

Sermon: Rights, Freedom, Power, & the Glory of God

Series: Love, Power, and Life, 1 Corinthians, part 3 (4)

Bible Passage: 1 Corinthians 10:23-33

²³ “All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. ²⁴ Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. ²⁵ 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. ²⁸ 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. 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?

³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ³² Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, ³³ 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.

Let's pray together please.

Heavenly Father, we pray that as we take a look at this passage and talk about this, what feels like a very foreign issue – eating food that has been used in sacrificial idols, or perhaps we have that altar in our home and there is food or fruit offered to these idols, whether we think this is irrelevant or not, we know Lord that if it is in the Bible and you are really the God of the universe that gave us this eternal truth, we pray that you would show us the relevance in each one of our lives ,whether we're Christian or non-Christian, whether we worship idols or we don't worship anything at all. We pray that you would teach us. In Christ's name. Amen.

Some of you know, this Monday and Tuesday, I had the privilege of attending a retreat with pastors. We went to this conference center in Ashland, MA. It's my second time going to this conference center and this place is actually the retreat center for Northeastern University. I went to this retreat and it's all pastors. I'm not a foodie. I don't really like food – I mean I like quantity of food, not really quality of food. I have to say, though, this is probably one of the finest retreats I've ever eaten food at. Not only that, the service is incredible. It's practically a four star

restaurant where everything, the soup, the sauces, everything, is made from scratch. It's technically buffet style but you have a waiter come over to ask you what you want to drink. The second you finish your food, someone comes over and asks, "Can I take that plate for you?" We say "Oh, thank you, thank you" you know, the normal stuff.

On the last day of retreat, one of the shift managers came up to me and another pastor and we told him, "We really enjoyed being here. Thank you for serving us." She responded and said, "You know, I don't normally say this to people, but you guys are one of the nicest groups we've ever had." I thought, "This isn't really a place you send teenagers to; it's not like a youth conference site". She elaborated, "Every time we do something for you, your group says 'thank you'. A lot of groups don't do that. We just take their plates and they don't say anything, but your group always says 'thank you' and it's always very courteous and polite." I was thinking, "Good thing we did that because she knows we're pastors."

I thought about how, in so many ways, when I'm not thinking about it, people are looking at my life, and maybe your life too. People are looking at the lives of those who say "I follow Jesus" and they are always making an impression. "This person who says they follow Jesus, are they really following Jesus? Are they really the real deal?"

We come to a place in this section of 1 Corinthians where Paul, the apostle, is helping the Corinthian church get through a very sticky issue. It may not seem sticky to you and me, but it's really complicated to those people in that culture and time. To the degree that you and I understand how complicated and relevant it was to them, I think it would really help all of us today. In their market system, much of the meat you could buy would have been used in pagan idol worship, as a sacrifice to other idols. The issue that came about was, "If I'm a Christian now, and I believe there is one true God and I'm called to forsake all the other Gods and follow only one true God, can I eat this food that has been sacrificed to an idol?" Paul, throughout the chapters, tells them they can totally eat the food, but he nuances it by saying, "there is nothing wrong with eating this food, but I want to give you some principles about how to glorify God in issues where people have different opinions." That's what this passage is about today.

How do you glorify God when Christians, maybe even well-meaning Christians, differ on certain issues. Probably one of the easiest ways to relate this to modern culture would be: in Chinatown, where I get my hair cut or where I eat food. Sometimes, next to or built into the restaurant, there is this little alter, statue, or idol, maybe there are some incense burners or fruit being offered.

Maybe you go into a restaurant or store here in Chinatown and you notice these idols or decorations. Sometimes they're decorations and sometimes the owners of these businesses really believe in these idols.

Let's say you're at a Chinese restaurant eating a meal and you see an orange being offered to some idol or statue. Most Chinese restaurants serve you orange slices. You're sitting there getting ready to pay and you see the waiter grab the oranges from in front of the idol, slice them up, and serve them to you. You're probably thinking, "I just finished my lunch and they just grabbed the oranges that were sitting in front of that idol and served them to me." Some of you might be wondering, "Well, how long have they been there?" But that's not the point. The point is: should we eat that? Is that okay?

Paul basically gives us principles about what to do and what not to do. There are three principles I'd like to share from the passage about how to glorify God when we have issues that might raise questions that we might disagree about. The first principle might take longer than the other ones because the passage discusses it more. I want to state the principle and then explain what I mean by it.

