

# with perseverance in truth

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[ 0 : 00 ] I think I don't fit the image of the person who normally stands at the front of a wedding and I think there's a novelty in that for people. And so I seem to get a lot of phone calls from people saying, can you come and do our wedding because they think that I'll be fun.

I don't know that that's actually true, but there's an assumption there that until my hair is entirely grey, and it is getting there, but until it's entirely grey, they just assume that I'll be fun.

But it's also one of the most challenging things I do in my job because when it comes to weddings, there are a lot of different people involved with a lot of different ideas about how things should happen.

If you've ever been to a wedding rehearsal, perhaps it was your own, perhaps it was that of your child or relative, it's amazing how you can be standing there and the idea that the bride and groom have for how their big day should go is not necessarily the same as the idea that the mother of the bride has about how the day should go or the mother of the groom or the grandparent of the bride. There could be 15 different expectations of what's supposed to happen. And deep down, I know that there's certain things that I have to do to make sure they get married by the end of the day. And so I've got people at the front telling me, be fun, be relaxed.

[ 1 : 08 ] We want it to be really enjoyable. And then I've got the person in the second row telling me, it's a serious occasion. You've got to focus. Don't be so flippant about going through things. And there's all these different people telling me what to do.

And so instead of being a joyful occasion, I'm so nervous about offending all these people that I end up just going into my shell and I don't really know what's going on. I'm just staring at the page, getting my words out and signing the bit of paper. Weddings are supposed to be exciting, even for me when I'm standing at the front of it.

But when there's so many different expectations, you can become so scared that you're not really sure what to do. And last week, Chris opened up 1 Corinthians 8 for us and encouraged us that the freedom we have in Christ should not be used lovelessly.

We shouldn't use it in a way that bears on the conscience of our brothers and sisters. But there's a risk for us when we hear a message like that. The message isn't saying this, but there's a risk that what we suddenly do is instead of feeling free, we feel trapped by the consciences of everyone around us.

We were having a conversation in our community group during the week and we're saying, well, what if one person thinks I should do this and then another person thinks I should do this? And they're opposite things. How do I decide? And then you end up living your life not as somebody who's free, but as somebody who's scared and worried about always doing what everybody else wants you to do.

[ 2 : 29 ] And so thankfully, chapter 8 isn't everything that Paul says about our freedom in Jesus. And so in chapter 9, Paul wants to point to his own example of rights that are his that the Corinthians don't have so that we might understand exactly what it looks like to use our freedom the correct way.

Because the question that we need to ask is, we're free. Last week, we were encouraged to give up our rights, but sometimes we actually have to stand and claim our freedom.

But when do you do which? When do you give up your right to serve your brother? And when do you stand for something that is true because they need to learn this truth? That's the question before us tonight, and so that is where Paul takes us in chapter 9.

Paul opens up, am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Paul has special rights because of the job that he does. He's a preacher of God's words. He's the one who

planted this community in Corinthians.

It doesn't exist if Paul doesn't go there and teach them about Jesus. He's their spiritual father, and so he has a right to get financial support from them. That's not a weird thing.

[ 3 : 40 ] That's normal for people who plant churches or who are religious leaders in this age. And so Paul is entitled to take things from him, take things from the church, but he doesn't.

But the reason he doesn't is what's important. He doesn't choose to go without their money because he's worried about what they think. He doesn't choose to go without their money because they're pressuring him that it's a bad idea to take money.

In fact, there's a clue in here that some of the people thought he was a dodgy apostle because he wasn't taking money. They are of the attitude that, you know, you get what you pay for, and so if we're not paying for this guy, maybe he's not so impressive after all.

But Paul is really committed to denying something that he's entitled to. Why? Not because what they want. There's a principle that's dictating how Paul uses his freedom.

There's a grid that he uses to answer that question, when do I hold on to my rights and when do I deny them for the sake of my brother? Paul has a single agenda on display in these chapters here. His freedom is committed to a singular purpose, and it's there in verse 12.

[ 4 : 55 ] Second half. But we do not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.

We put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. Notice that that word there, hinder, it's not obstacle, it's not barrier, it's the really general word that includes anything that might even slow down the progress of the gospel.

If there's something that Paul could do and still eventually it would work out for good, but it's the long way around, he doesn't want to do that. He's so committed to being effective with the gospel, to being efficient with the gospel, to reaching as many people as possible with the gospel, that he will put up with anything rather than be a hindrance in any way, shape or form.

We know that there's no issue with Paul taking money. As a gospel worker. Here he says, it's my entitlement. The other apostles are doing it. He says that Peter is doing it.

