** From a Biblical perspective, why are lawsuits so common in every age?

*(Q4) Lawsuits are common because sin is a universal problem. Some people sue because they were sinned against. Others file lawsuits hoping to sinfully deceive a court and win a settlement that does not rightfully belong to them.*

Paul reminded the Corinthian church that someday they will judge the world, including angels, during the millennial reign of Christ (6:2, 3; Dan. 7:22). Believers might also take part in judging fallen angels when Satan, and by implication his angels, are *cast into the lake of fire* after the conclusion of the millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20:10; see also 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). Paul's reference to *judging angels* might also indicate that believer's will rule over good angels during Christ's millennial Kingdom.

After pointing out that believers will judge angels, Paul seems to change his tone to sarcasm in verse 4, a verse that is admittedly difficult to interpret. He apparently suggested that if the Corinthians insisted on having disputes, then they would need to look no further than the least esteemed believer in the church to settle the dispute. Perhaps his point is that such a believer has God's Word and the Spirit as his resources. No unbelieving government official could match such resources. But the Corinthians acted as if *no one* in their church, not even one of their leaders, was qualified to judge disputes (6:5). The church members all claimed to be wise (3:18), but their practice showed otherwise. Paul was direct with the Corinthians in telling them such a practice was shameful (6:5).

**ASK:** Do you think the Corinthian believers who went to the civil courts to settle their cases were often reconciled to one another after the verdict was announced? Explain. *(Q5) Most likely not. The civil court gave verdicts, but it did nothing to change the believers' hearts and encourage reconciliation. Only the church under the direction of the Holy Spirit could bring true closure to the cases.*

We should note that later in chapter 6, Paul reminded the Corinthians that they were indwelt by the Holy Spirit (6:19). And even later in his letter he talked at length about the spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit gives to believers in the church (12–14). The overall purpose of those gifts was to edify the church, the Body of Christ. In chapter 13 Paul taught that believers are to use God's love to guide their exercise of spiritual gifts. The Spirit's presence, His enabling, and His love more than qualified believers to settle disputes between members. And the Spirit's presence, enabling, and love would help them focus on edifying one another instead of demanding their rights every time they felt wronged (12:7; 14:12, 26).

**ASK:** Would you say a believer who carries grudges against fellow church members is living by the Spirit? Explain. *(Q6) If he was living by the Spirit, then he would be interested in lovingly edifying his fellow church member instead of carrying grudges against him or even seeking revenge.*

Brothers who brought brothers before unsaved judges blemished the church's testimony in Corinth (6:6, 7a).

**READ:** John 13:34, 35. **ASK:** For what did Jesus want His disciples to be known? *(Q7) For their love for one another.*

**READ:** 1 Corinthians 6:7a. **ASK:** How did Paul describe the Corinthians' practice of taking each other to court? (Q8) *As a complete failure.*

### **B. A selfless principle (6:7b, 8)**

Instead of suing a fellow church member, Paul taught that taking a loss or suffering damages would be better than going to a secular court (6:7). Of course, this may not have been an option in every dispute that arose in the church. But Paul pointed out that in the cases at hand, the Corinthian church members were not simply caught up in circumstances beyond their control. They were wrongfully acting as the aggressors (6:8). And aggressively gaining a satisfactory verdict in such instances would mean little since the legal battle would injure the church's testimony.

**READ:** 1 Corinthians 6:8. **ASK:** What would motivate a believer to *do wrong and defraud his brethren even at the expense of the church's testimony* (cf. 3:3)? (Q9) *Such a believer would be motivated by self-centered, carnal thinking.*

Paul does not give specifics on how a church should handle legitimate disputes between church members. He speaks only of utilizing a *wise man* (6:5). We can infer that such a proceeding would be under the authority of the autonomous congregation and might fall in the category of a church discipline case.

We should note that Paul is not teaching that government courts are necessarily evil and that believers should always avoid them. His teaching that such government *powers . . . are ordained of God* (Rom. 13:1) makes that clear. Certain issues in a believer's life may require the court's involvement even if a matter concerns a dispute with another believer. There could also be a situation in which a believer attempts to settle a matter with another believer by following the pattern of 1 Corinthians 6 only to find the other believer wants to take the matter to court. In such cases, believers will need God's wisdom and the assistance of other godly believers to maintain a good testimony and godly attitude.

