

# 1 Corinthians 6:1-20 PM

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[0:00] 1 Corinthians chapter 6 is a word of warning and assurance for God's people who are stuck in sin. If I were to give the passage or the sermon a title, I would say this, it is the whole gospel for the whole person.

Because it addresses two problems that are common to us as Christians, as followers of Jesus. On the one hand, either we tend to truncate the gospel, we select those bits that we like and we select those bits we'd rather leave out.

We truncate the gospel. Or on the other hand, we apply the gospel selectively. So either we do not embrace the whole gospel, or we do not let the whole gospel embrace our whole life.

And 1 Corinthians is a letter that focuses on gospel application. It is medicine for that disease. It is all about, what does Jesus' death and resurrection mean for my life?

What does it mean for our lives? How do we live it out communally and personally? And in the first four chapters of the book, we saw Paul addressing fighting and biting and jealousy and arrogance and envy.

[1:09] All the things that divide and disunite the church of Jesus Christ. And what Paul did is he spoke the gospel in order to bring gospel unity at the foot of the cross.

And now, as we've been wading into chapters 5 through 7, Paul's been addressing a different set of issues. Sexual immorality and how the church responds to it. And his goal, once again, is not just gospel unity this time, it is gospel purity at the foot of the cross.

The astonishing thing about this letter is that Paul leaves no stone of our lives unturned. Every area of life is brought under the grace of Christ.

Because it is Paul's conviction, and he wants it to be our conviction too. That the message of the crucified and risen Christ is good news for every person. That the message of this Jesus is good news for the whole person.

So, here we are. 1 Corinthians chapter 6. A word of warning and assurance for God's people who are stuck in sin. I'm going to suggest that the passage is roughly comprised of two sections with a little transition in the middle.

[2:20] So, verses 1 to 8, it's about sinning against your brother. Your brother or your sister in Christ. Verses 12 to 20, it's about sinning against your body. And then, in the middle, verses 9 through 11, is a word of warning and assurance.

So, let's jump in. Verse 1, sinning against your brother or sister. Verse 1, when one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?

So, what's the problem that Paul is highlighting here? The problem is that in the church, people are solving interpersonal problems through secular litigation. Now, Jesus himself knew that his followers weren't always going to get along with each other.

So, in Matthew chapter 18, for example, he gave clear teaching about what to do when disciples start bickering. He says, step 1, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault just between you and him alone.

Step 2, if he does not listen, then take two or three others along with you. Step 3, if he refuses to listen to all of you, then tell it to the whole church.

[3:35] And what we see is that in Corinth, none of this is happening. Instead, believers are going to unbelievers to help them solve their problems in court. Now, at first glance, this may not seem like such a bad thing.

Oh, they're being really humble. They're going to others to help them solve their issues. But actually, in this case, when we kind of narrow in into the details of the passage a little bit further, we realize that these Christians have completely lost sight of the gospel in the way that they are

relating to one another.

Let me show you this. I'm going to try to show you this in a few details here. Look at verses 7 and 8 with me. Verses 7 and 8. To have lawsuits at all with one another, says Paul in verse 7, is already a defeat for you.

Why not rather suffer wrong? Note that word. Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves, here's the word again, wrong and defraud even your brothers.

Now, this word right here, wronging somebody, it means to do injustice to another person. And this word is the same exact Greek word that Paul uses in verse 1 and verse 9, when he describes the unrighteous people outside the church.

[ 4 : 51 ] So what Paul is saying is he's saying, the way you're relating to each other inside the church is exactly the same way that people are relating to each other outside of it, and those are precisely the people you are going to help you with your problems and how you're supposed to relate to each other.

Second detail, that word defrauded. Did you notice that that came up twice as well? In verse, at the very end of verse 7, why not rather be defrauded, but instead, you yourselves wrong and defraud even your brothers.

So this language of defrauded, which means to kind of be cheated out of something that is rightly yours, this shows up twice. And this dovetails with something that we're going to see in just a few minutes.