1. Asking "is it okay?" is not the best way.

To say, "It's okay" is not the best way. What I mean by that is: there are a lot of people, when we talk about Christian life, who ask things like, "As a Christian, is it okay to...?" If you're not a believer and you've been seriously considering Christianity, you might ask things like "Is it okay for a Christian to go clubbing or go to bars?", "Is it okay for a Christian to buy and drink a lot of alcohol in the safety of his or her home?", "Is it okay for a Christian to support certain political candidates?", "Is it okay for a Christian to engage in a certain form of entertainment?", "Is it okay for a Christian to do certain physical things with his or her girlfriend if it's not sex?". The basic principle is: "Is it okay?" is not the best way. If you, as person, whether you're Christian or not, ask a question like this, "Hey pastor, for a Christian, is it okay...", Paul would say that that is probably not the best way to ask the question.

Let's see this as we take a look at the passage beginning in verse 23:

²³ "All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. ²⁴ Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. ²⁵ 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. ²⁸ 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. 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?

In order to understand this passage, you need to understand what almost every commenter has said about this text. The rhetorical questions, beginning in the second part of verse 29, actually go right after verse 27. Not that the order is wrong, but Paul is making a parenthetical statement. Let's take a look at verse 28:

²⁸ 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.

You're almost going to say this: “Don't worry about not eating it, it's okay.”

For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience?

Then you would think: “So wait a second, you just told me to not eat it because of someone else's conscience.” Does that make sense? It's supposed to be confusing. He's saying, “It's okay to eat it. Don't worry about it because it's fine.” But then it says, “If someone says, “Hey, this was offered in worship”, then don't eat it for sake of the one who informed you and for the sake of their conscience. I don't mean your conscience but theirs so don't eat it.” But then he says:

For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience?

You'd think: “Wait a minute, you just said that if someone asks me about the sacrifice or the usage of that orange, I shouldn't eat it.” Most commentators would say that Paul is actually adding parentheses. This is kind of long and confusing, but necessary to understand the text properly. Let me read it, beginning in verse 27. I want you to see the parentheses and I'm going to reorder the text for you. I'm not changing the Bible, I'm just trying to explain what is probably obvious to Paul's readers but is harder for us as English readers.

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 ²⁹ 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? ²⁸ 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.

Now, what does this all mean? What it means is: we have to understand that there are a lot of things in the Christian life that are perfectly okay. Let me give you an example. (Any of these things, by definition, are going to ruffle a few feathers, but that's not my point.)

Let's talk about alcohol. As I've grown up in this church, I've noticed something. This isn't to judge you. When I first came to BCEC and attended several weddings, I noticed that there was no alcohol. The weddings have open bars and I go to the open bar and find that it's open... soda. In the last four or five years, I've noticed that a lot of our really good Christian couples have alcohol at their weddings and, if I may dare say, pretty good selections of alcohol.

The Bible does say that Jesus drank wine. I understand that there is a difference in the concentration, strength, proof, and alcohol of the wine of the ancient world versus the wine of today. I understand that, but I think it's really unbiblical to say that it's always wrong to drink wine. I don't think you can make that case from this passage. Therefore, if you say, "Pastor, is it okay to drink alcohol?" The answer, biblically, is, "Sure, Jesus drank wine. The apostle Paul drank wine. Timothy drank wine when his stomach was giving him problems. The disciples all drank wine. Jesus even turned water into wine." The point is: is it okay to drink alcohol? The clear answer is yes, but I think this passage would say that that is probably not the best question.

That'd be like saying, "If I'm dating my girlfriend and we're not going to have sex because the Bible says that we shouldn't have sex, is it okay if we're unclothed?" If you start asking questions like that, you're probably not going in the right direction. The key thing here is not whether or not something is right, but, going back to verse 23, whether something is helpful or beneficial to others. That's the paradigm Paul is saying. When it comes to these issues, it's not just a matter of "is it okay?" "Is it okay" is not the best way. You should be asking other questions like: "is it helping others?" and "is it building others up?"

Paul says this throughout all the chapters, "There is nothing in the meat; you can eat the meat. You can totally eat the meat that is a sacrifice to idols. Don't eat it in that place because they are demonic association with idols, but if the meat is in a market, you can eat the meat because it is totally devoid of any spiritual connotations. Maybe your friend is not a believer and they put the meat in front of you. Just eat it. Don't worry about where it came from. It's totally fine in the eyes of God. However, if, perhaps, the host or another guest says, 'did you know this meat was

used in pagan worship?’ Don’t eat it. Give up that right for the sake of the one who asked you. Not your conscious. You are free to eat the meat or partake in that activity because it is not wrong in the Bible; it’s okay. But for the sake of the other person, if eating the meat will cause another to stumble, then never eat meat again.”

