

Who Are We? Pt.1

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[0:00] We face this morning, and as you know, we are continuing in our series, True 1 Corinthians. We're in chapter 6 this morning. We're making progress.

! In chapter 6, it's on page 1134 of your pew Bible. So I want to encourage you to grab your Bible and open and follow along. In chapter 6 here, Paul is continuing...

In chapter 6 here, Paul is continuing in the same vein that he was in in chapter 5. And here he continues to rebuke the Corinthian church, specifically for their failure in dealing with sin and disagreement within the body.

They failed to deal with matters internally in the context of chapter 6 that the passage we're seeing here. Instead of dealing with things internally, they've brought the cases that they should have dealt with within the church.

They've brought it into the public sphere, between the law courts. And Paul wants to show us that the root of the problem, really, both in chapter 5 and chapter 6, the root of the problem with the Corinthians is their inability to realize who they really are as the Church of Christ.

[1:26] They've become a church so arrogant and worldly in their outlook that one couldn't tell the difference between the church and the Rotary Club, or the Neighborhood Watch Association, or the CrossFit Gym.

If you've been at the CrossFit Gym, you might know that there's a religious pervert to being a CrossFitter. I hope no one is a CrossFitter here. I don't mean to offend you.

But there's no difference between the church and any of those secular groups. But the reality is actually that the Church of Christ is distinct from all earthly institutions.

It is a mystical body because of its union with Jesus Christ and because of the sustaining gift of the Holy Spirit that resides in her.

The Church is God's kingdom on earth. We've said that before, if you remember. We are not an earthly institution.

[2:33] Even though we may yet be in the world, we are not of the world. The Church has Jesus for our husband and king.

The Church has God as our Father, the Holy Spirit as our guide. We are not of this world. And when we relate with one another, we must relate with one another on the basis of the fact that we are not of this world.

Rather, we have kingdom values. The kingdom of heaven. We must relate based on those values. Based on kingdom realities. And when we behave as if we are of the world, we tell a lie about who we are.

We fail at our mission of being distinct from the world around us. But the problem is, when you don't know who you are, you cannot act as you should.

That's what's going on with the Corinthian Church. And that's the recurring question we must ask ourselves. Do we know who we are? Now, so what's the issue here in chapter 6?

[3:49] The issue is that, again, they don't know where they are. Just like in chapter 5, remember that they failed to exercise godly discipline towards an unrepentant sinner in their midst.

And this week, we are going to see that they are continuing in that. Because they are taking matters against each other into the pagan courts.

They are suing each other before the pagan magistrates. Before unbelievers. So Paul is saying to them, don't you know who you are?

Remember that Paul had concluded in chapter 5 by saying that in the end of chapter 5, he says, for what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church that you are to judge?

And he says, he reminds them, God judges those on the outside. But for you, purge the evil from among you. Judge, discern, discipline within the church. But they are doing the opposite. [4:51] They are failing to judge sin amongst themselves. But they've got it all backwards, you see. Because they fail to judge sin in their midst.

And in the same token, they're judging those on the outside. Those unbelievers, they're judging them. But at the same time, while judging them, they're bringing cases, disputes within the church of Christ.

They're bringing it to the outside world. To be adjudicated, to be judged by unbelievers. So one Christian is committed an offense against another Christian.

It's likely a matter of civil fraud or civil dispute. And they've decided to settle the matter in the law courts. Now, at this point, it's sad to say that in the American church, that scenario that I've just described seems normal and reasonable.

What else is a person to do? You might say. Well, like the Corinthians, we are a very litigious culture. Like them, we've let the trend of the culture seep into the church.

[6:10] We have a culture that is readily prone to manipulate others for personal advantage. We sue at the drop of a dime in our culture, just like in the Corinthian culture.

And suing someone, using the law as a tool towards your own end, your own selfish end, is an American pastime. We know this.

Just as it was in the Greco-Roman culture. And so it's likely that these two parties that are disputing in the church, they were even being encouraged by their fellow believers.

Well, if he's offended you, sue him. Take him to court. Rather than settling the matter within the church itself. And what's Paul's reaction to this?