In verse 10, when Paul lists 10 different types of sins that are not going to inherit the kingdom of God, three of those sins seem to have to do with money or possessions.

He talks about thieves, he talks about the greedy, and he talks about swingers. So supposedly, the sort of lawsuit that Christians are getting into here involves money or property or business of some sort.

[ 6 : 00 ] They're not just going to law for justice, they're going to law courts for selfish gain. Third detail. Once again, verse 7.

To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why, Paul? Why is this a defeat? Why not rather suffer wrong?

Why not rather be defrauded? What would possibly make Paul say, that is the better way to go?

There's only one answer. It's that he serves a crucified and risen Jesus Christ.

Right here, I think Paul is saying to them, you have not followed the way of Jesus, which is the way of self-sacrifice. Jesus came not to defraud others, but he came to be defrauded.

He came not to cause harm to others, but he absorbed the harm that others caused to him. And so Paul is saying, if you do anything other than imitate your master and Lord Jesus, choose the way of the cross, then you've already been defeated in the Christian life.

[ 7 : 06 ] And so we see in verses 1 to 8, that the main issue, according to Paul, when believers are taking each other to court, is that they are demonstrating that they have completely lost sight of the gospel of Christ crucified.

And this means they're putting themselves in real spiritual danger, and they need to be warned. But there's a secondary issue that I think we see in the passage as well. Three times, Paul notes how what the believers are doing in going to court is they're doing, they're kind of hashing out with one another before unbelievers.

So we get this in verse 1, verse 4, and verse 6. He talks about how what the Christians are doing is before in the presence of non-Christians. In other words, by going to court, their actions are bearing false witness to Christ.

In other words, Paul is concerned not only that these Christians have a spiritual health issue, but also that they have a missional health issue as well. And so in verses 9 and 10, Paul issues the strongest possible warning.

Look at what he says. You probably remember it. Notice, he's just said they're acting like the unrighteous.

[ 8 : 30 ] Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

That's quite a list. Notice a few things about this list. First, notice how personal it is. Sin and the sinner are not separated here.

Paul doesn't just list a bunch of sins. He talks about it in personalized form. Sinful activity is not divorced from the people who do the activity.

So Paul's not talking about just sins in the abstract. He's talking about people who are sinners. Why does he do that? I think a couple reasons. I think unless I realize that my sin is not just something out there that I did in the past, but my sin is something that has come to define me as a person. I am the sort of person that would do that sort of thing. Then I have not yet come to realize how deep is my own sin, and how great is my need for a Savior.

[ 9 : 40 ] But Paul has another reason why he focuses on sinners as opposed to just their sins, because it sets him up to explain the gospel in verse 11 in terms of an identity change.

The gospel doesn't just come to proclaim forgiveness of sins. Everything you've done bad is washed away by the grace of the Lord Jesus, although that is true. The gospel wants to do more than that in our lives.

It doesn't just want to forgive the sins. It wants to transform the sinner. It wants to bring a total identity change. And so Paul talks in very personal terms about sin here.

And the second thing he does is notice how this list is actually quite balanced. Like for our modern 21st century ears, we hear it and we're like, whoa, Paul's talking about sex a lot.

Why is Paul so obsessed with sex? And this is a common criticism that can be made of the church sometimes in our culture, is that church, you guys are just obsessed with sex. But here, Paul, only four of the ten things that he mentions in the Greek are actually sexual sins.

[ 10 : 50 ] The first is sexual immorality. It's the Greek word *pornea*, which just represents any sexual activity outside of marriage. But because he goes on to talk about adultery, I think Paul here is specifically talking about those who are unmarried and engaging in sexual activity.

And then the second term, he talks about adultery, those who are married and are engaging in sexual activity with somebody other than their covenant partner. And then he talks about a third thing, men who practice homosexuality.

