

2.2 The Difference Two Days Make

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Preacher: Josh Johnston

[0 : 00] Right, we're going to turn to our Bibles now, we're going to read together. And last week, Josh began again in 1 Corinthians.

We've been dipping in and out of 1 Corinthians very profitably over recent months with Josh. And he was looking at chapter 5, and we're going to read this evening 1 Corinthians chapter 6.

So beginning at verse 1. Paul says, and he's speaking to the Christian church.

When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare to go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world?

And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more than matters pertaining to this life?

[1 : 05] So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there's no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between brothers?

Brothers, brother goes to law against brother. And that before unbelievers. To have losses at all with one another is already a defeat for you.

Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud. Even your own brothers. Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do you 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.

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 our God.

[2 : 13] All things are lawful for me. Here's Paul introducing again some of the Corinthians questions. Those bits in the quotation marks.

You're saying all things are lawful for me. But, says Paul, not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me. But, I will not be enslaved by anything.

You say food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality. But for the Lord. And the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?

Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never. Do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her?

[3 : 17] But it's written, the two will become one flesh. But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.

Flee from sexual immorality. Every, here you see the little number two there, the footnote. Every other sin. There's no word other there.

I think this is probably another question from another quotation from the Corinthians that Paul is citing. Every sin a person commits is outside the body, you see.

But, the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?

You're not your own. For you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body.

[4 : 21] Amen. May God bless us his word. Well do turn your Bibles again to 1 Corinthians chapter 6.

It's very hard for us to hide what we truly believe. The truth is that our actions, our lives, tell the story of what we really believe.

And we see a crystal clear example of this in our chapter today. The Corinthians expose what they really believe about the most important days in history. The day of grace, which is in history. The day of the cross of Christ. And the day of glory. The day that will end history. The day of the coming of Christ in judgment. These two days feature in some way throughout this whole chapter. And Paul exposes again and again what the Corinthians genuinely believe about these days. He says six times throughout the chapter, Do you not know?

[5 : 31] Do you not know? Because what they're doing only serves to question whether they really believe in or want the cross of Christ or the coming of Christ.

And all that they mean. So Paul is saying, Do you not know just how significant the day of grace and the day of glory are?

If you did, then you would be so much more careful in your relationships. Your relationships with brothers and sisters in the faith. And also your relationships and sex.

We've seen over and over again that the Corinthian problem is that they think they are mighty. But their vision is limited to this world. And limited by this world. And they need to be disempowered. And so Paul's ongoing prescription for them throughout this letter. His cure to lay before them again and again. Is the cross of the Lord Jesus. Its power. And maybe even more importantly, its pattern.

[6 : 32] The message of the cross. And the manner of the cross. And those things deeply shape our relationships, don't they? Relationships in the church.

Relationships with the watching world. And relationships formed through sex. And so the first thing we see in our chapter this evening is undignified disputes, verses 1 to 11.

Undignified disputes, verses 1 to 11. When a church cannot deal with one another graciously. They debase their witness and endanger their souls.

The cross demonstrates and demands that losing out for others' benefits is truly glorious. It might seem like a somewhat random problem that we've got here in these verses.

To stick in between two passages that center on sex gone wrong. A passage about squabbles and lawsuits. But tying chapters 5 and 6 together is a lack of judgment that the Corinthians display.

[7 : 33] It's a word that appears throughout these chapters. A lack of judgment that undermines the church before the world. Remember the pagans were watching.

They were scandalized by the Corinthians tolerating incest in chapter 5. And they have a lack of judgment that means in practice sin is taken very lightly.

Because the realities and implications of the cross are either forgotten or ignored. There were Christian brothers in Corinth who were happy to take one another to court.

That's what we see at the start of this passage. It's hard to know exactly what the dispute is over.

Had someone knowingly sold another person a chariot with a dodgy brake? Who knows?

Was there a dispute over who owned how much, what percentage of whatever business? We're not told. And it doesn't really matter. The telling thing isn't what the disagreement was over.

[8 : 31] But how the disagreement was handled. And Paul wants us to see the deep theological truths that are at stake. So look at how they undermine before the world the coming again of the Lord Jesus.

Five times Paul talks about those outside the church. Verse 1, the unrighteous. Verse 2, the world twice. Verse 4, those with no standing in the church.

And verse 6, unbelievers. How we relate in the church matters because the world is watching.

Jesus himself said that, didn't he?

Your love for one another will show the world that you're my disciples. And so we need to take heed of that. Now it's likely that the dispute that has arisen is because of genuine greed and attempts to take advantage of others in the church.