Paul is horrified. He says to them, you dare go to the law, you dare go to law. That means you dare sue each other before the unrighteous instead of saints.

[7:13] Essentially, what Paul is saying is, this is not biblical, what you're doing. You are not relating rightly with each other as citizens of the kingdom of heaven. And why is it that Paul will say that?

Because you might say, well, Paul lives in a backwards, backwater somewhere. So maybe, you know, the courts and the judicial system of his time were not up to snuff.

But we are Americans. We have good law systems. You know? Maybe that's why Paul is saying that. No, that's not really, Paul has no concern about the veracity and the fairness of the courts. Interestingly enough, the current Corinthian society is notorious for corruption when it comes to the matters of civil cases.

Because in the current culture, the wealthier you are, the more connected you are, the more likely you are to get a ruling in your favor. Because of the patronage system.

[8:13] You can grease somebody's hand and they will get you what you want at the law courts. And so, in the civil courts, in the Corinthian culture, it's favored those who have money, who are the privileged elite.

And perhaps, that's what's going on here in the Corinthian church. This is maybe why they're taking each other to court. Some theologians have sort of gathered that it's the wealthier people in the church who are using the court as a way to manipulate other brothers in the church.

They're using their privilege and the favorable hearing they will get in the court to pray on their fellow brother in Christ. But even if the courts were not corrupt, Paul will still have said what he said here.

It is, this is unbiblical. Because, why does he say that? Why is it unbiblical? Why is it, why is he horrified at the very acts that they're doing?

He gives a reason in verse 2. He says to them, do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, by the way, that's what he means by saints.

[9:28] Those who are in Christ, not just somebody that the Pope has declared as, you know, given saints to them. All who are in Christ are saints. And he says, do you not know that saints, that is you, will judge the world?

And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Paul is operating on the basis of what the church is.

He recognizes that although this reality is fully not yet realized, he recognizes the reality of who we all are in Christ.

Who we are becoming and who we will be. And so on that basis, he's operating. And he's calling the Corinthian church to operate on that basis as well.

Paul is saying to them, you will judge the world one day. On the last day, at the last judgment, you will sit and judge the world. And if that is true of you, how idiotic is it that you will not be able to judge concerning trivial earthly matters?

[10:42] You will judge on that day about cosmic, eternal issues. How can you not judge over earthly, trivial matters? And Paul isn't making this up when he says you will sit, saints will sit in judgment one day.

He knows his Bible, that's why he says it. In Daniel 7, you know, remember Daniel 7, if you know your Old Testament, Daniel 7 speaks of the everlasting dominion of the Son of Man, the Messiah Jesus.

And in that chapter, in verse 22, Daniel says, in verse 22, judgment was given for the saints of the Most High. Judgment was given to the saints of the Most High.

This is the final judgment. When the world which stands in rebelling against God and against His Anointed One will come under judgment, and we, saints of the Most High, will be involved in that process.

John, also, in Revelation 20, saw in his vision of the last day, in chapter 20, verse 4, he says, then I sought thrones and people seated on them.

[11:55] We were given authority to judge. And so that's what Paul is referring to. So Paul continues, do you not know that we are to judge angels even?

In verse 3, you will judge the fallen angels on that day. And if that is, if that is in fact true, and we know it's true because it's there in God's Word, Paul then continues, how much more, how much more than matters pertaining to this life?

If you're going to judge angels on that day, how much more are you able than, can't you not judge matters pertaining to this life? So if you have such cases, that is, if you have such dispute among yourselves within the church, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church?

this is the shame, this is the disgrace, this is why Paul is horrified. You who are to judge the world and angels in matters of cosmic and spiritual significance, you cannot judge amongst yourself over trivial earthly matters.

Paul wants them to consider eternal realities. And he says to them, anything in this world, no matter how significant you might think the case is, if it's earthly, it is trivial in light of what judgment you will pass on that day.

[13:38] And he's also trying to tell them, this is to your shame because no matter what favorable ruling you might be seeking, or the winnings that you might get at the law courts for suing your brother, all of those things are insignificant in light of eternity on that last day.