It's a normal thing. In fact, in the letter to Philippians, which Paul writes to another church he's planted, he spends a bunch of time commending them for how generous they've been and how great it is and how encouraged he is that they're giving money.

[ 6 : 09 ] Money is not the problem. It's not an issue of right or wrong here when it comes to rights. The issue is, it's going to be a hindrance for the gospel. Paul would rather get a second job and work nights to make sure that money doesn't complicate the relationship he has with the Corinthians.

He would rather work harder than maybe he has to to ensure that no one that he's preaching to feels like they have some sense of ownership. For the Corinthians, if they were giving money to Paul, it would have been like Paul was their employee.

And so there might have been the temptation for them to try and tell him what he should be saying. There might have been the temptation for Paul to not to say the hard words when he needed to say it. And so to make sure that the gospel gets heard, no strings attached, he's willing to take an extra job on top of caring for this group of people and being a missionary and doing all these other things because he wants the gospel to be free of charge.

So last week, our freedom is not to be misused. Last week, we need to be careful that we don't cause others to sin with the freedom that we have in Jesus. But this week, Paul is showing us that our freedom has a direction.

It has an offensive. It has a purpose that we can be committed to. It's in the positive. And in verse 19, he makes it explicit. Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone to win as many as possible.

[ 7 : 38 ] This is the consuming desire for Paul. This is what it means to live for the gospel as the priority. He wants to see people come to know Jesus. And not just a few, he wants as many as possible to know the hope that he has.

This trumps every other thing that matters in his life. Every other desire that he has, this comes first. Paul told us in chapter 7 that marriage is good, that a wife is good, and yet he chooses not to have one because he believes that he can be more effective for the gospel without one.

Chooses to give up something good that he affirms because without a wife, he believes that he can be more effective to see more people saved. His agenda is this above all else, to win as many as possible.

The freedom that we have in Jesus has a purpose. It's not a blank check for you to do whatever you want in your life. It is a gift from God that is directed.

And so I wonder, when you got up this morning and you were getting dressed, did you ask yourself the question, will these clothes help me win people to Jesus? When you were trying to decide what job you might get, maybe when you're choosing uni courses or school subjects, did you ask the question, will this help me win people to Jesus?

[ 9 : 06 ] When you were deciding who you would date, who you would marry, whether or not you would date, whether or not you would get married, did you ask the question, will this help me win people to Jesus? Now, it might sound like I'm being dramatic or excessive.

Surely my clothes aren't that important. But you've got to understand, this is the only question. This is the first question. The only earthly structure that will last for eternity is the church.

The only thing that will last beyond this life is the community of God's people. It's Christ's bride. And so it is infinitely more valuable than will I look good in these clothes?

It is infinitely more valuable than will I be happy with this girlfriend, boyfriend, husband, wife. It is infinitely more valuable than will this job pay me enough or satisfy me? More important is, will this help me win as many as possible?

That is the purpose for which Christ has died and risen. It is the purpose for the freedom that we have. Paul's agenda, personally, and his desire for the church in Corinth, and our desire here at St. Paul's is that we would be driven to live out our freedom like this.

[ 10 : 24 ] That we would be marked as people who care more than anything else, that at the end of our lives we will have been poured out and won as many as possible. This section, chapters 8 and 9 and 10, culminate in chapter 11, verse 1.

If you've got your Bible open, have a quick look. It says this. Paul finishes this big rant about the freedom that he has in Jesus when he says, follow my example as I follow the example of Christ. Paul is leading the charge for the Corinthians. He's saying, if you're not sure what this looks like, have a look at my life. Look at what I do. But more than that, this is what Jesus did with his life. It's what Rob was praying just a second ago.

Jesus was entitled to so much more than what he experienced in his earthly life. But he made choices to suffer and to sacrifice because his agenda was to give his life so that some people would be saved.

He spent time with the people that were controversial, with the people that we might have found it difficult to love because his agenda was to save as many as possible.

[ 11 : 27 ] It's his example that we're called to follow. We have been freed to live like Jesus. Paul is unpacking in this chapter what it looks like to embrace our freedom and to use it the way that God designed for us.

So that's the answer to the question we had at the beginning. When do I deny my rights for the sake of my brother or sister and when do I stand on my rights because truth matters? Well, you ask which one will be more beneficial for the gospel?

Which one will help me more to win people to Jesus? There will be times when denying your rights will be more beneficial for your brother or sister to hear the gospel.