If you look at verse 8, you can see that. But Paul spends a lot more time on how these things should be settled in the church, on the impact it has in the church and the world, than on the specifics of the wrong that's been done.

[9 : 36] And so I think the key word in here is the word trivial, verse 2. Because whether the details of the dispute were trivial in the world's eyes or not, isn't the point.

It'd be easy to just read this part of 1 Corinthians as a fairly basic instruction that simply tells Christians that they should never sue one another.

Tick, I've never done that, I'm good. But there's a principle behind all this that is important for us to grasp. Look at why this is trivial. Verse 2, Do you not know that we are to judge the world?

Verse 3, Do you not know that we are to judge angels? It's trivial because of eternal truths. Have you forgotten your future? He's telling them that they're acting as if Jesus isn't coming back. And they're doing so in full view of the world. The principle is that the future should shape how we relate to one another.

[10:40] In any relationship. Yes, taking other Christians to court is to be avoided. Verse 7, It's already a defeat for everyone if that happens. Because at some point on both sides, grace has gone out the window.

I don't understand this. Paul's not saying that the courts of this world, the legal systems of this world will no sway for a Christian under any circumstances. Not at all. But what he is saying, is that there is a date that's set, a day that will come, when we will see and partake in the glorious last judgment. We knew that a day will come when all wrongs will be made right. Our eyes have been opened to ultimate realities. Our eyes have been opened to the unseen realities of heaven and hell.

And so that shapes life in the present. We can discern, is it really worth our time here on earth? Is it worthy of our time to chase down every last pound that is ours?

To insist on every last right that we can. Is that the best use of our time? In light of eternity? It's hard to know here exactly what Paul means by us judging angels.

[11:57] We aren't given much else to go on. It's perhaps most likely a reference to in some sense us judging fallen angels at the last day. But without knowing exactly what Paul means, look at what he's doing by saying that.

He's expanding the Corinthians view on what it means to be a Christian. They love this world. But life as a Christian does not remove us from this world.

The spirituality isn't an up there, out there kind of thing that's separate from this life. But Christians also know that we have a hope and a perspective that does transcend this world and life in this world.

There's more to life than the here and now. So verse 3, if we're to judge angels, if that's our future, then how much more matters pertaining to this life?

We don't just have the true view of life in this world, we have a view of the world to come. Will it matter in eternity if I have one fewer sheep in my flock?

[12:59] Not even slightly. Will it matter if we cause a dangerous rift with a brother that produces a bitter root? Well, it might seriously matter.

Must I extract every pound of flesh now so that I can trust that everyone else's wrongs will be accounted for? Or can I trust that everyone else's wrongs, along with my own, will be taken care of at the last day?

We had rights by the real judge, the Lord Jesus. I wonder if you can picture the Lord Chief Justice or some other highly ranked judge in this country struggling to settle a dispute between his children. Or a Supreme Court judge taking a dispute, a lowly dispute to judge Judy. You'd have to question their fitness for their task, wouldn't you? It would be an embarrassment for them.

Well, how much more for the world to see Christians squabbling like this, living as if this world is the be-all and end-all? Verse 5, Paul says it's to their shame.

[14:07] It debases their witness. They're proclaiming to the world that our glorious future is a lie, that we need to take into our hands every last injustice now and solve it today. So how do we handle things in a church when inevitable issues arise between Christian brothers and sisters?

What does it look like to let eternity shape our relationships here and now? Well, surely of all people, we must be able to disagree without it being faithful to our relationship.

There's not a lot of that in the world at the minute, is there? But surely of all people, we must be able to do that. And surely things are best resolved face-to-face with respect, with charity, with generosity, with humility.

Certainly not behind backs and on social media. But instead, through grown-up conversations that allow for nuance, that are filled with listening and not insisting, and that invite another brother to help if needed.

I wonder what the watching world thinks when Christians fight and argue about theology on Facebook. Isn't that simply betraying that we want to prove that we're in the right?

[15:21] I'm going to get the better of my brother. Well, there's enough cancel culture around. So when we do feel genuinely wronged by someone in the church, snubbed, overlooked, insulted, taken advantage of, are we going to let that shape church life forevermore?

Or until we've extracted our penance? Or until they've come on bended knee to plea for forgiveness? And until then, will we ignore people, snub them, gossip about them, or even leave a church because of it, because we've not been valued enough?

Notice Paul's ire here is focused not on the defrauders, but on how wrongs are dealt with. That's worth pondering. Friends, the truth is we will run into all kinds of annoyances and grievances. We will do that in this church. That's a reality. It's a reality in any church family. But how we deal with them matters. It reveals to the world what we truly believe.

