

# 1 CORINTHIANS 6:9A

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Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 6. In the beginning of this chapter Paul was dealing with the sin of Christians taking each other to civil court. Some of the Corinthian believers were deliberately putting themselves in a position where they would be judged in court by unbelievers. But Paul gave a better approach than going to court before the unrighteous. Instead he said in verse 1 that we should go before the saints. And Paul wasn't talking about just a few extraordinary believers. In Scripture the word "saints" refers to all Christians. We all have the status of being holy in God's sight. And as our practical holiness more closely matches our positional holiness, we become more equipped to serve as judges for our fellow believers. All of us should be willing and ready to help our fellow Christians resolve a dispute.

So in verse 1 Paul confronted the Corinthian believers by asking them a pointed question to make them think more deeply about their failure in this situation. And then in verses 2–4 he followed up with four more questions. He was showing his readers why they should have taken their disputes before the saints and not the unrighteous. First he reminded them in verse 2 that the saints will judge the world. When we're reigning with Jesus in the future, we will have the privilege of helping him pass sentence on unbelievers. Then Paul argued from the greater to the lesser. If one day we're going to do something as important as judging the world, then certainly we are worthy right now to do something as simple as judging trivial cases.

Then in verse 3 Paul reminded us that we're going to judge not only the world but angels as well. And most likely he was talking about fallen angels who have rebelled against God. So if we're going to help Jesus judge fallen angels and send them to hell, then we're certainly capable of judging the insignificant things that are part of our daily lives right now. Then in verse 4 Paul mentioned that the Corinthian believers appointed as their judges those who have no standing in the church. But the Greek word for standing actually means "to despise." So the idea here is that these unrighteous judges and their behavior were despised by the church in general. Now the Corinthian church in particular didn't have this attitude. These believers had enough respect for the unrighteous judges that they willingly took each other to civil court. But Paul was hinting that the Christians in Corinth should have had a different attitude. They should have despised the way these judges behaved.

Then in verse 5 Paul finally gave us a sentence that's not a question. He wrote, "I say this to your shame!" So we have an exclamatory statement here, which is an even stronger type of sentence. And in this statement Paul made it clear that he was trying to bring shame on his readers through his questions. It's a good thing for us to feel shame when we've sinned against the Lord. It's an alarm that God uses to wake

us up and help us repent of our sins. Then in the rest of verse 5 Paul asked yet another question. He said, “Can it be that there is not one wise person among you who is able to arbitrate between fellow believers?” Now the Corinthian believers would have thought that their church was full of wise people. But actions speak louder than words. If they really were wise, then why didn’t one of them serve as an arbitrator and help resolve these disputes between believers in the church? This is the great irony that Paul was pointing out in this question.

Then in verse 6 Paul made another exclamatory statement. He wrote, “Instead, brother goes to court against brother, and that before unbelievers!” These people were brothers and sisters in God’s family, and yet they were taking each other to court before unbelieving judges! These judges didn’t believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and that’s why their rulings in court were often unrighteous and unfair. But the real issue here is that we’re not being a good testimony to the world when we take our fellow believers to court. Unbelievers should see us loving each other instead of fighting each other in court. That’s why we should find a wise person in the church to serve as an arbitrator for us. But every Christian should be able to fulfill this role, because we’re all supposed to be pursuing wisdom. And God provides wisdom for us if we ask him for it and search for it in his Word.

Then in verse 7 Paul finally gave us a regular sentence. He said, “As it is, to have legal disputes against one another is already a defeat for you.” These people were going to court to try to win the case and get a legal victory. But they were in a no-win situation! One of them was going to get a favorable verdict, but it would come at a high price. It was inevitably going to be accompanied by a spiritual defeat. That’s why Paul used the word “already” here. The people who were in a legal dispute didn’t have to wait for the verdict to find out the ultimate outcome. Paul told them that even before the verdict was given, both parties in the legal dispute had already lost the case in God’s sight.

So after Paul made this chilling observation in verse 7, he asked two short parallel questions: “Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?” The Greek word for cheated just means to rob or steal. So when some of the Corinthian believers were treating their fellow Christians wrongly, they were stealing from them. In other words, this dispute must have involved some kind of financial transaction. Most likely one person owed money to the other and wasn’t paying it. Now certainly the person who was being wronged should have found a wise person in the church to serve as an arbitrator. But if that approach didn’t work for some reason, then no more action should have taken place. Paul said that it’s better to be wronged and cheated by a fellow believer than to take that person to civil court.

