

1 Corinthians 6:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church.

Analysis

If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church. Paul's biting irony: even the **least esteemed** (exouthenēmenous, ἐξουθενημένους, 'despised, made of no account') in the church possess more competence than pagan judges for Christian disputes. This either means

1. literal nobodies in the congregation surpass worldly judges, or
2. Paul sarcastically mocks their status-obsession: 'Go ahead, appoint your despised ones—even they're better than Roman courts!'

The Greek syntax is ambiguous (imperative vs. rhetorical question), but the sting is clear: Corinthian Christians elevate external authority while demeaning internal wisdom. Biōtika (βιωτικά) reduces their lawsuits to trivialities—why involve unbelievers in what amounts to household squabbles?

Historical Context

Roman society was hyper-stratified: senators, equestrians, freedmen, slaves. Status anxiety consumed Corinthians (the nouveau riche of a Roman colony). Church members likely included wealthy patrons and poor laborers (1:26-29)—taking disputes to civil courts reinforced worldly hierarchies Paul seeks to

demolish. In Christ, the 'least esteemed' might be apostles (4:9-13) or poor believers disrespected at the Lord's Supper (11:22).

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. Who in your church do you 'least esteem'—and how might God's wisdom speak through them in ways you're ignoring?
2. How does seeking secular remedies for church conflicts reveal that you trust worldly power more than Christ's body?
3. What would it look like for your congregation to develop robust internal processes for conflict resolution?

Interlinear Text

βιωτικὰ	μὲν	οὖν	κριτήρια	έὰν	ἔχητε	τοὺς
of things pertaining to this life	then	G3767	judgments	If	ye have	G3588
G982	G3303		G2922	G1437	G2192	
ἐξουθενημένους	ἐν	τῇ	ἐκκλησίᾳ	τούτους	καθίζετε	
to judge who are least esteemed	in	G3588	the church	them	set	
G1848	G1722		G1577	G5128	G2523	

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 5:12 (Judgment): For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?