

1 Corinthians 6:1-20 AM

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Preacher: Rev. Jordan Senner

[0 : 00] I just want to say at the beginning, this sermon is going to be a little longer than normal. I am not sorry. Some matters are worth the time.

1 Corinthians chapter 6 is a word of warning and assurance for God's people who are stuck in sin. 1 Corinthians chapter 6 is a word of warning and assurance for God's people who are stuck in sin.

Or we do not let the gospel embrace the whole person. And 1 Corinthians is medicine for that disease. It's a letter that focuses on gospel application.

What does Jesus' death and resurrection really mean for my life? What does it mean for our lives? How do we live it out? Communally and personally. In chapters 1 to 4, Paul has been addressing biting and fighting and arrogance and jealousy and envy.

All those things that lead to division and disunity in the church. And he is applying the medicine of the gospel. And the goal is gospel unity at the foot of the cross. And then he takes us into chapters 5 to 7 where we are now.

[1 : 36] And Paul is addressing sexual immorality and the church's response to it. And the goal is gospel purity at the foot of the cross. In 1 Corinthians, no stone of our lives is left unturned.

Every area of life is brought under the sovereign grace of the sovereign Lord Jesus Christ. And it is Paul's conviction, and he wants it to be our conviction too. That the message of the risen and crucified Jesus Christ is good news for every person.

That the message of the crucified and risen Lord is good news for the whole person, body and soul. So today, God speaks to us through the words of 1 Corinthians 6.

A word of warning and assurance for a people who are stuck in sin. And I'm going to suggest that our passage can be divided roughly into two parts with a transition in the middle.

So in verses 1 to 8, it's about sinning against our brother, our brother or sister. In verses 9, in verses 12 to 20, it's about sinning against our body.

[2 : 44] And then in verses 9 to 11, in the middle, it's a word of warning and assurance. So let's jump in 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 here?

Paul's saying that Christians within the church are solving interpersonal problems by going to secular litigation. They're taking things to the courts. Now Jesus knew, and he tells us in his gospel, that relational problems are going to arise amongst my disciples from time to time.

We will not always get along. And in Matthew 18, he gave clear teaching about what to do when this happens. He gave us three steps. Step 1, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between him and you alone.

Step 2, if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you. Some witnesses. Step 3, if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the whole church.

- [3 : 48] In Corinth, none of this is happening. Instead, believers are going to unbelievers to help them solve their issues in the public courts. Now at first, this may not sound that bad.
- Like, oh, well it's nice when others can help us solve things, right? But when you look at the details a little bit more closely, especially verses 7 and 8, the details, the language that Paul uses there, I think he's trying to show us that these Christians in doing this have completely lost sight of the gospel in the way that they're relating to each other.
- So, let me show you a few of the details. Verse 7, he says, Notice that language.
- Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves, here it is again, wrong and defraud even your own brothers and sisters. And the Greek word that is behind that word translated wrong is the exact same Greek word that shows up in verses 1 and 9 as describing the people they're going to to solve their problems as the unrighteous.
- So what is Paul saying? He's saying the believers in the church are acting just like the unbelievers outside the church that they're going to to help them with their problems. They're doing wrong to one another.
- [5 : 13] They're doing injustice to each other. But notice also the language of defrauding. And this is the second detail in verse 8. You yourselves wrong and defraud.
- Why not rather be defrauded in verse 7? So this shows up twice. Not only are they doing wrong to each other, but what is the wrong they're doing? They are cheating each other out of something that is rightfully theirs.
- So this dovetails with what we're going to see later on in verse 10 when Paul gives this whole list of sins. It's not just all sexual sins. But Paul talks about thieves and the greedy and the swindlers.
- The implication being that the lawsuits here most likely involve money or property or business of some sort. These brothers are taking each other to court for selfish gain.
- And the third detail shows up once again in verse 7. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?
- [6 : 16] Isn't that an astonishing thing for Paul to say to them? Who is the one who was wronged? Who is the one who allowed himself to be defrauded?
- There's only one person Paul can have in mind here, and that's the way of Jesus as he sacrifices himself on the cross. In other words, what he's saying to them is he's saying, what you are doing towards one another is choosing another way other than the cross.
- And that's why he calls it, this is defeat for you. Because to choose any other way other than the way of self-sacrifice on the cross is a matter of defeat for the Christian. And so the main issue for Paul in verses 1 to 8 is that these believers, by taking each other to court, have demonstrated that they have lost sight of the grace of God shining through the cross of Jesus Christ.
- And they are in real spiritual danger because of this, and they need to be warned. But there's a secondary issue as well. Three times in verse 1, 4, and 6, Paul highlights how these believers war with one another in public before unbelievers.
- In other words, Paul is aware not only of the spiritual unhealthiness that this bickering and fighting in public reveals about the believers in the church, but Paul is also very aware of how their actions in the court are bearing false witness to Christ.
- [7 : 43] They do not reflect the way of the cross in how they are living. And so Paul's showing us that these interpersonal problems in the church are no minor thing. They actually reveal a deep spiritual disease and a deep missional unhealthiness.
- And that's the context in which Paul speaks in verses 9 to 10, the strongest possible warning that one could imagine being spoken to any church or Christian.
- He says in verse 9, Remember, he's just told them they're acting like the unrighteous.

