

NOTE FROM PASTOR JONATHAN

1 Corinthians 6:12–20

¹² “All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. ¹³ “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. ¹⁴ And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. ¹⁵ 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! ¹⁶ Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷ But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. ¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

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

1. What's your favorite way to use something for a purpose it wasn't originally made for?

This term “hack” was originally used when people modified computers to do things they weren't designed for, often expanding their capabilities (<https://cacm.acm.org/opinion/when-hackers-were-heroes/>). But the term has branched out. There are IKEA hacks (<https://ikeahackers.net>), where people repurpose and modify IKEA furniture in creative ways. Did you know people use their dishwashers to cook food (<https://goodfoods.coop/cook-your-dinner-in-the-dishwasher/>)? Now that finances are tight and people want to reduce waste, upcycling (repurposing things that would be considered unwanted) is growing (<https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/home/craft-ideas/how-to/g139/genius-upcycling-ideas/>).

I used to have a laptop that would overheat all the time. I sprayed compressed air by holding the canister upside down to cool it. Probably not the smartest thing, but it worked.

In this week's passage, the Corinthians are using their bodies in ways God didn't make them for.

2. What's something normal or acceptable for most people, but something you avoid?

Some of us have allergies, so we stay away from peanuts or pets. Others have sensitivities to light or sound, so they avoid movie theaters, concerts, or anything bright and loud. Maybe you're an introvert. While your friends love being at parties and gatherings, you look for every opportunity to avoid the crowd and be alone.

I used to have asthma, so I had to avoid people who wore heavy perfumes/colognes and cigarette smoke. If I didn't, my throat would constrict and I'd struggle to breathe.

In this week's passage, Paul tells the Corinthians to stay far away from sexual immorality, even though it was normal for their neighbors.

3. What's something obvious to other people that took you a long time to realize?

Many people don't realize the hidden arrow in the FedEx logo (<https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/hidden-designs-famous-logos>) or that the arrow in the Amazon logo looks like a smile and points from A to Z (<https://www.designhill.com/design-blog/amazon-logo-decoding-the-hidden-meaning-evolution-and-history/>).

Perhaps you learned some common Christian beliefs were wrong, like the three kings being at Jesus' birth (they were magi, we don't know how many, and likely arrived after his birth) or the devil ruling hell (the devil will be punished there, Revelation 20:10).

Did you know a pony isn't a baby horse? I sure didn't. Did you know that there's an arrow next to your gas gauge that tells you which side to fill your gas tank? There's just so much out there!

In this week's passage, Paul reminds the Corinthian church of obvious truths about their bodies that they missed.

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

4. What are some signs that the enjoyment of something good has become harmful?

Something I'm grateful for is that God provided pleasures! He could have made food simply a vehicle to meet nutritional needs. We could be eating protein pellets and taking fluids via IV. In His graciousness, He made a seemingly endless variety of flavors and textures that we can enjoy. And we can thank Him for that. One of the best things about living in the Vancouver Metro is finding cuisine from across the globe.

But the gift of food can also be harmful. For example, it's hard not to eat too much! Many of you know what I'm talking about. Too much salt or sugar can wreak havoc on our bloods sugar or pressure. Food becomes an idol when we care more about food than people, like if we get upset that our spouse overcooked the steak. I remember trying to get groups to go out for a meal, and there would often be someone who just wanted to eat what they wanted to eat and didn't care about the rest of the group. (No, it wasn't a dietary restriction. Just being picky.)

There are plenty of great hobbies we can pursue, like reading, art, music, sports, and more. But they can become harmful when we spend too much money on them. Or we neglect our time with God and our family/friends.

5. Pastor Ray said, "We live in an age of what's called 'expressive individualism'. Each person seeks to give expression to their inner life, rather than identifying with a human community, much less submitting to God's design.

Authenticity to one's inner feelings rules the day."

Why is it dangerous to focus on our individual desires and feelings?

Here are some suggestions.

Blind spots. When we're focusing so hard on what we're thinking and feeling, we'll have blind spots. We can think what we're doing is right or the best for us, but we don't see the problems with our thinking.

Not Rooted. You humans always think you're so smart. Er ... us humans. We think we've figured things out better than our parents/teachers/others. We think we're so unique that others' wisdom doesn't apply to us. But we have a very limited perspective. But if we rely on whatever we're thinking at the moment, how can we know we're right? How many of us in our 20s look back and realize how immature we were in our teens? The same goes for people in

their 30s looking back at their 20s, and so on. I bet some octogenarians look back and think, “Oh, I was so immature in my 70s.”

God’s Word and a healthy church provide rooted, time-tested wisdom and guidance. God created the universe, so He has insight that no human have. Older members of the church have experienced following God’s wisdom (or disobeying God’s wisdom).

Selfish. People are naturally selfish. We want what we want. Every manmade problem on earth (crime, war, excessive consumption, poverty, etc.) is because of selfish behavior (James 4:1-3). If the whole world thought of the human community or God’s design, we wouldn’t be in so many messes.

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

6. What are the benefits of understanding God’s plans for our bodies? What are the hazards of getting it wrong?

As Pastor Ray pointed out, Paul asks the Corinthians, “Don’t you know ...?” three times in this passage (v. 15, 16, 19). They were living wrong because they didn’t remember or live our God’s plan for them.

Take some time to consider how God blesses us and how we can be a blessing to others when we use our bodies for God’s plan. Also consider what happens when we use our bodies for the wrong goals.

7. How does uniting with others in sin (e.g., sexual sin) affect our unity with Jesus?

Our sin separates us from God. Believing in Jesus allows us to be reconciled to Him (Romans 5:10). We become God’s children (John 1:12-13). We can spend time with Him (John 15:1-15). We can abide in God’s love (1 John 4:16). When we commit sins with others, it prevents us from experiencing unity with Jesus.

Cheating on Jesus. Intimate sexual union is used as a metaphor for the union between Jesus and the church (Ephesians 5:31-32). It’s not that the relationship between Jesus and the church is sexual, but that it’s so intimate and should be exclusive. In the Bible, God often uses the illustration of a cheating wife to give a concrete illustration of what happens when His people worship other gods. When we’re in a sexual relationship outside of God’s plan, we’re being united with someone outside of God’s plan.

Split Allegiance. When we follow Jesus, we become part of Jesus’ body. That’s the illustration Paul uses when he writes about each person having a function in the church (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12). Our bodies are part of Jesus’ body and used for Jesus. If we engage in sexual sin, we’re uniting part of Jesus’ body to our illicit sexual partner.

Corrupting Spread. It’s like gangrene, dead tissue that spreads to the rest of the body. Don’t Google pictures because it’s gross! When we engage in sinful actions, it can encourage others to do the same. Jesus has some harsh words for people who cause His followers to stumble (Mark 9:42).

8. Why should we “flee” from sexual sin?

Paul doesn’t just say avoid or ignore sexual sin. He says to flee. Run! In the Greek, the verb is “present active imperative”. It’s something that we continually do. We don’t flee from sexual sin once. Temptations rise and fall with

our hormones, what we see around us, and how we respond to stress. That means we must keep avoiding it and running away whenever it pops up.

It's a Contradiction. Jesus frees us from sin. If we go back to indulge in sin, we're going back into slavery (2 Peter 2:19). Why would we want that?