### **C. A sobering point (6:9–11)**

Paul made a sobering point to those Corinthian believers who insisted on suing each other. He stated that their actions were like the actions of the unrighteous. Their bickering lawsuits were no better than the vilest offensives of the unregenerate, wicked Corinthians who were destined to eternal separation from God if they did not turn from their sins and trust in Christ as their Savior (6:9, 10). The Corinthian believers had responded to the gospel. The Lord had reached down into the miry clay, scooped them up, washed them from their sinful filth, set them apart to honor and serve Him, and gave them a righteous standing in His sight (6:11). They were sanctified in their position before God, but they were acting like they were still unrighteous unbelievers.

This point is sobering because God counted on the Corinthian believers to be His witnesses to the lost in Corinth. When the Corinthian believers acted like they were still unrighteous, they hurt their ability to communicate the gospel effectively to the lost.

**ASK:** What should happen to petty disagreements between believers when they consider how their actions affect their ability to communicate the gospel?



(Q10) *The believers should move quickly to resolve their differences and then support each other in their common goal of winning the lost for Christ.*

## II. Maintaining Distinctiveness (6:12–20)

### A. Maintain godly purity (6:12–18)

Paul went on to develop the truth that a believer's life is not about freedom to do what he pleases but about how he might use his freedom in Christ to glorify God and reach the lost. Paul gave four questions for believers to ask to determine if they should engage in certain practices. Paul then used those questions to show that sexual immorality is obviously not an acceptable practice.

**RESOURCE:** Display resource 9 as you go over Paul's guidelines from 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 13.

Paul's first guideline in determining whether to engage in a practice was to ask if the practice was *expedient*, or profitable (6:12). Did the practice help Paul in his walk with God?

Paul's second question focused on whether the practice would enslave him and damage his reputation and his relationships (6:12). Sin is usually enslaving, but other practices may become enslaving and sinful if they take a believer's time and keep him from serving God faithfully.

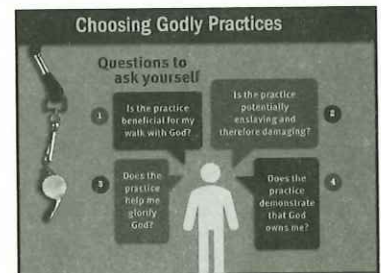
Paul's third and fourth questions addressed the lie that practices that involve the physical body cannot be wrong. Some believers in Corinth thought that since eating is not a spiritual exercise, then other physical activities, including those of a sexual nature, must not have any bearing on a believer's spiritual life. This thinking originated with the Greeks, who believed the physical body was worthless and therefore had no bearing on a person's spirituality. But Paul was clear that a believer's physical body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord (6:13). All a believer's actions, including physical activities, are supposed to be for God's glory (cf. 6:20). So Paul's third question asks whether the practice in question helps the believer glorify God. His fourth question builds on the third. It asks whether the practice demonstrates that the Lord owns the believer's body (6:13).

**ASK:** What are some practical ways a believer might demonstrate that the Lord owns his body? (Q11) *He takes care of his body so he might serve God effectively with it; he does not use his body to draw attention to himself.*

To emphasize his point that the believer's body belongs to God and is therefore important, Paul reminded the Corinthians that God raised up Christ from the dead and would one day raise all believers from the dead (6:14). Their physical bodies were important to God.

Taking his argument even further, Paul taught that a sexual relationship is more than just a physical act because believers are *members of Christ* (6:15). When a believer has a sexual relationship with a *harlot*, he becomes a *member* with the harlot. Should a believer who is a member of Christ also become a member with a harlot? Paul emphatically said, *God forbid* (6:15).

Paul quoted Genesis 2:24 to support his teaching (1 Cor. 6:16; cf. Matt. 19:5).



God's plan for marriage has always been for one man and one woman to become one flesh. That is the only godly sexual relationship because it is the only one that reflects the Lord's union with the believer (6:17). The only fitting course to follow, then, was to *flee fornication* (6:18). Indulging in fornication, Paul explained, is equivalent to destroying one's own body (6:18; cf. Prov. 6:32).

**ASK:** What makes fleeing fornication possible? (Q12) *Strong marriage relationships, regular time in God's Word, submission to the Holy Spirit's control.*

## **B. Maintain a godly ambition (6:19, 20)**

Paul summoned the Corinthian Christians to honor the Lord with their bodies, living for Him as redeemed people. The Christian's body is *the temple of the Holy Ghost* (6:19). These words no doubt stunned first-century Jewish believers, who were the product of roughly one thousand years of discipline in temple worship in Jerusalem. Paul wrote similarly to the church at Ephesus, comparing the church body to a living temple, inhabited by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:21, 22).