There are situations you and I face where we might cause someone else to stumble. Now we’re going to get into an area that I think Christians get really confused about and struggle with. That leads me to the second point. When we’re talking about issues where Christians disagree, how do we glorify and honor God in those situations? Paul says that asking “is it okay?” is not the best way. We need to ask better things and we’ll get to that later on.

2. Offending someone means to cause he or she to fall back into a sinful lifestyle.

What does it mean to offend someone? When is it wrong to offend someone? When is it wrong to say, “You’re causing me to stumble”? When is it okay to say, “You’re causing me to stumble”? This happens all the time. Let me just give you the context in our modern culture.

Someone will say, “You know, I don’t really like that church because they’re too casual. I don’t think they respect the Lord. They’re offending my sense of faith. People should dress properly and bring their best to the Lord. What about reverence and the sense of awe and respect and worship?” Then someone else will say, “You know, I don’t like how we tell people and make this obstacle for people that they have to dress up for church. What about Jesus and coming as you are? What if they’re low-income and don’t have a Sunday’s best? What did James say about not making a big deal about what people wear and not favoring people who dress nicely? I’m offended by the people who say you have to dress up! Where in the Bible does it say you have to dress up for church? That offends me.”

Hopefully you realize that there are good points on both of those positions. How do we deal with that? There was this phrase that I would throw around a lot in high school and college: “Oh, don’t do that. That’s causing me to stumble.” I would use it like: “Oh, don’t listen to that kind of music because it’s causing me to stumble” or “I don’t like you and you’re causing me to stumble, so can you just go away?”

We have this issue here. When is the offense okay and when is the offense something we should really change? Let's take a look at verse 27-33:

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. ²⁸ 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.

³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ³² Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, ³³ 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.

So what is the offense? In order to break it down, we need to see how Paul breaks it down in verse 32:

³² Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, ³³ 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.

What does it mean to offend someone? This church is probably less verbal with our criticism. Maybe it has to do with cultural background, but we're not direct as other churches, I've found as I've talked to other pastors. I've had little notes saying, "the drums are too loud", "the sermons are too long", "the sermons are too short". It's always a note – a friendly, nice, anonymous note. I've had conversations with some of you and my point isn't to offend you.

What does Paul mean by causing someone to stumble or offending someone? "I'm not going to give any offense to Jews, or Greeks, or to the church of God." That's impossible! How am I not going to offend anyone? Here is one of the closest analogies we can extend to this concept: the best analogy is to understand that if you see another Christian, an older and more mature Christian, who reminds you and brings you back to your previous sinful lifestyle – that is the kind of specific stumbling Paul is talking about.

He's not saying offensive in general. He's referring to people who used to go worship at idols and give their food to idols, if they're young or new Christians and are struggling with that sin because they used to be really involved in practicing their other religion that was all about sacrificing and worshiping idols, and that person sees an older Christian eating the food that makes them revert to a sinful lifestyle.

When is it wrong to have drums or a certain type of music in a church setting? Perhaps if you're ministering to an area that had a really gothic, heavy metal drug culture. When you bring them to church and they hear this kind of music and see people wearing this kind of clothes and it makes them think of that lifestyle and makes them tempted to go back to that lifestyle. If you've never been in that drug lifestyle and you are offended by the sound of drums, that's not what Paul is talking about here.

If you're coming from a place where you struggled with verbal abuse growing up, your parents told you you were worthless, and then you go to a church where the culture where there is friendly banter, some people call it trash talking. I'm not a fan of trash talking; I think it has a certain degree of arrogance and pride, but I'm okay with some friendly banter. I think it's possible to have two friends to banter between them in a joking manner. If I came from a really competitive environment or I came from a family where my parents used to talk down to me and I see it differently.

Sometimes I'll say to my son, "Come here... now get out of here." When I think of my children, I think they don't think anything. I think my wife doesn't think anything. However if I'm in my home counseling someone who came from a home where the father was abusive and I have my son come over and I say that to him, that's probably not loving. Is it okay to say the phrase, "Come here... now get out of here; scram."? It's fine, but let's understand: if know that behavior, that activity, that statement will cause someone to revert to a sinful, destructive place, that is where the Bible says to not go there.

