

# The Highway of Christian Freedom

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[0:00] The sermon text for today is 1 Corinthians 10.23-11.1. At the conclusion of the reading, we'll declare, "This is the word of the Lord, and the church, in joyful response to his revelation given to us, will together say, Thanks be to God."

All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.

Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. For the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof. If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner, and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience.

But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience. I do not mean your conscience, but his.

For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks? So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

[1:20] Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Heavenly Father, we come before you one more time, Lord.

Lord, needy, needing to hear from you. So, Father, as Rob just prayed, God, I pray that everything that is spoken from my lips, Lord, would be a word from you and not for me.

Lord, get Mike Lusa out of the way right now, Lord. We want to attend to your word and what you have to say to this people right here today. So, Spirit, we trust that you will do that, and we ask, Lord, that you would transform us into the likeness of Christ this morning.

In his name we pray. Amen. Well, good morning, Shoreline. Let's try that one more time here. Everyone's feeling a little sleepy.

[2:44] Good morning, Shoreline. And again, I want to say happy Mother's Day. And just so glad that you're here this morning. My name is Mike, one of the pastors here. And I want to say, as we get started here, that just because you can do something doesn't mean that you should, right?

Now, this is a lesson that we're seeking to instill in our children right now. Yes, you can skip rocks at Ocean Beach, but when your brother's head is between you and the water, then you probably shouldn't do it, right?

Now, this rides against, and we see this in our own children and in ourselves, this rides against our selfish nature that says, "I want to do what I want to do when I want to do it."

So if my brother's head is in the way, that's too bad for him, you know? Now, it doesn't just ride against our selfishness, but also, in light of the country that we live in, against our personal freedom and autonomy that we cherish as Americans.

And yet, if we're honest, we realize that absolute freedom, that complete personal autonomy, it actually makes us a danger to ourselves and to society.

[4:02] Now, freedom, it must have constraints if it is to be true freedom, right? This is seen in so many different scenarios. But sports, sports don't work without rules, right?

There's no freedom to play pickleball if people are chucking the ball at each other. That turns into dodgeball, which is another game and also very fun. But dodgeball has its own rules, too. Sports don't work without rules.

Driving would become a nightmare if people just drove however they wanted. You see, there are higher principles. There is a more noble ethic than simply pure freedom.

And that's what I think today's passage is about in 1 Corinthians 10. So, if you haven't turned there in your Bibles, please turn to 1 Corinthians 10, 23-11, verse 1.

And if you don't have a Bible, we have Bibles on the back table. Feel free to keep one as a gift to you. We are walking through this year the book of 1 Corinthians, considering the church's call to display Christ in all things.

[5:09] And the title of the sermon today is The Highway of Christian Freedom. The Highway of Christian Freedom. And we're going to unpack what that means.

As we've seen the last few weeks, if you've been with us, the Corinthians were wrestling with how to engage with their secular culture's habits and customs as it relates to the topic of food offered to idols.

Food that had previously been offered up and sacrificed to the gods. How do we relate to that?

Now, Paul has spent, he spends three full chapters addressing this topic.

Like I said, from chapter 8, verse 1, all the way to 11, verse 1. And so, today we're in the fourth and final section of his response. And so, as Paul lands the plane today, we're going to see, he provides some concluding application points.

He provides some summary principles, all having to do with the nature of Christian freedom. And as it relates for the Corinthians, to food offered to idols.

[6:12] And then he expands out to all of life. And so, we begin here in the first two verses with freedom clarified. Freedom clarified.

Look at your Bibles, verse 23 of chapter 10. Paul says, all things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up.

Now, if you're experiencing a *deja vu* moment, you're not alone, I hope, because we've already heard Paul quote this Corinthian catchphrase, all things are lawful before. That was back in chapter 6.

In chapter 6, if you remember, Paul was addressing sexual immorality within the church, and his argument showed how the Corinthians were using this slogan, this all things are lawful slogan, to justify what was clearly sin, what was clearly incompatible with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But we see in today, so now we're in chapter 10, there's another issue he's addressing here. The Corinthians were apparently also using this phrase, all things are lawful, in their justification for eating food offered to idols.