There will be times when it is good and right for you to sacrifice so that others will come to know Jesus but there will also be times where you need to stand up and say I am free to do this in Jesus so that the people around you can come to understand what it means that Jesus has died and washed you and made you clean and that nothing can undo what he's done on the cross.

And the question you've got to be asking is which of these will help me win people to Jesus? Whether you're getting dressed, picking a job, picking a suburb to live in, whatever it is, Jesus is the thing that matters.

[ 12 : 46 ] Our freedom is ours but for the goal that others would know that freedom as well. That's God's agenda. He has called you and loved you and adopted you and accepted you and forgiven you so that others might be called and loved and adopted and forgiven.

Jesus on the cross is the ultimate example of this. He is God. He has every right and every authority to take himself down from the cross.

He has every right and every authority to command angels to come and lay waste to the soldiers that are in front of him but he chooses to stay there because that's necessary for any to be saved. He sacrifices his own because his goal, his purpose shapes his action. For us as a church our goal is that we would save as many as possible.

Our goal as individuals needs to be that we will save as many as possible and so the question we need to wrestle with is, is that goal shaping who we are? Is that goal shaping how we spend our time and our energy?

[ 14 : 03 ] This is what our vision statement is about. Here at St Paul's we want to share God's heart to see lost people come to know him, to see dead people come to life. We want to know Jesus and treasure Jesus and represent Jesus in such a way that God gets glory and people find joy as they find freedom and then they get to know Jesus and treasure Jesus and represent Jesus so that others will come to find joy in him as well.

Our goal as a church, our goal as Christians must dictate what we do and how we live and so I want to suggest two ways that we need to particularly work on for us as a church and I have to say for me personally and so maybe for you as well.

Have a look at verse 19 with me. Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone to win as many as possible.

To the Jews I became like a Jew to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law though I myself am not under the law so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law though I am not free from God's law but I am under Christ's law so as to win those not having the law.

To the weak I became weak to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. There's the agenda again.

[ 15 : 29 ] By all possible means I might save some. And how does he do it? By becoming all things to all men. Two things that are going to help us begin to even comprehend what that might look like.

The first thing is we need our identity redefined. I don't know if you noticed there in verse 20 Paul says to the Jews I became like a Jew to win the Jews.

Paul is a Jew. Paul is a Pharisee. Paul is the poster boy for being Jewish. If they wanted to advertise to recruit Jews Paul would be on the poster.

He ticks every box for them. He's born in the right month. He's circumcised on the right day. He raves about this stuff in Philippians chapter 3. But for him now that he knows Jesus his identity is so radically different that his Jewish heritage is second at best.

First and more importantly he considers himself a Christian. He considers himself forgiven. He considers himself somebody who is defined by the one who died on the cross for him.

[ 16 : 40 ] See until we know who we are we won't be sure which bits we're supposed to hold on to and which bits we let go of. If we want to be able to be flexible if we want to be able to serve the community around us then the first part is we need to soak under God's word and hear the gospel over and over and understand that we are forgiven completely and irreversibly that everything that we brought to the cross has been left at the cross and dealt with and paid for that there's nothing that we can actually add that will become an extra barrier.

We are no longer identified as Chinese or Filipino or Malaysian or Australian or English or whatever we might be. We are no longer defined by the job that we have. We are no longer defined by the paycheck that we earn by the suburb that we live in by the marks we get in our exams by the language that we speak.

That all comes second and third and fifth and thirtieth and whatever else. First and foremost Jesus has died for us. We are Christians.

If you are following Jesus the thing that defines you is him. He is the centre of who you are. He is the thing that defines your status your position and so you need to be okay to let go of some of the things that used to define you whether that be your ethnic background whether that be your status in the community because of the job that you hold or the title that you have you need to be willing to let go of that because the centre the thing that matters is the gospel is Jesus.

We live in Chatswood. I am not Chinese. I could not be less Chinese but our suburb is full of Chinese people who don't know Jesus and so I need to let go of the fact that I'm Aussie and Bogan.

[ 18 : 35 ] I need to let go of the fact that my only food choice when I walk into Westfield is McDonald's and I need to be comfortable to stretch myself culturally because I'm not Australian first I'm Christian first and being Christian and being free in Christ means I'm defined by a need and a

burning desire to see people one to Christ and I'm not going to be able to do that if I'm not willing to go where they are if I'm not willing to spend time doing the things that they want to do.

I was reading this week about Hudson Taylor who founded the China Inland Mission he was a missionary and when he was there he'd spent time reasonably ineffectively trying to share the gospel and he decided that a helpful step would be for him to grow his hair long and put it in a braid to wear the Chinese clothes that the men around him were wearing and to start eating Chinese food.

