

What Some of You Once Were

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[0 : 0 0] Our reading this morning is on page 1147 in your pew Bibles. And it's 1 Corinthians chapter 6, page 1147.

If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord's people? Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world?

And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life?

Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you ask for a ruling from those whose way of life is scorned in the church? I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is 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. The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been already defeated.

[1 : 1 6] 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.

Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers 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 our God.

This is the word of the Lord. Good morning, St. Silas. My name is Martin Ayers.

If we've not met, it's great to see you here. If you could keep your Bible open at 1 Corinthians chapter 6, that would be a great help. And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you'd find that helpful just to follow as we look at this portion of God's word together.

[2 : 3 1] But let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. So, Heavenly Father, whenever we hear your voice, we know that we will be changed.

We'll either turn further from you or we will draw nearer to you in deeper, more faithful trust. So we ask for your help by your Spirit at work in our hearts this morning, that you would give us ears to hear your voice.

Heads that can understand and hearts that are willing to respond rightly. For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. One of the themes of chapter 6 of this letter that we're working through is that who you are shapes how you live.

Richard Osman has written the best-selling detective series, The Thursday Murder Club. The third book has just come out, The Bullet That Missed. People are saying it's the best one yet.

I have no spoilers. If anyone is worried, don't worry. But it tells the story. The books tell the story of these four friends in a retirement village who formed this Thursday Murder Club where they try and solve crimes together.

[3 : 50] And Richard Osman went on the show, Who Do You Think You Are? Where they, on the BBC documentary, each time they take somebody and they look at their ancestors.

And as they delve into their past family history, they find things out about their background. And often they can find connections that say, oh, well, that's interesting because I think the same way.

Well, Richard Osman was there talking about being a writer of these best-selling murder books. And he said, my novels are crime novels and I've always read crime fiction as well. And it's because my grandpa was a police officer.

It's absolutely in my DNA. If I wasn't a TV presenter, being a police officer is what I would have loved to have done. My grandfather was a sort of perfect role model to me.

You see what he's saying? Because I saw my grandpa and what he was like, his DNA is part of my DNA. And that's shaping how I live.

[4 : 49] And then on the program, amazingly, Richard Osman found out that in 1831 there was a murder in London. And his ancestors formed a group to try and solve it.

They formed a murder club. And so Richard exclaimed, I've got to get my head around this. I've written books about amateur sleuths. And suddenly I find out that my four-times great-grandfather was caught up with his wife and his mother in trying to solve a mysterious crime.

And you could see him thinking to himself, I thought this was in my DNA because of my grandpa. Maybe it goes back further than that. And that this is who I am. There are characteristics in my family that make us, by nature, people who want to solve crime.

But whatever we make of that, it's true, isn't it, that who we think we are shapes what we do and shapes how we live. And the Apostle Paul shows us here in 1 Corinthians chapter 6 that the same principle holds true in life today.

You know, if you think there's no God, he doesn't say this, but if you think there's no God, and so you think that we're just mammals and we're accidental byproducts of impersonal forces at work in us, that's going to shape our views about how we treat other people and about what we think about life, about sex, about ambition.

[6 : 09] Well, when we come to know God in the Bible, he gives us a new identity. Jesus gives us a new status, new privileges, new standing, and then he calls us to be who we are, to let who we are shape how we live.

We've heard in recent weeks that the Christians in this church in Corinth that the Apostle Paul is writing to, they've made a good start in the Christian life. They've come to trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins, but then they hadn't grown up as Christians.

So they love to think of themselves as wise, but they've missed that true spiritual wisdom is centered on Jesus and his atoning death for us.

And they love to think of themselves as spiritual, but Paul has shown them that true spirituality is centered on the message of the cross. And they love the word maturity, to think of themselves as mature, but Paul says because they still think in a worldly way, they're actually still baby Christians.

They haven't grown up. And he's writing to them, urging them to grow up. And now we hear that they were taking each other to court. So Paul tackles that issue this morning, the issue of disputes between them.

[7 : 25] And each time he gives them a command, he calls them to let who they are now in Christ, shape how they live. So our first point this morning is, settle your disputes, you will be God's judges.

The problem comes in verse 1. He says, if any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment, instead of before the Lord's people?

So he describes the judges in the courts of Corinth as ungodly, because they were not Christians. But also there, I think, because there's a hint that the system wasn't fair either.

In Roman Corinth, society was deeply unequal. There were the haves and the have-nots. And maybe if you had the right connections, or you had the money for the right lawyers, the right advocates, you could use the court system, not just to get even, but to take advantage of people.

And Paul is astonished that after people have become Christians, they would continue with that kind of behavior, that kind of mindset. So Paul isn't talking here about criminal offenses.

[8 : 35] He calls the disputes that he's describing among the Corinthians, at the end of verse 2, as trivial cases. And at the end of verse 3, he calls them the things of this life.