This is so true. When people are younger Christians, or at least when I was younger, I saw the world in black and white. This is wrong and this is right. If someone were to disagree with me, I would get into a debate with them. "You know, R-rated movies are wrong! Why are they wrong? Because of sex and violence! Why on earth would a Christian possibly spend money to be entertained by something Jesus Christ died for?" The counter-argument: "Nowhere in the Bible does it say R-rated movies are wrong. The Bible has sex, incest, adultery, rape, and tons of violence." The church is splitting over R-rated movies. If you understand the principles behind it, hopefully I'm painting both sides robustly. The Bible is an R-rated book. Have you read Song of Songs? There's a lot of stuff in there. It talks about the physical anatomy of men and women. It's one thing to understand the goriness of war or how God has made the human body, but it's another thing to seek entertainment by it.

Here's the basic thing: the newer the Christian, the more dogmatic they are. You know how I said earlier that the newer Christian sees things in black and white? Well, the more mature Christian sees things in black and white too; he or she is just a lot more gracious.

Take alcohol for example. This may not be true for all cultures in all contexts, but for example: I know people that are strongly open to alcohol, which is fine and totally legitimate for Christians. Some people might argue that it's wrong and that it causes people to stumble. I take what our senior pastor says. Our senior pastor is the epitome of so many things I see. The wiser Christians I know have a very clear idea of what is right and wrong. Many of them abstain. Many of the respected men and women I knew abstain from many things; they abstain from alcohol or certain types of movies or music. You would think, therefore, that they're conservative and that they think those things are wrong. However, when you get down and talk to them privately, they would say, "No, there's nothing wrong with alcohol, but I never drink alcohol. There's nothing wrong with watching an R-rated movie, I just never watch R-rated movies. There's nothing wrong with spending thousands of dollars on a vacation for pure recreation when there are people starving, dying, and in need of the Gospel, but my family and I don't really go on vacation because we like to give our money to the people who are hungry and starving for the Gospel and for real food."

It's so true. The people who have walked the furthest with Christ have the commitment to laying down all their rights, not because those things are right or wrong, but because they are past that point and it's the most loving thing to do. "Is it okay?" is not the best way how to spend our time, how to spend our money, how to spend our lives. "Is it okay?" is not the best question. If you ask, "Is it okay for a Christian to own a really expensive home or car?" Not the best question. "Is it okay a Christian to go on really lavish vacations?" Not the best question. "Is it okay for a Christian to read certain kinds of books?" Not the best question. The best question is: what can I do for the glory of God and what kind of offense am I going to give?

Paul gives these three categories of offense: to the Jews, to the Greeks, and to the church of God. Paul explains in the context and through other things, we know what these things are. This is the kind of offense Paul wants to avoid.

To the Jews, he wanted them to understand that believing in Jesus is not denying that there is one god. That was the thing that Jews kept stumbling on. "So you believe in two gods?" "No we don't believe in two gods, we believe in one god. Jesus is the son of God. In fact we believe that

Jesus is the son of God and the third person of the Trinity. That is what we believe.” If an ancient Jewish person were to go to a Christian and say, “I don’t agree with you because you believe in two gods”, Paul would say, “You got to really work on your part to fix that. They should not be walking away because you believe in multiple gods, but if they believe that there was no resurrection, then that’s important and that’s where we differ.”

When it came to the church of God, to the Christians, it was about what we’ve said: don’t do anything that causes someone to go back and revert to a formally destructive, sinful lifestyle—in their case, falling into the pagan worship of idols.

To the Gentiles, Paul would say, “Don’t give them any reason to resist the following and listening to the commands of Jesus.” What he means by that is “Don’t give them any reason because you guys are suing each other. The non-Christians don’t even sue each other that much but you Christians are suing each other. The non-Christians are not even fighting as much or having incest, yet you Christians are doing that. You’ve got to give no offense to these non-believers.” That is what Paul is saying.

It’s not a license to say, “That shirt offends me”, “that worship song offends me”, “that illustration offends me”, “that book offends me”—it’s not about that. It’s about the proper offense that says, “I will do anything and everything that will help other people come to Christ.” That leads to the third principle about glorifying God in these situations.

The first one we looked at was: “is it okay?” is not the best way. The second one we looked at is: the true nature of offense is not what we don’t like, but what causes other people to fall back into a sinful lifestyle; that’s what it means to offend someone. When Paul says, in verse 32:

³² Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, ³³ 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.

