

***MBC Leadership seems to believe that the Injunction filed by the Plaintiffs violates the teaching of 1 Corinthians 6:1 – 8. But does it?***

Pressed for time? If so, here's a concise summary right at the top.

But I encourage you to go on and read the fuller Bible Study which follows, as this is really an interesting question to study.

***Does 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 Teach Filing the Injunction was Wrong?***

**-----The Short Answer -----**

- **No. It does not.**
  - 1 Cor 6:1-8 does NOT teach that it was unbiblical to file the Injunction against MBC Leadership. It is an incorrect understanding and/or application of the passage to say otherwise.
- **Why #1:**
  - In the Corinth scenario, lawsuits were being filed between fellow members of the church – peer-to-peer.
  - In the case of MBC, the Injunction was filed between members of the church and the church's leadership
- **Why #2:**
  - In the Corinth scenario, lawsuits were being filed to settle personal disputes between those members.
  - In the case of MBC, the Injunction was filed to call church leadership to account for its misdeeds in abusing church members, exemplified by improper deactivation of members and canceling their voting rights, violating the church's Constitution and abandoning certain established practices that had been in place for 60 years.
- **Why #3:**
  - In the Corinth scenario, these suits presumably sought compensation for damages. (Cheating and fraud are mentioned specifically.)
  - In the case of MBC, Plaintiffs are ***not*** seeking compensation, even though there well may be evidence for fraud. The outcome sought in general is to require MBC Leadership to follow the church's own longstanding rules and practices.
- **Why #4:**
  - In the Corinth scenario, there were other, Biblically principled approaches for resolution already available within the church.
  - In the case of MBC, leadership stymied the resolution process, frustrating those with complaints and working against Biblical methods to resolve the issues. Fortunately, because of the Christian Principled Foundations of our nation, there was still an opportunity for a Christian Principled resolution.
- **Why #5:**
  - In the Corinth scenario, individuals sought relief in courts embedded in a pagan culture.
  - In the case of MBC, Plaintiffs are seeking relief in Commonwealth Courts that were created and founded upon Christian Principles, not pagan ones.

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## ➤ Why #6:

- In the Corinth scenario, the members involved in these suits looked no different than anyone else in the culture. Unbelievers would conclude following Christ made no real difference in a person's life.
- In the case of MBC, action taken by the Plaintiffs **does** look different because they are **not** seeking financial compensation – as many, or perhaps even most would in a similar situation. With the assistance of a Christian Principled Court, they are simply seeking to have the church follow its own rules and practices, demonstrating that there are Biblical ways to pursue relief from a church leadership gone wrong.

Of further interest, filing of lawsuits to settle disputes between members (v.1) was only the half of it. That there would be disputes serious enough to invite such filing in the first place (v.8) was also of great concern to Paul. (see discussion below)

## Conclusion:

In conclusion, 1 Cor 6:1 – 8 is not a command against all lawsuits, or even all lawsuits involving Christians. It is rather an admonishment for specific behavior involving lawsuits that existed between fellow members of the Corinthian Church – a church immersed in a pagan culture. In the current case of MBC, the specific situation is hardly comparable.

Quite contrary to the complaint that the Injunction is not Biblical, it should be pointed out that there is scripture that actually supports action such as the Injunction.

Here is one example:

1 Tim 5:19 – 20 (NIV84)

*“19 Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. 20 Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning.”*

In considering MBC Leadership's position on this, it only serves to strengthen the message that our elders are not providing the leadership that our church needs. The ability to accurately and truthfully interpret scripture are skills required of both Elders and Pastors, but sadly are not demonstrated here. Good exegetical methods and sound hermeneutics undergird these abilities. Unfortunately, the eisegetic nature of the teaching we have been receiving over the past several years has likely contributed to the deterioration and lessening of these skills.

**In summary, the claim that Corinthians 6:1-8 teaches that filing the Injunction was wrong is not supported by scripture itself.**

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Now, if you can, take the time to delve more deeply into this oft cited scripture, consider more surrounding detail and see what more we can learn about this interesting passage. In the spirit of the Bereans, follow along and consider this for yourself.

# Does 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 Teach Filing the Injunction was Wrong?

## ***Does 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 Teach Filing the Injunction was Wrong?***

### **-----The Fuller Answer -----**

One of the first things needed in understanding Bible Scripture is to understand the context. So, let's look at that first.

