

Living Out Who We Are

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[0:00] Well, they're married. You know who I'm talking about, don't you? A bit hard to miss, really. Everyone's been talking about it for ages. The wedding of Prince Harry and actress Meghan Markle.

And now in case you missed it, although it was on almost every channel last night, on the next slide is a picture of the happy couple last night at their wedding. And on the next one is a picture of inside the church.

And then apparently actually in the church there were all sorts of stars from Oprah Winfrey to David Beckham to all sorts of people. And then on the next slide, outside the church, there were all these people lining up just to get a glimpse of the happy couple.

It looks just like my wedding with Michelle, actually. But now that Meghan is married to a prince, her identity has changed, hasn't it?

She's officially no longer a commoner, but a royal. And no longer just another Hollywood actress, but the first Duchess of Sussex.

[1:04] And now that her identity has changed, so must her behaviour. She must now live in a way that is appropriate to her identity as a royal.

Attending royal functions, observing royal protocols. In fact, people have been talking about it for ages, what she can and can't wear. Even how she must wave. And I saw this bit. She was waving the royal wave as she went down.

The point is, her identity shapes her behaviour. And as we come to 1 Corinthians chapter 6 today, Paul is at pains to point out that the Corinthians' identity in Christ ought to shape their behaviour too.

In other words, they are to live out who they are in Christ. And the first area they are to do this in is with disputes amongst one another.

So at point 1 in your outlines and verse 1 in your Bibles. Now we read, If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare take it before the ungodly for judgement instead of before the Lord's people?

[2:11] So here it seems there is a dispute between two people in church. And the word for dispute here refers to a civil lawsuit. So it's not about breaking the state law or committing a serious crime.

If that was the case, it would have been taken to the secular courts. We'd have to take it to the police and so on. Rather, as Paul will say at the end of verse 2, it's a trivial case in the big scheme of things.

And here it's one church member suing another who has cheated him in some sort of business deal, it seems. Now the issue is not seeking justice.

We can seek justice. The issue is seeking justice before ungodly judges in the secular courts instead of the Lord's people, the church. You see, they ought to be able to deal with this issue in-house, says Paul.

Why? Well, because of who they are. Do you see verse 2? Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are able to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases?

[3 : 18] Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more than the things of this life? Do you see who they are? They are the future judges of the world.

Actually, when I first read verse 3, which says, do you not know we will judge the angels? I thought, no, I didn't know that. But it is based on the Old Testament. It was common in Jewish writing.

And the New Testament makes it even clearer. We will judge the world with Christ. It's extraordinary when you think about it. In fact, I think we often forget how privileged a people we are.

But the point is, if this is who they are, the future judges of the world, then can they not judge present trivial cases amongst themselves?

Of course they can. But they are not. And so Paul continues with more rhetorical questions. You see verse 4. He says, Here, Paul asks these rhetorical questions to shame them.

[4 : 41] Because this was the church who claimed to know everything. Who claimed to be so spiritual and so wise. And so Paul says, After all your talk about being so wise, is there really no one wise enough to judge such trivial cases?

And then he says, Are you so naive to think the ungodly, whose values are completely different, will care about your trivial case? Will give you a fair ruling?

And what's worse than all of that, is that they're airing their dirty laundry in public. That seems to be what Paul is saying at the end of verse 6. That they are doing this in front of unbelievers.

And it so opens Christ and his church to ridicule. I mean, imagine if I did a business deal with Vijay for a moment. He paid me \$1,000 to fix his car.

But because I don't even know how to change a spark plug, I just took the money and pretended to fix his car. And then Vijay took me to court. Can you imagine what the headlines of the local newspaper would be?

[5 : 49] It would be something like this on the next slide. Clergy sue each other. So much for Christians showing us the way. It would be something like that, wouldn't it?

You see, by airing their dirty laundry in secular courts, the Corinthians were also providing an opportunity to bring Christ's name into disrepute. And so they were to deal with it in-house.

Jesus gives us some guidelines for how we might do this in Matthew 18. Although we don't have time to look through it all. Matthew 18, 15 to 17, if you're taking notes. Now, again, this is about trivial cases among Christians.

