

Week 6, 1 Corinthians 6

Hook



Main Point: A believer's identity in Christ must direct his actions.

Group Activity:

Today's lesson will examine the concept of identity. Ask your class members to list some of the titles they hold (these will include marketplace and family titles); record these titles and the accompanying job description on the white board. Next, break the class into small groups and challenge them to write a job description for the position of "Disciple of Jesus Christ." Allow each team several minutes to develop their thoughts and then provide an opportunity for each group to share with the class as a whole.

Do you believe the job description of a "Disciple of Jesus Christ" changes over time? Does it change depending on the culture the disciple lives in? Why or why not?

How does a believer reconcile living in a culture that values "individual truth" with a Savior who demands particular actions?

Without listing specific churches, pastors or denominations, in what ways have you seen churches seemingly forget that they have a job description?

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Book

Main Point: A believer's identity in Christ must direct his actions.

Text Summary: 1 Corinthians 6

First Corinthians 6 reveals the Corinthians severely straying from Christian behavior in two ways. They are acting like unbelievers in the way they settle disputes among the body of believers, and secondly, the way they treat their own physical bodies as it relates to sexuality.

By observing the ways these Corinthian believers relate to others and self, Paul concludes that they have lost their sense of identity. Paul purposefully uses the phrase "do you not know?" *five* different times (vv. 2, 9, 15, 16, 19) to reveal a glaring problem: They obviously *don't know* how their Christian identity should inform their conduct. Amid this obvious Corinthian identity crisis,¹ Paul uses chapter 6 to remind them exactly who they are in Christ and restore them to proper living in the community of faith.

For Paul, matters of justice and sexual ethics in the Church should be far superior to the ways of non-Christians,² yet the Corinthians are regressing back to the systems of the world to settle their issues and guide them in sexual behavior. Like us sometimes, the Corinthians have re-conformed to the patterns of the world regarding justice and sexuality, and their only hope to act correctly is to remember who they truly are.³

1 Corinthians 6: 1–11 [Read]

Sub-point: Believers should be forgiving and willing to suffer in the name of Jesus.

Previously in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul has drawn a line between outsiders and insiders. To build off of this idea, Paul opens chapter 6 with a specific Corinthian situation that further illustrates what outsider behavior looks like in contrast to insider behavior. When small civil disputes arose among believers, their first response was to take one another to "the unrighteous court," a public justice system well known in its day for its favoritism toward the rich and powerful.⁴

Paul harshly chastises the Corinthians for this approach to settling disputes, rightly accusing them of acting like outsiders of the faith who have no other option but human law. While major criminal cases should obviously be brought to the state, Paul's direction here is likely regarding

¹ Um, Stephen T. [2015] *Preaching the Word Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, p. 106.

² *Ibid.*, p. 104.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁴ Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 72.

smaller civil matters (it seems that Paul is addressing disputes concerning property or money)⁵ that could be resolved with maturity and grace.⁶ In verse 5, Paul instructs that instead of going to court, small relational infractions should be resolved “between brothers,” which portrays to the world the Christian ideal of grace covering a multitude of sins.

Paul’s approach to restoring this congregation to proper practice regarding disputes is to point them back to their identity. They have forgotten who they are, and it is showing in their behavior. In this passage, Paul reminds them that they are saints who are washed, justified and sanctified by the Lord, saints who will one day judge the world and even the angels (vv. 1–3, 11). The specifics concerning the angels in verse 3 is left unclear; it is perhaps a reference to fallen angels or an allusion to the presiding of believers with Christ over angelic hosts (Matthew 19:28).⁷ Either way, Paul reminds the believers that they will have a role of judging with Christ in the final Day of Judgment.⁸

Paul lays out a stark contrast: How can those who will eventually judge immortal beings on a cosmic scale not be capable of settling petty, temporary, earthly matters between themselves? How can those who are undeserving be justified in the courtroom of God, and yet take their brothers to human court over silly issues? His irony purposefully stings.⁹

The argument crescendos in verses 7 and 8 and the author brings to light how these lawsuits are harming the cause of Christ; to have these disputes demonstrates an attitude that is not Christlike and demonstrates a spiritual failure.¹⁰ Instead of sullyng the name of Jesus with these disputes, Paul challenges the believers that it would be better for them to endure suffering and being defrauded. But instead of suffering for Christ, becoming victims for the kingdom, these Christians are actively wronging and defrauding other Christians, taking the role of aggressors for their own selfish purposes.

Paul finishes with a list of the characteristics of “the unrighteous,” or in other words, qualities that would reveal a person does not know Christ. His purpose of the list is clear in verse 11—the reminder that “such were some of you.” Using the past tense in this statement, Paul is trying to help them remember these worldly ways of behaving should be in the *past*, not in the *present* lives of these believers. But it seems that, in several areas, the Corinthian believers’ actions looked just like the world’s; their actions looked just like who the believers used to be.

⁵ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2198.

⁶ Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 73.

⁷ Gaebelein, Frank E [1984] *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary Volume 10: Romans through Galatians*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, p. 222.

