

*Sermon on 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1 for Grace Church by Jonathan Shradar*

Later today, men will approach the “field of battle.” To many of them, it will be the most important event of their lives and most of us will be watching, some with rapt attention. They will buckle chinstraps and go head-to-head to win... for the glory of the game. To highlight themselves, their team... to earn their renown and honor that come with victory.

As we think of this display of the pursuit of glory we can realize that it is not reserved for the field under lights and millions of spectators. The pursuit of “glory” is so common it must be part of the fabric of humanity. To be known, respected, praised, adored by others. Any time you have internally asked the question: ‘what will people think’ you reveal a desire for glory. To be accepted and affirmed. Add to it a sense of freedom - of no boundaries on our pursuit of it, and all kinds of crazy can happen.

Even when we recognize it as a futile endeavor, we still run after glory for ourselves, a tainted expression of the One whose image we are made in. And in our striving for self-glory we can be tricked and manipulated into glorifying other things, dangerous things.

Glory itself is not bad - the highlighting of the good, the deserving, the beautiful - but we tend to put it on the wrong objects. But we gather in this place, and our homes, week after week to say that there is a better way. There is an appropriate direction for glory and when we understand it and pursue it, life is, well, glorious!

This is what the Apostle Paul is recounting to the church in his letter to Corinth. That they have been saved to something better than the lesser pursuits of individual, self-glory they are used to. Something better than the “kingdom of me” over everything. In our text today he finishes his counsel on how to behave in an idolatrous culture as people free in Jesus - whether or not to eat food tainted by idol worship.

**The life of Christian freedom is lived to benefit others to the glory of God.**

**1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1**

The letter transitioned in the first verse of chapter eight; “now about food sacrificed to idols:” and Paul has taken us in these three chapters through caring for the younger more inexperienced believer, setting aside deserved rights to care for others, the overriding value of proclaiming the gospel and avoiding the corruption of Christian communion with the worship of idols in temples.

It is an appropriate question even in the modern context of our lives, how do you live out the gift of freedom gained in believing in Jesus as Savior and Lord? What does flourishing Christian liberty really look like? What are the things we think of or live for as we enjoy the blessings of the gospel - forgiveness, new life and purpose.

Paul's conclusion on Christian liberty sets our trajectory this morning. Be Free, for Others, for Glory. **The life of Christian freedom is lived to benefit others to the glory of God.**

## 1) Be Free

At the preaching of Christ and him crucified, something magnificent has happened. People have believed in him and been given entry and security in the kingdom of God. The attempts at pleasing God enough with our behavior, the right rituals and restricted diets are over. The one way of getting right with God and being his child, is believing in Jesus.

Remove the restrictions and rules, the religiosity, and there is freedom. But it is not just an unintentional benefit to following Jesus - it is part of the point. For freedom you have been set free. Food will not bring us close to God; We are no worse off if we do not eat and we are no better off if we do...

Paul quotes again the Corinthian slogan of "everything is permissible" to put their freedom in the appropriate Christian expression but key here is that there is freedom.

The Christian is to have a clean conscience when it comes to eating meat - partaking in things that are nonessential, that are morally neutral. Paul tells us to not be burdened by our own thinking - really overthinking - of freedom. Instead we are free to enjoy.

**1 Corinthians 10:25-27** "Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. [26] For "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." [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." (ESV)

If you get invited to a party and want to go, go and eat the spread of goodies. Think of the experience this way. Pretend in our day it was common for chicken wings to be offered in the temple of the desert god by our pagan neighbors. We know it is silly because there is no such thing as a desert god - one of the reasons we won't go eat the chicken in their temple - but if your neighbor invites you to her Superbowl party and there are hot wings there... realizing you really can't find chicken in the market unless it has been offered in some way to some god... eat it.

Without raising any question on the ground of your conscience. Not for one second are we to entertain the question, "will this hot wing separate me from God?" Because we are confident in Christ and we know nothing will separate us.

Now hot wings are a silly illustration - making me hungry - but what of other things where there is a silence, a neutrality in Scripture? Drinking, smoking, dancing! Education choices for our kids; choosing a neighborhood to live in; career choices, political opinions... you know your thing, because you think about it all the time.

He is not saying, 'sin all the more...' but in those things that are not prohibited by Christ, don't put artificial prohibition around them. Be free. Free to enjoy, free to avoid. Free to do as you please.

