

Three Courts

Ponder: How do you decide what to do?

Scripture: “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord” (1 Corinthians 4:3-4, NKJV).

Our judicial system is designed so that appeals can be made to higher and higher courts, eventually reaching the Supreme Court. Likewise, in everyday life, there are at least three courts which pass judgment upon us. How, then, do we decide what to do in any situation?

1. The court of human opinion (v. 3a). We ought not to say, “I don’t care what anybody else thinks!” Paul cared. He became “all things to all men,” observing the customs of various cultures as long as they did not conflict with God’s will (1 Corinthians 9:22). He urged the Romans to “have regard for things good in the sight of all men” (Romans 12:17). Realize, however, that godly behavior will also earn you the hatred of some (Matthew 10:22). In fact, when everybody speaks well of you, look out! (Luke 6:26).

2. The court of conscience (1 Corinthians 4:3b-4a). The conscience either approves or condemns, depending on the individual’s perception of right and wrong (Romans 2:15). We ought to strive to have a good conscience (1 Timothy 1:5), and we ought never to act against our conscience (Romans 14:14, 22, 23). If the court of human opinion rules against us, we can appeal to the next higher court – the court of conscience. Even when the conscience is working properly, however, you may still be wrong because your understanding of right and wrong is flawed. For example, even as Saul was persecuting Christians, he sincerely believed he was doing right (Acts 26:9).

3. The Supreme Court (Judgment of God, 1 Corinthians 4:4b). From this court there is no appeal! Jesus is the judge (Acts 17:31), and He has all authority (Matthew 28:18). Regardless of human opinion, we must strive to be accepted by God (Galatians 2:10). “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

If we faithfully follow God’s word, and people approve, we should rejoice. If they disapprove, we must continue following God’s word anyway. We must educate ourselves to know what God says is right and wrong so that our consciences will approve when we obey and condemn us when we disobey.