Then in verse 8 we have another exclamatory statement. Paul wrote, “Instead, you yourselves do wrong and cheat—and you do this to brothers and sisters!” So instead of being willing to be wronged and cheated, the Corinthian believers were wronging and cheating. In verse 7 Paul was talking about the people who were being cheated and were filing the lawsuits in court. But in verse 8 he was talking about those who were doing the cheating and were being taken to court. Both groups were committing sin here! And Paul ended this verse by stressing once again that both of these groups were part of God’s family. Paul was appalled that the Corinthian believers were wronging and cheating each other. Instead they should have followed the example that he gave them in 2 Corinthians 7. In verse 2 he said, “We have

wronged no one, corrupted no one, taken advantage of no one.” Our goal should be to never treat anyone wrongly, especially our fellow believers.

Now let’s move on to 1 Corinthians 6:9. We’re ready to cover some new material. But this verse ends in the middle of a sentence, so we’ll read verses 9–10 together. Look at what Paul wrote here: “Don’t you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God’s kingdom? Do not be deceived: No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or males who have sex with males, no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit God’s kingdom.” So it seems obvious that Paul was done addressing the issue of Christians taking each other to civil court. Instead of continuing to zoom in on that particular sin, he was zooming out to look at a variety of sins. We have a long list here of different types of sinners.

But before we take a closer look at this list, we need to make sure that we don’t rush past Paul’s opening statement in verse 9. This statement provides the link between his discussion about lawsuits in verses 1–8 and his list of sinners in verses 9–10. Notice first of all that Paul asked a question here. We just saw eight questions in the first eight verses of this chapter. But Paul wasn’t done asking questions yet. He knew that they were a powerful tool for getting people to think. And this particular question should remind us of two questions that we saw earlier in this chapter. Paul started verse 9 with the phrase “don’t you know,” and that’s also how he started his question in the beginning of verse 2 and his question in verse 3.

Now in verse 2 Paul actually put the word “or” before the phrase “don’t you know.” And if we look at our more literal translations in verse 9, we’ll see that Paul did the same thing here. The English Standard Version, the Legacy Standard Bible, and the New American Standard Bible all have the word “or” at the beginning of this verse. Now this conjunction normally introduces an alternative. For example, if you go out to eat for breakfast, you might be given the choice to have either bacon or sausage with your meal. But Paul wasn’t presenting an alternative approach to lawsuits compared to what he had just said. Instead he was giving us a question that supplements his earlier teaching. He was just moving his camera to show us the scene from a different angle.

Then Paul added the words “don’t you know,” just like he did in verse 2. We’ve now seen this phrase a total of five times in this letter. It already showed up in chapter 3 and verse 16 and again in chapter 5 and verse 6. Then of course we saw it in verses 2–3 of this chapter. And we’re going to see it three more times in this chapter and twice in chapter 9. So it appears a total of 10 times in this letter. But what’s amazing is that Paul used this phrase only once outside 1 Corinthians. So why did he use it so many times in this letter? I think the reason is that he was trying to teach the Corinthian believers a lesson. They thought too highly of themselves and boasted in their knowledge and wisdom. So Paul knocked them off their pedestal and brought them down a few notches. He was showing them that they still had much to learn.

Now this doesn’t mean that the Corinthian believers didn’t have any knowledge about spiritual things. After all, we know from Acts 18:11 that Paul taught the word of God in Corinth for a year and a half. But the problem was that these people often didn’t live in accordance with the knowledge that they had. So I think that the obvious answer to Paul’s question here is yes. The Corinthian believers didn’t have as much

knowledge as they thought, but they almost certainly knew what Paul was talking about in this question. However, they weren't applying this knowledge to their lives. And so Paul had to pause and remind them that the unrighteous will not inherit God's kingdom.

The Greek word for unrighteous just refers to acting in a way that is not right. It's the same noun that we saw back in verse 1. There Paul said, "If any of you has a dispute against another, how dare you take it to court before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?" Paul was talking about the fact that most judges were unbelievers and didn't live in obedience to God. And their unrighteous behavior certainly had an impact on their rulings in court. They would often reach unjust decisions that favored those who were wealthy and prominent in society. But in verses 7–8 Paul used a verb that comes from the same root as this noun. In verse 8 it's translated in the Christian Standard Bible with the phrase "do wrong." To do wrong is basically to treat someone unrighteously. And that's what some of the Corinthian believers were doing to their fellow Christians. They were acting just like those unrighteous judges!

