

1 Corinthians Chapter 6

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[0 : 00] Let's turn our Bible then back to 1 Corinthians, 1 Corinthians and chapter 6, and to those verses. Just earlier today, in fact, I was reading part of an interview with the renowned TV naturalist, Sir David Attenborough.

And in that interview, he's asked about his thoughts about various matters, nationally and internationally and so on, particularly in view of his 91 years of age and a new series coming out in which he's involved.

Some of the subjects that he was asked, his thoughts on, were, of course, Brexit, and, of course, the sacking of Jeremy Clarkson by the BBC, those two most important national matters.

But he goes on to talk about what he believes to be the fundamental or the most fundamental problem that the world faces. And he says this. This is a direct quote from that interview.

Why is there urban violence? Why are there all these problems with immigration? Why are we running short of food and polluting? Every single one of those comes down to because there are too many people.

[1 : 22] Now, that idea is not uncommon. In fact, it's quite common amongst many atheists, particularly. But, of course, it's wholly wrong.

Wholly wrong because if you study any history at all, you'll find that every single one of those problems has occurred again and again throughout the whole history of mankind. There's always been problems with violence, always been problems with people's dying of hunger and famine, always been problems with migration and people being driven from one place to another.

We know what the greatest problem is, don't we? The greatest problem that the Bible tells us has always afflicted humanity from almost the very beginning is the sinfulness of the human heart.

The only cure and solution to that problem of a sinful heart and the repercussions that it has in our society and in our world is that we need a heart transplant from God.

We need to be born again. We need to be regenerate. We need to be new creations. There are times, sadly, and I would say that possibly in the UK and maybe even in the US at this time, there are times when even such a work of God in the heart of people does not bring about the social change that it should.

[2 : 49] In other words, there are times when the church of Jesus Christ, the people of God whose hearts have been changed, do not bring about social change as God intended them to do.

Think about the time of the Victorian period when God's people, the church, often the non-conformist consciousness as it was called, changed the whole atmosphere within the nation. The changes in schooling, work, children, prostitution, every single aspect, prisons, all of these were transformed.

Slavery transformed because those who had a changed heart changed their surroundings. And I would say that not only is our day a day in which these things are, in one sense, impotent, but certainly the days of Corinth around about the year 60 AD.

Because as we've looked at this letter that Paul writes to the church in Corinth, we see again and again that it was making very little difference to its surroundings, its society.

In fact, there was very little to distinguish between the church and the world, the believer and the unbeliever. We've seen right from the start that this is a divided church, an arguing, disputing, fighting, quarreling church.

[4 : 08] Church. We've seen that it's a church which accommodates all sorts of gross immorality. It only stands out from the world around about it because it has sunk further in its sin, as we saw in chapter 5, with incest, than actually the Roman citizens around them.

And Paul has had to speak strongly and firmly to these people. He's appealed to them in chapter 1, verse 10. He's spoken to them and said, you're just children acting like infants.

He's spoken to them again and again, don't deceive yourselves. He's spoken to them again, your boasting is not good. He's had to take strong line with them because his desire and longing is that they might live the life for which Christ saved them, that they might be the people that God purposed them to be.

And so when we come to chapter 6, we find that another outshoot, another repercussion of their divisions and of their sinful behavior is that they are now practicing litigation against one another.

In other words, taking one another to court over every trivial offense. And what is so bad? Not only were they disputing and fighting with one another within the church, they were taking their fight, as it were, into the secular courtroom, into the public eye.

[5 : 40] Now in the days of the church in Corinth litigation, was indeed something that went on and again and again. Historically, we know that this is the case.

But here are the Christians doing exactly the same. They're copying the actions and the lifestyle of the world around about them. We thought about this last time, how that the church is like a ship on the sea.

The world is the sea and the church is the ship. As long as the church is above the sea, as long as the church is above the water, then all is well. But once the water gets into the ship, then the church is sunk.

And what has happened in Corinth, and has happened, I believe, in many places, in the church of Jesus Christ in our days, is the same thing. The world is in the church, and therefore the church is sinking and in grave danger of being scuppered.

They copied the actions of the people around about them. And Paul gives several reasons here why they should sort the problems out within the church fellowship, why they should sort these things out together rather than taking one another to court.

[6 : 48] Now, of course, you only have to look around us in our own society to see that litigation is, again, the default action of so many people, isn't it? It's in the papers and the news all the time.

Whether it's a marriage breakup, taking one another to court over costs and over who's going to divide up the fortune. Whether it's taking someone to court because they've had an accident, suing them for damages, or an employee, an employer fallout, or an industrial action.