Daring lies the irony in this whole matter because he's trying to warn them, you are so concerned about winning, about getting your way, about taking your brothers to court, to court, that you don't actually recognize that you're putting your own soul in jeopardy.

in seeking to get a favorable ruling about trivial earthly matters, you're jeopardizing a far more insignificant eternal destiny.

Paul continues, to your shame, because surely you can administer justice among yourself. Why do you then lay such matters before those whom you will one day sit in judgment over?

Remember what Paul has said earlier in 1 Corinthians, those who have no wisdom, because he says all the wisdom of the world pales in comparison to the wisdom of God.

[15:08] And he says in verse 5, he drives the point home, I say all of this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one, here's the sarcasm from Apostle Paul, can it be there is no one among you wise enough, you will claim to be wise, you Corinthians.

Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, but instead brother goes against brother, goes to law against brother, and then before unbelievers.

Paul is essentially saying that the greatest judge in the land, with the most credential, with the most accolades in schooling, is inferior to judge matters between Christians than the least saints in the church.

Because, why is that? Because they only have wisdom of this world, which is passing away. And you, on the other hand, you have the Holy Spirit. If you are saints, you have the Holy Spirit who

searches everything.

Remember chapter 2, what Paul says of the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God. He searches everything. The Holy Spirit comprehends the thoughts of God. And you have that Spirit in you. [16 : 27] That's what we have, believers in Christ. Christ. We have the Holy Spirit to understand freely the things taught by God.

Therefore, we are capable of adjudicating, of discerning, exercising discipline, arbitrating between one another within the church of Christ.

But the Corinthians are so arrogant, and this is the root of their problem. And perhaps we have the same arrogance in our day. But for some of us, I think it's sometimes also a bit of an inferiority complex problem going on.

Because some of us will say, well, oh no, I can't possibly make heads or tails about this issue. I'm not experienced enough, I'm not credentialed enough to speak on it.

And Paul says, Paul wants to say to you, this morning, and I'm paraphrasing him here. He says to you, such thinking about yourself is shameful of you.

[17 : 37] He's saying to you, get over yourself and remember who you are in Christ. You have received the spirit of Christ. You are not a natural person.

You have the mind of Christ. You remember that. Depend on his word. trust that the Holy Spirit will lead you to understand and to make judgments aright based upon the very same word which he has inspired.

And of course, we must admit at this point that there are exceptions to the rule. If you're a lawyer or even an observant of the ways the institution of church has filled in the 20th and 21st century, in matters of concealing sin and hiding it, you might be saying to yourself, well, Paul doesn't know what he's talking about.

He lived in a different age and a different time. He doesn't understand modern jurisprudence. But in actual fact, Paul is a trained lawyer by training.

He valued the law of his day. He's not undermining the judicial system of his day. And he's not meaning to undermine the judicial system of our day.

[18 : 59] In fact, he utilized the law to his own advantage. Remember in Acts, when he was going to be unfairly tried by the Jews who were planning to kill him.

It was going to be an unfair trial. And they've already plotted to kill him. They've already found him guilty before the trial. Instead, he exercised his right as a Roman citizen and demanded instead to be tried by Rome.

And when he was beaten in another instance unjustly as a Roman citizen, he demanded restitution because a Roman citizen is not meant to be beaten in that manner.

Paul used the law to defend himself before civil magistrates who were pagan. But in all of these contexts that I've described, Paul was dealing with outsiders, unbelievers, not with fellow Christians. Paul never took a fellow believer to court. And you will see that pattern throughout the New Testament. Matters of dispute are to be tried within the church.

[20 : 09] church. And Paul, but Paul does not mean by saying that, he doesn't mean then to say, as Christians we should disregard the law of our land.

In fact, remember Romans 13, Paul also wrote Romans and he says that there he upheld the civil authority of his day.

But, but here's the thing. The rule given here, not to take matters to the civil courts, between brothers and sisters and brothers and brothers and sisters and sisters in Christ, does have exceptions.

