

NOTE FROM PASTOR JONATHAN

Hey Life Groups!

We're starting up a **podcast series** that digs deeper into the sermon. Here's an episode with Pastor Brody and Pastor Brett (Austin Heights) talking with Silas about the previous Sunday's sermon (May 18). Find it on your preferred service:

Apple: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/in-house-conversations-episode-1/id1797627605?i=1000709481998>

Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/1eHgvrJmkTvzr8Bzl4bk4H?si=FlhGoW2PSbithulwrPpmEw>

Amazon: <https://www.amazon.ca/Willingdon-Church-Podcast/dp/B0DXX78RLZ>

Also, have you considered investing in the spiritual growth of a younger believer by offering biblical wisdom, encouragement, and support? We're launching Biblical Generational Mentoring, a new discipleship initiative focused on intentional, Christ-centered relationships. We ask that you prayerfully consider if God is calling you to become a mentor and invite you to attend the **Mentorship Program Info. Session** on Saturday, June 7. Register here: <https://willingdon.org/events/mentorship-program-info-session/>

A friendly reminder that our next **Food Drive** is Sunday, June 1! We also have our **Kenya Short Term Mission Team** of 5 women, led by our long term missionary Siang, heading to Kenya in June! They are collecting like-new clothing and shoes for the community that they will be serving in Kenya. Find the info. and specific types of clothing to bring: <https://willingdon.org/events/kenya-stm-clothing-drive/>

1 Corinthians 6:1–11

¹ When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? ² 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? ³ Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! ⁴ So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? ⁵ I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, ⁶ but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? ⁷ To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? ⁸ But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!

⁹ Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ 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.

Let's Warm Up: Questions to break the ice.

1. Do you prefer to deal with conflict head-on, indirectly, or not at all?

Sometimes it's our culture or our personality. Some of us like to say everything out loud, clearly and directly. No dancing around! Others prefer to find or create the most diplomatic way to address the issue at hand. (I try to be in this category.) While others try to avoid the issue and hope it goes away on its own. (When I'm overloaded, I sometimes end up here.)

At another church years ago, deacon board meetings would last hours, often going nowhere. People would be talking around the issue and not dealing with it. I was happy when a guy named David became the chair. He had a way of saying, "It seems to me that we've been talking for a while and getting nowhere..." Then he'd say the problem is this or that, so let's deal with it. *Then* we'd finally get somewhere. To be honest, I was jealous! When I tried to speak up like him, nobody listened to me. I'd end up getting angry, derailing the discussion.

In this week's passage, Paul tells the Corinthians that they're dealing with conflict in a very unhealthy way.

2. How do you behave differently in different environments (e.g., co-workers/customers vs. friends/family)? Why?

A lot of us don't act the same when we're in different environments or with different people. When I talk to my son, I use simple words because he's a toddler. And I'll sing nonsense songs to make things fun. I also ask questions I normally wouldn't ask an adult, like, "Do you wanna' go potty? Did you make a big poop? Want to show mommy?" Asking those questions around the office would probably land me in hot water. Even with adults, I talk differently from person to person. With newcomers and visitors, I don't speak like they're familiar with Willingdon or Christianity. I'll explain things that would otherwise be obvious to someone who's been here for a while. In more formal conversations, I pretend to be articulate and elegant in manner and speech. When I'm casual, I use slang, and my pronunciation takes a sharp decline.

In this week's passage, the Corinthian church isn't acting consistently with how they should follow Jesus.

3. What's something you have strong opinions about but have no expertise in (e.g., food, style)?

Some of us have hot takes on food, like pineapple on pizza, despite not knowing anything about making pizza. Maybe you love a particular sports car, but have never driven over 120 kilometers per hour. Or you're picky about the music you listen to, but don't know anything about instruments or the music production process. The Olympics were a year ago, and, despite most people never watching breakdancing before, a lot of people knew a certain competitor was not good.

Long ago, I watched Project Runway with my brother and his wife. During the judging sessions, I found myself making comments about the finished clothing despite having a terrible fashion sense of my own and only having watched the show for a few days. We'd jokingly say, "That's definitely editorial." Or, "That's not editorial enough."

We just had recent elections. I saw a lot of fervent social media posts propping up or tearing down this candidate or that policy. In the comments, most people had no idea what they were talking about because they couldn't explain their view. It was just trading insults.

In this week's passage, Paul chastises the Corinthian church for bringing disputes to non-Christians who did not know what was right and wrong by God's standards.

Let's Get Started: Questions to start thinking about the main themes.

4. How does focusing on smaller problems cause us to miss higher priorities?

It's easy to focus on superficial issues so much that we don't have the brainpower to consider deeper ones. Have you ever spent so much time setting up your desk to be the perfect environment to work in, only to realize you don't have enough time to work? We have school/work, friends/family, chores/errands, and so on. It's easy to focus so much on those that we ignore bigger needs, like abiding in God through prayer or the Word.