But Paul has another means of solving issues amongst ourselves. In verse 7, you see, the cross doesn't just save us for the life to come. It also shows us the pattern for life now.

[16:44] The Corinthians show the world that the cross isn't what marks them. That's what Paul's saying in these verses. But isn't it a beautiful thing to see someone who's in the right or has an advantage or has the upper hand who's happy to set that aside for someone else's benefit?

Preferring to lose out and see another flourish rather than gain and see another suffer. That's a beautiful thing because that's exactly what the Lord Jesus has done for his people.

And we'll be seeing that this morning. And isn't that a model for us? When we feel wronged and slighted by our brothers and sisters, we don't need to insist on every apology and every reparation and every wrong having its day in court.

Verse 7, why not suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? I wonder what state we'd be in. If the Lord Jesus demanded that of us.

The cross says that we can lose in this world and that's okay. The world that we do live in has little or no space for forgiveness or grace.

[17:56] If we say or do something even 20 years ago that's now judged to be wrong, even if it wasn't then, you're done. You're finished in public. No way back. But isn't it even more tragic to hear of someone who carries a bitterness against the church member or a minister because of something they said or did a decade ago and they just haven't been able to let go and deal with it.

Friends, in the church, we believe in the cross and coming of Christ and that shapes every relationship. Any church which grasps the implication of those things will have grace as the very fabric of our relationships together.

How could we do any other? But when grace is absent amongst the household of faith, it doesn't just debase our witness. Paul tells us it endangers our souls.

Look at the danger the Corinthians are placing themselves in. Verse 9 carries straight on from verse 8. Furthering our own ends at the expense of brothers and sisters is nothing other than unrighteousness.

Verse 9. Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? I think Paul picks up this behavior in what he lists in verse 10 with swindlers and the greedy and all the rest.

[19:17] Jesus really cares about what is right and what is wrong. And if we really believe in Christ's return, if we take him at his word, then how on earth could we possibly be found behaving within the church just as those around us behave?

We know that this world isn't ultimate. We know that Jesus cares about the character of our lives. If we're indistinct in how we relate with the world around, then the question has to at least be asked.

Do we really believe in a thing different from the world around? And if we don't, be warned, says Paul, we will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul warns, do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral nor adulterers nor adulterers nor men who practice homosexuality nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards revilers or swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

As much as the world might want to trumpet and delight in these things, not so the people of God. We saw last week that these are the very evils that are to be purged from the people of God in Deuteronomy.

[20:33] Jesus cares about these things. He cares about his people and that they're distinct from the world around. that they're marked by his cross and by his coming.

And so whether it isn't sin in the realm of sex or in how we cherish material things and mistreat brothers and sisters, God cares. He cares so much that verse 11, and such were some of you, but you were washed of these things at the supreme cost of the blood of his own son.

He cares so much so that you were justified, declared to be righteous just as the Lord Jesus is. And you were sanctified.

He set us apart from the world to be devoted to him. And all that means that this list of things, that things that the world loves, are our past, not our present. to continue in these things, looking just like the world and relationships with sex or to material things or with each other, is not just to deny Christ's return, but to deny the cross and to imperil our souls. [21 : 51] So Paul says, be warned. And then he goes on to tackle, very particularly, sexual immorality. And that's what we see in our second point. He goes on to tell us about dignified unions, verses 12 to 20.

Dignified unions. Our bodies are more important than we imagine. The truly spiritual life is not an out there reality.

Spirituality is thoroughly down to earth. Notice that undergirding this issue is still the cross, verse 20. Still present.

We were bought at a price. But also, Christ's coming. Verse 14. The same issue still persists through this. And in day-to-day life, the arena in which real heavenly spirituality is played out in this world, cherishing the cross and the coming, is right here in this, this human body.

What we do with our bodies really does matter. Paul talks about the body eight times in these verses. It's all over. Verses 12 to 20. And the body is a deeply spiritual thing.

[23 : 10] Paul makes his argument about sexual immorality through the two most profound unions that exist. Union with Christ and sexual union. But first, look at verse 12.

In our English Bibles, we can see various statements here that have inverted commas around them. And these appear from this point throughout the bulk of the rest of the letter. And in all likelihood, they are Corinthian sayings, Corinthian ideas, ideas that they like to trumpet.

And so Paul often quotes them and then corrects them. So you can see verse 12. They say, all things are lawful for me.

Paul's correction. But not all things are helpful. We mustn't be dominated or enslaved by anything. Verse 13, their idea.

Food for the stomach, the stomach for food. And God will destroy both one and the other. It's only food. It's only a bodily function. Paul's correction. The body is not for sexual immorality but for the lowers.