[7:22] Now, I want you to notice, Paul doesn't reject their slogan, right? He didn't reject it in chapter 6. He actually agrees with the principle of Christian freedom.

And I want to say, just read the book of, the whole book of Galatians, in a large part, is about the freedom that Christians have from the Mosaic law, from all the rules and the regulations, because of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, Christians are no longer bound to the Mosaic law.

Christians are free from it. The myriad of civil and ceremonial requirements, whether about eating and drinking or about purification rites, are no longer binding on Christians.

That's why Paul says in Galatians 6.1, for freedom, Christ has set us free. He doesn't want the Galatians, the Galatians, he doesn't want the Galatians to go back to being under the burden of the law.

He's saying, for freedom, Christ has set us free, and therefore, all things are lawful. So the first thing we see, Christians are free in Christ. Paul doesn't reject the slogan, but just as he did in chapter 6, Paul shows how the criterion, is it lawful, is not enough.

[8:39] Remember, just because you can do something, doesn't mean that you should. Just because the Bible allows something, doesn't make it wise in every particular instance.

See, there's more to consider. What is the more? What's the more that we ought to consider? That's what Paul is bringing to view here. The more is what is helpful, right?

What is beneficial. And specifically, in that second phrase, he says, but not all things build up. The more is what builds up. What encourages, what edifies others.

You see, as Paul is wrapping up his discussion here on food offered to idols, he is returning us to the principle of love. This is what he started with.

In chapter 8, verse 1, he had said, knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Christians are free in Christ, yes, but freedom must be governed by, must be mastered by, tempered by, love.

[9:45] See, love is the higher and more noble ethic than simply freedom. And so, Paul moves then into an imperative. Look at verse 24. Paul says, let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.

Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. See, in all of our living among others, before others, we should, of course, know that we're in line with scripture, right?

We should, of course, know that what we're doing doesn't violate God's moral will, that it's lawful, that therefore, we have the freedom, we have the right to do it.

That's the first criterion. But the second criterion is whether our speech or our actions are for the good of others rather than self.

Now, in reality, these two criteria are really one. Paul says in Romans 13, owe no one anything except to love each other.

[10:48] For the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

Paul's simply expounding on what we see Jesus teaching in his earthly ministry, right? That love for God and love for neighbor is the fulfillment of the whole law. That is the spirit of the law.

It's love. And so, we can't separate doing the will of God from love because love is actually the expression. It's the outworking of God's will. Obedience to the Lord, obedience to his commands is, as Paul says in Galatians 5, faith working through or faith expressing itself through love.

True Christian freedom. It knows my rights in the gospel, but it's always mastered and governed by the higher criterion of Christ-like love for others.

You know, it's kind of like driving a car. There is a beautiful freedom in being able to drive, isn't there? The modern American road trip would not exist apart from cars.

[11:58] As the earlier, I alluded to the need to abide by the rules of the road, right? If people weren't doing that, it'd be nuts out there. It already is nuts out there. But even more basically than that, a car just simply needs to stick to the roads and the highways, right?

Or else that road trip of American freedom quickly becomes I'm stuck in a ditch waiting for AAA to come and rescue me. There's no freedom in the ditch, right? There's freedom on the highway.

You know, going 70 miles an hour through Texas because the speed limit's higher out there.

Actually, I think it's even higher. There's freedom on the highway. So absolute freedom to use the car however you want is not truly freedom to drive unless you have a Jeep and it's designed for off-roading, you know, and then there's freedom.

But it's actually a terror and a danger if you just use your vehicle however you want. True freedom has constraints. That's what I'm trying to get across here. You know, if you've been looking at some of the local news, as it has many times before, this isn't new, our government is currently wrestling with the constitutional right to free speech.

Rather, what exactly is protected by that right? Now, whatever the government declares, whatever the government decides for American citizens, church, a Christian's freedom of speech ought always be governed by the principle of love.

[13:26] Paul expresses it like this. Here's a verse that you should memorize. Ephesians 4, 29. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up as fits the occasion that it may give grace to those who hear.

That is speech that is truly free. Speech that's no longer captive to my sin nature, right? To my selfishness. It's speech that comes from a heart that has died with Christ.

The self has died with Christ. The heart has been resurrected with him. And the speech flows from that heart. A heart that's captivated by Christ in the gospel of love.