Dangerous. God doesn't call things sin because He's boring. Sins are dangerous. Here are some consequences of sexual sin:

- **Sexually transmitted illnesses.** Chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis are the big three bacterial STIs here in Canada. Syphilis is on the rise (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/syphilis-canada-skyrocketing-1.7123968>).
- **Emotional trauma/pain.** Sex leads to emotional and physical bonds (e.g., oxytocin (<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/22618-oxytocin>)). When those bonds are broken, we experience emotional pain. Having sexual partners outside of a committed, monogamous relationship with another Christian also increases the chances of trauma and hurt. Too many people are hurt because they thought they were looking for a relationship, but were used as an object to sexually satisfy the other person.
- **Self-image/identity problems.** Society says, "My worth is based on how sexually desirable I am. If people don't find me desirable, I'm worth less than someone who is desirable." This leads to tons of depression, eating disorders, body dysmorphia, and other self-damaging issues.
- **Wrong goals.** "The goal of a relationship is sexual fulfillment." "The more sexual partners, the better." Instead of sex being the means to an end (e.g., to make babies or to bond with a spouse), it becomes an end.
- **Devaluing other humans made in God's image.** Instead of seeing someone as a holistic being, we only care about their sexuality. How many of us guys have eyes that naturally drift to certain places when we see something that draws our attention? Seeing people as purely sexual objects leads to terrible things like sexual trafficking (<https://ally.org/human-trafficking-in-canada/>).

It's Normal. Tyrannosaurus rex was a fearsome dinosaur. If it wanted to eat you, you'd be in grave danger! But nobody needs to tell us to avoid them because they're all extinct. Instead, here in BC in 2025, we avoid flash floods, black bears, and wildfires because those are normal.

In Corinth, prostitutes were the norm for Greco-Roman society. Roman philosopher Cicero, who lived 100 years before Paul's letter, believed that guys who didn't use prostitutes were strict.

"But if there be any one who thinks that youth is to be wholly interdicted from amours with courtesans, he certainly is very strict indeed. ... he is at variance not only with the licence of the present age, but even with the habits of our ancestors ... For when was the time that men were not used to act in this manner? When was such conduct found fault with? When was it not permitted? When, in short, was the time when that which is lawful was not lawful?" (For Marcus Caelius., 20.48)

Prostitutes were the norm for his era, going way back in time. It's always been the norm!

Plutarch, who was young when Paul wrote this letter, stated that wives shouldn't be angry when husbands party with other women. They should be happy that he respects her by not treating her like he treats those women! Maybe Pastor Isaac should include this in our marriage prep course (<https://willingdon.org/marriage/prep-course>) under "What Not to Do".

"The lawful wives of the Persian kings sit beside them at dinner ... But when the kings wish to be merry and get drunk, they send their wives away, and send for their music-girls and concubines. Insofar *they are right in what*

they do, because they do not concede any share in their licentiousness and debauchery to their wedded wives. If therefore a man in private life, who is incontinent and dissolute in regard to his pleasures, commit some peccadillo with a paramour or a maidservant, his wedded wife ought not to be indignant or angry, but she should reason that it is respect for her which leads him to share his debauchery, licentiousness, and wantonness with another woman.” (Moralia, 140B)

It’s like a zombie movie. One or two zombies aren’t that dangerous. But if we aren’t careful, we’ll be quickly surrounded. If we don’t actively flee from these sins, we’ll find ourselves seemingly trapped.

Sexual sins are so common now. Prostitution is pretty abundant the Vancouver Metro (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/sex-worker-survey-bc-1.6807534>). Having multiple sexual partners is common (<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-003-x/2020009/article/00001/tbl/tbl01-eng.htm>). When I was a teen, I had to work hard to see pornography. Nowadays, I need to work hard to avoid it.

Slippery Slope. Every year, people cross safety railings and fall to their deaths at canyons (<https://www.sfgate.com/california-parks/article/tourists-die-falling-viewpoint-bryce-canyon-20303366.php>). It always starts out promising. They see an amazing view. They want to get a closer look, but the barrier prevents them. They think they’re safe because they can see the edge, so they cross the safety fence/rope/railing. They get too close and tragically die.

It’s like that with sin. In 2002, Ashley Madison began (<https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/article/2024/may/14/ashley-madison-netflix-documentary>). Its slogan: “Life is short. Have an affair.” The CEO said it was a healthy way to help marriages, because partners (usually husbands) could get their fix. In 2015, hackers released the data of 30 million users. Many well-known Christian leaders and pastors were exposed. Initial statistics indicated over 400 church leaders resigned (<https://calvinchimes.org/2015/09/11/christian-leaders-found-on-ashley-madison/>). A seminary professor even committed suicide.