And I want to give you some examples of possible exceptions. And before I do though, I want to remind you again, because this is often what we do. The exceptions, we must be careful not to use the exceptions as an excuse to disregard the principle that Paul gives here.

But, first and foremost, we must realize that the church must not, must not cover up crimes. Right?

[21 : 26] We are actually called to respect the authority of the civil government, government, wherever we are as the people of God. We are to obey the governors.

And doing so means that we are not to cover up any crimes, even if it's crimes in our midst. So the church is not to cover up criminal, sexual, or physical abuse.

To do so is wrong. it is sinful, and does not honor Christ. So that's not the context of chapter 6 here.

The context in chapter 6 is not criminal behavior, that are run afoul of the law of the land, but the context in chapter 6 are civil disputes.

Business disagreement, for example. nibbly spats between brothers, siblings in Christ.

[22:30] So imagine a scenario, scenario 1. There's another exception. If a Christian is sued, whether by a non-believer or by a disobedient Christian who refuses to settle the matter within the church, if a Christian is sued, it is proper to defend yourself in the courts.

If you're sued, actually, you can't deny, you can't ignore it, say, well, I'm a Christian, I'm not under, no, you must defend yourself, and that would be an exception, where then you need to go ahead and defend yourself, but you're not the one who initiate that, actually, even if it's within a fellow brother in Christ.

Another scenario may be if you need to defend someone or yourself from physical abuse. In our context, for example, if you need to get a restraining order against a potential or current abuser, you will have to engage the courts of the land in order to do that.

That would be a proper exception in this case. And there might be other scenarios where there might be an exception, but we must remember not to make the exceptions, the rule.

The principle of Paul is quite clear here. the principle stands. Christians are not to take one another to court over civil matters. But also notice though that why Paul says that he's not saying we should turn a blind eye towards wrongs in the church, is he?

[24:02] Not at all. And that's why the biting sarcasm in verse 5, can it be that there is no one among you who is wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers?

Could you really be that lacking in true Christian wisdom, that you cannot judge matters of this sort amongst yourself? Of course, Paul believes that they can and they do have the wisdom to adjudicate these matters between themselves.

And that's why he's horrified that they're not doing so. Paul sees it as a scandal, and it is grace. He sees it because it tells a lie about who they are in Christ.

It tells a lie about the church of Christ and it is not a good witness to the world around them. That's why Paul exhorts them.

And then he goes on in verse 7. And here I think he's addressing the litigants. In this scenario, probably the two brothers who brought the case before, before each other, taking each other to the courts.

[25:10] And in verse 7 he says, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?

For you yourselves wronged and defrauded even your own brothers. Now there's a threefold indictment in these two verses. He says to them, you're already defeated. You've lost, regardless of the outcome in the decision that the court makes over this matter.

You've already lost because you've failed to exercise godly wisdom. And instead, brother sues brother before unbelievers.

Secondly, he says to them, instead of seeking out or accepting settlement within the church, you've taken the matters between people who are in Christ, who are citizens of God's kingdom, you've taken the matter before the unbelieving pagan legal system.

And he says, that's a defeat. That's a defeat for you. Because by doing so, you've diminished the gospel before the outside unbelieving world.

[26:24] How does a church proclaim the transforming gospel of Jesus Christ and the wisdom of our God? That puts the world's wisdom to shame when it cannot even settle matters between each other, but takes them before the pagan courts.

And if the gospel is at stake, Paul even drives the point home. If the gospel is at stake, if eternal matters is at stake, why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?

And as I say that, as you hear that, that's hard. That's hard to hear, I know. We are Americans. We must insist on our rights, don't we?

But Paul is a great example to us, because he is for the gospel first and foremost. Because of this, he says it will be better to be cheated and to be defrauded over earthly trivial things, so as not to jeopardize weightier eternal things.

This is as Gordon P. puts it, he says this is the non-retaliation ethic of the Christian faith.

Non-retaliation ethic of the Christian faith, which we're familiar with.

[27:49] If you remember Matthew 5, Jesus, our Lord and King, says this in Matthew 5, if someone slaps you on the right cheek, what does he say to do? Turn to them the other cheek also.

