

Prayers

To God

Ask the Lord to be gracious to you as you do your best in your work today. Ask Him to keep you on the 'straight and narrow', and keep your 'eye' pure.

For myself

Hear me, Lord Jesus, when I cry to You. Sometime I am overwhelmed with the things that are before me, yet I can no more escape them than see behind me! Give me the grace and strength to trust You in all circumstances, especially as I confess to You my sins, and to accept Your forgiveness, Your blessing and help. Change me, Lord Jesus, and make me and the whole of Your church more like You. AMEN

For others

Weekly theme: academia

Pray today for any university you have had any dealings with, or any university close to you. Pray God's blessings on its work, and pray for integrity and honesty within the academic process.

Meditation

Where can you go that is not touched by human hands?
Even the deepest depths of the seas,
the last great planetary unknowns
Are now explored, as new things are regularly found.
Every field of grass bears the touch of human flesh,
And every breeze the molecules of human breath;
Every path across the desert is charted,
every country footpath mapped.
And neither you nor I
can find throughout this awesome world
a place where God has not yet been.

For within creation's ever changing motions,
He it is who holds the beat of nature's heart within His hand
And nurtures it, for us, for life, for the future;
And all the re-creation yet to come;
For when all things have reached an end
Then all is born anew, again, once more,
But without the pain, the agony
And perfected in Love.

Bible Passage

1 Corinthians 6:1-20

¹ When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare take it to court before the ungodly instead of before the saints? ² Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge far less significant cases? ³ Do you not know that we will judge angels? Why not everyday matters! ⁴ Moreover, when you have to make such judgements, why do you set them before people who have nothing to do with the church?

⁵ I say this to shame you. How can it be that there is no wise person among you capable of assessing a dispute between fellow believers, ⁶ so instead, one believer goes to court against another, and this in front of unbelievers? ⁷ The very fact that you take each other to court means that actually, you have already been defeated! Why not rather accept being in the wrong? Why not rather be swindled? ⁸ But instead, you do wrong and you defraud, even other believers!

⁹ Do you not know that the wicked will not take possession of the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor those who practice homosexuality ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

¹¹ Now this is what some of you were: however, you were cleansed, you were made holy, you were put right before God in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

- ¹² You say 'I can do anything!' - but not everything is right.
- You say 'I can do what I want!' - but I will not be dominated by anything.
- ¹³ You say 'Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food!' - but God will destroy both one and the other.

Now the body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body; ¹⁴ and God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are parts belonging to Christ? Shall I then take parts belonging to Christ and make them belong to a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, 'The two will become one flesh.'

¹⁷ But anyone who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. ¹⁸ Avoid sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the one who commits sexual immorality sins against the body. ¹⁹ Or do you not even know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰ You were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

Review

What an amazing passage of Scripture! Paul is certainly not afraid of having an argument with the Corinthians! In the previous chapter, he had to deal with a case of sexual immorality within the life of the church. He mentions the matter again here (6:14-16), but the chapter as a whole deals with a host of difficult issues; grievances, disputes and court cases (6:1-8), general immorality (6:9,10), unspecific issues about food (6:13) and then sexual immorality again. There is much to get our heads around, let alone our hearts!

Wonderful passage no. 1

Yet as so often within Paul's writing, within the barrage of difficult and detailed arguments, he offers us something no less than pearls of wisdom, and these lift our hearts significantly. Here, these are found in verse 11, and in verses 19 and 20. Verse 11 is well known and expresses the glory of righteousness and holiness, '*you were cleansed, you were made holy, you were put right before God ...*'. But the full power of this text comes not through its general encouragement, but when it is appreciated for what it clearly is in this chapter; it is a vigorous call to the faithful to believe the truth about their condition, and stand against the power of the evil one to promote sin. If the believer focusses on the truth of their salvation, then there is no room for the

enemy; God's piercing light evicts the tempter and the temptations. This is a wonderful verse of far more than encouragement; it is a prophetic word by which the believer dismisses the enemy!