Since a believer is the Spirit's temple, wherever the believer goes, the temple of the Holy Spirit goes. Whatever he does, the temple of the Holy Spirit does. These sobering facts ought to grab our attention and influence our actions. Perhaps we need to rethink our priorities, redefine our interests, reorder our habits, and rearrange our schedules because we are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Paul went on to tell the Corinthians that they were God's purchased possession (6:19b, 20).

**READ:** 1 Corinthians 6:20. **ASK:** What price was paid for believers? (Q13) *Christ's death on the cross.*

We are God's purchased possessions. Just as a buyer purchased a slave in the slave market and set him free, so God bought us at the cost of His Son's blood, and He has set us free to serve Him. Our lifelong ambition ought to be to glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits (6:20).

As we saw in lesson 1, the pagan Temple of Aphrodite, with its one thousand priestesses, dominated the religious scene in Corinth. Paul wanted the Corinthian believers to display the temple of God through their lives in a way that would put Aphrodite in the shadows. As they did, they would create a stark contrast between their lives and those of the pagan Corinthians.

**ASK:** As the society around us becomes more promiscuous, is it easier or more difficult to live a holy life? (Q14) *Sin and temptation may be more accessible, yet the person who abides by God's Word will project God's holiness more brilliantly before the world.*

As God's redeemed people, the Corinthian Christians had received the opportunity to show their unsaved neighbors that Christ did make a difference in their lives. They could have let their lights shine so others would see their good works and glorify their Father in Heaven (Matt. 5:16). Unfortunately, they muffed that opportunity. They condoned sin in their church and then drafted lawsuits against one another. Their light was dulled. The effectiveness of their future witness



hinged on their willingness to heed Paul's exhortation to *glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's* (6:20).

Have you checked your light's wattage recently?

## MAKING IT PERSONAL

### The Court of Our Minds

Most of us will probably not have an occasion to drag a fellow believer into court. But all of us will face conflicts with fellow believers. Sometimes we drag our fellow believers into the courts of our minds and play the roles of prosecutor, judge, and jury. We may even present our case before family members or other fellow believers.

**ASK:** Why do we sometimes feel justified in trying an offending fellow believer in our own personal courts? *We feel like we have the right to plead our case. We think we will feel better if we try offending believers in the court of our minds. We value being justified over being reconciled.* (Q15)

**ASK:** Instead of trying fellow believers in the courts of our minds, what should we spend our energy doing? (Q16) *Seeking reconciliation with the offending believer. Searching our own hearts for sin.*

### Reputation Is at Stake

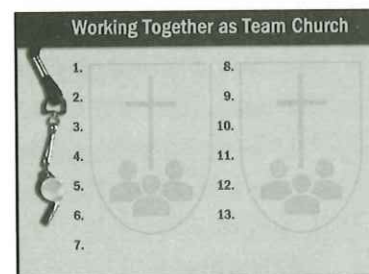
**ASK:** What does the world conclude about Christ by watching your life, especially your interaction with fellow believers? (Q17)

**ASK:** What will you do to strengthen your testimony before the world? (Q18)

### Summary and Memory Verse

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: Reflect Christ in relating to believers.

Encourage your learners to memorize 1 Corinthians 6:2. Give them an opportunity to quote the verse in class next week.



# Team Relationships



## Topic

Relationships

## Theme

Whether single or married, the believer should honor and serve the Lord.

## Desired Learner Response

The learner, whether single or married, will focus on serving God through his or her life.

## Materials

- Resources 1 and 10

## Scripture Focus

1 Corinthians 7

## Summary

The Corinthian Christians faced several issues involving their marital status. Paul addressed these complicated and controversial issues and urged the Corinthians to honor and serve the Lord, whether married or unmarried.

## Outline

### I. Principles about Getting Married (7:1–9)

- A. Marriage is normal (7:1, 2)
- B. Marriage is a partnership (7:3–5)
- C. Marriage is optional (7:6–9)

### II. Principles about Staying Married (7:10–24)

- A. Instructions for a believing couple (7:10, 11)
- B. Instructions for a believer married to an unbeliever (7:12–24)

### III. Principles about Singleness (7:25–38)

- A. Free to stay single or to marry (7:25–28)
- B. Free to serve the Lord (7:29–38)

### IV. Principles about Remarriage (7:39, 40)

- A. Free to remarry after spouse dies (7:39)
- B. Free to remarry in the Lord (7:39)
- C. Free to remain unmarried (7:40)

## Memory Verse

*“For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord’s freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ’s servant”  
(1 Corinthians 7:22).*