Paul isn't making these up. He's just following God's instructions. He's following his Lord. Jesus also says to them, if someone sues you and takes your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

This is the non-retaliation ethic of the Christian faith. And I know what you're thinking as the wrong party. But that's just unfair. That's unjust.

But have we forgotten who we are? We are children of God. We are children of God. Not by natural birth, but because the only begotten Son came to our world.

And he came not to demand an exact justice, which was his right to do. Rather, he relinquished his right for justice on the cross.

[29:03] And instead, he showed mercy. He carried our shame and our judgment and our punishment upon himself.

The free grace, which is ours in Christ, was in fact, very costly. because of the death of the Son of God.

We are the servant in that parable. We hold a debt that cannot be paid in 10,000 lifetimes. Yet, Jesus paid it all for us.

And if that's true of us, if that's the means by which we were made children of God, God, then we can surely display this same kingdom ethic when we are wronged, when we are sinned against.

We can turn the other cheek. We cannot seek retaliation and revenge for the sake of the gospel.

And that's what Paul is emphasizing here, to the wronged party, to the one who was wronged in this case.

[30:20] He says, it would rather for you to just endure the hurt than to take your brother to court. But then, Paul also has a word for the people who are in the church, who are cheating their fellow brothers in the family of God.

He has a word for them. And here it's a grim warning for them. In verse 9 he says, do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived, he says to them.

Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor the drunkards, nor revilers, nor swingers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul here lists these sins. If you remember, they're the same sins he listed at the end of chapter 5. There's four extra ones here, in these verses, in verse 10 of chapter 6.

But what's important to note, what's important to note, even as Paul lists these sins, is that there is forgiveness for those who are repentant.

[31:28] In fact, that's why Paul is giving this warning to them. So that whoever is the offender may repent, turn to Christ, and receive forgiveness. But he also gives a warning, if you do not repent, if you persist in your practice of sin, of these sins, Paul warns that, he gives a warning to such oppressed person in the church of Christ.

He says, your soul is in peril, because people who practice these sins will not, will not inherit the kingdom of God.

That's a significant thing. Will not inherit the kingdom of God. You'll be on the outside looking in.

These catalogs of sins that Paul gives, although as you read them, they're vastly different from one another.

If we are to choose what sins are listed here, we might choose some of them. We're like, well, you know, Paul, greed, come on. Drunkard, that's a bit too severe, Paul.

But no, Paul is listing these sins, and by the way, they're not just arbitrary. Theologians believe that he listed these sins, because these are the sins that are sin and mocked in the Corinthian church.

[32:53] These are the sins that the church in Corinth struggles with. And we'll see as we continue in this letter that some of those things come up. But Paul says, the link between each of these sins, although they're different, he's saying to them that Christians who practices, who continues without repenting to practice such things are outside the kingdom.

And the warning here is because some of them claim to be Christians, but they are using the Christian faith as a tool to serve their own self-interest, their self-gratification, which is opposed to the way of King Jesus.

Jesus calls us to be self-sacrificial in our love for one another, to suffer, to deny ourselves. Rather, there are some who are praying on their fellow brothers and sisters. And Paul wants to warn them,

if you continue and persist in such behaviors, you will not inherit the kingdom.

Let me just say a quick word about these sins that are listed in verse 9 and 10. Pornoi, which is sexual immorality, is all sexual acts that is outside the biblically prescribed line of a husband and wife in committed lifelong marriage.

Every sexual act outside of husband and wife, male and female, in committed lifelong marriage, is sexual immorality. And those who are in the practice of doing this without repentance are on the outside looking in.

[34 : 41] He goes on, he says, adultery, McCoy, that is any sexual relation that a married person commits outside of their marriage.

Any sexual relation a married person commits outside of their marriage. And then he goes on and says, and those who practice homosexuality. In fact, in the Greek, those are two separate words that are English translation of the two words are malakoi and asenokotai.

It's a tongue twister. But the reason I bring that to your notice is that Paul here is saying the very act of homosexual practice, keeps you outside of the kingdom.