And that's actually a translation of two different Greek words, which respectively describe the active and passive partners in a homosexual union. So four out of the ten things that Paul is talking about do have to do with sexual activity, with those that are unmarried, those that are married, and those that are in same-sex partnership.

But the other six terms cover a whole range of things. It covers worship. Notice idolatry. It covers greed and unjust business practices.

Thieves, greedy, swindlers. He covers gluttony and addiction. Drunkards. And he even covers public defaming of people's reputations. Revilers.

[ 12 : 02 ] And so all of these are what Paul has in view. All these sins are, in a sense, on a level playing field in Paul's mind. One is not worse than the other, but all are devastatingly bad, because they will not inherit the kingdom of God if people do not willingly repent and rest their lives on the grace of the Lord Jesus.

And this is where Paul then goes. This is the most amazing thing about this list, is that he doesn't end just a chapter at verse 10. He goes on to verse 11. In other words, the list of sins is not the last word.

Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more. And Paul comes in with this wonderful word of assurance. Verse 11. And such were some of you, but you were washed.

You were sanctified. You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God. The great problem that Paul is unmasking and addressing in these early verses is something that we will all face in our journey at some point as Christians.

Most Christians don't set out to be blasphemous sinners who will not inherit the kingdom of God. That's not most Christians' goal in life, right?

[ 13 : 26 ] And he's speaking to Christians. I think what Paul is describing is something that is far more subtle and slow. He's describing what happens in the Christian life when we take our eyes off the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And that leads us to forget who we are and whose we are. And then that leads us to give in to sins that contradict the grace that we've received and the identity transformation that we've received in Christ.

So taking our eyes off Jesus means we forget who we are and whose we are. And then we give in to living in contradiction to who God has made us to be. And I think you see this.

If you look, for example, at the very beginning of the psalm, Psalm 1, verse 1. It says, Blessed is the person, notice, like happy is the person. This is the good life. Did you notice the person who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers. Did you notice the verbs? Walks, stands, sits. It describes this progression of slowing down and settling in.

[14:33] Nobody that's a Christian normally consciously sets about to abandon Christ. But a lot of people who are Christians slowly grow more and more comfortable and content without it.

Small, hidden steps. J.I. Packer once said, Sow a thought, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny.

Before we know it, we have settled in. We're stuck. We're enslaved. We're defeated. And we're hopeless. And so Paul speaks in the first 10 or 11 verses of Corinthians chapter 6.

A wake-up call for those who have grown comfortable in their sin and blind to its seriousness.

Because he wants us to turn from our sin and experience the grace-filled assurance.

That God has come to reclaim his creation. God has come to justify us, to make us right with him.

God has come to sanctify us, to make us holy and pure again.

[15:35] And God has come to wash us of all of our sins. And so it's on this note of hope, on this note of assurance, on this note of gospel clarity, that Paul then takes one of the sins that he listed in verses 9 and 10, sexual immorality in particular, and he buries into it and focuses on it.

And that's what he does in verses 12 through 20, sinning against your body. You all doing okay?

You can take a deep breath if you need to.

This is a significant section. I don't know how to get at it very clearly. So I'm going to do my best because it is profoundly deep.

But there are two words that I want you to remember. The first I've already mentioned, pornea. It is the Greek word for sexual immorality, and it shows up three times in these verses.

And the second word, where I'm going to spend a lot of time talking, is soma. It is the Greek word for body, and it shows up six times in this passage.

[16:43] So pornea, sexual immorality, soma, body. And there are two places, one sentence at the beginning and one sentence at the end, where Paul interweaves these two words together. The problem in Corinth is how these two are relating.

He says in verse 13, And then five verses down in verse 18, And so Paul here is interestingly depicting sexual sin as a form of self-harm.

Think about that. It's not good for us. It diminishes our humanity in some way. And in addressing the issue of sexual immorality, Paul unpacks how the gospel funds a rich theology of the body.

In our 21st kind of century cultural moment, like the first century in Corinth, actually, our understanding of the human body is intimately connected to our ethical lifestyle.