3. Do whatever it takes to help more people believe in Jesus Christ.

Here’s the ultimate principle for when people disagree on these issues: do whatever it takes to help more people believe in Jesus Christ. That’s what it comes down to. That is how a more mature believer begins to look at his or her choices in life. Do whatever it takes so that when people look at your life and my life, your finance habits and my finance habits, your lifestyle and

my lifestyle, they will not be given more reasons to reject Christ; rather, they will be given more reason to follow and obey Christ. That is the positive principle here.

A few years back, I was talking to this woman who was given an opportunity to get a promotion and get more work. She was struggling with this thinking, “Do I really want to do this?” She was telling me that this job position was a very high-power job, but the families of the people around her would pay a big price. This is a very sharp, successful woman given the opportunity to demonstrate her skills and do a challenging part of work. When we’re talking about the situation, she said, “I know, and my coworkers know, that if I take this position, I’m going to have a lot less time with my family. Is it okay?” I asked, “Well is it okay? How’s your family?” She responded, “I talked about it with my husband, we’ve been praying about it with the kids, and I really think that it’s okay. It’s going to be very hard and we’re going to have to be very intentional about spending time as a family. We’re not doing it for the money. It’s really just an opportunity to grow as a worker and professional. I think we’re really okay with it.” I told her, “Okay, let’s pray about it.”

Next time she came back and she said, “I found out that there’s a new Christian in the department. When I was talking to other people about this job opportunity and people knew I was considering it, she said to me, ‘But aren’t you Christian? Isn’t that going to take away time from your family?’ I later found out that this woman had Christian parents who never raised her directly because they were always away for work. They were good Christian parents; they were moral, faithful, and they tried to love her, but they just didn’t convey to her that she was more important to them than their jobs.” Do you understand the situation?

Here’s this woman with a great opportunity asking, “Is it okay to take a promotion?” Sure because she’s already counted the cost as much as she can, but here’s this other sister in that exact same group who has shared “isn’t that going to take away from your family?” not because she’s judging you, but she’s thinking about her lifestyle, her family, her upbringing, and how that causes families to fall apart. When I spoke to this person and asked her what she decided, she said, “I didn’t have the heart to take it and have this woman here think that I am neglecting my children, even though I’m pretty sure I’m not. It’s okay.” Because she turned down this promotion, she had an opportunity to meet with this other woman and form a discipleship relationship. It’s a beautiful story.

“Is it okay?” is not the best way to figure out what to do in life. Rather we need to figure out if we’re putting an offensive stumbling block, not because I don’t like you, but because we’re trying to help people have no hindrance to believe in Jesus. That’s the point of all the Christian life. To glorify God by building up and loving others so that more and more people would know the power, the joy, the love, the friendship, the holiness of Jesus Christ.

Now this, practically speaking, to bring this into your life, you have to have an intentional, relational conversation about these topics. Here’s what I mean: in the past three or four months, I’ve been thinking a lot about the counseling appointments I’ve been blessed to share; many of you have shared your stories, victories, and struggles with me. In almost every case, the older the person gets, the more complex their problems are, the more complicated their issues are. You know, when I was in youth ministry, it often went like this: “I don’t know if I should do this, my parents said no…” “Okay, then don’t do it.” But when we become adults, we have jobs, spouses, children, and it becomes more complicated. I’m finding an inherent barrier in my ability to serve many of you: I just don’t know enough about your situation. There’s so much more back history with your in-laws, your upbringing, your field and industry. The further I get from that and the less I know, I have to give you broader and broader principles. Until it feels all I’m saying is, “Well do whatever it takes to glorify Jesus.”

Here’s the trick and here’s what I think we need to understand: this is a precious relationship, a relationship where someone can say to you, “You know, it’s okay to do this, but here is what I think is best.” Do you have anyone in your life who has the knowledge of your life and the authority and respect of your mind who can say to you, “Yeah I mean Christians can do this, but may I tell you what I think is best?” The only people I can say that to consistently is my children. There are other people’s kids, even at church, that I see all the time and part of me recognizes, “Okay, those parents made those choices. It’s okay, but I really don’t think that’s the best.” Because it’s not wrong and unbiblical, I refrain. My kids get all of that. “Some people will say this. It’s okay, but what I think is best is if you think about it this way.” “Someone said to not do that, but I think you should do…” The only people I can do that with is my children and people who have invited me into their lives like a discipler. Those are the only people I feel I have the relationship bridge to do that with – not many people.