Further on, it seems to be about money. So these verses, they don't stop us from seeking justice from criminal authorities, or safeguarding authorities, or the police, if we feel that somebody has done something in the church against us.

And the church mustn't try and brush allegations like that under the carpet, and say, we've got to resolve those internally, where it's that kind of serious allegation. But in Corinth, it was about civil litigation, about one Christian taking legal action against another in the civil courts to try and get money from them because they feel that they've been wronged by that other Christian.

And Paul, strikingly, never says in this section that they haven't been wronged. They may well have been wronged by another Christian. He just says, surely you can find people within the church family competent to judge your dispute and to resolve it fairly for the two of you.

And in chapter 6, verse 5, he's very punchy about that. Just have a look. He says, I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers?

[10 : 04] But instead, one brother takes another to court. And this, in front of unbelievers, you see his concern there. I remember some years ago, there was a football team, it was Tottenham Hotspur, the chairman was Alan Sugar, who, you know, on The Apprentice, you're fired, firing everybody.

Well, some years ago, he was chairman of the football club, and they had this star player, Jürgen Klinsmann, and when he signed for the club, he gave Alan Sugar a signed copy of his shirt, a signed shirt for him.

But then he decided he wanted to leave Spurs, and the way he went about it was he criticized the club to the media. And Alan Sugar turned up on TV, furious, and he said, what that man has done, he's washing our dirty linen in public.

And he pulled up Jürgen Klinsmann's shirt, and he said, I used to have this on my wall, I wouldn't wash my car with it now, he's washing our dirty linen in public. Well, that was just a football club.

But you see that the concern of Paul here, the apostle, is that when two Christians take matters to court, publicly, in front of the world, the concern is that the reputation of the gospel is at stake.

[11 : 20] And the media love a good dispute, don't they? You think about the coverage this year of Johnny Depp and Amber Heard and their trial, and what that's done to their reputations. So we see today that when Christians get locked in a dispute, when there's a legal action involving churches, it gets in the news.

And the secular media love to run the story. It's as though one of the reasons people like it is that it reassures them that this Christianity, there's nothing in it, is there?

Because they behave just like we do. They're no better than anyone else. And there is a misunderstanding there because as Christians, we would know we're no better than anybody else.

Jesus came not for the spiritually healthy, but the spiritually sick. He came to call sinners, not the righteous, to come and trust him and be saved. At the same time, once we've turned back to God, the apostle Paul here gives us a remarkable reason why we should be able to resolve our disputes ourselves, among ourselves.

And it's about remembering our future. Just have a look at verse 2. He says, Do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases?

[12 : 42] In verse 3, he even says that we'll judge angels. In fact, four times in this section, Paul says, Do you not know? As though, we really should know this.

In verse 3, he says, Do you not know that we will judge angels? And I was thinking, I didn't know that. But we will. Jesus has died. He has risen. He will return to judge the world.

And he will reign over a new world. Everything put right. And he will call us as his people to be involved in that judgment and that reigning over the new world.

So if the Spirit of God is transforming us, growing us to maturity and wisdom in this life, preparing us for that glorious future when we will reign with Jesus, surely we can find people from within our Christian community who we could trust when there are differences between us to listen and mediate and bring a fair, just outcome rather than needing to involve lawyers.

And for us today, we live in a very litigious society, don't we? Where it's seen as quite normal to sue someone. You know, you fall over a friend's pathway and you sue them.

[13 : 54] And you think, well, they'll have insurance. I was reading recently, I was looking at this, about some of the craziest things people have sued for. Obviously, most of them were in America.

But we're not far behind. There was one man in Texas, a 37-year-old. He went on a date with a girl. Clearly, it didn't work out because they went to see Guardians of the Galaxy Volume 2 and she spent the time texting on her phone and he sued her, claiming that her behavior had affected his enjoyment of the movie.

Other people have sued. Someone tried to sue Starbucks because when they bought an iced drink, because of the ice in it, it had less coffee in it. And a man even sued Michael Jordan and Nike for promoting Nike Air Jordans with Michael Jordan because he claims that he looks too much like him and has been confused for Michael Jordan every day for 15 years.

So that's the world around us and when we're wronged by a fellow believer, the world will say, well, you've got to sue, haven't you? You've got to get your lawyers involved.

Picture it, you know, you buy your car off someone from church and they made assurances and on the second day that you're driving it, it just breaks down. Or you let your flat out to someone in church and they break your worktop and they trash the sofa.

[15 : 20] Or you get some building work done by a Christian and it's just not right. I hope this isn't sounding too familiar. But in our disputes, the point is, could we not find some agreed, trusted, wise fellow believers that we can agree upon to let them judge what they think would be a fair outcome between us?