When he did that the other missionaries around him made fun of him they basically thought he'd lost the plot he'd let go of the gospel he'd become too much like these people who are devil worshippers and he was going to go to hell as well but he knew what mattered he knew that the Bible didn't tell him what clothes to wear or what haircut to have or what food to eat the Bible told him that Jesus had died for him that he was free in Christ that obeying Jesus was what what mattered and so he could gladly and willingly and joyfully sacrifice everything that he'd known culturally up to that point in his life and adapt so that others might come to know Jesus we need to know what our identity is so that we have security as we stretch ourselves into places where we might be uncomfortable because the second thing we need to do if we're going to be all things to all men is we need to be culturally flexible one of the real strengths that we have as a church here is we're an

Anglican church whether you know what that means or not is kind of irrelevant the good news is we've got a bunch of stuff which makes us really committed to the gospel of Jesus but the danger for us is because all those things are there for us and they've kind of done a lot of the hard work over the years of history to make sure we're committed to God's word it's easy for us to add our own hoops for people to jump through when they come to church it's easy for us to say when somebody comes to Chatswood walks into church off the street decides they want to follow Jesus it's great to have you let us now show you the rest of the things that you need to do to fit in with us let us tell you what clothes to wear let us tell you what music to listen to let us tell you what appropriate English is let us tell you how to sharpen your vocab so that you can belong with us here on the North Shore it's really easy for us to make people have to be like us have to do things the way that we do them even if they're not gospel issues we were talking about on Friday night at youth I wonder how comfortable we would be if somebody started attending our church who wasn't big on personal hygiene and smelled a bit would walk in with bare foot every week had a massive mohawk was covered in tattoos and liked to smoke would you be comfortable with them coming and sitting next to you they love Jesus they're really excited to be a part of his people is it okay for you if they sit next to you every week or would you start letting them know how they can adjust their culture to actually fit in to actually be a part of God's church the Bible doesn't tell them they have to wear certain clothes doesn't tell them how regularly they have to bathe doesn't tell them whether or not to smoke cigarettes yet we add these hoops for people to jump through we take secondary things that are our culture and we make that what it means to be a Christian we live in a place that is hugely culturally diverse there are all sorts of people here who don't get how we work and so if we make our church family if you in your life expect people to be like you then you're putting up barriers to winning people you're putting up obstacles for people coming to Jesus one of the joys of being part of our church is that we are a diverse group of people but I wonder if sometimes you find yourself sitting here wishing that some of those diverse people were a bit more like you were more into doing church the way you like it liked the same music that you do

I had to confess to our morning congregation this morning that I have been doing this in conversations with people in our church that we've had arguments about how we do our gatherings and when I say arguments I mean loving rigorous discussions there's been a few of those over the last few years with godly brothers and sisters but reality is there's been points where I have called my preference the preference I have called my cultural idea of what's good when we gather the biblical idea of what's good when we gather and I wonder if you ever do the same if you think certain songs are more glorifying to god if you think a certain type of church is more glorifying to god we need to be culturally flexible because we know who we are in Jesus and so long as we get reminded as a gathered community that it's him alone who has died and risen as long as we get reminded that it's his glory that we live for then maybe we need to let go of some of the other things that make us feel comfortable here at church maybe we need to be okay if the chairs are in a circle next week when we get here and not spend the first hour distracted by the fact that it's not how we

normally do it now there is a warning for us here because we're not supposed to be flexible to the point where there's a sin involved

[ 24 : 49 ] Paul says to the Jews I became like a Jew he doesn't say to the adulterer I became like an adulterer there are certain things that are cultural issues that can be given into and then of course there are certain things which are sin and out of love for Jesus we never bend on that's why it's important to know our identity to remember that when Christ forgave us and gave us freedom he gave us a whole new life he gave us a new start he gave us a new path this is the only basis on which you should assess your life personally and our life corporately I promise you that at some point in the future we as a church family will do something that will make you uncomfortable I'm not promising that as my desire but in this room we don't all like exactly the same stuff but if you're willing to ask the question is this good for the gospel and if so I'm going to suffer joyfully so that we might win some then we will see