And even, of course, what's saddest of all is what we see reflected here. We read and hear of churches, Christians taking their church leaders to court to resolve matters. Isn't it amazing that when we pick up the Bible, we're picking up a book which is as up-to-date and as relevant as today or tomorrow's newspaper, more so, in fact.

We see again and again these things around about us. Now, thankfully, as far as I know, within our own fellowship, nobody is taking me to court.

And I'm not planning to take anybody else to court. And I hope that you're not planning to sue one another. You may say, so again, we're back to as we were this morning a little bit. Well, what does this have to do with us? Is this just purely theory?

[8 : 05] Is this just purely for out there? No, of course not. Because ultimately, what Paul has to talk about is the matter of relationship. And you and I are in a relationship together as part of a local church.

And we know very well that one of the great tools that Satan uses to make a church ineffective is division. And so what we read here is helpful for us, at the very least.

To help us to prevent such things happening, help us even going down and taking a step on the pathway to such things happening, teaching us how we are to resolve our differences, which we will have.

Because we are all different. And we're all, sadly, still sinners. And the way that Paul deals with this is that he says to them a repetitive phrase, do you not know?

In fact, in the whole chapter, he uses that phrase six times. Three times here, in the passage we're looking at, three times later on. Don't you know? In other words, he's declaring that the real problem is that they are ignorant and acting out of ignorance about fundamental truths concerning themselves.

[9 : 18] And that ignorance has allowed this state of collapse within the church to be left unchecked. And in fact, if it continued, it would really be the complete decimation of God's people in that city.

And so what does he do? What does he say to them? Don't you know? What have you forgotten? What should you be reminded of? Which is going to help them to deal with their relationships with one another and keep them, particularly, from taking their problems to a secular court.

And the first thing he says is he corrects their thinking concerning the future, or rather, their future. Their future. Don't you know, that's the first thing he says, verse 2, that the Lord's people will judge the world.

Wow. The Lord's people will judge the world. So don't you know that in the future you will be God's chosen judges of the world?

Did you know that? Is that something that you've thought about? Is it something that you understand? Well, it's something that Jesus told his disciples in Matthew chapter 19 and verse 28, he said to them when he was teaching about his return, I tell you the truth that the renewal of all things when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel.

[10 : 47] Now, the fact that we shall be involved with and engaged in the judgment of the world with Christ is part of this incredible truth that being a Christian is being united with the Lord Jesus Christ in everything.

So we are united, yes, in his death because he died for us. We are united in his resurrection because he was raised for us and we shall be raised too. But also, what do we read here?

Because he is going to judge the world, we share in that judgment as well. In everything. We are one with Christ so that everything that touches him touches us.

us. This is the miracle, this is the amazing reality of what it means to be a Christian. It's not simply having a friendship with Jesus where I speak to him and know him from a distance, it's about being united and one with him in that incredible story or that incredible illustration of the vine and the branches.

The very life of Jesus flows in the life of the Christian. But Paul was thinking perhaps more so, not just of the words of Jesus, but particularly the teaching that's found in the book of Daniel.

[11 : 53] If you'd like to turn there with me for a moment, it's Daniel 7, you don't need to, but if it's okay for you to do so, then it's in Daniel chapter 7 where Daniel is being shown and told about the future, about future kingdoms, about future empires and about what will happen at the end of time.

In Daniel 7 and verses 26 and 7, talks about the very, about the very last kingdom, the fourth kingdom, different from others, we're told.

In verse 26, we're told that at the end of these things, the court will sit and his power, that's the power of, well, Satan really, will be taken away and completely destroyed.

Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. That's God's people. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom and all rulers will worship and obey him.

So here's this concept of a court being in session and God's people being those who are seated and who are exercising judgment in that court. This is what's going to happen when the Lord Jesus comes again.

[13 : 15] We don't know and understand. Don't ask me to explain it all to you. This is what we're told. We know it will happen. We know that we shall be those who pass judgment and exercise judgment alongside the Lord Jesus Christ.

Both the spiritual world and the physical world, Paul tells us, angels as well will be judged by the church as God directs us. What does he say? What does he remind them of this? What does he teach them this?

The logic is very clear, isn't it? As he puts it this way. Verse 2, if you're going to judge the world, surely you can judge trivial cases.

Surely if the church of Jesus Christ, God's people, are going to have this extraordinary responsibility with Christ to judge the world, then surely, when it comes down to the tiny nitty gritty, the silly little things that Christians fall out about, surely you can pass judgment on that.

Surely you can work it out. Surely a believer who has the Holy Spirit, however young they may be and immature in the faith, surely they're better qualified to make judgments between believers than an unconverted, though wise, non-Christian.