And next, Paul shows us that we shouldn't really feel the need to get even, to enforce our rights. So that's our second point more briefly. He says, don't always get even, you are God's family.

So Paul says, by the time you've involved lawyers, you've already lost. If you have a look at verse 7, the very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already.

And I used to be a lawyer, so I know that is true. Okay, I know what lawyers charge. I know how long it takes lawyers to investigate what's going on and finally write a letter.

I know several of you are lawyers, you're very welcome here. But if you are instructing lawyers, in a sense, you have already lost. Okay, a lot of money. But Paul's point is not about the money, is it?

[16 : 34] It's about the reputation of the gospel. And he says, with a very challenging question in verse 7, why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?

That is hard, isn't it? That there comes a point where even though you still feel that you lost out to a brother or sister in Christ, you would rather let go of it and suffer that loss than go through a process of taking them to court where in public you would criticize them.

Now, why is that? It's because who we are should shape how we live. And in verse 6, Paul reminds us that in Christ, we are family. We're brothers and sisters.

So in verse 6, he says, one brother takes another brother to court. In verse 8, you do this to your brothers and sisters. This year, we had the Wagatha Christie trial, didn't we?

All over the news. Rebecca Vardy and Colleen Rooney in court, a libel case. And the country was so enthralled by the story, they're making it a West End stage show.

[17 : 44] Honestly, they are. Why? Partly, we were baffled that the wives of two national football stars could be squabbling in court.

That baffled us. How much worse if they'd been family, if they'd been sisters in court together. And Paul is saying that in Christ, that's who we are.

We are brothers and sisters, family with one another. If your brother or sister wrongs you, would you not rather lose out than get a lawyer involved?

And as we think about having to bear the cost of being wronged, we can picture Jesus as our model. He's the rightful king of the world and we have made ourselves his enemies by the way that we'd lived, saying no to him and wanting his rule out of our lives.

And while we were God's enemies, he showed us compassion and love. That Jesus didn't come to bring judgment when he came first time, he came to bear judgment from God for us.

[18 : 56] So that our standing before God depends on his free choice that he made freely, that he would rather be wronged so that he could pay our debt and show us mercy.

And knowing that Jesus did that for us frees us not to need to get even when we've been wronged financially by a brother or sister. It's a trivial matter.

But in the rest of the passage, Paul also gives the other side of that, that as brothers and sisters, surely we should make it our ambition not to wrong one another, not to give another fellow believer a reason to want to be in dispute with us.

So he's just as exasperated by the people causing the harm in verse 8. Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong and you do this to your brothers and sisters.

It's completely out of place among the rescued people of God. So that's our third point this morning is that we're called to live a new lifestyle because we've been made clean.

[20 : 01] Live a new lifestyle, you've been made clean. What he's saying here is that change is fundamental to the identity of being a Christian.

So he asks the key question of verse 9. Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? He's not saying here that by doing right we earn our place in the kingdom.

That would go against so much that Paul writes everywhere else and that Jesus teaches. But when we grasp that we've been rescued by a gracious God it will change us.

Change is inevitable. So we're not saved by our good works but we won't be saved without them because good works are the necessary evidence that we've come to grasp the salvation that God holds out for us through the cross of Christ.

And if we claim to be saved by God but we carry on with a pattern of life that goes against God's will there comes a point when we're proving that we don't really belong to the kingdom at all.

[21 : 10] If these things still mark the direction of our life then our life is still in the wrong direction. So Paul then lists a series of behaviors where if they were to characterize the way we live they would be clear evidence that we haven't turned back to God.

That we've not been rescued into his kingdom. He lists in verse 10 being a thief being a drunkard being a slanderer spreading lies about other people being a swindler taking from others what's theirs and right in the middle there he includes the greedy quite deliberately I think at this point in the chapter because he's saying this is what you're being like in Corinth if you're going to court with one another.

the general principle then is that being a citizen of the kingdom of God living in hope of his future inheritance should define who we are and shape how we live.

There is one phrase in verse 9 that gets lots of attention today and it's where Paul mentions men who have sex with men as part of those characteristics that mean we won't inherit God's kingdom.

it's key to understand that he's talking here about sexual practice he's not talking about desire or about orientation a fair number of people in our church family experience same sex attraction and they are committed to living without a homosexual sexual relationship and I guess that might be the hardest walk to walk in the church in Britain today because wherever they turn they can find a Christian leader who would tell them just find a sexual partner it would be no barrier to you playing a full part in the people of God and having an inheritance of God's in God's future but for those in our church family who are same sex attracted they're clear what God's word says and so they're choosing to live in a life of singleness and celibacy because they see that that's God's will for them and the authentic Christian life involves costly change for everyone for all of us so male homosexual practice is clearly listed here but the list starts with the term sexual immorality in verse 9 the sexually immoral will not inherit the kingdom

