

Stay Out Of Court! – 1 Cor 6:1-7; Mt 18:15-18

How To Settle A Dispute With Another Believer

I'd like for u to turn w/ me to 2 passages today instead of 1 – 1 Cor 6:1-7 and Mt 18:15-18

I want to look at *both* of these passages – one from Jesus, and the other from Paul . . .

B/c *together* they give us a clear picture on *how to settle a dispute with another believer*

Disputes of a serious matter involving wrong doing, or deception, or malicious intent between two or more brothers or sisters in Christ

Serious issues that require serious attention; That's the issue (1 Cor 6:1-7)

[1] When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? [2] Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? [3] Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! [4] So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? [5] I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, [6] but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? [7] To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?

That's Paul; Meanwhile, Jesus says in Mt 18:15-18 . . .

[15] "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. [16] But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. [17] If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. [18] Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

That's Jesus; Put those two passages together – the general guidelines from Jesus and the specific application from Paul . . .

And you get a step-by-step process for how to settle a dispute with another believer

The first of which is . . .

Step 1 – If you can, let it go and suffer the wrong (1 Cor 6:7)

When you have an issue with another brother in Christ – like a legal issue, or an issue of right and wrong . . .

The first and preferable course of action, is to let it go and suffer the wrong

That's where Paul *ends* his argument, and the place we should *begin* our settlement (7) *Defrauded* – cheated, swindled, deceived, taken advantage of

After going through his whole argument in the first 6 verses, urging them to keep the matter in the church . . .

He basically sets it all aside and says – Why do anything at all?

Why take *any* course of action? Why not let it go and take your lumps?

That's the first and preferable step in settling a dispute with another believer – if you can, let it go and suffer the wrong

It may not be easy, but it *is* simple – straight from the heart of God, for our benefit

➤ Having said that, there are times when you *shouldn't* let it go

Like when the offender poses a significant *risk* to others

For instance, if you've been sexually abused, you need to speak up so as to spare others from the same thing

Or if you've been robbed in the parking lot, you need to tell someone – b/c it's likely they'll do it again

Letting it go and suffering the wrong doesn't necessarily mean keeping silent

It means choosing not to pursue punishment or retribution or remuneration for *yourself*

But don't keep silent if there's a risk to others

Nor should you let it go if *legal* protection is needed

Like in cases of physical abuse or a threat to your life

And you *definitely* shouldn't let it go if the crime was committed against a minor

Though you may not be *legally* obligated to speak up, certainly there's a *moral* obligation – like in cases of child abuse or sexual assault

Short of those exceptions however, the first step in settling a dispute or a grievance with another believer, is to let it go and suffer the wrong

Step 2 – If you can't, talk to them and work it out (Mt 18:15)

This is where Mt 18 comes in; Where Jesus says in v15 – *If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.*

If you've been wronged, legally or otherwise, and you can't let it go . . .

You've prayed about it; You've sought counsel; And you've given it some time . . .

Then your next step is to go to that person yourself, and work it out

Telling him his fault as calmly as you possibly can, speaking the truth in love, and praying that he *listens* and repents

That's the implication here – that they acknowledge their sin against you, repent of it, and make amends

Not so much to make you whole again, or pay you back, or restore your dignity – but to reconcile as brothers/sisters in Christ, fellow children of God that you are

That's 15b – *If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.* You've reconciled;

You've restored your relationship that was broken by the offense

That's the goal of talking to them and working it out – a restored relationship

➤ And if you're on the *receiving* end of the dispute, that is, you've *committed* the wrong against your brother or sister in Christ – make amends now

Don't pass go, don't collect \$200, don't wait for them to come to you, and don't fake your way through worship any longer

Jesus said in **Mt 5:23-24** – *If you are offering your gift at the altar* [i.e. if you're worshipping], *and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift therebefore the altar* [as in, stop worshipping, stop faking it] *and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

Be reconciled, and then worship; B/c anything else is fake and wrong

Not only that (**Mt 5:25**), but – *Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court [i.e. make amends now], lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison.******

If you've been wronged and can't let it go – talk to them personally and work it out
And if you're on the *receiving* end of that talk, knowing full well that you're in the wrong – resolve it now
Lest your accuser *fails* to follow these steps, takes you to court, and puts you in jail

Step 3 – If you need, take others with you and sort it out (Mt 18:16; 1 Cor 6:2-3)

If he listened; If he received what you had to say and repented of it – you're done
But, as Jesus goes on to say in v16, *if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.*

If you need to, take one or two others with you, as in one or two other *believers* from w/in the church (that's the context), so they can help you communicate and sort it out
So they can help you *establish* the charges based on the *evidence* as the verse says

You're not taking them with you to gang up on the guy; Nor are they there for moral support; They're there to help the two of you separate fact from fiction
And I say take other *believers* with you, or *saints* as Paul refers to them in 1 Cor 6 – b/c they're the ones who are the most capable of judging *rightly*
V3 – *Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!*

➤ The reason we should take one or two *believers* with us to sort things out, is b/c believers are the most capable of rendering a fair and balanced judgment
The most capable of discerning the heart and motives of those involved
IOW the church is your best chance for a just verdict

That's not to say that the courts are inept or incapable of judging correctly, although I wonder these days in light of recent events . . .
But it is to say that when it comes to disputes between believers, the church is *better*

Not only do we have the mind of Christ on things, that is, his *perspective*, but we have a heightened sense of *discernment* that comes with the filing of the HS . . .
And a God-given *ability* to judge the world someday – that's Paul's point in these verses

➤ The Bible teaches that when Christ returns, he will enlist *us*, to help *him*, rule and reign
Judging the nations according to the authority and wisdom he grants us
He's already gifted us for that, *and* is preparing us for that

It's a concept first found in Daniel 7, and then reiterated by Jesus in Mt 19, and then Paul right here in 1 Cor 6, and then the Apostle John in the book of Revelation
Including **Rev 2:26** – *The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations*
Authority as in the right and the power and the ability – to rule and reign and judge

And then later on in **Rev 20:4**, he clarifies the timing of it all, saying that during the millennium, during that thousand year time span *after* Christ returns . . .