[14 : 32] That's what he says. I say this, to shame you, verse 5, is it possible there's nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers, but instead one brother takes another to court, and this in front of unbelievers?

Here's the challenge to you and I, dear friends. When we disagree with one another, as we do, how do we sort that out?

How do we sort that out? Do we sort it out brother to brother, sister to sister? If it's something that's very difficult, perhaps it's something more complicated than a simple problem that can be sorted out straight away, do we look to other mature Christians to help us to sort it out?

Don't we see that, dear friends, God has given us his spirit, he's given us his spirit and he's equipped us to be judges of circumstances and situations, and therefore it's so important that we do not do what the believers did here.

The second reason he gives, or the second thing he needs to remind them about, it's not only their future, but he reminds them of their family, rather that they are family, verses 6 and 7.

[15 : 51] Instead, one brother takes another to court. By fact, you have lost so it's among you means that you are completely defeated already.

Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong. You do this to your brothers and sisters. Notice how he's using those family terms, brothers and brothers and sisters.

He's talking about the fact that we are a family. What sort of family, what sort of loving family hangs out it's dirty washing in public?

Because that's what they're doing, aren't they? Now, Paul is not saying, in saying, look, let the church sort out the problem. He's not saying, look, let's keep it under wraps.

We know that this has been a problem, hasn't it, in one aspect of the worldwide church, where not just sinful things, wrong things, but evil, lawless, criminal acts have been hushed up and covered up.

[16 : 50] Paul is not saying that at all. What he is saying is this, is when there's a dispute and a fallout between Christians, sort it out in private, sort it out amongst yourself. Don't take it out and hang up your dirty laundry for all the world to see.

In one sense he says this, as soon as we do that, as soon as we show the world, as soon as we say every time there's a problem we fall out with one another, then what we're doing is we're showing ourselves to be losers.

He says you've been completely defeated already. You've already lost. Even if you manage to restore the problem and situation, you've lost it really.

You never can restore it. Once you take somebody to court, can you go back on it? Once it's public and out in the open, can it be ever hidden up again? Of course it can't. He says we're defeated in the world's eyes.

We've lost all credibility, we've lost all respect to the world around about us which is watching us as Christians, how we live, and how we behave and whether we love one another or not. Now we know that when the world catches hold of a story of Christians, whoever they are, usually not actually real Christians but churches or whatever, some religion fighting with one another, they love it.

[18 : 05] The world says, aha, I knew that you were just the same as us. I knew there was no God who changed your heart. I knew it was all a con. Or else they say, well if that's the sort of Christianity, you, God, I don't want them to do with it.

It doesn't appeal to me, fighting, I've got enough problems fighting with my boss, I've got enough problems with my neighbours without joining a church and fighting with everybody in that as well. We're family, Paul says, rather we should love each other with a brotherly love, which means putting other people first, putting one another first, that's to be our testimony to the world.

Peter, as he writes his letter, encourages the Christians there, he says, above all, first thing, first, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins.

Love is the rule, there's only one rule in this church, it's very simple isn't it, love. Paul says it elsewhere, the whole of the law of God is summed up in love, love for God, love for one another.

It's this family, they've forgotten they're a family, they're not a bowls club, or a golf club, or a conservative club, or something else, they're a family.

[19 : 26] Yes, families fall out, but they make up, they sort it out. So must we. Do I view the person next to me, or behind me, or in front of me, do I view that person as my family, who's special to me, precious to me, important to me?

That will prevent me, of course, seeking to be divisive and fall out with them, but surely it must mean that when I do and things go wrong, I'll seek to put that right. I won't just let it pass by, or let bitterness or resentment grow in my heart, so that ultimately in the end there's a rift and division that separates us which perhaps there's no way back from.

So Paul reminds them that they are of their future, he reminds them of their family, he reminds them of their fortune, really verses 7 through to 10. It seems that clearly there's part of the problem they have with lawsuits is to do with money.

He says why not rather be wronged, why not rather be cheated, instead you yourselves cheat and do wrong, well that's got something surely to do with finance and with money. Maybe somebody's lent money and the other person's reneged on giving it back or something's gone on here, we don't know all the details but clearly it's to do with things, possessions, objects.

What Paul says here is this, why are we getting so het up about things which are material and physical when actually all of these things are going to go, they're not going to last, they're all temporary and the riches and the fortune that we have in Christ is something which is far more valuable.

[21 : 18] He says once this why not be wronged, why not let yourself be cheated rather than take that person to court, why not let that person keep the money, if they're so determined to have it by any means, even cheating and robbing, let them have it.