And not serious crimes which must go outside to the police and so on, like child abuse. I mean, that's where the church has failed historically, isn't it? But when it comes to trivial cases and lawsuits, then they had to live out who they are.

The future judges of the world. And so deal with it in-house. Lest Christ's name be dragged through the mud. But they also deliver out who they are as God's holy family.

[6 : 54] So point to verse 7. Oh, we'll move on from that. Thanks, Gwyneth. So point to verse 7. The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already.

Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong. And you do this to your brothers and sisters. Now, here Paul addresses the whole church in general, but these two men in particular.

And he says to them, no matter which one of you wins or loses the court case, you've both already been defeated. You've both already lost. How?

Well, in two ways. At first, lawsuits means they've lost their unity as God's family. Notice in verse 8 how Paul says they're not just cheating each other, but he says they're cheating their brothers and sisters.

You see, they are united together as family, as God's family. And as we heard in our first reading, how good and pleasant is it when God's people live together in unity? But, you know, suing one another doesn't really lead to unity, does it?

[8 : 07] After all, it's hard to maintain fellowship with someone in the church if they've cheated you or if they're taking you to court. And so by having lawsuits, they've already been defeated.

They've already lost family unity. But the second way they've already lost is that they've lost holiness as God's holy family. You see, Paul will go on to remind them in verse 11 that they've been washed and sanctified.

The word sanctified means made holy in the name of Jesus. This is who they are, God's holy family. And holiness, remember, has two ideas to it.

First, it means being morally pure, or it can also mean being set apart from the world for God. But as soon as they have lawsuits, then they are no longer acting in holiness.

They're no longer set apart from the world. They're living like the world. They're living like the unrighteous who will not inherit the kingdom of God. The one who is suing is acting like the world who demands their rights.

[9 : 14] And the one who is cheating or swindling, same thing, is acting like the world who deceives to get ahead. And so for the swindler, the cheater, Paul gives this warning in verses 9 to 11.

And notice the unrighteous person he mentions last. So verse 9, he says, And at this point, the person who's cheated and swindled thinks, I'm getting off here, but notice Paul mentions last, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God. And so given that warning, then the swindler must stop swindling, cheating.

For those who persist in sinning, who refuse to repent, show they do not truly trust in Christ. And so they will not inherit the kingdom of God.

What's more, he is swindling his own brother in Christ, which does not promote family unity. And for the one who is taking his brother to court, well, Paul said back in verse 7, why not rather be wronged?

[10 : 43] Why not rather be cheated? In the words of Jesus, why not turn the other cheek? In fact, after that verse about turning the other cheek, Jesus goes on to say, And if they sue you, take you to court for your shirt, give him your coat as well.

Let it go. And this is a revolutionary way of thinking, is it not? I mean, we're taught to stand up for your rights. Especially when it comes to money, which is really what is behind the lawsuit, I think.

But being part of God's holy family means being set apart from the world, not being like the world, but being like Christ. And Christ himself gave up his right as the son of God, didn't he?

To come to earth and to die for you and for me. And this principle of giving up our rights for the sake of others is really what we're to apply in all our relationships, particularly in the church.

You see, I don't think we have people at Holy Trinity who are swindling each other and suing each other, do we? At least I hope not. Yet there will be times when people might step on your rights.

- [11:51] But we are God's holy family and we need to be different to the world, set apart from the world, and be willing to forego our rights for the sake of love and unity. For example, if someone says something hurtful to us, then we have a right to an apology, don't we?

But if we demand it, it could create even more disunity and tension. And so we must be willing to forego our rights for the sake of love and unity. Or if someone parks in our spot at church or, heaven forbid, sits in our seat at church.

We need to be willing to forego our rights for the sake of unity and love. And it's not always easy or trivial like that, is it? I mean, to get personal for a moment, I remember one time someone saying how encouraging they found what Vijay said in a sermon was when it was actually what I said in my sermon.

Now, don't get me wrong. Vijay says lots of encouraging things too. And I don't want you to start thanking me at the door just to build me up.

That's what they did at 7.45. They felt sorry for me. But the point is, it was hard for me not to demand my right and say, hey, that was me. And although this is talking about trivial cases, this principle will even enable us to let some big things go as well.

