

Litigation and the Christadelphian

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IN THE WESTERN world, in particular, there has been a rapid rise over the past thirty years in the number of compensation claims and associated litigation passing through the law courts. The media regularly contain reports ranging from high-profile celebrity cases, and compensation claims following rail and air disasters, to police officers seeking compensation for post-traumatic stress following their attendance in the course of duty at major incidents.

This culture of endeavouring to make someone pay if something has gone wrong permeates the whole of Western society, whether it relates to a motoring accident, a raised paving stone causing someone to trip, or hospital treatment deemed unsuccessful. There has been considerable publicity of late in the UK relating to cases where schoolteachers have been subjected to litigation for assault.

It is not the purpose of this article to examine the substantial impact this is having on the insurance industry, and more especially on health, education and other public services, but to see how this affects the ecclesia. There seems to be a correlation between comparatively wealthy societies, with an emphasis on materialism and covetousness, and the tendency to rush to litigation. Such was the case in wealthy Corinth.

Going to law before the unjust

“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?” (1 Cor. 6:1). Here a brother was actually going to law against another brother, and therefore Paul says: “I speak to your shame” (v. 5). The matter in dispute, whilst seeming large in the eyes of the litigants, was really a small matter in terms of the Kingdom: “we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18).

The key issue in Corinth was the failure of brethren to seek the edification of the ecclesia, being influenced by the immoral and covetous world around them rather than by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ. Rather than be distracted in a court case, it would be better to suffer loss:

“Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?” (1 Cor. 6:7). Further, there should be brethren in the ecclesia who would be far better qualified than those outside to adjudicate in disputes between brethren.

However, whether within the ecclesia or outside, if we have been defrauded, such is not really important, even though it may seem hard at the time. To seek redress through the courts is to place another obstacle, in terms of time and energy expended, in the way to the Kingdom. As Paul writes to Timothy: “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2 Tim. 2:3,4).

If any man will sue thee

It is always important to remember that the Lord is in control of our lives; our angels daily converse in the supreme court in heaven before the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Gen. 28:10-15; 1 Kgs. 22:19-22; Ps. 34:7,15; Mt. 18:10). When such trials come upon us, they are not accidents but situations specifically designed to enable us to develop the mind of Christ (Rom. 8:28).

The teaching of the Master himself is the basis for our conduct in the current dispensation: “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. *And if any man will sue thee at the law,* and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain” (Mt. 5:38-41). We cannot serve God and mammon, but we must seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

As bond slaves to Christ we have no rights; and, being no longer servants of sin, those impulses which are our natural way of thinking must be put to death—those thoughts of demanding our ‘rights’ or seeking redress must be abandoned. As Paul writes:

“Doctrines to be Rejected” No. 35 of the *Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith* states that we should not “serve in the army, or as police constables, take part in politics, *or recover debts by legal coercion*”. This encapsulates the principle of our separation from the world because we live by the Spirit and not by the flesh.

“Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:17-21).

We should not therefore resort to litigation,¹ which is a symptom of the spirit that is at work in the children of disobedience (Eph. 2:2).

Appealing to Caesar

When Paul appealed to Caesar, it was not to obtain compensation for wrongful imprisonment, nor indeed for any personal benefit (Acts 25:11,12). Having been told by the Lord that he must bear witness in Rome (23:11), the apostle

was showing that he had been commanded by God to preach Christ to all nations (26:20), but in so doing he had not offended against Jewish law, nor indeed against Roman law. His appeal to Rome was occasioned by the circumstances of Festus seeking to do the Jews a pleasure in sending Paul back to Jerusalem (25:9), and to certain death thereby.

The principle here for us is that if we are taken to court, not in the matter of a personal legal action, but for the Truth’s sake, then an ‘appeal to Caesar’ may be appropriate. The example of conscientious objection to military service comes to mind, with such a stand being another opportunity to witness for Christ.

1. There are times when there is nothing wrong in employing a solicitor, for example, in a property transaction. Both Abraham (Gen. 23) and Jeremiah (Jer. 32:6-12) followed the legal custom of the time in purchasing property. Such legal processes are not litigation seeking compensation or redress.

“The household of God” (Eph. 2:19)

Godly relationships in our home life

Harry Tennant

How do we build a godly household in this confused and largely unbelieving world? This article sets signposts and guidelines to help us find our way for our particular household even in adverse circumstances. How soon do we teach our children the good way? What about single parent homes? What are the right roles for husband and wife? God does set us seemingly impossible tasks, but there are true ideals.

WE ARE AMONGST the most privileged people on earth. God is our guide, and He has provided for us an infallible handbook. Take, for instance, our responsibilities to our household. We are given a remarkable role model, which includes detailed instructions. Listen to these words. They are as if we are overhearing the soliloquy of the angel of God: “Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely

become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him” (Gen. 18:17-19).

If Abraham properly carried out these instructions they would serve to bring about the fulfilment of the great and precious promises of God.