So don't wait for the government's clarification on free speech, okay? Let your free speech, whether it's in the home or in the workplace or on social media or at your or your kids' sports games, let your

speech always be mastered and governed by Christ-like love for others.

That's freedom clarified. Then Paul moves to apply this principle to two more specific situations involving food offered to idols.

[14:40] So here we see verses 25 through 30, freedom applied. And the two situations we're going to see are the meat market, that's situation one, and the home of an unbeliever.

Now before we read, remember from last week that Paul expressly condemned eating food in idol temples. In verse 20 of chapter 10, Paul had said that what pagans sacrifice, they offer to demons and not to God.

I do not want you to be participants with demons. So we talked last week about how the leftover meat from animal sacrifices in pagan temples, it would be consumed by priests, or it would be served at meals that were held within the temple precincts, social gatherings, or it would be packaged up and then taken down the street to the meat market.

And so the question that Paul is answering here now is can Christians eat meat sold in the meat market or meat that's then taken home into the home of an unbeliever where a believer is invited to share a meal when that meat was potentially offered up in sacrifice to the pagan gods the day before.

Now what's Paul's answer? It's the same in both situations. Look at verse 25. Paul says, eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience.

[16:12] In verse 27, if one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience.

Last week, Paul demonstrated a rigid firmness in his stance about eating in idol temples, right? If he had demonstrated firmness there, here he's demonstrating flexibility.

In the temple, Paul argued, they were participating in the evil systems of this world. However, in the meat market, in the home of an unbeliever, they have freedom, he's saying.

They have freedom to buy and eat. So they don't need to go probing into the origins of the meat, like, y'all, where'd you get that meat from? You know, it looks like it might have been off. No, like, they don't need to do that even though they know that it possibly came from the temple of Apollo down the road.

They don't need to fuss about it. They don't need to be overly paranoid about it or overly cautious. Paul's saying your conscience, it can remain clean. Like, you can be at rest in your conscience.

[17:23] You know, it's kind of like, as someone pointed out at community group, it's kind of like hot dogs. You know, like, don't ask where it came from, just stick that savory meat on the bun, you know, garnish it up a little bit and eat it.

I'm not saying you need to eat hot dogs, okay, I just want to throw that out there. But why is this Paul's instruction? Like, when he was so clear about eating in temples being sin, like, why is he so relaxed now when that same food has traveled down the road into the meat market or into the home of an unbeliever?

His reasoning comes right in the middle of those two situations. Verse 26, Paul says, Paul's quoting from Psalm 24, verse 1.

And some, there's not evidence that's conclusive, but something that in Jewish homes of that day, they'd actually use Psalm 24 as a blessing to the Lord over meals.

We're not sure. But Psalm 24, it affirms the fact, this verse affirms the fact that there is one, one sovereign creator God. If you recall in chapter 8, actually, Paul had talked about there being one God, the Father, right?

[18:45] And one Lord Jesus Christ. There is one sovereign creator God from whom are all things. That's what Paul is saying here. Food and drink are from his gracious hand, not from the hand of any so-called God of the pagans, right?

So, so the Corinthians can therefore receive this food. If you look at verse 30, they can partake, they can receive and partake with thankfulness to the Lord.

There is no inherent demonization of the food itself, even it has been sacrificed to demons, writes one commentator. Okay, so, so Paul affirms here the Corinthians' freedom if there's no known

connection of the food with idols.

Okay, no known connection of the food with idols. They have the freedom to eat and to give thanks. But then he doesn't leave things there, does he? He doesn't leave things there.

Then he gives this caveat in verse 28. But, he says, if someone says to you, this has been offered in sacrifice, then do not eat it.

[19:51] For the sake of the one who informed you and for the sake of conscience, I do not mean your conscience, but his. Okay, so, in verses 25 through 27, Paul affirmed the Corinthians' freedom to eat with thankfulness.

Again, so long as there is no known connection of the food with an idol. Now, in verses 28 to 29, he is exhorting the Corinthians to be willing to and to actually set aside that freedom, to set it aside for the sake of the informer.

All right, now, who is this informer? This informer is most likely an unbeliever, probably the host of the home that the believer was invited into or maybe a member of the host's family who for some reason, we can speculate, but for some reason they decide to inform the believer that that food came from the temple.