- [13:10] Someone in my Bible study group last week said they know of a Christian school who were thinking of suing for damages because they were wronged and they would win. And he said it was in the millions.

But because it was against another Christian organisation, the school decided to let it go for the sake of unity and preventing Christ's name being dragged through the courts.

You see, often we want to know, when is it no longer a trivial case so I can get my right in Sioux? But that's not the question. The question is, can I let my right go for the sake of unity and Christ?

Because that's what Jesus did for me. We're not only the future judges of the world, but we're also God's present holy family. And so our identity ought to shape our behaviour.

That's the area of disputes amongst one another. Paul now moves to the area of our bodies and how we use our bodies to treat God. So point three in your outline and verse 12 in your Bible.

- [14:13] And he quotes the Corinthians. He says, I have the right to do anything you say, but not everything is beneficial, says Paul. I have the right to do anything the Corinthians say, but I, says Paul, will not be mastered by anything.

Now here in verse 12, it's a little tricky to understand what's going on, but it seems as though the Corinthians have misunderstood the gospel. You see, in Christ, we have great freedom.

And so on the next slide, Paul says in Galatians chapter five, he says, you, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free, free from the law. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather serve one another humbly in love.

But it seems the Corinthians were doing the exact opposite. They were using their freedom in Christ to indulge their sinful nature and not serve one another in love, not benefit one another.

And so Paul says, you may have rights, but not everything is beneficial for others. You may have freedom, but do not use it to indulge the sinful nature and become mastered by your sinful nature again.

[15:24] You see, the Corinthians had misunderstood the gospel. But they've also misunderstood their bodies. Verse 13, you say food for the stomach and the stomach for food and God will destroy them both.

The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord and the Lord for the body. By his power, God raised the Lord from the dead, which means bodily resurrection, and he will raise our bodies also.

It seems they think that the body is destined to be destroyed, doesn't it? And so therefore, they can do whatever they like with their body. But Paul says, no, you and our bodies are made for the Lord Jesus to serve him.

And so God will raise our bodies just as he did Christ's body from the dead so that we can keep serving the Lord Jesus even in the new creation. For we are made for him.

That's who we are. I remember being at a wedding of a friend of mine and the bride had just walked down the aisle all dressed up looking stunning. The groom was beaming.

[16:34] The people were oohing. Everyone was smiling. And then the minister started by saying, people often say at weddings that they are made for each other.

But as I look at these two here today, let me tell you that is not true. And there was this audible gasp in the room. And the minister continued by saying, they are made firstly for Jesus.

And then he quickly added that they make a great couple as well just to relieve the tension. But he was right. I don't think I'd have the boldness to say it like that at a wedding I conducted. But he is right. We are made for the Lord Jesus.

Not only that, we are united to the Lord Jesus. And so it really matters how we treat our bodies. Do you see verse 15? Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?

And so shall I then take the member of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never. Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body?

[17:40] For it is said in Genesis, the two will become one flesh. But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Paul says that our bodies are members of Christ, a part of his body.

And Paul quotes from Genesis saying that just as sex unites a husband and wife as one flesh, so verse 17, the spirit unites us with Christ as one.

And that means if we engage in sexual immorality, then we're actually bringing Christ along with us. That's a scandalous thought, is it not? So scandalous that Paul says, never.

We cannot engage in sexual immorality because we bring Christ with us. We're not to live that way. Rather, we and they are to live out who we are.

They are made for and united to the Lord Jesus. And so live like it, says Paul. It matters what we do with our bodies.

[18:42] And for the Corinthians, this particularly meant verse 18. So he says, flee from sexual immorality then. All other sins a person commits are outside the body. But whoever sins sexually sins against their own body.

You flee immorality, he says. He also adds another reason. He says, while all sins are deserving of judgment, some sins have a greater impact. For sex is meant to be like super glue that joins a husband and wife together as one flesh.

Just as he said back in verse 15. Jesus affirms this in Matthew 19. And so to engage in sexual immorality is to cause harm to your own body in a way that no other sin can.

Sure, drunkenness and drugs and even gluttony harm our bodies too. But only sex unites your body to another in such an intimate way that if we do it sinfully, it's against our bodies.

