

Can Professing Christians Sue Each Other Civil Court?

By: Dr. Robert A. Morey | March 25, 2008
<https://njjat.com/apologetics.html>

Point # 1 The New Testament church was at first a messianic synagogue (James 2:2). As a messianic synagogue, the early church had *elders* who judged *religious* issues such as doctrine and morals. In the history of the Jews and the early church, the elders did *not* rule on *civil* issues such as violations of the law.

Point #2 According to Matthew 22: 21 and Luke 20: 22-25, we are “to give to Caesar what is Caesar’s,” i.e. take legal action on matters pertaining to civil law. Just because you’re a professing Christian, this does not negate your responsibility to obey the law.

Point #3 This means that no church may judge civil issues such as:

- A professing Christian who murders another professing Christian.
- A professing Christian who rapes another professing Christian.
- A professing Christian who robs another professing Christian.
- A professing Christian who destroys the property of another professing Christian. etc.

Point #4 This means that a *civil crime* requires a *civil resolution*. But criminals in the church always try to escape legal action by claiming that, since they are Christians, they can’t be sued by fellow Christians! But, whenever civil law is violated, only the civil courts may adjudicate.

Example: A professing Christian was caught molesting a child in the church. What should be the reaction of the parents, the pastor, and the church? Should they call the police because a crime has been done? The molester argued that since he is a professing Christian, they cannot call the police or sue him in court! He should not be punished for what he did. The parents turned him into the police and sued him in the courts for damaging their child.

Example: The book keeper of a church stole church money and, when caught, argued that the church could not *sue* her or turn her in to the police because she is a Christian! The church turned her over to the police and sued her in court to get back the money she stole.

Point #5 1 Cor. 6: 1-8 has been misunderstood by most Christians. Professing Christians who are *criminals* use the passage to stop their victims from going to the police or suing them in court. They argue that Christians should not go to court against each other, therefore they should get away with their crimes. Is this what Paul is saying? NO! A proper interpretation of the passage results in the following:

a) 1 Cor. 6 assumes that all the parties in the dispute are: (1.) members in the same local church and (2.) are under the authority of the same elders. When professing Christians belong to different churches, 1 Cor.6 does *not* apply.

b) If both parties of professing Christians are members of the same congregation and are under the same elders, what *religious* issues can they submit to the elders of the church? 1 Cor. 6:2 narrows the judgment of the leadership to “insignificant issues.” The Greek word “*elaxistwn*” means things that are *insignificant*.

They refer to such things as stepping on someone's toes or jumping ahead in a line or the kinds of insults that people often give to each other. Nowhere in the passage is an ecclesiastical court asked to judge civil issues.

What is in view in 1 Cor. 6 is that they were calling each other names and insulting each other. Paul said that with such "insignificant issues," we should be prepared to put up with personal insults by fellow members of the church in order to maintain unity in the body of Christ.

Point #6 When professing Christians are dealing with a civil issue such as the failure to fulfill verbal or written contracts or the defrauding of wages or inheritance, that is an issue for the civil courts. While Jesus judged religious issues, He refused to judge civil issues.

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

(Luke 12:13-15)

When the apostle Paul "appealed to Caesar" in Acts 25:11, i.e. he took his case to the civil authorities, he did not contradict what he said in 1 Cor. 6.

The conclusion: When one professing Christian defrauds another professing Christian in a civil or criminal action, *it is the duty of the victim to take civil action to remedy the issue.*