Sometimes we're superficially good, so we assume we're all-around good. Lots of people come every week and participate in church services and programs, so they think they're good. But they're not growing deeper in their relationship with Jesus and other believers. They're not part of the family, and they're not on mission.

When I worked in youth ministry, lots of parents thought that if their kids participated in the church, they'd be good to go. And that the solution to their kids talking back or not focusing at school was just to get them to church. They didn't realize it was a deeper sin issue, and the solution was Jesus.

In this week's passage, the Corinthians were focusing on (relatively) smaller issues when people offended or did wrong to them. They should have seen that the higher priority was to extend Jesus' grace and forgiveness to them.

5. Why is syncretism (the blending of Christian and non-Christian beliefs) dangerous?

It's second nature to adapt non-Christian beliefs into our Christian mindsets. Many of us became Christians after living a non-Christian life for a long time. We're surrounded by non-Christians at work and school. We're bombarded with non-Christian messaging from the TV, social media, movies, books, and more. And our sinful nature is naturally non-Christian.

But it can be dangerous when we try to believe or do things that aren't God's way. And it's extra dangerous when we try to mix it with Christian ideas, because it can be difficult to differentiate the two.

For example, it's good to have solid production value in worship services. It would be distracting if the stage were poorly lit or if the worship leaders sang way off-key. But many churches have shifted the idea of worship into pageantry and entertainment. The world is about flashiness and gimmicks. Sadly, many churches have adopted those strategies (<https://youtu.be/ER-Cik6A1ZQ>). Yes, they draw a ton of eyes. Yes, the production value and artistry are impressive. But people walk away talking more about the flashiness than about Jesus.

The Corinthians tried to blend God's kingdom with the Greco-Roman empire. Instead of dealing with their issues the Christian way, they sought to do it another way.

Let's Dig In: Questions to discuss the passage and how we can respond.

- 6. Pastor Richard quoted his mentor, "Richard, everything you do in this life is preparation to the life to come!" How do our actions now prepare us for our eternal lives?**

We may focus too much on temporary things, forgetting what will last forever. So, what will last forever? For one, our relationship with God will continue past this life. When I spend time praying and reading God's Word (either alone or with others), I'm growing closer to someone I will spend eternity with.

The same goes for other believers. As I love other Christians, I'm practicing what I will do in eternity. Obviously, that serving will be different then, but that loving heart will be the same.

Being godly is also part of eternity (1 Timothy 4:7-8). I want to be more like Jesus and I want to practice and develop that here and now.

- 7. Pastor Richard said, "There's a saying in biblical counselling: 'Whatever rules your heart rules your life.' The Corinthian church had a sick heart, and they would rather *be* right than *do* right." Why is *doing* right better than *being* right?**

In the case of the Corinthians, they wanted to be right. They wanted to go to court to prove that they were in the right and their fellow Christians were wrong. And it is good to *be* right, but sometimes focusing on *being* right causes us to *do* wrong. We'll do whatever it takes to prove that we're right. We'll get angry. We'll raise our voices. We'll use slurs and insults. We'll escalate things out of proportion. We're still right in some areas, but we've become wrong in others. Looking at Jesus' example, He knew He was right and *did* right, too, whether others recognized He was right.

Our higher calling is to love God and love others (Matthew 22:36-40). When we try to fight for truth without love, we lose both (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

- 8. Why are the sins that Paul listed dangerous to allow in the church? How has Jesus forgiven you and helped you turn away from those sins?**

Paul writes that the unrighteous won't inherit the kingdom of God. "Unrighteous" by itself is kind of a vague word, so he lists out several behaviors acceptable to the wider society in his day. I've batched them into themes.

I won't force anyone to share if they're uncomfortable, but sharing how Jesus loved, forgave, and cleansed us is a celebration of His goodness. It sends a message to people stuck in sin that there's hope! And those who are struggling will be encouraged to go to Jesus.

Sexual Immorality

The Greek word for sexual immorality is πόρνος (pornos) and refers to "one who practices sexual immorality" (BDAG). This is kind of a catch-all word and can refer to anyone who has sexual relations outside of marriage. Paul lists a few common examples of sexual immorality in his day.

Adulterers. The Greek word is μοιχός (moykhos), meaning "one who is unfaithful to a spouse, adulterer" (BDAG). Committing adultery breaks the commitment vow made between a husband and wife. It separates

what should be a life-long bond (Mark 10:6-9). A marriage should be a mutually beneficial relationship, so committing adultery destroys trust and harms both parties. Marriage is also a tangible reflection of the relationship between Jesus and Christians (Ephesians 5:22-33). Adulterers show they don't understand how Jesus and people relate. Since sin starts from the heart, even having adulterous thoughts or fantasies is already sin (Matthew 5:27-28).