[23 : 48] God made men and women equal before him but different and physically different and sex was his good idea for committed lifelong marriage between one man and one woman and that their faithful committed intimacy would display God's love for his people and the term there for being sexually immoral applies to any sexual activity that goes against that good design of God so if you're here with us this morning and you're in a same sex relationship at the moment and you're exploring who God is and how to come to know him I want you to know that we feel deep compassion for you and we don't stand in condemnation over you and as far as I can see before we come to know God through Jesus every one of us will be characterized by something in this list it's a list that applies to all of us and that is Paul's point with the list that these are many and varied ways to have a pattern of life that demonstrates that we've turned from God it's a list that includes getting drunk and being greedy the teaching of Jesus challenges every culture so you might be here this morning and you've come from a culture where greed is accepted and approved of where people are applauded for having helped themselves and made it for themselves but where same-sex relationships are seen as bad for society or you might be from a culture where the worst thing you can be is a greedy selfish banker but where same-sex relationships are celebrated if the Bible is God's word for every place and every time it is going to challenge every culture deeply but when it comes to God's word we can't pick and choose the bits we agree with we have to let God have the right to disagree with us notice again too that the phrase

Paul uses to start this list is do not be deceived in verse 9 do not be deceived neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God it's the language of the Garden of Eden where Eve was deceived where Adam and Eve were assured by the evil one the devil that God's judgment would not come on them if they disobeyed God you will not surely die he said and they were deceived and here Paul is talking about our future that our direction of life will lead to forever there's an advert on the radio at the moment warning against fraudsters who scam you out of your money you know on the phone or online and there's a woman on it talking about how she lost her life savings to scammers and it was the money she was saving up for her retirement and she's telling her story on the radio and while she's speaking about losing tens of thousands of pounds in a scam there's another voice you can hear and he's laughing and the bloke's voice is choosing a sports car and he's revving the engine and he's driving at you picture him driving away with this sports car that he's buying with the money that he's stolen from her she's being deceived and the message of the advert is don't be deceived don't lose your future by being deceived well in a similar way

Paul is saying here that any of us could find ourselves deceived about our eternal future that for all of us if the fundamental direction of our life has not turned back to God in repentance we won't inherit the kingdom of God and if Paul had stopped there we wonder is there any hope for the Corinthians and for us but then Paul gives us wonderful words of hope in verse 11 let's look together at verse 11 he says with absolute confidence verse 11 and that is what some of you were that was our past to continue in those behaviours to be defined by them not that they were aberrations that they defined us but verse 11 then continues with this emphatic but but you were washed you were sanctified you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God so when Paul says that is what some of you were he's describing a continued state of life and then he gives us three ways of describing a one time past event to us that's happened to each of us when we put our trust in Jesus that has once and for all transformed who we are he says but you were washed it's the language of being made clean that whatever we might feel about our past that however dirty we might feel for what we've done or unclean in God's eyes be assured in Christ you are completely clean our past has been washed away every mistake every deliberate fault then he says but you were sanctified it's the language of being made holy morally perfect that God looks on you now as set apart for him in perfect moral purity from the moment you put your trust in Jesus he doesn't see your sin he doesn't see greed drunkenness slander sexual impurity it's all been lifted from you and taken from you as far as the east is from the west so that he looks on you and he sees holiness purity and then he says but you were justified it's the language of being approved of by God in his courtroom found not guilty but then more than that being vindicated by God that you lived righteously thanks to the spirit of God who drew us to put our faith in Jesus and thanks to the work of Jesus on the cross that he took on himself all of our moral uncleanness our dirtiness our impurity our guilt and Paul is saying look at who you are now you didn't deserve it you couldn't earn it but now knowing who you are let that shape how you live it means that your sin doesn't define you anymore and owning our new reality in Christ is key to having the power from the spirit to change it means when we're tempted to sin we can remind ourselves and tell ourselves

I don't have to sin anymore I don't have to do this it's not who I am now it's who I once was it's not who I am I don't have to sin and it means if you've come to church today feeling that you've let God down perhaps feeling really wretched perhaps thinking I don't know why I'm bothering going to church I've made a mess of being a Christian we can be assured those behaviours whatever they are they don't define you they have no hold on you they're not how God sees you the mistakes you've made are not how God sees you he says to you that's what you once were but I've washed you sanctified you and justified you through my son the Lord Jesus Christ let's pray together we praise you heavenly father that you are the God who has given us a fresh start thank you that by your spirit's work in us and the perfect once for all work of the Lord Jesus you have brought us to be part of your new people your rescued people washed sanctified justified father we pray that you will be at work in us that you will purify our hearts that you will refine us that having been washed clean we would display in our lives a new direction that we would live out the goodness of your word and the righteousness of your kingdom for we ask in Jesus name

Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen