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Title: *Happier: Obligated and Unrestricted*

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

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Good morning, Orchard Hill Church. I am Mike Chilcoat. My nine to five is I work for Young Life as the regional director for what's called the keystone region. That's most of PA and a little bit of Ohio. But my wife and I and our three daughters call Orchard Hill home. And we actually live in the area, and it's not lost on us because we are members here at Orchard Hill that we get a chance to get up here and teach.

I'm humbled to get to do it. I'm humbled to get to spend a little time with you this morning and dive in. And hopefully, the hope here and the prayer is that we leave here knowing Christ more than when we walked in. So, that's the hope.

So, we are continuing on in the series called *Happier*. And last week you heard from Russ and First Corinthians seven. We're continuing on in First Corinthians eight. And you could title this message this morning, *Free to Sacrificially Love* - to have the freedom to actually love sacrificially.

It sounds like a contradiction, but it's not. To possess this freedom helps us to bypass that freedom and to lay it down in the pursuit of sacrificially loving other people. So, free to sacrificially love. And as Russ talked about, and as I'm going to talk about today, right during this time when this letter was written by Paul, there were many problems arising in court, many problems arising in the Church of the Corinthians.

The main issues revolved around disunity and sexual immorality. But we're going to dive into some ones that were maybe off on the side a little bit that they brought up in the letter as well. And, you know, I thought about it this morning, I thought about wearing a Pens jersey. I thought about wearing a Crosby jersey. But, you know, I thought I'd go with the suit.

And you might be wondering, why does Chili look like he's about to sell us a Chrysler? It's because I have a wedding directly following this. Literally, I will say amen. And then, you know, like Elvis or someone, I'll duck out the back and my car is even facing the right direction. The good news is if you're thinking oh, no, Chili is going to be late for the wedding... the good news is it's right down the street in Maryland. So, the wedding is in Maryland.

This was a terrible plan on my behalf. But a good thing. It's a really old friend of mine. A 46-year-old guy who's never been married. We're all really excited to be a part of it. I'm guessing I won't make it. I'm guessing I will be there for the reception. But Kimmie and I have had so many moments where we've snuck into the back of a wedding. Maybe you are better people than we are, but we have had to do that.

One of my favorites was there was a moment when Kimmie and I were driving to a really rural kind of barn wedding. We get lost. We're definitely going to be late. We pull up thinking, I will sneak into the back of the barn, and no one will notice, and the wedding is outside. Has this ever happened to you? We were kind of driving by the tree line, trying not to be seen, and then getting to the back of the wedding because they were being dismissed by rows, we were like, we got to get in there.

We looked like a scene out of *Band of Brothers* where Kimmie and I were running from hay bales to hay bales to hide. And then we finally got there, we went in, we did the old thing where you sit, and then everybody gets up and claps like beautiful, beautiful service. We watched about four seconds of it, but that's what's going to happen. Soon. If you can picture me in Maryland in just a few hours, that'll be what's going down.

So, back to the passage here. In First Corinthians eight, you have the church in Corinth dealing with these issues. And around the time that this was written, this would have been during Paul's third missionary journey. But prior to that Paul had actually spent 18 months with the Corinthians. They were his buddies. He knew them well. And it was this new church, and with it came a lot of problems and a lot of misunderstandings. But here is Paul on his third missionary journey, and they send a correspondence, a letter. He receives a letter from the church in Corinth and there are several disputes and various issues that have come up within the church, and they're asking Paul if he'll address them.

So, here's Paul navigating these questions by the Corinthians and about their traditional way of life. And here's where it gets a little nuanced. Paul is having to navigate this with the church through the lens of idol worship and idol sacrifice in the ancient world. Culturally there was a lot of this going on. He's trying to navigate it where he's trying to give them instructions, but also be cognizant of the fact that this was really common - idol worship in the ancient world and how that went down culturally.

And he's trying to figure out how can we navigate this in love? Back in the day when they would make a sacrifice to an idol, this would be a sacrifice in an attempt to feed the gods. They would sacrifice an animal in an attempt to feed the gods. One-third of

the animal that you brought in to sacrifice would be burned. One-third of the animal would go to the temple priests.

And then there's this sticky situation, the sticky subject of what do you do with the other third, the last one-third of the animal, and so the last one-third of the animal you would take home and you would feed your family with it, or you'd throw a barbecue in your neighborhood and watch the Pens game or something. This is what you would do with this last third of the meat. You would take it home.

So, the one-third that you take home feeds your family well. There are some sticky situations arising because what if your non-Christian friend invites you over for dinner? Some of these folks that are following Christ at the Church of Corinth were like, what if I get invited to a barbecue and I know that this animal was sacrificed to an idol?

Can I eat this? Can I, can I go and grab some of this pulled pork or am I not allowed to because it was sacrificed to an idol? It's an interesting question. Right? And there they're asking them things like; will God be unhappy if I eat this meat? Will he be frustrated with me? Should they never eat with nonbelievers?

I don't assume to know who's in this room. There are probably a lot of folks that have been in a relationship with Jesus Christ for a long time and have been attempting to follow Christ. There are probably others that are just getting a feel for it. And here are others that are like, I have no idea where I stand. I'm just here checking it out.

I heard it was food sacrificed to idols. I thought, man, I got to see that one. No, but you probably are here and maybe feeling it out and checking it out. But the question here for the believers that Paul is posing is should they never eat with non-Christians? That doesn't seem right. Because the meat was sacrificed to these idols is that going to be kind of a deal-breaker?

It's an interesting question. The Corinthians had written to Paul to discover God's will on these particular issues. This food sacrifice to idols thing was a big deal in the ancient world. Now, there's probably a bit of you that's saying, well, but Chili in 2022 in Wexford, PA, is the food sacrifice, the idol things, still relevant for me today? And I would say no. Hey, thank you so much for being here.

No, there's more. I would say this, literally that one is probably not going to be a common one that you and friends deal with, you know, in your office on Monday. However, as you see as we study through this, this is going to hit closer to home than

you could possibly imagine. More about the attitude towards religiosity or cold calculated rule-following and getting so caught up in the rules that we no longer love people well. That the priority becomes more of following the rules and agenda and traditions rather than loving and caring for folks. So, it actually will be relevant.

The real question here that Paul addresses and pinpoints is the question of freedom, discernment, knowledge, and love. Freedom, discernment, knowledge, and love. Are we supposed to leverage our freedoms in an effort to love? I'll ask it one more time.

Orchard Hill Church, as followers of Jesus, are we supposed to leverage the freedoms that we have in an effort to sacrificially love other people and make the most of every opportunity? I would argue an emphatic yes. In fact, when the Lord renovates our hearts and changes our hearts from the inside out, I believe He compels us to go and love sacrificially.

Why? Because we know where we are eternally. We have the assurance of salvation. He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose. When we're sacrificing time, money, and effort. Maybe it's a difficult person to navigate relationally. When we're sacrificially loving people, we are giving things we can't keep anyway and leveraging them in an effort to make an impact eternally.

So, the trade. Although it's difficult, don't get me wrong, I push my own agenda to the forefront a lot. Very selfish, self-centered, you know, manipulative at times. There are definitely moments where my agenda I make paramount so I'm not judging you or talking at you. I'm talking with you. But is that the key here? Is that the important part? Is love the goal and the chief purpose of greater knowledge? Is the purpose of greater knowledge to love better?

It's interesting when we talk about freedom. In my life, I've had moments where maybe I've been part of the solution and I've leaned in and used my freedom and leverage to sacrificially love others. I've had other moments where I have completely botched the thing and fumbled the ball and used my freedom for my own good and own advantages and my own self-promotion.

It's funny, and as you grow up, I think you understand and learn freedom differently. There are times in my life when I've had a moment where I thought this is going to give me real freedom. This is going to lift all, you know, take the governor off and really lift some of these shackles off of me. And I remember way back in the day, hearken with me, if you will, way back in the day when I was in middle school, way back in middle school, crazy time for all of us in middle school.

Imagine this. I haven't mentioned this in any of the other services. Are you ready for this? In middle school, I wrestled at 95 pounds. I could have a couple of 95-pound people on me right now and it would be similar. But 95-pound, little tiny Mike Chilcoat, back in middle school. We had an old school. I lived just north of downtown Columbus in this small suburb just north of the city. And our school was really old and it had no air conditioning, no central air, and it had no windows really. I mean a few windows here and there, but really most rooms were windowless. Terrible design. It was like a prison barracks, and this was designed by the same people.

So, we had this, you know, situation late in the year when it was getting really, really hot. And I'll be honest, I want to push pause for a second. I was quite comfortable. I don't even remember being uncomfortable. I thought it was fine. But some people were really upset and thought, this is really hot in here. And they're saying this isn't right, that we don't have air and there are no windows and it's just so stuffy in here. It's true. You can't learn like this. Right?

And we had a class one of the periods and it was taught by this old sort of hippie that was like, you take it to the streets, stick it to the man. Right? And you guys need to protest. You need to protest the fact you don't have air conditioning. Little 13-year-old Chili was like, this is a brilliant idea to just watch chaos reign and do something stupid.

So, my friend Bob and I are in the back of the room going, that's right. That's right. We got to get everyone fired up. And we start saying, no cool, no school, no cool, no school. I agree. And let me tell you, push pause for a second, and let me tell you about my friend Bob. I was not very academically rigorous at the time. I didn't take it very seriously. I was like the most skilled member of academia who ever lived compared to Bob. He was barely awake in school.

And Bob, his dad, was our baseball coach, among other things. But it was weird because as little as Bob took it seriously, his dad was the total opposite. Rick, big intimidating dad. Maybe you had a dad among your friend group that was like that. We were all a little scared of Rick. Menacing guy, a strict disciplinarian. He did not play. Okay, keep that in mind.