Men Who Practice Homosexuality. "Men who practice homosexuality" is an interpretation that combines two words. The first Greek word is *μαλακός* (*malakos*), "pert. to being passive in a same-sex relationship, effeminate esp. of catamites, of men and boys who are sodomized by other males in such a relationship" (BDAG). The second is *ἀρσενικοίτης* (*arsenokoytace*), meaning "a male who engages in sexual activity w. a pers. of his own sex" (BDAG). There's a lot of controversy about what those terms mean. In today's culture, many try to defend same-sex relationships (including Christians). They interpret *μαλακός* as simply being effeminate and *ἀρσενικοίτης* as forceful homosexual relations. By their logic, consensual adults can be in same-sex relationships. But marriage/sex has consistently been heterosexual (Genesis 2:24-25), and same-sex relationships have been consistently forbidden (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-27). (Read this article for further explanation: <https://theaquilareport.com/pauls-understanding-of-sexuality/>).

Idolators. People in Paul's day worshipped literal idols. They made statues to represent gods in order to make sacrifices to those deities and honor them. Paul was stirred to preach the Gospel because he saw all the idols everywhere in Athens (Acts 17:16-34). In Ephesus, many turned to Jesus from worshipping Artemis and other gods. People involved in making idols got angry and caused a mob to attack Christians (Acts 19:23-41).

Idolatry is alive and well in many parts of the world. Growing up in the States, I remember seeing idols of Guan Yu in almost every Chinese restaurant (https://chinatownology.com/guan_gong_culture.html). My parents and my wife are from Taiwan. There are 15,000 official temples in Taiwan, which is only a little bigger than Vancouver Island. India is another place where idolatry is everywhere (learn with Morgan Freeman <https://youtu.be/-ZrZTL06tGQ>).

Perhaps the modern equivalent is idolizing people. We even call certain celebrities idols! Think of the show American/Canadian/Pop/etc. Idol. East Asian pop stars are also called idols. We get obsessed with how beautiful they look, how stunning their style is, and how they effortlessly dance and move. It becomes idolatry when we're more interested in pursuing them and being like them than Jesus.

Greedy. A wise man once said, "Greed, for lack of a better word, is good." No, wait, he was a bad guy and a criminal (<https://www.yahoo.com/entertainment/greed-good-oliver-stone-explains-origin-relevance-classic-wall-street-line-30-years-later-233048889.html>). The Greek word Paul uses is *πλεονέκτης* (*plehonektace*), meaning "one who desires to have more than is due, a greedy person" (BDAG). It's not wrong to want more, but it's dangerous when you pursue wealth (and any other pleasurable thing) more than Jesus. Paul calls it idolatrous (Ephesians 5:5) and warns that desiring to be right leads people into temptations and destruction (1 Timothy 6:9-10). Jesus also warns that the deceitfulness of riches prevents Christians from being fruitful (Matthew 13:22).

It's not wrong to have wealth! It may not feel like it, but Canadians are way richer than most of the world (<https://www.worlddeconomics.com/Wealth/Canada.aspx>). It's especially dangerous when social media and TV are filled with flaunted wealth. It tricks us into thinking that lifestyle is attainable, normal, or even healthy. There's even a term for it: "wealth porn" (<https://www.thesun.ie/fabulous/14680174/tiktok-driven-wealth-porn-women-debt/>).

It's wrong when gaining wealth becomes the focus, when we want to use our wealth for our own pleasure instead of serving God's kingdom and loving our neighbors. In fact, being content with what we have is a sign of godliness (Hebrews 13:5-6).

Thieves. The Greek word is κλέπτης (kleptace), where we get the prefix klepto. We all know that swiping something from a store is wrong. The other day, I was at the T&T in Aberdeen and saw lots of blown-up photos of thieves caught on camera. But there may be other ways we take what's not ours, like fudging our taxes (<https://vancouver.sun.com/news/local-news/cra-uncovers-1-3-billion-in-unpaid-taxes-in-b-c-real-estate-sector>).

In my younger days, high-speed internet and nerdy know-how allowed me to illegally download tons of movies, video games, and programs. I justified it by saying that I wasn't hurting anyone. Eventually, I realized I was still stealing. I might have had an argument if it was something I needed, like if I really needed a program but couldn't afford it. But I didn't need to watch those movies or play those video games. (If anything, those distracted me from my real responsibilities.)

Swindlers. Another translation is as people who "cheat people" (NLT). I grew up in Florida, where it's common practice to put a fish logo on your car or business to denote you're Christian (<https://www.theledger.com/story/news/2006/11/19/in-business-is-the-christian-symbol-a-sign-of-faith-or-merely-bait/25826754007/>). It's supposed to show people that they're trustworthy, but over time that symbol got a bad reputation from people using it to build trust but cheat people. Lots of Christians avoided supposedly Christian businesses, and non-Christians got the idea that Christians are cheats.