Is it really that important? Does it really matter more than the relationships within the church? Does it really matter more than the witness of Christ to the world? Isn't the gospel of greater worth than my rights?

We hear a lot about rights. This is the right of children, this is the right of a husband, this is the right of an employee, this is the right, this is my rights.

Is that how the Christian should behave? Is that how we should behave? It's all about my rights, my human rights. Is that more important than God's will?

More important than the gospel? More important and particularly let's bear it in mind in comparison to what we have. Bear it in comparison to what God promises to us.

[22 : 24] He promises us a kingdom. He says in verse 9, do you not know that the wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? In other words, those who know Christ and do right will inherit the kingdom of God.

That's our possession, that's our treasure, that's what we're living for, that's what we're heading towards. Clearly in the church there are some people who are not believers.

There are some people who have entered the church who deceive and who cheat, who are not there because they love Christ, but they are there to get something out of it for themselves. That's always been the case.

Sadly that is the case even today in the church that we know about. Those who do it for profit and for gain, who swindle and to cheat. But Paul says this, these people cannot be believers.

These people surely must be people who are outside of God's grace and who will not inherit the kingdom. And then he goes on, doesn't he? Don't be deceived, don't be mocked, don't be fooled.

[23 : 29] You cannot be a believer and inherit the kingdom if you continue to practice living in this way, with sexual immorality, with idolatry.

Remember we looked at that this morning, that can include just being greedy, with adultery, with homosexuality, with stealing, with greed, with drunkenness, with use of your language, with swindling.

Now we all fail, we all get it wrong. But what God says is this, that when our hearts have been changed by the spirit of God, these sinful practices will be dealt with.

We can't just continue with them, we can't just say, well it doesn't matter how I behave or how I live, of course it does. Yes God is gracious and the wonderful thing is this, Paul says this, that is what some of you were.

You were like that before Christ changed your heart. Isn't it marvellous that God has love for the homosexual, that God has love for the idolater, for the adulterer, for the thief, for the greedy, for the drunkard, for the swindler, for the slanderer.

[24 : 37] God has forgiveness for them, whoever they are, whatever our sins, whatever our past, he's willing to wipe the slate clean, he's willing to welcome us into his family. He won't turn away anyone who comes to him, whatever they've done.

But, if we come to him, we come to him leaving our sins behind. We come to him seeking to be changed. We come to him to be new creations.

So, Paul has reminded them, look, there's a future when you're going to judge the world, surely, you can deal with this problem. You're part of a family, so love must cover everything that you do.

And you've got an inheritance, a kingdom in heaven. Why fight for the things of this world? Why fight over the scraps of rubbish on the floor like dogs over a bone? When you've got a table which is full of good things and more to come besides.

And finally, in verse 11, we have three more truths, really truths from what we've already been said. We've said that when you're a Christian, your heart's changed, your relationship with God has changed, your relationship with one another has changed, something has happened.

[26 : 03] And so he looks to their experience. Don't you know? Here's his last, don't you know? Sorry, but you were.

Sorry, verse 9 is or don't you know? And then don't you know in one sense that you are. This is what you are. You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified. Let's look at them briefly together.

All of them are past tense, worn-off events, aren't they? You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified. These things have happened to the Christian. They're our experience.

Titus in chapter 3 tells us that God saved us through the washing of rebirth. When we become to Christ, we become new creatures, and the old is gone and the new has come.

We're cleansed from our old sin, that sin that stained us. That old sin, that old filth is removed from us. Not just in the sense of being forgiven, but we are given a new nature, a clean heart that desires to please God and live for him.

[27 : 07] Again, 2 Corinthians 5 17, if anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation. The old is gone, the new has come. That's why we have water baptism, don't we?

It's a picture of being cleansed. It's a picture of being brought into the family of God. It's a picture of God's saving work in a person's life. And that's why baptism is for once.

It's a one-off. We don't do it every week, do we? We don't do it every year. We do it once in a person's life. Because God has done it for us once for all when we come to Christ.

Why has God washed us? Has God washed us so that we can get filthy again? Has God washed us so that we can roll in the mud again? So that we can, in the very base words of Proverbs, be like a dog returning to our vomit?

Of course not. Surely God's washed us because he wants us to be clean. Surely he's washed us because he wants us to avoid that sin which stains and marks.

[28 : 10] I'm sure we've all had something of that experience where we're going to a wedding or we're going to a prom or we're going to something special and we've had our clothes specially washed or dry cleaned, a suit or a dress or whatever.