So Paul gave these people a warning in verse 9. He reminded them that the unrighteous will not inherit God's kingdom. The Greek word for inherit is used 18 times in the New Testament, and Paul wrote six of them. But four of those six occurrences appear in this letter. The first two are here in verses 9–10. The last two are in chapter 15 and verse 50, where Paul said that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor can corruption inherit incorruption." So three of the four uses of this word refer to inheriting God's kingdom. We see a similar reference with Paul's use of the word in Galatians 5:21. This is the passage where Paul compared the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. And right after he listed the works of the flesh, he said that "those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

But Paul wasn't the first person who talked about inheriting God's kingdom. Look at what Jesus said to his disciples in Matthew 25:31–34: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" So in this passage we see that we're going to receive our inheritance when Jesus comes back. Many of you know what it's like to receive an inheritance from your parents. They probably designated in their will that you would receive some money and possessions when they die. But the inheritance that Jesus and Paul were talking about is much better. We're going to inherit the kingdom of God.

The Greek word for kingdom is quite common in the New Testament. It's used 162 times, but only 14 of them are in Paul's letters. It basically refers to a place where people are under someone's rule. And Paul always used this word to refer to God's kingdom and not to a purely human kingdom. Usually he made that clear by including a reference to God, like we have in 1 Corinthians 6:9. But even when he didn't do that, the context shows that he was talking about God's kingdom. Now this subject isn't prominent in Paul's letters, but it's very common in many other parts of the Bible, especially the gospels. In fact, some Bible scholars see it as the overarching theme of Scripture. But it's also a tricky and controversial topic. So it's important to get a good handle on this subject. Let's pause and study this theme more carefully.

Scripture teaches that there are two basic forms of God's kingdom. The first one is called "the universal kingdom." This aspect of God's kingdom includes the entire universe. There's a sense in which everything and everyone is in God's kingdom. This has always been true, and it always will be true. We see this truth taught in Psalm 103. Listen to what David wrote in verse 19: "The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all." This verse is clearly teaching the doctrine of God's sovereignty. He is in control of everyone and everything that happens. He rules from his throne in heaven over the entire universe.

But we also see a more narrow sense of God's kingdom in Scripture. The second form of God's kingdom is called "the mediatorial kingdom." This phrase refers to the visible rule of God on earth through one or more human mediators. These people are divinely chosen representatives who speak and act for God. We see one of the earliest references to this aspect of God's kingdom in Exodus 19. In the opening chapters of this book, God used Moses to deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Then God led these people to Mount Sinai in the wilderness. Look at what he instructed Moses to tell them in verses 5-6: "Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation."

So even though God already ruled over the whole earth, he still wanted to form a special nation for himself. He wanted the Israelites to be a kingdom of priests. Now certainly Aaron and his descendants were priests through whom the other Israelites had access to God. But in a sense all the Israelites were priests because they represented God to all the other nations on earth. Now at this point in time the nation of Israel didn't have a king, and that situation lasted for quite some time. But there were always human leaders of various kinds, starting with Moses and Aaron. When they died, Joshua and Aaron's son Eleazar led the people into the land of Canaan, which God had promised to give them. And when they died, God used a variety of judges to lead the people, like Gideon and Samson.

But eventually the Israelites demanded a human king because they wanted to be like the other nations. And God granted their request and appointed Saul to be their king. But Saul failed to obey God, and so God chose David to replace him. After Saul died, David had a long and successful reign as king over Israel. And that turned into a dynasty in which David's sons continued to rule over at least a portion of Israel. In fact, God made a very special promise to David in 2 Samuel 7. In verse 16 he said, "Your house and kingdom will endure before me forever, and your throne will be established forever." So God promised to preserve David's family so that his descendants would continue to reign in Israel.

But after a few hundred years, the Israelites became so evil that God sent them away into captivity. Even many of the Davidic kings were wicked during this time. But God did not completely destroy the Israelites or David's family. And he promised through his prophets that one day the kingdom would be restored. We see this fact very clearly in Daniel 2. At this time the Israelites were in captivity to the Babylonians, and one of these captives was a man named Daniel. One night King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had a fascinating dream from God. In the morning he asked his advisers to tell him the dream and explain the interpretation, but they couldn't do those things. However, God revealed the dream and its interpretation to Daniel.

Look at what Daniel said to the king in verses 31–35: “Your Majesty, as you were watching, suddenly a colossal statue appeared. That statue, tall and dazzling, was standing in front of you, and its appearance was terrifying. The head of the statue was pure gold, its chest and arms were silver, its stomach and thighs were bronze, its legs were iron, and its feet were partly iron and partly fired clay. As you were watching, a stone broke off without a hand touching it, struck the statue on its feet of iron and fired clay, and crushed them. Then the iron, the fired clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were shattered and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors. The wind carried them away, and not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.”