Drunkards. Mennonites have had a mixed history with alcohol ([https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Alcohol_\(1958\)](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Alcohol_(1958))). I grew up in a denomination that forbade alcohol (<https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/resolution-on-alcohol-7/>).

Paul's concern isn't about alcohol, but drinking too much of it. Paul actually recommended Timothy to drink some wine for his health (1 Timothy 5:23).

In Ephesians 5:18, Paul writes that drunkenness is ἄσωτία (asotia), "reckless abandon, debauchery, dissipation, profligacy" (BDAG). It leads to behavior that's destructive and sinful. He contrasts drunkenness with being filled in the spirit, worshipping God, and giving thanks to Him. I think we can also lump in other legal substances that can cloud judgment, like marijuana use.

We can see this play out. Just last week, a drunk driver killed three children in Toronto (<https://globalnews.ca/news/11185845/3-kids-dead-19-year-old-drunk-driving-toronto/>), two moms left four kids in a car for hours to get drunk at a bar (<https://lawandcrime.com/crime/your-kids-have-been-here-for-hours-moms-left-4-children-in-unlocked-car-with-a-bag-of-weed-while-they-got-drunk-at-a-bar-police-say/>), a guy drunkenly fired his gun outside a sports bar leading to him getting fatally shot (<https://www.12news.com/video/news/crime/drunk-patron-fatally-shot-after-opening-fire-on-peoria-sports-bar-police-say/>), and drunkenly abusive passengers were taken off a flight (<https://youtu.be/Tjqd7CNgnL8>). And that's just in a week!

If we do drink, let's make sure we know our limits.

Revilers. It's also translated as verbally abusive (NET), slanderers (NIV), or are abusive (NLT). Instead of speaking truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), they attack and tear down. We see this all the time, like with Pastor Richard's intro of someone attacking others online, or when someone hurls insults and swears in an argument.

9. What message does it send to non-Christians if churches are permissive about wronging and defrauding?

Defraud in Greek is ἀποστερέω (apostereo), meaning “to cause another to suffer loss by taking away through illicit means, rob, steal, despoil, defraud” (BDAG). One commenter put it well: “It is one thing to be a righteous victim; it is another thing to be a victimizer.” (Garland, *1 Corinthians*). Instead of being patient and overlooking offence, they were causing offence.

This would be the opposite of Jesus’ way. Jesus sacrificed His life to save His enemies (Romans 5:6-10). He was all about serving and giving for the good of others. Judas, who betrayed Jesus, was the one who stole from Jesus and the disciples (John 12:4-6). And Jesus calls us His followers to also deny ourselves to serve others. Could you imagine if Jesus had scammed people?

Tragically, so many non-believers have the impression that churches are places of scamming and wronging.

Churches can be notorious for multi-level marketing recruitment

(<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/multilevel-marketing-christians/>). Fraud is pretty rampant in churches across North America

(<https://www.forbes.com/sites/walterpavlo/2013/11/18/fraud-thriving-in-u-s-churches-but-you-wouldnt-know-it/>). And in my first year at Willingdon, Pastor Angus kept emailing me and others to send him Apple gift cards! Kidding, it was a scammer emailing the church posing as him. Or at least that’s what he said ...

And lots of people get hurt in churches, which is a sad reality because we’re all sinners this side of eternity. But what’s worse is when those perpetrating the harm aren’t called out. There have been countless incidents where known abusers get a pass (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/faqs-sexual-abuse-southern-baptist/>). That sends the message that God sides with people doing harm while ignoring those being hurt.

10. Pastor Richard said, “If you don’t decide to be a forgiving person up front, you’ll never forgive because no one ever truly FEELS like forgiving. We feel like getting even. But, because as Christians we have experienced God’s forgiveness and love, we have the basis and the motive to forgive others...even if it means allowing ourselves to be wronged.”

How can meditating on Jesus’ forgiveness help us to forgive others and allow ourselves to be wronged?

We have to prepare to have a forgiving mindset beforehand. There’s the expression, “You don’t build a storm shelter during a tornado.” Our instinctual reflexes aren’t FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE, FORGIVE. So, we have to decide to be forgiving up front. And we don’t do that by flipping a switch. We have to meditate on Jesus’ forgiveness.

Read about Jesus’ parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:23-35. Something that helps is remembering just how much Jesus has forgiven us. He had every right to exact revenge or punish us for all of our sins, but He instead forgave us. Paul called himself the chief of sinners, who was called as a demonstration of Jesus’ mercy (1 Timothy 1:15-16). I have to remind myself that God forgave me so that I could be an example of His forgiveness. And that involves me forgiving others, too.