#### **Context:**

##### Its Geography:

The city of Corinth enjoyed a special geographical location on an isthmus – a narrow strip of land connecting two large land areas otherwise separated by bodies of water. This relatively narrow strip of land connected the sizeable Peninsula of the Peloponnese – south-central Greece – to the rest of Greece – and in turn Europe – to the north. This meant that the land-based movement of people and goods going north and south had to pass right through the Corinth area. That presented a great many business opportunities for folks who lived there.

But there was another geographical feature that further enhanced those opportunities.

Roads were not the only means of conveyance. The economy of Greece, its islands and the whole Mediterranean region for that matter, were very dependent on sea going vessels to move goods and people as well. It was a long way around the Peninsula of the Peloponnese and it consumed time and resources to sail it. But the Ionian Sea to the northwest and the Aegean Sea to the southeast were only about four miles apart at the isthmus and the point where Corinth was situated. If only the two seas could be somehow connected to allow ships to pass from one side of the isthmus to the other.....

While it appears there were longstanding desires and plans to create a water-filled canal across the isthmus, it was apparently out of reach at the time of Paul. But as an alternate, an overland portage road had been built, through which ships were transferred from one side of the isthmus to the other.

There was real value – and real money to be made – in transiting ships across this narrow isthmus, thus saving a great deal of time and resources that otherwise would be spent sailing around the large peninsula.

Naturally, this would have made for even more business opportunities for the Corinthians.

##### Its Wealth:

Consequently, it was a very wealthy city, not only important to Greece, but reportedly the second most important city in the Roman empire in Paul's day. (*City of Corinth* , April 4, 2019 by Krisan Marotta)

All this to show that there was a lot on money in the neighborhood, which would have brought a great deal of carnal influence to the church at Corinth. As with many crossroad cities, it must have been a wild and wooly town.

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### Its Culture:

At the time of Paul, Corinth was a key player in the Roman Empire. As such, Corinth was totally immersed in a pagan culture. They worshipped many false gods and in general, disdained Christian values, teachings and principles. Roman Rule provided order and control but provided nothing like the freedoms, rights and privileges we have come to enjoy in the United States. It was a culture layered with many distinctly different classes in a way that would be difficult for us as Americans to imagine. And among these various classes were far ranging differences in rights, privileges and treatment. All were not able to own private property, to vote, to be free, and enjoy many of the other blessings we take for granted here in the United States.

Further, if you were wronged by someone, access to the courts and the justice system was not afforded everyone. Your wealth, your position, your influence – your station in life – were all determining factors.

Because of the wealth of the Corinth region, it would seem likely that many of the members of the Corinthian church were also wealthy and influential. This would have likely made them more eligible to have access to the courts, should they so choose, and in-turn, would enable them to seek resolution to wrongful acts in the courts, when such wrongs occurred. (It appears they may have been a very carnal bunch of Christians, which may have made it even more likely that such wrongs would occur in the first place!)

Then, there was yet another aspect of the culture that affected the situation – an aspect of Roman Law that may have made it relatively easy to bring civil actions.

During the time of Paul, Roman Jurisprudence was guided by a set of principles known as the *formulary system* \* and it had gained popularity of use in dealing with cases involving a great deal of money. It utilized *formulae* to make things move more quickly by using standardized pleadings. (\*Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman\\_litigation#Formulary\\_system](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_litigation#Formulary_system)).

So given the combination of these various aspects; the likely wealth, position and influence of the Corinthian church members giving them ready access to the courts; the propensity for wrongful actions to occur in a more Carnal Church; along with a legal environment that made it relatively easy and productive to bring suit, civil actions among church members would not have been totally unexpected.

As an interesting side note, even if you got to court, your case was judged by a person who held to pagan beliefs. And in addition, they may well be susceptible to bribe or other nefarious influences. So going to court, even when one was sure they were in the right, was always something of a gamble.

In any case, it would seem that some of the brethren in the Corinth church could afford to be players!

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This then seems to be what Paul was railing about. Church brother suing church brother to exact their 'pound of flesh'. And this was occurring, even though there were ways and approaches that could be utilized within the church body to resolve these issues.

### Paul's Message:

Let's go to the scripture now to see how this is brought out. And as there are some slight but interesting differences in the translations – like a picture of an object taken from different angles – I have included a few different translations to add dimension and depth to the interpretation process.