"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it," he owns it all, and you are free to enjoy it all in thankfulness toward him. Life is a gift and the giver is good!

**1 Corinthians 10:29b-30** "For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? [30] If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?" (ESV)

This is the "only God will judge me" moment for Paul. If I am free in Christ, my liberty, my freedom is judged by him and no one else.

Paul's preference for freedom over restraint when commending the gospel to unbelievers directly attacks Non-Christian stereotypes of conservative Christianity consistently characterize us as legalistic joy-killers. Because in our freedom we live the best adventure, we can have fun - eating everything set before us.

What good news. This freedom - giving thanks to the giver - enjoying his gifts.

As good as it is, and as passionate as some of us are about staying here, in this freedom; it is meant for something. Freedom, is not the center of Christianity. It is to be a tool used in a life pointing to someone even greater than the gifts that he gives... Freedom is not the ultimate good in a believer's life.

"Personal freedom, as important as it is for Paul, is not the summum bonum (highest good, or ultimate goal) of the Christian life. Seeking the good of others is."

## **2) For Others**

This is Christian freedom lived for the benefit of others.

**1 Corinthians 10:24** "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor." (ESV)

Back at the house party: **1 Corinthians 10:28-29** "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—[29] I do not mean your conscience, but his." (ESV)

In your freedom, give no offense to Jews, Greeks or the church but try to please everyone in everything. This is not being worried about hurting feelings, but robbing the gospel of a hearing.

For Paul personal freedom is not absolute; it is always conditioned by the “rule” of verse 24 - seeking the good of another.

The good that Paul always has in mind is their salvation, that they would share in the power of the gospel. So freedom is lived in such a way as to ensure that there are no roadblocks to hearing the good news of Jesus, of forgiveness and life in him.

Christian, you have been given freedom so that others may experience that same freedom and in the expression of that liberty, we are to have in mind the benefit of others. Because we are secure in relationship with Jesus - by his work - we are able to restrict ourselves, at times, for the good of others, “that they may be saved.”

The law of love, Christ’s way, is to care for the conscience of others. To guard them, serve them and show them what being free is Christ is truly about.

“No one is to seek their own good, but the good of the other person.” (24) - how would owning this declaration radically change our lives?! It is really the best place to be, in the purpose Jesus has given us to reveal him to a world in need. Lovingly serving others in our freedom.

It doesn’t end merely with others. It drives to the glory of God himself. All of this, the freedom we gain in Christ, the loving care of others, points to the king of glory, the real point of our lives.

### **3) For Glory**

**1 Corinthians 10:31** “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (ESV)

In all things, do everything for the glory of God. To shine the light on his goodness, his holiness, his power... acknowledgment of perfectness, rightness, peerlessness, unique-ness, admiration, exceptionalism, worship and respect.

The glory of God becomes our compass in the exercise of our freedom and our love for our neighbors. Ever before us is the question - how can I live to highlight Jesus? To point to the giver of all gifts, the One who earth and all that is in it belongs to?

We are really prone to living our Christian freedom as if it is for our glory, but when we get that it is for Christ’s, everything changes. As my missionary friend says, we live a “continual process of loosening my grip on my money, my time, my rest, my life, my future and entering into the freedom God offers when I turn that all over to him and his church and his mission. Then he can use me and I start to taste the reward of being a part of what he's doing.”

“Christians are to live all of their lives, starting with the most ordinary things like eating and drinking, in such a way that God is publically praised, honored, and made famous... The shape of our lives is meant to make the beauty of God light up brilliantly to those around us.” Um

To live holding things, even our freedom in nonessential things, loosely that the people we care for would see the higher value we hold on the One who has given us our freedom, who calls us his own, his children.

“This approach loves one’s neighbor in order to glorify God. The love of neighbor is a means of glorifying the God who first loved us. It is through our other-centered, self-giving, posture that we can be good neighbors because we are concerned about their ultimate good, namely their salvation... God is glorified when our love for our neighbors leads them to embrace him.” Um

Our whole life must be to God’s glory... What is not, or cannot be, for God’s glory probably should be excluded from “whatever you do.”

This is a tall order, this is peculiar way of living. “Come live for other people and someone else’s glory...” This is strange. But it is good and the life we were meant for.

And it is all imitation of Jesus. **1 Corinthians 11:1** “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” (ESV)

All that Paul has been unpacking, his giving up entitlement, his slavery to others, it is all because he is attempting to live like Jesus.