You understand what I mean? Like, our understanding of the human body is intimately connected to our ethical lifestyle. A few examples. Take, for example, the popular slogan, My body, my choice.

My body, my choice.

[18:03] And this often is used, it functions in ethical and medical decisions about both the beginning and the end of life. Or think of, for example, elementary children's school curriculum.

My kids, I'm going through, we're turning through this with my kids right now. It teaches that they can have a female body, but a male mind, and vice versa. And if there is discrepancy, then the child should choose to change their bodies to conform to their minds.

Because who they really are is associated with their minds and not their bodies. Mind over matter.

Mind over matter. Or think of the aphorism. This is a great one. You do you. You do you. You do you. We say it jokingly, but sometimes it ends up being a way in which we say, You just do whatever is going to bring you pleasure.

As long as you have the money or the social mobility or whatever you need to do that thing. And as long as it doesn't hurt anybody else. And in all of these cases, one of the interesting threads that kind of weaves them together and links them together is that the body does not have intrinsic meaning and dignity.

[19:17] It only has meaning and dignity insofar as I assign it to my body, or I choose to give it to my body in a particular way. And this is what's so distinctive about the Christian faith.

This is part of the reason why the Christian faith has a distinctive ethic in the world. Because it has a distinctive view of the human body as a gift from God. That has inherent meaning and dignity

because given from God.

So the human body is not something to be shunned, but something that is good. That is essential to our humanity. And Paul even says that it's being swept up in our redemption by Christ and the Holy Spirit.

And Paul even says that we'll be raised into eternal life in the new creation. According to Paul, the body has meaning and dignity in verse 13.

Because it is created for the Lord. And then notice how Paul flips that order. And the Lord is for the body.

[ 20 : 19 ] Isn't that an astonishing thing to say? God is for your body. And the great affirmation of that fact comes in verse 14.

Jesus Christ was bodily raised from the dead. And you too will be bodily raised from the dead someday. The body has a purpose in God's kingdom. And Paul wants to press this home even further.

So in verse 15, he asks them a question. Notice all these do you not know, do you not know, do you not know questions. Because there's six of them. And right here in verse 15, he says, do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?

He's saying that your union with Christ actually involves the whole of who you are, your body as well. Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be.

And then he moves on to the Holy Spirit in verse 19. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?

[ 21 : 19 ] Holy smokes. We could spend all evening on that one. Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God. You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.

So glorify God in your body. So notice this rich theology that Paul is unpacking for us. Through union with Christ and being indwelt by the Spirit, what we do with our bodies becomes a form of worship to and glorifying of God.

And this isn't the only place that Paul says this. He says this elsewhere as well. Think of Romans, for example. The first 11 chapters of Romans. Paul is talking about the majesty and the mystery and the mercy of everything that God has done to save us.

And then when he turns the corner and says, how should this affect the way you live? In chapter 12, verse 1, what does he say? He says, I appeal to you, therefore, my brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice.

Holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. This is why Paul cares so much about matters of greed and gluttony and sexual immorality.

[ 22 : 30 ] Not because he's a prude or a party pooper. But because he cares that God is worshipped and adored and glorified and honored in our lives. And he knows that we're not going to be fully human.

We're not going to experience the flourishing of the fullness of our humanity until we learn to see our bodies as what they really are by the grace of God. Temples of worship dedicated unto him.

So Paul is clear. Crystal clear. To glorify God, in verse 18, we must flee from sexual immorality. Notice he doesn't say just turn from it.

He doesn't say just manage it. He doesn't say just resist it. He says flee from it. Scripture says some things plainly that we would rather not hear.

But which has great power to change and heal our lives. And this is one of them. If you are here this evening feeling convicted of your sin but completely stuck in it, then I want to say I know what you're going through.

[ 23 : 39 ] I've been there before. Fifteen years ago, I was sitting probably in the sixth or seventh pew over there. Struggling with sin in my life. And I felt absolutely hollow inside.