So, for the Christian to now choose to eat that meat when the informer associates that meat with that God's existence and therefore that God's power, it's for the Christian to affirm and then to participate in the pagan faith of their host.

And so, Paul says, don't eat the meat. Don't eat it. Now, it's possible the informer could also be another Christian, maybe a weaker brother that Paul talked about all throughout chapter 8.

[21:13] So, then for the Christian to eat the meat after being informed is to lead that weaker brother astray, right, showing that weaker brother it's okay to participate in the pagan religious practices of our city.

Paul is applying here the principle of freedom governed by love. Right? Because he is first. He's upholding the Christian's freedom to eat the meat.

And this is why Paul goes on to say, he says, for why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? I think that's actually referring back up to the whole argument of 25 to 27.

Why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks? He said, a Christian's freedom is not defined.

It's not determined by someone else's conscience. A freedom of a Christian is defined by God and his word. But Paul is saying that Christians ought to let the exercise of that freedom be governed by the higher ethic of love.

[22:20] In other words, to use the language of chapter 9, they ought to be ready and willing to set aside to not make use of their rights in the gospel in order to build up those around them.

Now these principles of Christian freedom are so instructive for us today. Perhaps you're here and you're a Christian who tends towards excessive caution.

Okay, you have a right concern for obeying the Lord. That's good. But perhaps your sense of Christian freedom is being hampered by an overemphasis on do's and don'ts, on conformance to a set of rules.

And perhaps if that's you, you need to be reminded today that Jesus Christ has perfectly fulfilled the law in its entirety. You're standing before God. It's not based on your performance or your merit, but His.

You are free, therefore. You are free in Christ. We were just singing about that freedom. Those who God declares to be free are free indeed. Now it is true.

[23:28] Okay, it's true that we're in a spiritual war every day. It is true that sin can blind us. That was last week's message. But it's also true that the outcome of that war has been decisively determined by Christ's death and resurrection.

Therefore, you can live in the freedom of knowing you belong to Christ eternally. You can breathe again. You can breathe. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.

So receive it with joy and thanks. Now, on the other end of the spectrum, because not everybody is that person that tends towards caution. On the other end of the spectrum, perhaps you're a

Christian who tends not towards caution but towards carelessness.

Like, I can use the car however I want. What I mean is, like a good American citizen, you cling to your rights in the gospel and you exercise those rights passionately but perhaps without consideration for how it affects other believers or perhaps ignorant of the witness that you are presenting to the unbelievers around you.

Now, if that's you, perhaps you need to remember that your calling in the gospel is not first an exercise of freedom but first an exercise of love.

[24:51] Now, it's freedom governed by love. Love ought to be the master. Love ought to be the governor of everything that you think and say and do. Okay, but what are some food offered to idols situations that we face today?

I posed this question to you all four weeks ago when we covered chapter 8 and I was encouraged because some people have texted me with different ideas and I think it's good for us to be thinking about what does this look like today?

Now, one area that I mentioned a few weeks ago in chapter 8 that's relevant today is that of drinking alcohol. Right, there are certain scenes, certain situations and places involving alcohol that are more like an idol's temple.

Right, to be present in those kinds of scenes is to participate in a culture of evil but there are also other scenes, other contexts! where Christian freedom permits drinking and yet what Paul is saying is that even in those contexts we ought to be willing to set aside our freedom if it would cause damage to others whether believers or unbelievers.

You know, Halloween is another example. There are, to be sure, dark and satanic practices that occur during Halloween and there are also more innocent aspects disconnected from the darker side.

[26:14] Now, the cautious person might see evil in all of it. The careless person might see no harm in any of it. Right, but this passage, it urges us to more nuance, more thoughtfulness in both directions considering where we might actually have Christian freedom in the gospel but also considering how we might be participating in the evil systems of this world or leading others astray, presenting a tainted witness for Christ.

Now, those are just two specific examples and there are so many examples of life that we could press this into where the principles of Christian freedom applied. Am I, this is what we should be asking, am I exercising true freedom in Christ, governed by love, driving on the highway of freedom as it were?