⁸ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2198.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹⁰ Gaebelein, Frank E [1984] *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary Volume 10: Romans through Galatians*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, p. 222.

But something has changed from those old days—the believers have been washed by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5), sanctified in the Son (1 Corinthians 1:2) and justified before God (Romans 8:33).¹¹ The Corinthians have been declared righteous by God because they have been given Christ’s righteousness. It was time for the Corinthians to begin living up to that declaration.

How does 1 Corinthians 6:5–6 relate to Matthew 18:15–20?

Why does Paul maintain in verse 7 that even having lawsuits at all is a “defeat for you?”

How should a Christian respond when he feels wronged by another Christian? How should a Christian respond when he feels wronged by a nonbeliever?

1 Corinthians 6:12–20 [Read]

Sub-point: The Christian’s body belongs to Christ.

The second section of chapter 6 continues to explore how believers’ actions should reflect their identity in Christ. This time the focus is on sexual purity. Verses 12–20 are summed up succinctly in verse 16b: “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.”¹² Because God owns the believer’s body, it should be used to bring Him glory, not shame through sexually impurity.

It feels as if the reader is eavesdropping on a conversation between Paul and someone else in verses 12 and 13. Some scholars believe that the phrases in quotes are Corinthian slogans, known and used among the readers; some even hold that they originated from teachings of Paul himself.¹³ The apostle is a proponent of Christian freedom from the Law in his letter to the Galatians:

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. —Galatians 5:1

In verse 12, the author does not refute that believers have freedom in Christ; however, Paul tempers the notion that a believer should exercise freedom with two qualifiers: 1) Exercised freedom should help the Church, not hurt it, and 2) The believer should not be mastered by anything. Paul wants the Corinthians to consider the ramifications of their actions in regard to others (how will they affect the Church) and self (will the behavior lead to the believer

¹¹ David K. Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 516.

¹² Taylor, 150

¹³ *ibid* 153

becoming enslaved); Christians, when considering behaviors that are questionable, should employ these two qualifiers.

There are some behaviors that are never borderline concerning their appropriateness; they are always wrong. Such is sexual sin. Verse 13 introduces the Corinthian slogan (this one not originating with Paul but instead reflected in philosophy of the day) *Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food*. This way of thinking equated sex to consumption of food—a simple bodily function having nothing to do with the spiritual.¹⁴ When a stomach hungers for food, the man feeds it without question. So too, according to this way of thinking, when the body desires sex, the man should seek it out. The problem, Paul points out in verses 13 and 14, is that the body is meant for God. The believer's body is filled with the Holy Spirit and one day, the believer's body will be raised just as Christ was raised. The human body is relevant and important to one's spiritual walk today and has a role to play when Christ returns.

Paul continues in verse 15 expressing his amazement with the Corinthians' lack of understanding concerning these basic theological issues.¹⁵ The fact is that Christ has purchased the believer (the whole believer) and it cost Him His life.

An important note on Paul's mention of prostitutes in verse 15: Prostitutes weren't as culturally unacceptable in the ancient world as they are today. They were offered at the end of dinners to the guests, and it wasn't uncommon for a man to end his day this way. Wives were for children, but not so much for sexual pleasure. It was so accepted, that the Corinthian Christians justified their continued practice. Here, more than likely, it was not that "church members were going to prostitutes, but that they were participating in the Corinthian dinner parties where sexual immorality was part of the dining experience."¹⁶ We are members of Christ, so how can we be united with another? The prostitute can be understood not necessarily as an individual, rather a force of evil against Christ, a thief of His Bride.¹⁷ This connects to James 4:4, that friendship with the world is enmity toward God.

Verses 16 and 17 remind the reader that Christians have been joined in union to the Lord; when one commits a sexual sin with a prostitute, he "joins" that prostitute (Genesis 2:24). Paul is not suggesting that the man is married to the prostitute through his sinful choice but, the apostle does want the reader to understand that sex is so much more than physical.¹⁸ The ESV Study Bible expounds:

¹⁴ Taylor 155

¹⁵ Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 86.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Taylor, Mark [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 156.

¹⁸ Gaebelein 225

Because sexual union has a spiritual component, sexual activity outside marriage is a unique sin both against Christ (1 Cor. 6:15) and one's own body (v. 18; see Prov. 6:26, 32).¹⁹

Paul provides a straightforward approach to dealing with sexual sin—run from it. Just as Joseph ran from Potiphar's wife (Genesis 29:12), the Corinthian believer was to flee when confronted with this unique type of temptation. Why? Because sexual sin is different. Nothing else involves all of us, all we are, like sex does.²⁰

As stated by scholars, “the expression ‘All other sins a person commits are outside the body’ is a Corinthian slogan based on their dualistic anthropology, which made the body morally irrelevant.”²¹ Paul wants these Corinthians to see their bodies are temples of God, the very seat of His Spirit. This is foundationally groundbreaking against the platonic, dualistic idea of the culture.