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.

It's an astonishing list. It's a stern warning from the Apostle Paul. And there's a few things that I want to draw your attention to about it. The first is how deeply personal it is.

[8 : 55] Notice how Paul does not list sins here. He lists groups of people who are sinners. So Paul is not divorcing somebody's sinful activity from who they are as a person.

Paul is not speaking about sins in the abstract. He is talking about people who are sinners. Because he wants us to realize that my sins are not just something that I do out there, but they are something that come to define me as a person.

And that's the reason why I need a great Savior, is because they have come to define me as a person. But it also sets Paul up to do something wonderful in verse 11.

It sets him up to talk about salvation in terms of an identity change in verse 11. The gospel doesn't just forgive sins. The gospel transforms sinners.

The other thing we noticed is how balanced this list is. It's not all about sex. Like, our hearts and minds are drawn to that right away, but in the Greek, there's ten terms that Paul lists here, and only four of them have to do with sexual sins.

[10 : 06] Sexual immorality is the term for a person who practices sexual activity outside of marriage. In this case, it's the person in particular who is not yet married. And then there's adulterers.

It's those who practice sexual activity outside of their marriage. And then there are men who practice homosexuality. And that's actually two different Greek words that describe, in retrospect, the kind of active and passive partners in a same-sex union.

So, what you have here is you have four out of ten terms referring to sexual immorality, but the other six terms are covering a whole host of things. It's covering idolatry, so issues of worship.

It's covering issues of greed and unjust business. There's thieves, there's greedy, there's swindlers. It's covering issues of gluttony and addiction, drunkards. And it's covering issues of public defaming, revilers.

So, not only are these deeply personal things, but there's actually a comprehensiveness to the list that Paul gives us. One sin is not worse than another, but Paul is serious all the same.

[11 : 14] None will inherit the kingdom of God if they do not willingly repent and rest their lives on the grace of Christ. And that's why this list is not the last word for Paul.

Notice it's a warning, but right away in verse 11 he gives assurance. He says, such were some of you. Here's the identity change. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God.

Paul gives assurance the last word here. Assurance that where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more. The great problem that Paul is unmasking and addressing in verses 1 to 11 is something that faces all Christians at some point in their life.

It addresses the times in our lives when we take our eyes off the gospel of Jesus Christ. When we forget who we are and whose we are. And when we give into sins that contradict what Christ has done for us and who he has made us to be.

And that's the trajectory, taking our eyes off, forgetting who, and then giving in. And this rarely happens suddenly. It often happens very slowly and subtly in our lives.

[12 : 36] Right? Think of Psalm 1. It talks about, Blessed is the person who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of the sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scoffer.

It's this sense of progression. One is walking, and then they're standing, and then they're sitting. They're settling into something slowly over time. Very rarely does a Christian consciously set out to abandon the way of Christ.

But more often, they slowly grow more and more comfortable and content without him through small, hidden steps. It's as J.F. 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've settled in, we're stuck, we're enslaved, we're defeated, and we're hopeless.