And that brings us to the final point today, which I've called Freedom's Highway. This is from the last few verses. In these final four verses of this three-chapter discussion, Paul brings the topic to a close and he does so by panning out to the three overarching principles for how Christians ought to live.

In other words, these are the three criteria forming the highway on which Christian freedom is to run. And here is the first principle. In everything, seek the praise of God.

God. So Paul starts here, verse 31. He starts with the topic at hand of food offered to idols. Look at verse 31. He says, so whether you eat or drink, he's talking about the situation, do all to the glory of God.

[27:58] But then he expands this, not just to food offered to idols, but to all of life, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

In Corinthians, the way that you approach eating food offered to idols, and the way that you approach everything in all of your life should first and foremost be with the relentless pursuit for the glory of God.

It should be making much of God for the praise of his name in this world. God's glory, God's praise, God's honor, his beauty and splendor and majesty, that displayed in our hearts and lives, that made known to the nations, that is the purpose of our existence, church.

The Lord declared, actually, I didn't realize this until last week when I was in numbers a lot because of all the illusions Paul was making, the earth declared to Moses in numbers 14 21, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.

All the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord. Now if you've read through the Old Testament, you know that that promise, that declaration then gets repeated throughout the Old Testament.

[29:20] And one primary way that God is bringing that promise to fulfillment, as Rob read for us Ephesians 3.10, is through his saints, through the church, remember Paul read that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

That is God's glory on display through the church. It's through disciples of Jesus Christ who profess with our lips and our lives, our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. That's from Matthew 6, that's the Lord's prayer. Let that prayer be your daily prayer.

Remember, last week we alluded to the last petition of that prayer. This is a good prayer. Let that prayer be your daily prayer. Memorize it. I encourage you, memorize the Lord's prayer.

But don't just use it as a chant. Wrestle it into your own words. Wrestle it into the circumstances of your life. Let each day begin by expressing to God that desire, your desire, saints, for his praise, for his glory, to be magnified in your life.

[30:36] And then ask him for help. We can't actually do that on our own. We need his spirit. He's given us his spirit so that we can do that. So let that prayer be your daily prayer.

Father, your kingdom come, your will be done. And then, saints, let us engage honestly and prayerfully in self-reflection. We need to ask ourselves, am I seeking God's praise and God's glory in my use of money?

Am I seeking God's glory in the way that I'm stewarding my finances, my resources? Am I seeking God's glory first in my workplace? Am I seeking it, kids, in my treatment of my parents or siblings? Am I seeking God's glory first in my marriage, in my parenting, in my view of sports and entertainment? entertainment. Now, saints, because when we start doing this, we can get down on ourselves because we see all the ways that we're not doing that.

But the great hope of the gospel is that in Christ, we have become a new kind of humanity, Paul says in Ephesians 4, created after the likeness of God and true righteousness and holiness.

[31:54] We are new creations filled with God's spirit, and that means we can live for God's praise. This isn't some unrealistic ideal. If you are in Christ, you are a new creation.

You can live for God's praise and glory. And when we don't, because we do fail, we have, John says, an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, whose blood shed for us speaks a better word.

It speaks a better word. It tells of our right standing before God. We can live for God's glory, just as we were created to. Now, if you're doubting whether God deserves the glory, let me just, let me just assert, God alone is worthy of all the praise and all the glory now and forever.

You know, Moses says after the exodus from Egypt, he proclaims, who is like you, O Lord, among the gods, who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome and glorious deeds, doing wonders.

You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed. You have guided them by your strength to your holy abode. God has shown himself in creation, in redemption, all throughout history, and in our lives today, he has shown himself to be endlessly worthy of worship.

[33:25] So let everything that we do be for his praise and his glory.

Okay, that's the first principle here as Paul lands the plane, the first criteria of freedom's highway.

Now here is the second, in everything seek to please others. Paul says in verse 32, give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

Now wait a second, Paul. Are you saying that I'm supposed to be a people-pleaser? I thought I was supposed to repent of my people-pleasing tendencies, right?

Like I know Galatians 1.10, where you say, Paul, that you're seeking to please God and not man.

You know, I thought about titling my sermon, People-Pleasing for the Glory of God.

Because of this verse right here, what is Paul saying? What is he saying? We have to ask the question, what is the nature of this people-pleasing that Paul's talking about?