It's against the way God designed our bodies to be. And I think that's why sexual immorality often causes more hurt and creates more baggage than most other sins.

[19:48] But the point is Christians are made for the Lord. They are united to him. And God has designed our bodies to be united in a certain way.

And so it really matters what we do with our bodies. And then he adds a final reason about who they are. Not only are they made for the Lord and united to him, they are also God's temple and belong to him.

So point four in your outlines, verse 19 in your Bibles. He says, Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you've received from God?

Of course, the Spirit lives in us, working through our conscience. You know, those kind of things where you go, oh, look, I should really do that or I should come to church or this, that, the other. It's the Spirit working through your conscience.

And the point is if the Holy Spirit lives in us, then we ought to be holy with our bodies. What's more, our bodies are not even our own. Do you see verse 20?

[20:51] Or end of verse 19, You are not your own. You are bought at a price. Therefore, honour God with your bodies. You see, God bought us not with money but with the blood of Christ.

He bought us and redeemed us from death to life eternal. But if he bought us by his Son's blood, then we belong to him. says Paul.

Our bodies are not our own. Again, this is a revolutionary way of thinking, isn't it? I mean, the world says it's my life, I'll do what I want with it.

But for Christians who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, we are not our own. Our lives and bodies do not belong to us, they belong to God. That's who we are.

And if that's our identity, then it ought to shape our behaviour. We ought to, at the end of verse 20, honour our owner with our bodies. For the Corinthians, this especially meant no longer engaging in sexual immorality, but it includes every aspect of life.

[21:59] We are people who've been bought by the love of God and the blood of Christ. And so we do use our bodies, our lives, our all to honour God. One of my favourite hymns is one by Isaac Watts, When I Survey.

And the last couple of lines on the next slide are these. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my awe.

And it demands our awe, not just in thankful response to God's love, but because we've been bought by God's love and Christ's blood. And so it really does demand our awe.

Now can I say I've been encouraged by many here at HTD who do honour our owner with our awe. So I've seen people, for example, use their feet to visit others in hospital.

I've heard of people who use their mouths not to gossip and complain, but to pray and to encourage with a face-to-face or over the phone. I've seen people use their hands to make meals for others to give.

[23:03] In fact, I enjoyed a meal recently from someone else because they knew we were moving soon. We haven't moved just yet, but maybe I'll just keep putting it off so we keep getting meals. It's a joke. It's a joke. But, you know, people use their hands to make meals to give or to serve.

People have been serving over at Kiwa. Matthew's been painting like crazy and so on. I've seen people use their eyes to read their Bibles, their ears to listen to the needs of others. And so it's terrific because it shows you know who you are.

You are God's holy people. And so you live out your identity by honouring Him. And even for some amongst us who are frail and cannot do much with our bodies, I've still seen them serve God.

I was visiting Eve who was a member here at 9 o'clock some years ago. She's now in a nursing home and is very frail. She cannot use her feet to walk or even her hands to feed herself.

But as I came in she was using her ears to listen to a sermon from Paul Barker, the bishop, she said. She was very quick to add again, oh I listen to your sermons too Andrew. She said that before but it's fine.

[24:11] Now there are no Christians in her nursing home where she is and so she was telling me how she was having a conversation with some of the staff who are Muslim and they noticed her Bible was out and so she talked to them about Christ.

Here she is not able to use her feet or hands but she's still using her ears and her mouth to honour God. She knows who she is doesn't she? She is God's person.

In Christ we are the future judges of the world so we ought to be able to handle trivial cases amongst each other for the sake of Christ's name. We are also God's holy family so we ought not to cheat one another but be willing to forego our rights for the sake of love and unity.

And we are made for the Lord Jesus and united to him so it really matters what we do with our bodies. And finally we are the temple of the Holy Spirit and we belong to God and so we are to honour him with our awe.

Just as Meghan Markle is now to live out who she is as the Royal Duchess of Sussex so we are to live out who we are as members of Christ. Let's pray.

[25:20] Our gracious Heavenly Father we do thank you for this reminder this morning of who we are that we have been washed and sanctified in the name of our Lord Jesus.

We have been made your holy people. And so Father we pray that you would help us to live out who we are. For Jesus' sake we pray. Amen.