### 1 Cor 6:1-8 ESV (2016)

*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? 8 But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!*

### 1 Cor 6:1-8 NIV84

*1 If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? 2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! 4 Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! 5 I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? 6 But instead, one brother goes to law against another—and this in front of unbelievers! 7 The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? 8 Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.*

### 1 Cor 6:1-8 NASB95

*1 Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints? 2 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life? 4 So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? 5 I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide*

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*between his brethren, 6 but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? 7 Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? 8 On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. You do this even to your brethren.*

As we examine this text, please note that Paul does not take the position that we should never file a lawsuit. Instead, he is strongly admonishing the use of lawsuits in a very specific situation.

Further, there are actually two facets of this situation that roused his consternation and brought him to shame and rebuke the church at Corinth. He used them as bookends in his presentation. Not only was it a problem that fellow brothers in the church would be filing lawsuits to settle disputes between them (v.1). It was also problematic that there would be disputes serious enough in nature to bring them to filing such actions in the first place (v.8)!

Paul knew – and the members should have known – that there were far better ways to deal with problems between brothers of the same church. (In our day, with the blessing of canon, we would quickly think of Matthew 18:15-17 as such an example.)

In his “What were you thinking?” mini-lecture that followed verse 1, Paul talked about judging angels and judging the world. In his excitement and ire, did he let something slip from his journey to the Third Heaven? Or did he perhaps teach about this previously in a teaching not found in our Bible? It does seem to align with other scripture, however, such as Rev 3:21, Dan 7:22, and Matt 19:28. In any case, the reasoning appears to have been that if ‘saints’ – read ‘Christians’ – are competent to judge angels and the world, then ‘saints’ were certainly competent enough to judge fellow believers in these situations.

In an interesting way, Paul builds to his message in the middle of this verse set as he gets to verse 4. He presents a “So why?” – by saying something like *‘Why would you seek justice from a judicial system steeped in a pagan culture, when you could enjoy Biblically based resolution within your own congregation?’*

### **Lessons:**

So three important lessons come to mind, for the Corinthians – and in great measure for us as well: 1) The church is competent and well equipped to handle disputes among its members, 2) It is shameful and dishonoring to Christ to seek justice in such disputes from pagans in preference to resolution among brothers in Christ, and 3) Our witness of the Gospel to the world around us is rendered ineffective, when we look no different than unbelievers. Onlookers outside the church will conclude that following Christ makes no real difference in a person’s life.

As for the current case of MBC, it is hardly comparable to the situation found in 1 Cor 6:1-8 and nothing here would suggest that filing the Injunction was unbiblical. Dealing with a church leadership that has gone wrong is a wholly different matter and was not dealt with by Paul in this passage.

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He does address it elsewhere, however, such as

**Acts 20:27-31a** (ESV2016)

*“28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be alert, ...”*

and in 1 Timothy, where quite contrary to the complaint that the Injunction is not Biblical, scripture actually supports action such as the Injunction.

**1 Tim 5:19 – 20** (NIV84)

*19 Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. 20 Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning.*

### Conclusion:

There is more that could be unpacked from this target passage, but we have discovered more than enough to answer our question:

### ***Does 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 Teach Filing the Injunction was Wrong?***

For consistency, let's refer to the **Short Answer** points found at the beginning of our study.

- **No. It does not.**
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To add emphasis, while Paul argues that the courts surrounding the church of Corinth were far from Biblical – in their principles, process and persons – by sharp contrast, we are blessed as Americans, living in a country founded on Christian Principles, residing in the Commonwealth of Virginia – that is also founded on these principles, whose administrations of Statutes may actually be more Biblical than the administration of the MBC Constitution by our own church's leadership.

### **Final Comments:**

There was nothing tricky about this passage in our given case. It was not figurative or poetic or prophetic in nature. It just requires a plain and literal reading, a knowledge of the context and a logical understanding of the message. It takes a little study, in other words.

Unfortunately, we sometimes can come to believe the Bible is too complex and we must rely on an expert to decipher it for us. In fact, there are those who would encourage this thinking. But while experts can be very helpful indeed and add a great deal to our understanding, in the spirit of the Bereans, we must all become first class examiners of the word. We need to not only study the word, but learn the techniques involved in studying the word to reveal its truth to us so that we can apply it.

The inaccurate teaching such as was provided by MBC Leadership on this issue, is all the more dangerous before a congregation that does not have these skills.

*Not a Sermon, Just a Bible Study*