[34:45] Well, he tells us right here. This is the kind of people-pleasing that he's described for the last three chapters, actually. It's people-pleasing that refuses to put a stumbling block between others in the gospel.

That's actually what he means by give no offense to the Jews. Don't put a stumbling block in the way. It's going to turn people away from the gospel. It's people-pleasing with nothing in it for self. Everything in it for others, for their eternal good, for their life, for their salvation in Jesus' name. That is not the people-pleasing of this world, is it? That's not the people-pleasing that my flesh gravitates towards.

Not your typical self-glorifying, idolatrous, people-pleasing where the opinion and the judgment of others rules the heart. Now, see, this people-pleasing, this is a loving, God-glorifying, others-before-self kind of people-pleasing.

It's seeking after their eternal good. So, truly, this is, in fact, people-pleasing for the glory of God. This is the second criteria of freedom's highway, in everything, seeking to please others.

[36:03] I want you to use your redeemed imaginations for a minute. Can you envision married couples, the future state of your marriage, or engaged couples, the future state of your marriage in which you continually look to the interests not of yourself, but of your spouse, in which you constantly seek after their good above yours?

Can you picture what it would be like, what it would look like, what it would sound like, to view your neighbors, those that live around you, or those that sit around you at work, your coworkers, with the lens of how can I love them in a way that adorns the gospel, and that draws them to faith in Christ? Can you imagine that? Can you picture that in your minds? Kids, can you imagine what this afternoon and evening would look like and sound like if your aim was for the praise of God, to build up your siblings for their good?

Can you imagine what that would be like? But how could we possibly live lives like this? Like, how could we possibly live such radically others-oriented lives?

It's almost like we just need to forget about ourselves entirely. I think you're onto something. Tim Keller wrote a brilliant little book that I would highly commend to you called *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*.

[37:33] *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*. Clearly not a book written by someone from our secular culture. In it, he argues from 1 Corinthians that the essence of gospel humility, listen to this, is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less.

Not more of myself, not less of myself, thinking of myself less. This is what he calls blessed self-forgetfulness. How in the world do we get to that kind of place?

I think the final verse in today's text gives us the answer. In everything, seek the praise of God, seek to please others, and finally, in everything, follow the pattern of Christ.

Follow the pattern of Christ. Paul concludes, be imitators of me as I am of Christ. Christ. You want to know how to live in the freedom of self-forgetfulness.

Start by looking at Jesus. You want to know how to live a life that in everything seeks to please others for the praise of God.

[38:52] Start by looking at Jesus. Jesus. You see, Jesus Christ is, he is the preeminent example of laying down his liberty, right, of renouncing his rights for the sake of love.

Jesus Christ, I don't know if you know this, Jesus Christ enjoys ultimate freedom. All power, all authority in heaven and on earth is given to Jesus Christ the Lord, and yet he gave it all up. He constrained his freedom. He emptied himself, Paul says in Philippians 2, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

This is what Jesus did for the eternal good of sinners and enemies of God like you and me, and for the eternal glory of his Father in heaven.

And this becomes the pattern for Christ's followers to replicate. And you know, it's not only our pattern, it's our power. Christ has freed us from bondage to sin and to flesh.

[40:08] He has freed us up for service to God and to others. Now Keller goes on to say in his booklet that in light of the cross of Christ, the only person whose opinion counts, looks at me and he finds me more valuable than all the jewels in the earth.

I am chosen, not forsaken. I am who you say I am. More valuable than all the jewels in the earth. Now listen, if my ultimate approval, not from my spouse, not from my boss at work, not from my family, my neighbors, my coworkers, my ultimate approval is secure if it is secure in Christ. I am freed up. I no longer have to perform. I'm not even trying to perform for God's approval because I have it. I have it. And therefore, I'm freed from my selfishness to please others for their good and for the glory of God.

So in Jesus, we find the pattern to please others for the praise of God and the power to live it out. And what's more, we have the spirit of Christ living inside us.

Moment by moment, he is empowering us to live in this true Christian freedom. That's why Paul says, I have been crucified with Christ.

[41:37] It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. Because it's put his spirit right there. So this completes the highway. This is the highway. The highway of Christian freedom is to please others for the praise of God in the pattern of Christ.