I don’t think any of them thought, “Hey, I want to cheat on my wife and get caught in a gigantic scandal!” It started with fantasies that went unchecked. Then, they saw an advertisement for Ashley Madison. Then, they went to the website and saw that it was something they wanted. Then, they created an account using their email address and added their credit card. They crossed the safety barrier and didn’t realize they were sliding down a slippery slope to disaster. Once you’re sliding, it can be hard to stop before there’s real damage.

When I was in high school, there was a girl I liked. I invited her to church so we could sneak off to be together. We didn’t have sex, but still crossed some boundaries. I was so blinded by lust. In retrospect, I can see what a terrible witness I was. I should have invited her to church to meet Jesus, but instead used church to pursue my sinful lust. If anything, I was turning her away from Jesus.

9. **Pastor Ray said, “True Christian freedom is not just freedom *from* something, but for it to be meaningful, it must be freedom *for* something. A disciple of Jesus lives *for* Jesus in every area of their lives. A disciple of Jesus lives for Jesus, in every area of life and in all of one’s life, body and soul. A disciple’s freedom is for God’s glory and the benefit of others.”**

How does our concept of freedom differ from the world’s?

Freedom is the ability to do what you want, whether you're a Christian or not. Achieve or experience what matters to you. (Check out this video of people around the world sharing what they think freedom means: <https://youtu.be/mehs-RxArM8>. Heads up, there's one brief swear.)

The real difference is in defining what matters. For the world, individuals define what matters. Freedom is the ability to be in a relationship with or pursue whomever they want. Others want financial freedom, to spend money on things (homes, luxury goods, status symbols) or experiences (travel, concerts, restaurants) that make them happy. Some think freedom is being able to push your will onto others so you're free to do what you want.

For Christians, what matters is God and what God wants. We're free *from* sin and doing what goes against God and what He wants. We're free *to* do things for God and what God wants. Take a look at these examples and think about how we can use our freedoms for God.

Romans 6:20–22 – For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been *set free* from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

1 Corinthians 9:19–23 – For though I am *free* from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

Galatians 5:13 – For you were called to *freedom*, brothers. Only do not use your *freedom* as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

1 Peter 2:16 – Live as *people who are free*, not using your *freedom* as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.

10. How can you pursue healing and restoration from sexual sin?

OR

How can you help others pursue healing and restoration from sexual sin?

Acknowledge. Call a spade a spade. It is what it is. Don't mince words. I know we want to use euphemisms (like Plutarch calling it a pecadillo in Q8) or we're too ashamed to speak about it. But it is what it is. You have to diagnose the problem before you can find the cure. Don't worry, God knows.

If you're helping someone in the midst of these issues, be sensitive. If you have an established relationship, consider asking them about it. What is their understanding of it and how does it compare with their understanding of what God desires?

Pray. God knows what you've done. He knows every lustful thought in your heart. But He still sent Jesus to die on the cross for you (Romans 5:6-9). Sexual sin isn't beyond His forgiveness. Confess what you've done to Him and seek forgiveness (1 John 1:9). Ask Him to help you change. He's there for you.

If you're helping someone, pray for them. Pray that God would convict their hearts and soften them. Pray that God would release them from sexual sins.

Find Support. Talk to others in your prayer group so they can pray for you, encourage you, and help you be accountable. Don't do it alone.

If you're helping, don't judge them. Offer prayer, encouragement, and support. Ask them what help they need.

Use Resources. For some of us, we're using our bodies for our own sexual gratification. Adultery, pornography, and more. It's not easy, but we need to repent and take measures to find healing and hope. Consider signing up for one of our many programs to help people find hope from sexual sin (<https://willingdon.org/support-groups>).