[24 : 22] And I think verse 18 is possibly one of their sayings too. And so it reads, as we saw in the footnote, their idea. Every sin a person commits is outside the body.

Paul's correction. The sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Just sex is not a new idea.

The idea that we can have such a thing as casual, meaningless sex is not a modern phenomenon. Here in Corinth, they're saying, sex is just like visiting Greggs.

The body needs food, so we eat. The body needs sex, so we find a release. The idea of Christian freedom is so very often misunderstood.

And if being a Christian means we can now live as we please, all things are lawful for me, as the Corinthians seem to be saying, well, it's hard to describe freedom as something that means being completely unable to go into your bedroom by yourself at night without getting another fix, watching or imagining sex.

[25 : 29] It doesn't sound like freedom to be only able to see other people as objects for your own sexual pleasure. That's much more akin to being dominated by something, isn't it?

Paul says, we've been freed from the slavery of sin, which means that, verse 12, we no longer need to be dominated by it. It doesn't have to plot our course. It doesn't have to dictate the shape of our lives.

It doesn't have to motivate every decision. And sex, perhaps more powerfully than most things, can dominate someone. It's a very powerful urge, capable of consuming the mind, shaping the actions of someone, taking them into all kinds of trouble.

That isn't freedom. The body is not just simply here to function so that the real us can thrive, as if we can separate the real us from our body.

No matter how much that kind of thinking is trumpeted today, our bodies really do matter. They aren't hollow vessels for the real us.

[26 : 37] To think so is to have a completely impoverished view of life. The Corinthians' thinking seems to be that food, the body, sex will be destroyed by God, so they don't really matter.

What matters is the spiritual life, the soul, the real me. Look at verse 13. The Lord cares very deeply about our bodies.

After all, they're for Him. And He is for them. They are the arena in which worship happens.

They're the arena in which we worship God Almighty. They're the very thing that Christ has redeemed. Verse 14, God raised Christ and He will raise us up to in bodies.

The resurrection is real and physical. We see that with Jesus. His disciples could see His wounds. He ate in their midst in the resurrected state. And in chapter 15, later in the letter, it makes so clear to us that our resurrection is as guaranteed and as real as Christ's.

[27 : 42] spirituality isn't disembodied. To conceive of such a thing is to completely devalue life. And to really kneel the argument, look at what Paul does.

Verse 15 and 16, he pulls into focus and pulls together union with Christ and sexual union. Verse 15, do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?

Our bodies are members of Christ. The Holy Spirit joins us in a real physical union to Jesus. That's a real and inseparable union.

And so what we do with our bodies matters. Because what we do with our bodies than we do to Jesus. And particularly so when it comes to sex.

That's why we must be incredibly careful about what we give our bodies to in this realm. Paul was aghast that the Corinthians could knowingly and openly treat sex so casually equipping a trip to Greg's with a trip to a prostitute.

[28 : 49] Shall I take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! But the thinking behind that is not too far off today, is it? Every sin a person commits is outside the body.

My body isn't the real me. I'm in the wrong body. Those things aren't too unfamiliar for us today, are they? Well, Paul says that the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

That's not to say that other sins aren't against the body, but sexual sin is in a particularly significant way. I wonder if your ears perk up when I say that there is something particularly significant about sexual sin.

What's your reaction to hearing that there is a kind of sexual sin that is amongst the most grievous kinds of sin? Maybe your ears perk up because there's an unhelpful and wrong theological idea that would try to say that all sin is the same really.

And whilst it's true that all sin deserves wrath, that all sin is ultimately offense against God, that's not the same thing as saying that all sin is the same. God's own law makes that play in, doesn't it?

[30 : 00] The punishments fit the crime. Murder is worse than theft because people are more important than things. And even in the whole realm of sex, there's a difference between a young couple stumbling and falling into bed and then resolving that it won't happen again until they make things right in marriage.

There's a difference between that and someone running decidedly and headlong into a one-night stand where there's no possibility of putting things right. But our ears might also perk up because the world has been catechizing us for our whole lives to have a low view of sex, to enjoy seeing our favorite characters in films and TV hooking up, and teaching us to celebrate and enjoy bad sex, impoverished sex.

The world is catechizing us, teaching us all the time to believe that there is such a thing as casual, meaningless, sex. Paul says, do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her?

Sexual union is a profound union in similar ways to our union with Christ. After all, that's what it pictures. That has always been the reality of sex.

One of the Hebrew words for it translates as the mingling of souls. It's the thing that makes two people one, and not just in a physical way for a night. Sex and spirituality are both body and soul things.