And Paul uses those terms because he lived in a culture like ours where homosexuality was rampant. Some excused it away in his day, the same way people excused it away in our day. They say, oh, Paul could not really be talking about those who are in committed relationship with one another. Paul doesn't have a category for people who are homosexuals but in committed relationship to one another.

[35 : 54] That's a lie. Paul has a category for that. Paul understands all the nuances of homosexuality in his day because such nuances exist in his day as it does in our day.

And he condemns such practices and says such practices will exclude people from the kingdom of God. And to say otherwise, brothers and sisters, is to put people's eternal destiny in jeopardy.

To say that what God has called soul-destroying sin, to say it is not so, is a lie.

And the church of Christ must not tell a lie about God's word. God's word is clear. He goes on, he lists other sins, thieves. Those are people who commit actual robbery.

The greedy, desiring that which is not yours, seeking to obtain it by any means necessary, even resulting to swindling, defrauding your fellow brother and sister.

[37 : 02] Drunkards, those who are given to habitual drunkenness. It's likely here that Paul is actually referring to such people later in 1 Corinthians because such people show up at the Lord's table in the Corinthian church.

They show up to the Lord's table already drunk. They were rabble-rousers within the body of Christ. And then he says revilers.

And you know, we don't actually use the word reviler often in our day anymore. But it just means someone who is given to verbal abuses, Either by maligning other people's character, either through gossip or slander or through crude talk.

that's a reviler. Someone who uses their words to bring others down. And says all of these things are sins that exclude you from the kingdom of God.

God. But then Paul didn't end there. Verse 11. And he says, Such were some of you.

[38 : 11] Such were some of you. But you were washed. You were sanctified. You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and the spirit of our God. He said to them, you once, all of you, you once were dead in your sins.

You were by nature children of wrath. For you are no longer what God has done through Jesus Christ death and resurrection.

In sending the Holy Spirit to dwell with you and among you and transforming you from children of wrath to adopt your children of God. that great work of salvation.

Remember that. That is who you now are. You were like that. But you are no longer. You were washed. You were sanctified.

You were justified. You being justified by grace alone through faith alone. It is good to remember that on this Reformation Sunday.

[39 : 17] So the question is who are we at Holy Trinity? The question is who are we here at Holy Trinity? We must face this question head on just like Paul invites the Corinthian church to face it head on.

How much of the world has seeped into the church of Christ here? And the invitation that Paul offers us as we face the question is to remember who we are.

It's to remember that we are washed, sanctified, and justified. You cannot tolerate and excuse sin because of what Christ has done for you and to you.

You've been set apart. You've been made holy unto God. And so you cannot be indifferent when there is sin amongst you in your midst.

If we remember this, brothers and sisters, it will make us a forgiving church. It will make us a loving church. And our love will be exercised by exercising discipline among each other, calling each other to holiness, not sweeping it, sins, under the rug, as if it doesn't exist.

[40 : 36] To do so is to tell a lie about who we are. And I want to end here by saying if you're here this morning feeling guilty as these sins are listed, and you're guilty over your past sins, maybe even feeling helpless because you're still battling a particular besetting sin, you desperately ate that sin, but you're battling it.

Paul's invitation is for you as well. Remember who you are. This is your reality. God has done his work in you.

You are no longer mocked by that sin. Whatever the lure of that sin may be, you are no longer that. Rather, who are you?

You are washed. You are washed. You are sanctified. You are justified. That's who you are. Let us pray.

We thank you, Father, for your Son, Jesus Christ, through whose sacrifice we've been brought into your kingdom. We ask, Lord, that you would give us an acute awareness of who we are, so we may hate our sin, we may seek righteousness and the purity of your church, that we may boldly confront sin and error and call one another to repentance, that we will love one another and seek to protect who you have made us to be by exercising discipline in your church and even by willing to suffer loss and injury for the sake of the gospel and help us, Lord, we pray, to stand together in unity as your people, as an outpost of your kingdom here in Onondaga Hill, in Syracuse, New York.

[42 : 40] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.