More importantly, the sexual sin of a believer is a corporate body issue, too.²² Paul is saying that the sin of sexual immorality is “either more damaging than other sins or unique in kind, quantitatively different from other sins; that is, it is distinctive and worse than other sins in some way.”²³ This is because Paul's claim and the Christian understanding that our bodies are united to Christ and are temples of His Spirit. The final command in verse 20 is revisiting the call in verse 18 to flee sexual immorality.²⁴

How does Paul's logic in verse 14 prove that God cares about our bodies?

How are the Corinthians supposed to view their “rights” according to verses 12–13 and 19?

How is sexual sin different than other sins? How does the Bible uniquely instruct the believer in fighting sexual sin?

In what ways can a Christian protect himself or herself from falling prey to sexual temptation in today's culture? What safeguards have you placed in your life to protect your purity?

¹⁹ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2199.

²⁰ Um, Stephen T. [2015] *Preaching the Word Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, p. 118.

²¹ Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 86.

²² *Ibid.*, 87.

²³ Taylor, Mark [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 156.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

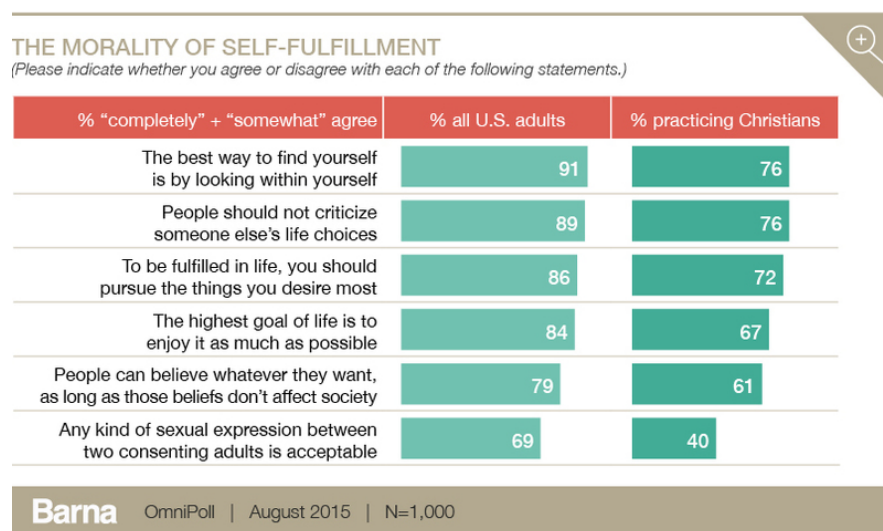
Week 6, 1 Corinthians 6

Took



Main Point: A believer's identity in Christ must direct his actions.

Group Activity: Recall the job description that your class developed for "Disciple of Jesus Christ." A poll completed by the Barna Group provides insight into the fact that many who claim the title of "Christian" might not agree with or adhere to the job description:



How might the Bible refute the beliefs held by the practicing Christians in the poll above?

Why does God expect/require a holiness from His children?

Lesson Conclusion: Paul's purpose in chapter 6 is to reveal a simple idea: your identity determines how you act. The identity of these believers was supposed to be first, a member of Christ, and second, a member of Corinth. However, because they had forgotten their primary identity in Christ, their Corinthian identity became primary yet again as evidenced by their

actions. They were acting according to the ways of Corinth in how they handled disputes, food, drink and sex, all living under the banner of “freedom,” when really they were enslaved to counterfeit identities apart from Christ. Paul’s harsh words in this chapter reveal that these Corinthians have forgotten Christ’s work on their behalf. Their unrighteous conduct reveals their “gospel amnesia,”²⁵ and makes their Christian identity questionable. To lead these believers back to upright behavior, Paul does not force them to learn a new identity altogether. Instead, he helps them relearn who they *already are* in Christ,²⁶ namely, saints who are set apart (v. 1), God’s future community in the next life (vv. 2–3), and God’s present community in the world (v. 4).²⁷ Paul is certain that restored behavior will flow from this restored identity in Christ.

Challenge:

Take counsel from mature believers. It would be easy to gloss over verses 1–11 if we are not in legal dispute with another believer, thinking that it does not apply to us. However, there are many ways we consult the counsel of non-believers as a first resort, even if it’s not about a legal matter. In what ways/areas do you run to the world to resolve issues in your life instead of first seeking the counsel of believers?

Flee sexual immorality. Evaluate your life in regard to purity. Ask the Lord to help you flee from sexual sin. Seek the assistance of trusted, mature believers in your life as you put into place safeguards and accountability measures to help you run from impurity.

Recover your true identity. We all are guilty of doing exactly what these Corinthians did—making our other roles in life our primary identity instead of Christ. When you are out of step with the Gospel, what identity do you usually lean toward for significance? Said another way, where would Paul look into your life and say that your behavior reveals that you have forgotten who you are? Your career? Your role as a parent? Your grades? Your money? Your intellect? Your relationship status? List the things in which you seek identity apart from God; then pray and return to the full and joyful identity that is already purchased for you in Christ.

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²⁵ Um, Stephen T. [2015] *Preaching the Word Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, p. 109.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 104.