So the king saw a statute in his dream that was made up of gold, silver, bronze, and iron. But then a stone smashed the statute and became a huge mountain that filled the entire earth. So that’s the dream itself, and then we see the interpretation starting in verse 37. Look at what Daniel said in verses 37–40: “Your Majesty, you are king of kings. The God of the heavens has given you sovereignty, power, strength, and glory. Wherever people live—or wild animals, or birds of the sky—he has handed them over to you and made you ruler over them all. You are the head of gold. After you, there will arise another kingdom, inferior to yours, and then another, a third kingdom, of bronze, which will rule the whole earth. A fourth kingdom will be as strong as iron; for iron crushes and shatters everything, and like iron that smashes, it will crush and smash all the others.”

So we can see that the various materials in the statute represent different earthly kingdoms. The gold represented the Babylon, and history shows us what the other materials represent. The silver is a reference to Persia, the bronze is a reference to Greece, and the iron is a reference to Rome. But the main focus in this dream is not on the earthly kingdoms. It’s on the stone that crushed the statute. Look at how Daniel explained it in verses 44–45: “In the days of those kings, the God of the heavens will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, and this kingdom will not be left to another people. It will crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, but will itself endure forever. You saw a stone break off from the mountain without a hand touching it, and it crushed the iron, bronze, fired clay, silver, and gold. The great God has told the king what will happen in the future. The dream is certain, and its interpretation reliable.”

So the stone represents God’s kingdom that would be set up in the future. It will endure forever and never be destroyed. It’s the same kingdom that we see mentioned in Isaiah 9:6–7. Listen to what Isaiah prophesied there: “For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. The dominion will be vast, and its prosperity will never end. He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever. The zeal of the LORD of Armies will accomplish this.”

This passage is talking about Jesus! He’s the promised descendant of David who will rule over his kingdom. He already came to save us from our sins, but one day he will return to reign as king over the whole the earth. Revelation 20 tells us that his rule will last for a thousand years. Then after a final rebellion from Satan, Jesus will rule for all eternity. So when Paul and the other New Testament writers referred to God’s kingdom, this is what they were talking about. Now many Bible scholars today believe that the Old

Testament promises about the kingdom are being fulfilled right now in the church. But what this means is that we have to interpret those promises figuratively instead of literally. And there's really no legitimate justification for taking this approach. We should take those promises at face value. One day Jesus is going to come back and set up his earthly kingdom in Israel, and we're going to reign with him and help him judge the world.

Now it's true that when Jesus came to earth 2,000 years ago, he said in Mark 1:15 that the kingdom of God had come near. Many Bible scholars interpret this statement to mean that the kingdom had arrived. But his point was simply that the king was among them and was offering to set up his earthly kingdom. And of course the Israelites rejected their king and crucified him, so the kingdom was not set up at that time. But these events were part of God's plan to save us from our sins. And when God saved us, he did indeed make us citizens of his kingdom. In Colossians 1:13 Paul said that God "has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves." But this statement doesn't mean that we're actually living in the kingdom right now. Jesus taught clearly in Matthew 6:10 that we should pray for God's kingdom to come. In other words, it hadn't been set up at that time, and it still hasn't arrived yet today! It's part of our future inheritance.

But we shouldn't just assume that everyone who makes a profession of faith is a genuine Christian. We need to watch people's lives and look for either the works of the flesh or the fruit of the Spirit. And if they're behaving unrighteously like some of the people in the Corinthian church, then we should conclude that they're not going to inherit God's kingdom. So Paul was giving the Christians in Corinth a strong warning here. If they continued to do unrighteous things like cheating each other and taking each other to court, then they were in danger of being excluded from God's kingdom. Instead of reigning with Jesus and helping him judge unbelievers and fallen angels, they would be counted among the unbelievers. They would be punished in hell for all eternity.

So we need to do what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 13:5. We need to examine ourselves to see if we're in the faith. Are we living in regular and habitual obedience to God? Are we behaving as citizens of God's kingdom and serving him faithfully? Are we waiting patiently for Jesus to return and looking forward to the day that he sets up his kingdom? Are we ready and willing to suffer like Paul and the apostles did? If we're genuine believers, then we need to recognize that we're "strangers and exiles" on this earth, as Peter said in 1 Peter 2:11. We're living in a world in which God has basically allowed Satan to have free rein. And so we struggle "against the cosmic powers of this darkness," as Paul said in Ephesians 6:12. But if we endure, we will get to reign with Jesus, as Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:12. Let's close in prayer and ask for God's help to live righteously for his glory.