And what do we do? We keep it in the polythene bag, then we keep it clean until the day because we don't want to just wear it when we're going out and doing the gardening. We're not going to wear it when we happen to go playing in the sea or by the beach or whatever.

We want to keep it clean for that special occasion. So it is with our lives, dear friends. We don't want our lives to be mucked up and messed up and filthied.

God's washed us so that we can be clean. And he says we were sanctified. Sanctified. Sanctified. What does that mean?

Well it's to do with the word being made holy. Sanctification. The Bible speaks of in many places and calls Christians, ordinary Christians, everyday Christians, saints.

[29 : 15] Not the very top echelon of Christians but the ordinary Christians. Saints. And that means somebody who's been made holy or declared holy by God. You see God is himself holy and only those who are holy can be in relationship with him.

We can't make ourselves holy because we're sinful and failing and weak but God makes us holy. He sanctifies us so that we become like him. So that our sin is removed and in his sight we are declared as holy.

Here's what Peter has to say in chapter 2 of his first letter speaking to ordinary Christians. You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.

To be sanctified means that we've been set apart for God. You see when we're not a Christian, before we come to Christ we're just part of the great melee of the world, the whole melee of the population.

We're just part of this great swarm of people. When you become a Christian it's as if God takes us and he picks us up out of that melee. He picks us up for himself. It's like in a wonderful way like what they used to have in Woolworths pick and mix.

[30 : 28] He's taking, choosing. And that's a wonderful thing isn't it? Choosing us to belong to him. We no longer belong to the enemy, the devil.

We're not part of his kingdom anymore. We're sanctified, we're set apart. We belong to God. So if we're washed, if we're clean, why should we filthy and dirty ourselves with fighting with one another like the world does?

getting into rough and tumble over trivial things as Paul puts them. And if we're sanctified, if we're set apart belonging to God, if we're his special people, then shouldn't that have an effect upon the way we live?

Shouldn't it be, Lord I want to please you, I want to show the world, I want everyone to know that I belong to you. And finally he says, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

The word justified, somebody's put it in this way, just as if I'd never sinned. It's God declaring us righteous. It's God passing judgment on you and I, sinful though we are, but he's saying you're righteous in my sight.

[31 : 40] I'm treating you as if your sins did not exist. I'm completely accepting you. So Romans chapter 5 says, therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

God accepts us and receives us, not for the good things we do because we can't do any. He receives us because we were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's through what he's done for us.

It's by his Spirit at work in our hearts. So let's think of these things. Think of the cost of these things. Think of what it meant for God to be able to justify us and sanctify us and wash us.

Think of the fact that it cost him the very blood of his Son. Think that God went to all those lengths to rescue and save you and bring you out of the world and away from those things which you once were and the way you once lived and the way the world continues to live in all of its terror and all of its horror and all of its unhappiness and he's brought you to be this church, this people.

Surely dear friends that's going to move us to live lives for him. Surely that's going to change our view of ourselves and one another.

[33 : 05] When we know these things we can't ever be the same again. Well let's pray together. Lord our God we do want to bless you for saving us and rescuing us from our sins.

Saving and rescuing us from this present evil age as Paul calls it. Thank you Lord that you do not simply forgive us and thank you that you do not simply rescue us from judgment.

That in and of itself would be far, far and above anything we could possibly merit or earn and deserve that you should forgive and set us free. But thank you that Lord Jesus you died on the cross that we might be set free from the power of sin.

That we might be those who are no longer mastered by sin as the world is, as those around about us are. That we might be free to be the family of God, the children of God.

That we might be free to love rather than hate. To forgive rather than to harbour bitterness. That we might be free to be at peace with one another and to work things out together rather than simply putting up our walls of right and saying that everybody else is wrong.

[34 : 32] Oh Lord we pray that you would help us. We feel the pressures around about us from the world. Lord we feel the way that it seeks to squeeze us into its mould and make us just like itself.

And we know that Lord that is only going to bring sorrow and grief to us but also going to bring dishonour and shame to you. And so we pray oh Lord that you would work in our hearts even today.

Lord where we know you and trust you as our saviour. Where we have known that experience of your Holy Spirit in our lives. So Lord we pray that you would extend the influence of your Holy Spirit in us that we may be more and more the people of God.

Where Lord our hearts are still cold towards you. Where we are still in our sins. Where we are still those who practice and live in all senses like the world around about us.

Lord save us and rescue us. Show us Lord that you are the God who freely forgives and freely pardons and freely saves all those who come to you.

[35 : 40] Lord let us not continue in that pathway to destruction. Lord turn us to the narrow way that leads to life. We ask these things in your name Lord Jesus.

Amen.