[31 : 35] Neither one of them is just the body, and neither one of them is just the spirit. They're both both. Sex is far deeper than a bodily function. The joining of two people together in sex is a union designed to be permanent in this life, in the way that our union with Christ is indivisible.

To form that union and then to try and rip it apart isn't and cannot be a clean break. Some sex is sometimes illustrated with a picture of two pieces of paper.

They're stuck together, one on top of the other. Well, what happens when you try to separate those pages? It's a mess to tear them apart. Bits of each page remain stuck on the other.

And that picture is sex quite well, doesn't it? Well, when we put these two unions together that Paul talks about, union with Christ and sexual union, and then think about what's going on in Corinth.

A believer joined with Christ and joining themselves to a prostitute, or indeed joining themselves to anyone who is not or will not ever be or cannot ever be their spouse, leaves Paul saying, never.

[32 : 58] To do so is to deface the Lord Jesus with whom, verse 17, we've become one spirit with whom our bodies have been joined. Look at verse 19, the last of the do you not knows.

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit? Our bodies are. What we do with him really matters. We are for so much more.

And so Paul says, verse 20, glorify God in your body. We are for him, this life, both body and soul is for him, bought by him at the price of his son, indwelt by him through his spirit and son.

We belong to him now. God and so how esteem does that make us? We aren't ever to give ourselves cheaply to another because we belong to Christ.

And there's good, positive ways that we can glorify God with our bodies in the realm of sex as we give them to what they're for. We'll see much more of that in chapter 7 in the next couple of weeks.

[34 : 07] But as we draw things to our clues, here is one way that certainly glorifies God. Verse 18, with our bodies, flee, flee sexual immorality.

Sex is a very powerful thing. We'll see in the next couple of weeks the right context for it. It's a powerful glue that strengthens a marriage, that celebrates the beauty of God's good design for humanity, that reflects the goodness of our salvation, and so when enjoyed in the right context, your sex life glorifies Christ.

But in the wrong context, it's ruinous. What urges can compare to sexual ones? They even cause our bodies to manifest the longings and preparation for it.

What temptations consume us more than sexual ones? Now it's worth pausing here for a second to say that sexual sin isn't beyond redemption, not at all.

Just look back at verse 11. Paul said, and such were some of you. You sinned sexually, some committed sexual morality, some practiced homosexuality, but you were washed, justified, sanctified.

[35 : 25] Jesus washes away the guilt for those who turn to him with it. And his grace will help us work through the lasting emotional and relational effects. So all the ways we feel here and repented of, we can rest assured that Christ's blood is enough to cleanse them.

But for all who are forgiven of any sin, Paul says now, in the present, flee from sexual immorality. Run away. Don't toy with it.

Paul actually uses that command about two things in 1 Corinthians. He says flee idolatry, which is the act of wrapping our souls around something that can't and mustn't take the place of God.

And he says flee sexual morality, which is sharing our soul with someone with whom we shouldn't. Flee. Now the reality of what fleeing will look like will differ for each of us.

I'm sure we'll all know when we're honest where our intentions lie, whether it's wise for us to stay up late, alone, watching Netflix, how wise it is to be friendly with an attractive colleague, or when it's unwise to spend time alone with someone else, or who we follow on social media, how we use social media, who we communicate with, away from glancing eyes.

[36 : 47] I'm sure when we're all honest we'll know what's wise and what's unwise there. Paul says flee. But isn't it true that faithfulness in small ways helps us to prepare for faithfulness in significant ways.

I wonder how often the first jump into sexual feeling is straight to adultery, straight to a one-night stand. Each time we feel to flee, we're lining up for ourselves for the next time, something more to flee or something harder to flee.

Each time we take hold of all the desires and by the Spirit's power and enabling, each time we flee in small ways by turning off the TV and heading to bed, by deleting apps that are unhelpful, by breaking off a relationship, each step of fleeing like this means we're preparing ourselves to flee when the temptations get bigger and harder.

And each time we do that, we're also testifying to the world that we love the cross and we long for Jesus coming. And nothing in this world, not even the powerful allure of sex is more important to us than that.

And doesn't that exalt and glorify our Lord? Isn't that us glorifying God in our bodies? Let's pray.
[38 : 20] Lord, we knew that many, if not all of us, have sinned or fallen short in this area. And so we do ask you to forgive us. And we ask that you would help us to take hold of all that you've promised and given to us that helps us in this fight.

And grant us grace as a church to cherish marriage and sex as you've given it. And for those of us who have repented of past feelings in this area, give us a warm assurance that we have been washed clean.

And Lord, help us live for the day when you will raise us up by your power. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

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