Trapped by what no one could see. And I came to worship every Sunday knowing that I needed to submit my whole life to the Lord, but I was holding back. And so I sang songs that I didn't feel.

I said creeds that I didn't live. I heard sermons that I didn't respond to. And it ate me up inside week after week. I share this with you this evening because I want you to know that if that is you tonight, there is hope for you.

I had to discover hope. You don't have to let sin bind you any longer. You don't have to live in the darkness and secrecy any longer.

You don't have to bear the shame and silence any longer. God has come to redeem you. He has come to reclaim you. He has come to set you apart and make you holy. He has come to wash you and make you clean.

[ 24 : 46 ] He has come to justify you and set you right with God. He has come to give you assurance that the new creation is yours. You will be raised to new life. You will glorify him. You will see his face.

It's one of the things I love about being part of an Anglican church. I know a lot of you may be new to this Anglican thing, but I'm telling you, Anglicanism has got some great stuff.

And the best thing about Anglicanism is that we come together every single Sunday and we don't act like we have it all together. We kneel before the cross and we confess our sins and we ask God to do what only God can do.

We say, God, forgive me. God, heal me. God, cleanse me. God, renew me. God, heal me. I had the fortunate phone call a few days ago from a woman in our church and she called me knowing that I'd be preaching on this passage and said, I'm praying for you.

And I said, thank you. I need it. And she shared a bit of her own story. And then she said, you know, I've spent a lot of time with an organization that used to exist here in Vancouver called Living Waters that ministered to people in relational and sexual brokenness and sin.

[ 25 : 57 ] And she said, I've gathered together pages of testimonies of people's lives who've been transformed by the grace of God. And I've gotten permission from them to share them with you if you would like to share any of them.

And so I want to read to you just three of those testimonies for those of you who need to hear tonight that hope is real and healing is actually possible for you.

So three testimonies. Number one, I enrolled in Living Waters seeking freedom from pornography, which had become in my teen years a normal part of my life.

I met God in my 20s and was able to stay away from pornography for a time. But in the year 2000, I was engaged to be married and it pulled me in, closed the door and threw away the key.

I was now married at Regent, a youth pastor, and I felt shame and guilt at not being delivered. I slowly came to see in Living Waters that God's grace goes deeper than my addiction to porn.

[ 27 : 00 ] Here I stand in Christ's work that he has done in and through me on the cross, transforming my brokenness into beauty. Testimony number two, Christianity has always been an unsafe place for me.

I'm a missionary kid and I got left at a home for missionary kids in Canada and never really got to know my parents who were in the mission field. The home was legalistic.

I was closely watched. Everything was measured. And I so longed for love and so looked for it in all the wrong places. Same sex, opposite sex, non-Christian.

Two marriages ended and my soul was torn apart. And on my third marriage, I discovered that my Christian husband now was addicted to internet sex.

We came to Living Waters together and I am learning for the first time that Jesus is real. And I am being knit together in my soul by God's love again, one tiny step at a time.

[ 28 : 05 ] In testimony three, I was sexually abused by my grandfather for 19 years. He was an elder in my church and my parents chose not to do anything about it.

I learned that I couldn't trust anyone for anything. But I looked and I became sexually promiscuous. In living waters, I brought to God the heavy pain of incest and he lifted it.

I have forgiven my grandfather and I know God is with me for the long haul now. My brothers and sisters, these are real people who have experienced real grace.

And you can too. The message of Jesus is good news for every person. And it is good news for the whole person, body and soul.

And so my brothers and sisters, I want you to know that Jesus Christ has come to claim you. And that when he shines light into the darkness of your life, it will feel like an utterly terrifying thing at first.

[ 29 : 25 ] But only by facing the light comes true freedom. Only by facing the light comes true healing. And whenever we face the light, we can know that the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness cannot overcome it.

So my brothers and sisters, I speak these things to you. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.