But notice Paul didn't actually say be imitators of Christ. This is of course implied. But he said, be imitators of me as I am of Christ.

Now it's common in Paul's letters for him to exhort the saints to follow his example. He actually already did this in chapter four of 1 Corinthians. And I want to ask, is Paul arrogant?

Like, yeah, look at me, look at me, look at me, follow me. Is he arrogant? it does seem like it.

And you know, I'm sure Paul had his struggle with pride. But three things here lead me to say that he's not. The first thing I want to point to is what is the example in himself that he's calling Christians to replicate?

[42:48] What is the example? It is a willingness to deny self, a willingness to constrain one's freedom for the sake of others.

Now, that doesn't sound like arrogance, right? That sounds like gospel humility. Second, he qualifies his imperative by saying, be imitators of me as I am of Christ.

Elsewhere, Paul calls himself the chief of sinners, 1 Timothy 1.15. He knows the battle between his spirit and his flesh, the indwelling sin that fights.

Read Romans chapter 7. But he's calling the Corinthians to imitate him to the degree that he imitates Christ. Now, third, this is simply discipleship in the faith.

This is apprenticeship. You know, if you're learning a new skill, such as woodworking, you seek to imitate the master carpenter, right? And the master is not arrogant to say, hey, watch me.

[43:52] And then try to do what I'm doing. There's not arrogance in that. Doing the same way, brothers and sisters in Christ, as we seek to please others for the praise of God in the pattern of Christ, we need to first look to Jesus.

Right? We need to go to the one place where he is most fully revealed, the word of God, and read it, and study it, and meditate upon it, and memorize it, and pray through it, and into it, and not just to cram our heads full of knowledge, but to know Jesus more, to delight in him, and to learn his pattern.

And second, we need to look to those around us. That's what Paul's saying, imitate me. Look to those around us who are following that pattern of Christ, and then who are living it out in our day, in our place, in our cultural context.

Christ. Look to those around you that are doing that, and seek to replicate them. In other words, we need to be in community, and in discipling relationships with one another, helping each other follow this pattern of Christ.

Now, this is going to take different forms, right? This is going to take different, it's going to look like different things in different seasons of life, but we actually need to actively swim upstream against the flow of individualism that we are immersed in in our culture.

[45:18] We need to swim upstream from that and pursue spiritually intentional relationships with one another. Is there someone in your life

that's close enough to you to be able to follow your Christ-like pattern? Or vice versa? Are you close enough to someone else to be able to see and to replicate their Christ-like pattern? If the answer is no, I would ask you, prayerfully consider how you might change that.

Prayerfully consider who in this body the Lord might be pushing you towards for discipleship. You know, this apparently inefficient model of life-on-life discipleship is apparently the means that Christ has established for his gospel to go forward through the local church.

So let's get on his agenda. Right? To the eyes of this world, it's highly inefficient. There's got to be a better way. No, no. Jesus, this is the way that Jesus established.

His twelve disciples, the three close disciples, Peter, James, and John, he was pointing to those guys for three years. This is the pattern that he's established. You know, just because you can drive off-road doesn't mean you should.

[46:36] Right? It's better to stay on the highway where a car can truly be free to do what it does best. And the highway of Christian freedom is to please others for the praise of God in the pattern of Christ.

This is the noble ethic of Christianity. Right? It's not an ethic of cautious rule following. It's not an ethic of careless freedom clutching.

It's an ethic of love. So, Lord, help us to embody this ethic for the good of others and your glory. Father, we want to live out our Christian freedom in the gospel.

And we want to do it in a way that builds others up. Now, this is hard because my flesh wants to build me up and nobody else.

Lord, would you help us daily to crucify that flesh. Lord, to buy the spirit, put the deeds of the flesh to death. Would you help us daily to cling to Christ and to find life in his name and power to live out his pattern of renouncing our rights for the sake of others, for the glory of God.

[47:55] And, Father, we want this gospel. We want you, Lord, to be on display through this church, through our lives. We want the world to see this, to be drawn to the gospel which they see adorned in us, through us.

Lord, Paul was so driven by his mission. Lord, we want to be driven by that same mission. So, God, help us to get our eyes off ourselves. Help us to have this radically others-oriented life.

For your glory, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.