Wonderful passage no.2

Further on in the chapter we can find verses 19 and 20, which are perhaps quoted more often; *'do you not even know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit ... and that you are not your own? You were bought with a price ...'*. Again, this sounds like encouragement to the believer to both receive the Holy Spirit and submit to the things of God. But if you read the full paragraph, you will realise that this is in fact a warning to Christians about sexual immorality! For as Paul explains (6:15,16), sex should never be regarded as simply casual because it affects the whole person, mind and spirit as well. Sin and sexual practice that ignores God's guidance (see Leviticus 18) cannot exist within a person alongside the Holy Spirit, and we are brought down to earth by the words that finish the verse; *'therefore glorify God in your body'* (6:20). This is a stern reminder to the Christian to have nothing to do with sexual immorality.

Yet we can still take the powerful phrase in verse 19 and make sure we apply it to our view of ourselves as God's people. Surely, Paul's point here is that the human body is valued by God and we should treat it accordingly. We must not imagine that our bodies are somehow something dirty, to be discarded and of lesser significance in the greater scheme of things; the Holy Spirit chooses to dwell in us so that God's work is done now, and in this world. It is God's choice to do this, and He values us.

Now for the difficult stuff - going to court?

All this is strong stuff, but what are we to do with it? We must look at each issue in this chapter, and take from it the obvious points Paul wishes to make; we cannot just take the 'nice' bits of a chapter (6:11, 19-20) as if they are divorced from the rest. The reality is that sin in the church caused Paul to write to Corinth to put the church right, and we must be grateful that as he did this, he has treated us with some wonderful pearls of wisdom expressing far more than we would otherwise know about our powerful Christian faith.

The first issue Paul deals with is that of church disputes, *'when one of you has a grievance against another'* (6:1). His advice here is hardly different from that of Jesus, who tells the disciples that when two parties disagree they should first try to meet to resolve their differences (Matt 18:15). If this is not possible, witnesses should be found to offer independent evidence of the truth of what is claimed (Matt 18:16), and if this does not resolve things, then the whole church is asked to decide the issue, as advised by those who have deliberated (Matt 18:17). Paul appears to assume that the Corinthians know this Gospel message, and is astonished that believers should take their problems *'to court'* (6:1f.). Where mistrust exists to the extent that God's people go to a secular court to sort out the things of God, the wisdom of God has been ignored and the leadership of the church has failed.

Paul insists here that the church must 'judge' its own disputes (6:1-4), as he said in the previous chapter, *'is it not those who are inside (the church) that you are to judge'* (5:12). So why does he then say what seems to be the opposite; *'do you not know that the saints will judge the world'* (6:2)? Paul's thought may be moving too fast for us here, because he is speaking here of the future, not the present. He envisages a future time when God's Kingdom is established and His rule is complete, and God's people rule the world. This is a time that has not yet come, but the message is absolutely clear; at such a time the 'saints' will indeed judge everything, including angels (6:3)! Paul warns that the accompanying judgement of God is coming on the righteous, and there will be no place for sin (6:5-8).

Cleansing from sin - in general

As we have seen, Paul is worried that people in the church were tolerating sin without dealing with it before God (6:9). He emphasises, *'neither the sexually immoral ... adulterers ... the greedy, drunkards ... will inherit God's Kingdom'* (6:10). As I have pointed out before, some thought that Paul's Gospel told them the 'Law' was cancelled (e.g. see Gal 3:11) so they could now do whatever they wanted! They said, *'I can do anything'* (6:12), but Paul warned, *'not everything is right ... (do) not be dominated by anything!'* (6:12). Verse 12 and 13 are best read like this, not as part of a general sentence of speech, but as like 'bullet points', in which Paul gives examples of what people were saying.

In all this, however, the truth is that the one who believes is a special creation, made 'holy' to God (6:11), and set part for good things. Paul insists that the purveyors of sin have deluded the church; there can be no compromise on sin and it must be outlawed. True holiness has no place for sin, and the one who knows that this is the call of the Gospel will not want to have anything to do with it. From then until now and beyond to

God's future, true cleansing happens only when all sin is confessed and the Gospel teaching of grace is respected and practised by people who know they have been '*cleansed ... made holy ... put right before God ...*' (6:11).