God work fantastically through us if we were willing to say my first priority when I gather is not comfort but the gospel going out and people being saved this will be a welcoming place for anyone to walk into regardless of where they're from what their background is if they've ever been to church before because we will be pursuing more than anything else that the gospel stays the main thing we'll be letting go of our preferences and we'll be welcoming people like Jesus does exactly how they are so that they can be forgiven and transformed and know the freedom that we know we need to be consumed by God's desire we need to let go of our commitment to comfort and we need to be willing to sacrifice our rights no matter how much it hurts so that others may come to know Jesus Paul gets really really visual here in these last few verses in verse 24 he says do you not know that in a race all the runners run but only one gets the prize everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training they do it to get a crown that will not last but we do it to get a crown that will last forever therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly I do not fight like a man beating the air no I beat my body and I make it my slave so that after I have preached to others I myself will not be disqualified for the prize this will not happen accidentally if you're not consciously thinking how can I be flexible for the sake of others if you're not actively thinking how can I be more conscious of the cultures that surround me where I live where I work then you won't be you default to what is comfortable you'll default to people who are like you and you'll miss out on an opportunity to share the gospel with a whole bunch of people who don't know life and don't know hope are you willing to beat your body and make it your slave for the sake of the gospel are you willing to give up some really familiar habit so that someone can meet

Jesus are you willing to give up dressing a certain way are you willing to give up hanging out at a certain place are you willing to give up a kind of music that you like if that's going to give you access to some more people who don't know Jesus are you willing to try some food that disgusts you right now are you willing to go to some shops that you've never been interested in going to before in order that people may come to meet Jesus this will require honest reflection for us none of us came in here tonight thinking that we were culturally narrow none of us came in here thinking that we were not open to the people around us but the challenge is there for all of us there could be more and so I wonder will you reflect honestly on where can I remove some barriers to the gospel where can I fix my eyes on the prize so that more will be won to Christ the question is simple it's not is this right or wrong that's an easy question to dodge the question is does this help the gospel or does this hinder the gospel they're the only two categories there is no neutral if it doesn't help then by definition it hinders because you're wasting energy on something that's not helping the question is not right or wrong the question is does this help the gospel or does this hinder the gospel the great encouragement of this passage is that as

Paul slaps us in the face and says come on try harder and beat yourself beat your body into being a slave run at the prize there is this huge encouragement in verse 23 Paul says I do all this for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings did you get that Paul sacrifices Paul preaches Paul travels Paul tries as hard as he can to fit into whatever culture he is among not so that they share in the benefits he wants that to happen but he says here that he does all of this that I may share in its blessings see for Paul sharing the gospel and experiencing the gospel are one thing it's not that we become a Christian and are forgiven and then a task we're given is evangelism for Paul to hear the gospel is to share the gospel there is no separation for him he says it again in verse 27 I beat my body I make it my slave so after I have preached to others I myself will not be disqualified for the prize for him the evidence of genuinely knowing the freedom that is in Christ is having your

priorities so shaped that what you care about more than anything else is winning as many as possible there's no separation for him and so he finds great joy in the sacrifices that he makes in the sacrifice of financial gain in the sacrifice of having a wife to travel with him he finds joy because in making those choices he grabs hold of Jesus even tighter the things that could have defined him he lets go and embraces all of

Jesus with everything that he has the great blessing of being a follower of Jesus is that as he calls us to sacrifice as he calls us to take up our cross as he calls us to live life in the footsteps of Jesus every cost that we pay is far surpassed in the blessing of knowing Jesus as our Lord everything that we give up is far surpassed in the gain of having the prize that waits for us at the end denying your rights is the gospel gospel that's who Jesus was that's who Paul was and until we are willing to let go of what is rightfully ours and take hold of this mission then we're following something other than the gospel of Jesus because this is who he is this is what he's called us to in Christ you are free you are forgiven but you are free for a purpose you are free that others may come to know that same freedom and so let me finish with the call of verse 19 though I am free and belong to no man

[ 32 : 50 ] I make myself a slave to everyone to win as many as possible that is God's design for your life that is God's desire for us as a church that as many as possible would come to know him because of the way that we live let's pray father God we want to confess that there are many things in our life that are there because they're comfortable they're there because we haven't even asked the question how does this impact on our gospel effectiveness we want to thank you that Jesus has died and Jesus is alive and our freedom has been bought at the highest price God help us not to take it for granted help us not to get distracted into thinking that forgiveness was the end game give us eyes to see the path that you are marking out in front of us give us hearts so consumed with love for you and desire to see people saved that we will joyfully do whatever it takes give us eyes to see the cultures around us give us love for them that we might adapt and be flexible that we might remove all human barriers from people hearing your message

God give us words to say and use us to call people into your kingdom into your freedom into this hope Father thank you for Jesus our saviour and our king Amen