I go around life thinking, “Yeah, I guess that’s okay; it’s not wrong or unbiblical.” However, if you asked me, “Enoch, what do you think is best?” I would say 1) I need to know a lot more about your situation because I don’t know all the back story of your family or your job or your

field. Beyond that, I don't think you and I have built up the trust or the openness to say, "Let me tell you, I think it's okay, but let me tell you what's best."

Do you have people in your life who know enough about the details and complexities of the issues you and I face that they are informed and give you permission to say, "I can read the Bible and I know what's okay, but I really want you to tell me what you think is best, even if you think I'm going to disagree with you or I'm going to be mad. Will you tell me what you think is best because I don't want to just know if it's okay to do this, but what will maximize people believing in Jesus, following Jesus, because I want to do what is building up others, what is loving others, and I'm glad to lay down all of preference so others can understand how glorious it is to know Jesus.

"Is it okay?" is not the best way for a Christian to ask. Neither should it be about not offending people, if it's not offending people by putting a hindrance, a stumbling block to faith. It's all about helping people believe in Jesus. Do you have someone in your life who knows enough of the details? One counseling session will not do it. I would even dare say, a once a month meeting will not get you there for months, or even years. The complexities and challenges I face take too long to explain to someone in one or two settings. They have to journey with me and go through it with me for months or years. That's why small groups are so important. There is such value in sharing with a few trusted partners or being consistent with your small group life. Friends, life has too many complexities for you to tell someone your problems in 15 minutes and then expect an answer in the next 15 minutes, especially if we're yearning to help others believe in Jesus.

When we face these situations, practically, I want to ask you, do you think, "Is it okay...?" Let's understand that that is an important question, but it's not the best question. Will this help or hurt others to follow Jesus? Will it help or hurt my witness of my savior? Will this help others have a reason to reject Christianity because it's not making a big difference in your life or will it help people say, "I cannot ignore the claims of Christ because that family, that coworker, that neighbor, is just too different in a good, Christian way." I believe the way to get there is to have this kind of relationship, to have someone know the complexity of the things we face and to give them permission, "friend, don't just tell me what's okay. Will you brave and venture to tell me what you think is best? I may disagree with you and I can because 'it's okay?'" But at the same time, we need to go beyond "is it okay?" because that's not the best way.

The best way is what Jesus said. The best way is what Paul said. “I won’t eat meat. In fact, I won’t ever eat meat again.” In some families I know, they don’t drink alcohol at all because there’s that one uncle in their family who became a Christian and struggled with alcohol. For the rest of that uncle’s life, they’re not going to drink alcohol, especially at a family function. They’re not going to judge you for drinking alcohol and if you ask them if it’s okay, they’ll say yes, it’s fine. However, they abstain because they’re doing it to help someone else trust in Christ and have no reason to reject or resist the love of Christ.

If you’re a non-believer this morning, you might have such an experience where the reason why you’re still a non-believer is because you can point to someone who said they’re Christian but lived life a certain way. I implore you to not judge Christ completely by the shortcomings of this church. Obviously the Christian church has a responsibility to live up to the commandments and teaching of Jesus, but the whole reason Jesus came to die for us is because we could never do this on our own.

Whether we’re a Christian, a new Christian, a mature Christian, a young Christian, or a non-Christian, this is how to know Jesus. This is how to help others know Jesus. This is how we use our power and freedom to the glory of God.

Let’s pray.

Our great Father in heaven, would you show us the better way, which was already forecasting in 1 Corinthians 13 about love and I can’t wait to get there with our congregation. For now Lord, thank you for the practical advice that “is it okay?” is not the best way for a Christian to figure out “is it okay for a Christian to do this?”, “is okay if we buy this?”, “is it okay for us to choose this kind of lifestyle?” Lord, it is important to know if the Bible says it is allowable or not, but help us to see that there is so much more –the opportunity to help other people know Jesus.

Maybe some of us are dealing with food sacrificed to idols because of our heritage backgrounds or maybe some of us have some other issues and we’re thinking about whether or not we should do something. Maybe it’s fine and we can embrace it or maybe it’s an opportunity to lay down a privilege or a right so that others may find Christ because He was the one who laid down His own right, His own life, so that we might be saved. Lord, make this

practical teaching a reality for our church and may the non-believers and friends in our midst see that this is a part of what it means to know Jesus personally. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.