“That is Christian freedom: being free from ourselves to glorify God by being like Christ.” Imitation points us to the prize... it points us to Jesus. As the thing of value in our life.

### **The life of Christian freedom is lived to benefit others to the glory of God.**

Honestly, I am not all that good at doing everything for the glory of God. I am not quick to set aside my rights to guard others and to ensure the gospel is heard unstained by my selfishness.

I wonder, how can I buckle down and get it done. Since Paul quotes Psalm 24 I might runback there to see what else it says of those able to worship the king of glory.

**Psalm 24:3-5** “Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? [4] He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. [5] He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation.” (ESV)

Too high of a bar for us, all of this has been accomplished. Jesus is the one with clean hands and a pure heart. He has ascended the holy hill and invited us in. When it comes to living our freedom right before others and for God's glory, where we mess up, Christ's work keeps us. And because he shares his blessing with us, not based on our ability to love and live well, we can now live our freedom for others and his glory.

“God calls you to humble yourself, forsake self-worship, and seek his will. The only thing you can build your life around that will bring you lasting joy is the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” - Jack Miller

The only way we can be moved out of our self-interest and self-centeredness and live lives of other-centered, self-giving love on mission is to see that we are the recipients of God's other-centered, self-giving love on a mission in Christ!

“Jesus - the one who was ultimately glorified - in a sense became de-glorified in order that we, his enemies, might be recipients of his love. Jesus was the only person in history who perfectly loved his neighbor (and his enemy) for the glory of God. He fulfilled the Law even while avoiding the trap of legalistic pietism - he never attempted to avoid his neighbors in his glorification of God. He secured and exercised freedom even while avoiding the trap of hedonistic activism - he never attempted to use his neighbors to gain glory for himself. Christians can love their neighbors for the glory of God because Jesus loved us - his enemies for the glory of God. We can disadvantage ourselves for others because Jesus ultimately disadvantaged himself for us.” Um

By ourselves we are left separated from God due to our sin, our self-glory seeking - and there is an impossible expanse between where we are and where we should be. Its fourth and forty with seconds on the clock... In comes a new quarterback. Jesus faces that for us. The One privileged, deserving honor, perfectly obedient to God the Father, and he sets aside his advantage. Not merely tolerating your sin, your brokenness. He takes it on himself - as if he had lived your life, earning the wages of sin - He felt the lashes of the whip... each one we deserved. He suffered the stakes being driven through his wrists and feet. He bore our mocking and the bitter cup of no relief and his last breath was for you giving you opportunity, freedom and a view of his glory breaking forth at his resurrection. [the Cross - that big, not little bearing, but sacrifice...]

“We are newly motivated lovers because our affections have been steered by the beautiful picture of Jesus going to trial in our place and giving us all the advantages he had... We now live a life of freedom that doesn't abuse our liberties but instead uses them for the glory of God by loving our neighbors.” Um

This is what the life of freedom looks like: **Matthew 16:24-25** “Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. [25] For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” (ESV)

Not cliché “taking up our cross” but genuine, Spirit empowered death-to-self, reorienting where we put glory, shining the light on the cross and Jesus’ invitation to forgiveness, freedom and a future in his name.

I am convinced this doesn’t sell books but it is what the BOOK declares page after page. It is the better life, the worthwhile endeavor. A life of others-centered joy, community and mission. Finally living as designed to. It is exactly what Paul invites us to in imitating Jesus.

What can we do in response this morning?

Let Jesus Own every inch of your life. Give him your heart, your dreams, your fears, your personality. Believe in him, that he is God, that his work on the cross changed your record and in his name you are given access to the holy hill of relationship with God. Yield all of yourself to him. You know the things you have been holding back - let them go today, imitate Christ.

Let your affections for Christ be stoked. Free from the chains of sin, free to live a life of thankful generosity, giving yourself up so that other will be saved. Let’s Jesus’ approval of you warm your heart and give you resolve. Let his secure embrace of you - whether you succeed or fail - give you the motivation to get back up and live again.

Share the love. This letter to the Corinthian church is unfolding into an exhortation on living in community with other believers - what a missional life looks like - So live your freedom with love for one another and for the stranger; seeking not your own benefit but the benefit of many, so that they may be saved.

We have been given so much in Christ, in order to give it away for others, just like Jesus. We can’t live a better life than this, the life of his glory and our good.

**Psalm 24:5-6** “He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation. [6] Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Selah” (ESV)

May we be such a generation.