The problem of sex, again

At the end of this penetrating passage, Paul urges his readers to abandon sinful excess, whether in food or sex (6:13), and this leads him to a stunning observation about sex, with significant consequences. It is as if he has been reminded that all he has dealt with earlier in chapter 5 remains a bigger problem, perhaps it was something that had been taken to court by some at Corinth, we cannot know for sure. We do know that Paul now speaks about it again, but this time with a new twist. He urges God's people to recognise the true consequence of sexual excess, because sex is more than just the gratification of pleasure and desires. Quoting Genesis 2:24, '*the two will become one flesh*' (6:16), he argues that sex is the joining together of two people as if in marriage. Devious sexual practice then is an affront to this sacred sacrament and institution. Why then should a Christian man or woman imagine that anything other than harm can come from sex outside of marriage, for example, as Paul quotes, in a union with a prostitute? God wants a pure spiritual union between man and woman.

There are many consequences to all this, and Paul reveals yet more in the coming chapter (7). Here, he is led to say with extraordinary force, '*do you not not even know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit ...?*' (6:19f.). Without doubt, we are being told that unconfessed and ungodly sex forms a barrier between the soul and God, like a knife to the spiritual heart. But Paul appeals to his reader to dismiss such ideas completely, and focus again on the privileges of grace; '*you were brought with a price*' (6:20)! Yes, Christ's sacrifice on the Cross is sufficient grace for the destruction of the power of this dire sin. **Hallelujah!** But the question remains. Will God's people hear this and confess to the Lord the details of their sin, for this is the only way through the mire of sin? The eternal salvation of the soul depends upon this! '*You were brought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body*' (6:20)!

Discipleship

Application

The problems of sin

We are reminded here that sin is a problem, especially sins we think we can live with or handle without too much difficulty! We may not think of handling church disputes as significant for dealing with sin, but Paul knew that unless such things were dealt with according to Christ's way (Matt 18:15-17), a church would be in trouble. Of course, those who break the law of the land face worldly justice; but disputes and sins within the church that remain unchallenged become like a cancer in the church.

A bigger challenge comes when Paul enlarges what he has to say (6:9), and identifies a number of sins that people either don't like to talk about or like to hide, as if a quick confession at church on Sunday will always suffice to put things right. He calls us all to be more serious about our relationship with God; do we mean it when we claim (6:11) that in Christ we have been 'cleansed'?

Sex, within a pure relationship with God

The latter part of this passage is deeply challenging. Not one of us likes to talk about sex, yet it is a fundamentally powerful part of human life. Behind this passage lies the core Biblical principle that the marriage relationship between a man and a woman is like the relationship between Christ and His people, the Church. We are called to remember that the Holy Spirit lives in us, and we are therefore a 'temple', that is, a 'dwelling place' of God. Indeed, all our many parts, including the sexual parts (6:15) have a godly purpose. We can only conclude that sexual love and procreation are massively important to God, and we should live and behave as if this was so.

Ideas for what to do

- Talk with other Christians about the Biblical teaching on sex and personal relationships. Discuss sex before marriage and homosexuality and other topics. Measure your discussions against your interpretation of this passage.

- Pray for people you know who have been badly affected by some difficult issues at church, which has not been handled well.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What does this passage teach us about how to deal with problems in the church today?
2. What is special about the sexual union of a man and a woman? What does the Bible teach us about the purpose of men and women, and the marriage relationship?
3. How can the church best witness to its stance on sexual practice and marriage within a society that largely rejects its advice?

Final Prayer

Heavenly Lord, lead Your people into a true fellowship of faith, one in which those who know their salvation yearn to be a 'body' that live according to Your will. Give them the courage to seek a common mind about sin and evil, and give them the strength to both confess sin and receive God's gracious love. Lead Your people to be more like their Saviour. **AMEN**