See, 1 Corinthians chapter 6 in the first half is a wake-up call for all who have grown comfortable in their sin and blind to its seriousness. But it's also an assurance that all who have been convicted of their sins and aware of its seriousness and want to turn to the living Christ, they turn to the Christ who speaks grace-filled words of assurance.

[13 : 55] You are washed. You are sanctified. You are justified. You are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. And it is with this gospel clarity and this assurance of hope that Paul then chooses one of the ten sins that he listed in verses 9 and 10, sexual immorality.

And in the rest of the chapter, he buries into it. In verses 12 to 20. He says, not only have you sinned against your brothers in Christ, but you have sinned against your own body.

Now, I want to... This passage is dense, so let me try to get into this with you here as best I can, but I'm not going to answer all your questions. There are two major words that introduce the main themes of this section.

Pornea, the Greek word for sexual immorality, is mentioned three times. And then Soma, the Greek word for body, is mentioned six times. And the way in which pornea, sexual immorality, and Soma, the body, interrelate, is shown very clearly at the beginning and at the end of the passage.

So in verse 13, the problem is described this way. The body is not meant for sexual immorality. And then in verse 18, whoever engages in sexual immorality sins against their own body.

[15 : 20] So Paul is describing sexual sin as a form of self-harm. It's not good for us. In addressing the issue of sexual immorality, Paul unpacks how the gospel funds a rich theology of the body.

It's really fascinating how he does this. In our 21st century cultural moment, like the first century, our understanding of the human body is intimately connected to our ethical lifestyle.

Let me say that again. Our understanding of the human body is intimately connected to our ethical lifestyle. So think, for example, of the popular slogan, my body, my choice.

My body, my choice. And how that often functions in ethical and medical decisions, both in the beginning and the end of life. Or think, to give another example, and this is something I'm going through with my kids, how the elementary school curriculum teaches kids that they can have a female body, but they can have a male mind, or vice versa.

And if there's a discrepancy, then they get to choose, they can choose to change their bodies to conform to their minds. What's the implication behind that? The implication is that who they really are is associated with their mind, not their body.

[16 : 36] It's mind over matter. Or think of the aphorism that is common among young adults, you do you. You do you. Which is often a way of supporting a kind of pleasure-seeking lifestyle, at least for those that have enough money and social mobility to do what they want.

Often qualified with, so long as it doesn't hurt anybody else. But does it hurt you? So in all of these cases, there's this common thread throughout them.

It's that the body does not have any intrinsic meaning or dignity. It only has meaning and dignity that I assign to it or that I choose for it.

But one of the difficulties with that is my choices and my thoughts about myself fluctuate, whether it's 9 a.m. in the morning or 3 p.m. in the afternoon all the time. And what the Christian faith has is it has a distinctive ethic, in part because it has a distinctive view of the human body as a gift from God.

It has dignity and meaning inscribed into it by God as something that is good, something that is essential to our humanity, something that is involved in our redemption by Christ and the Holy Spirit, and something that is going to be risen into eternal life in the new creation.

[17 : 57] According to Paul, the body has meaning and dignity, he says it in verse 13, because the body is for the Lord. And then notice the astonishing way in which he flips it.

And the Lord is for the body. And then verse 14, how do we know this? It's nowhere more clearly than in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and how we will share that bodily resurrection.

The body has a purpose, says Paul. And he further unpacks that purpose in verse 15, where he asks another one of those piercing questions. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?

So our bodies are somehow brought into this union that we have with Christ. Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be.

And then he introduces another image in verse 19. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit? Holy smokes, we could spend a whole morning on that. A temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God.

[19 : 12] You are not your own. You have been bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. This is astonishing what Paul is doing. He is saying that through union with Christ, in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, what we do with our bodies becomes a form of worship and glorifying God.

And this isn't the only place that Paul says this. And this, Paul says this clearly in one of the verses that, if you have been a Christian for any amount of time, is one that you clearly know from the very beginning of Romans chapter 12.

The first 11 chapters of Romans, Paul is talking about the majesty and the mystery and the mercy of God that has been poured out on the world through Jesus Christ. And then there's this turning point in chapter 12 where he says, what does this mean for your lives?

And he says, I appeal to you therefore, 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. Not because he's a prude or a party pooper, but because he cares that God is worshipped and glorified in our lives.