But *before* he ushers in the eternal state with a new heaven and a new earth . . .

John said in his vision of that time – *Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed.*

God has given us the privilege and responsibility and capability – to rule and reign with him some day, over all the earth*****

➤ Not only that, but Paul says in v3 that we will judge *angels*
Implying that we are *more* than capable of judging *people*

After all, angels are a little higher than *us* the Bible says (Ps 8:5; Heb 2:5ff) . . .

And more powerful than us; And more versatile

And some of them have been in the direct presence of God *non-stop* since their creation

And yet, *we* are to judge *them* Paul says

We are to make determinations re the quality of their service to God

How much more then are we capable of judging *matters pertaining to this life?* (3)

If we are to judge *them* in the *next* life, how much more capable are we of judging one *another* in *this* life?

In matters that are trivial by comparison? And disputes that are temporal?

And grievances that will fade over the years?

How much more? Way more; That's the answer

We're *way* more capable of judging matters here and now, b/c God has prepared us to judge matters there and then

Way more capable *in* Christ, than those *apart* from Christ

So if you need to, take others with you, other believers in the church, capable as they are, and sort it out – that's Step 3

And if that doesn't work . . .

Step 4 – If you must, tell the church and submit to their judgment (Mt 18:17-18; 1 Cor 6:5b-6)

1 Cor 6:5b-6 – *Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, [6] but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? Can it be? No*

Paul's speaking facetiously here, and the answer to his question is – *no*, that can't be

There are *plenty* of people in the church who are wise enough to settle a dispute, not the least of whom are the leaders – the pastors and elders and deacons

And if you must when you've been wronged, *and* after exhausting all the other steps – take the dispute to them; Tell it to the church like Jesus says in Mt 18:17

If he [referring to the accused] *refuses to listen to them* [to the group of 2 or 3 from step 3], *tell it to the church.*

Which begins with making it known to the *leaders*

And then, submitting to their authority and judgment as to the best course of action

➤ IOW it's not your call as the offended individual, to decide that we should automatically railroad the person

In fact, you're probably the *least* objective person to make that call

Not only that, but we're going to need some time to get caught up on the dispute . . .

And then, *allow* some time for whatever process we put in place, to hopefully bring about repentance and restoration

And if and when that doesn't work, we'll then decide how to most effectively treat the person as an outsider

That's what Jesus means when he says in 17b – *If he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector*

That is, treat him like a rebellious unbeliever who's living in sin, and knows better

But that's not your call when you've brought it to the church at this point

➤ And the *scope* of our response may or may not include the whole church

A good rule of thumb for which – is that the extent of the public response, should be proportionate to the public nature of the offense, and the role of the person involved

IOW if one of our pastors or elders should fail morally, and remain unrepentant about it –

I'd have to stand up and address that with *all* of you

But if one of our children's workers steals the purse of another worker – we'll probably deal with it at that level

Communicating to those who are directly involved, or associated with that ministry

In any case, if you're involved in a dispute, and you've exhausted the first 3 steps . . .

Tell it to the church, take it to the leaders; And then submit to their judgment

Let *them* decide the best response

B/c when it gets to that level, the ramifications are huge, and the responsibility enormous

➤ That's the very next verse in Mt 18:18, where Jesus said . . .

Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

IOW whatever decisions we make as a body re a rebellious unbeliever who knows better, will be honored in heaven

Our decisions, assuming they are Spirit-filled, will be honored in heaven

If we disassociate with a person, heaven will disassociate with that person

That's another aspect of turning someone over to Satan like we talked about in 1 Cor 5

And that's the kind of authority that God has given the church, and the ramifications of bringing a dispute to them – heaven is watching

So if you can, let it go from the get-go, and suffer the wrong

If you can't, talk to them and work it out

If you need, take others with you and sort it out

And only if you must, tell the church, starting with the leaders – and then submit to their judgment

B/c according to Mt 18, the host of heaven already does

Step 5 – By all means, stay out of court and avoid the loss (1 Cor 6:1,4-5a,7a)

That's the point of the entire passage – Stay out of court!

Which he develops starting in v1 by basically saying, “You'd be foolish to go to court and risk a judgment from someone who's unsaved”

And then in v4, after making a case for our ability to judge, he says . . .

So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? [5] I say this to your shame.

IOW why would you ever take your disputes *outside* the church, when everything you need is right here *inside* the church?

All the wisdom, love, discernment, and insight you'd ever need for a right/just decision

And then, having appealed to wisdom and common sense, in v7 he gives us the bottom line – *To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you.*

Not only would you be foolish and shameful for taking someone in our church to court, but you're a loser from the start – you're *already* defeated

You've already suffered loss

➤ Like the loss of peace – b/c there's nothing like an ongoing dispute to rob you of peace

In fact, disputes are fertile soil for the roots of bitterness

Avoid the loss of peace, and avoid the loss of an untarnished testimony

If you take another believer to court, whether you like it or not the world is going to think that you're no different than they are

“I mean what's so great about Jesus if you can't get along any better than we do?”

That's what they'll think

“And what's so great about your church if lawsuits are the order of the day?”

And as a result, your testimony for Christ will be tarnished; That's a loss

The point is, even if you win, you lose

So by all means, if at all possible, stay out of court in your disputes with one another, and avoid the loss

Better to suffer the wrong and let it go, than win the case and lose even more