[20 : 34] And he knows that we will not be fully human, or at least we won't experience the flourishing of the fullness of our humanity until we learn to see our bodies as temples of worship dedicated unto God.

And so Paul is crystal clear to glorify God in verse 18, we must flee from sexual immorality. Not put up with it.

Not just turn away from it. Not just resist it. But you must flee it. Scripture says some things plainly that we would rather not hear, but which have great power to change and heal our lives, and this is one of them.

If you are here this morning feeling convicted of your sin, but completely stuck in it, I just want to say I know how that goes. I've been there before. There was a time about 15 years ago when I was sitting in a pew right over there, struggling with sin in my life, and I felt absolutely hollow inside, trapped by what no one could see.

I came to worship every Sunday knowing that I was not submitting my whole life to Christ that I was holding back. I sang songs, but I couldn't feel them. I confessed the creed, but I didn't live it.

[21 : 56] I heard sermons, didn't respond to them. And it ate me up week after week. Now, God did a wonderful thing in my life that year, but I share this with you this morning because I want you to know that there is hope for you.

You do not have to let sin bind you any longer. You do not have to live in the darkness and secrecy any longer. You do not have to bear the shame and silence any longer.

What our passage is saying to us, even though it's hitting us straight in some of the deepest and tenderest and most painful places of our lives, when it talks about our sexuality, it is speaking a word of good news.

God has come to reclaim his broken creation. God has come to wash what has been covered in filth. God has come to set apart what is unholy and make it holy again.

God has come to make right with him what has rejected him again. And I love the fact that we're a community that comes together every week and is just honest about this fact.

[23 : 00] We confess our sins to God and we ask him to do what only he can do. We ask him to forgive and to heal and to cleanse and to renew.

And if you are here this morning and you are trapped by sin that nobody knows about, I just want you to know that that is true for you this morning. I had a woman from our church call me this week knowing that I would be preaching on this passage.

Thank you. Thank the Lord for people who pray for you. And she should have shared a bit of her story with me and she said, I've had a lot of experience walking with people through sexual brokenness.

I used to minister with Living Waters, an organization in Canada that used to journey with people in this. And she said, and I have a number of testimonies of people's experience of God's healing grace that I have permission from them to share anonymously if you want to share some of them.

There were a lot of testimonies. I just want to share three of them with you. Testimony number one. I enrolled in Living Waters seeking freedom from pornography, which had become in my teen years a normal part of my life.

[24 : 16] I met God in my 20s and I was able to stay away from pornography for a bit. But in the year 2000, before my engagement to be married, it pulled me in, closed the door, and threw away the key.

I was now married at Regent, a youth pastor. 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.

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 felt unsafe for me. I was a missionary kid. I got left at home, a home for missionary kids in Canada and never really got to know my parents. The home was legalistic.

Everything was strict. Everything was measured. I so longed for love and so looked for it in all the wrong places. Same sex, opposite sex, non-Christians.

[25 : 26] After two marriages falling apart, my soul was torn apart. And in my third marriage, I discovered that my Christian husband was addicted to internet sex. We came to Living Waters desperate.

And I'm learning for the first time that Jesus is real. And I'm being knit together in my soul by God's love, one tiny step at a time. Third testimony.

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. And I became sexually promiscuous. In Living Waters, I brought to God the heavy pain of incest.

He actually lifted it. And over time, I forgave my grandfather. I now know God is with me for the long haul. See, brothers and sisters, this was the work of God that he was doing in an organization outside the church.

[26 : 39] But this is precise the work that God wants to do in the church, too. Jesus came to bring real people real grace. And you can experience that in him.

Because the message of Jesus is good news for every person and for the whole person, body and soul. And as we journey towards the table, this is precisely what we remember.

This is what we celebrate. This is what we feast on this morning. We will kneel before our Lord and we will kneel beside one another and we will pray these beautiful words.

We do not presume to come to this your table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness. But in your manifold and great mercies, we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.

But you are the same Lord whose character is always to have mercy. Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear Son and to drink his blood.

[27 : 40] And here it is, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body and our souls washed through his most precious blood and that we may evermore dwell in him and he in us.

Amen.