So, Bob's there. We're firing up with a no cool, no school and we start to walk around the hallways and tell people, hey, listen, we're going to, you know, no cool, no school. So, at recess, this is how long ago this was, we had recess. At recess, we're going to meet on the football field. We're going to let them know we don't appreciate this and we need to get air conditioning or whatever. No cool. No school.

So, this is also the kind of kid Bob was. One time we had a poetry final. We had worked on it all semester. You can tell I was really good on the poetry final, but I had actually worked on my poem and everybody was turning in their poems. Bob sees us moving sheets up to the front of the room and he's like, what are you guys doing? We're like, it's the poetry final. It's due today.

He's like poetry final? This is the class you're in. This is what we've been working on the whole semester. And his eyes got really big. So, he rips a piece of paper out of a three-ring binder, and quickly if any, Kurtis Blow fans, if you're an eighties rap fan, this is what he wrote on his poetry final. Basketball is my favorite sport. I like to watch him dribble up and down the court. He turned that in for his poetry final. I will tell you, Bob got an F on that paper, but the effort was there. This is the kind of student we're talking about.

So, we're out on the football field and we think maybe it'll be funny if a few folks come out. It is the majority of the eighth-grade class and a lot of the seventh-grade class meet us on the field. We have no plans. So, we start chanting, no cool, no school. We can't learn like this. You know, they're taking clues from Bob who never went to class. So, there is no cool, no school. So, the principal comes out. It now becomes this full-on weird thing, and the principal comes out with a bullhorn. He's like children, children, return to class. This is inappropriate. Everyone's chanting louder and louder. No cool. No school.

So, like a bunch of immature middle school kids, we don't know how to deal with this situation. Someone yells run away. So, everybody scatters and runs away. This is where the story gets a little crazy. I lived four doors down from the school. Someone yells, party at Chili's house. So, now I have the majority of the eighth-grade class, and some of the seventh graders are in my home. My mom is at work. People are breaking stuff. I'm like, this is not what I thought to be funny. This is getting out of control. And so, I'm really nervous. And I walk outside and I mean, can you believe it?

It's lunch break. Right then my mom's minivan comes down the street. It looks like Animal House, right? All going crazy in the front yard. And I ran up and I'm like, Mom, I wanted to stay in school really badly. I was just peer pressured to leave, and all these people came over here. And she's not really buying it. She's a smart lady, but she's like, get everybody out of here. So, right when she's like get everybody out of here, the local news channels pull up to the school and our front yard. And they are reporting that these moronic kids, that look super spoiled, you know, snuck out of school because there's no air conditioning, no cool, no school.

So, my mom is just overwhelmed so she sends us away. So, I leave. I walk down to Bob's house. I'm sitting there with Bob. It's several hours after school now. The whole thing subsided and we're sitting there and Bob's dad comes home early from work and he's wearing a suit. Rick comes in big, tall, menacing. Rick walks in and we're sitting on the couch and he goes, Bob, somebody informed me that there was a walkout at the school. You didn't have anything to do with this, did you, Bob? And Bobby's like, no, no, sir. Nothing. I was in a class focused. He's like, good, glad to hear it. And Chili you're not a good influence on him either. You two need to take this stuff seriously. We're like, absolutely, sir. We never left.

Right then, it happened to be around 5:00 when the local news was on. Smart kids that we were. So, Rick, you know, he's had a long day at work. He gets a drink, sits down, and puts on the news. And there is a shot of a reporter saying these students walked out today because of lack of air conditioning, which sounds ridiculous. And right then it shows a clip of the principal with a bullhorn. And Bob is front and center in the face of the principal going, no cool, no school.

And Rick's head explodes and he's like, Chili, go home right now. I was like, yes, sir. And we never saw Bob again. That was the last time we ever saw Bob. I don't know what happened to him, but that is a silly story where I talk about our apparent view of what freedom would look like. We were using it for ourselves. We didn't even have a plan. We had no idea we were taking it for granted. We were just kind of all over the place and aimless.

Freedom can be super confusing. Now, were our motives, selfless there? Were our motives looking out for other people, or were they about ourselves? Knowledge and freedom aren't enough in and of themselves. Knowledge and freedom aren't enough in and of themselves.

First Corinthians 8:1 The passage that you heard Dan Irvin read. The first verse says knowledge puffs up but love builds up. You notice that knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. You see knowledge without love as the goal is hollow at best and deeply narcissistic at worst. Knowledge just for knowledge sakes, if there's no action taken, is self-centered, egotistical, and narcissistic.

So, how can we approach knowledge, freedom, and discernment to help us love more effectively? We need to stop and put a stake in the ground and say if it's just about head knowledge, if it's just about knowing things where we're going to be arrogant, think more of ourselves than we ought. But if instead we say and look through the lens of, Lord, you have paid it all on the cross for me, Jesus, you love me. I was fearfully and wonderfully made. Lord, even though I'm a screwup, you forgive

me. And in humility we say, I want to learn more about you and know you more intimately and allow that love to compel me to go care for others and give away time, talent, and treasure that I can't keep anyway. Then that will actually lead to humility, not just knowledge. If it stops at knowledge, we're dead in the water.

James 1:22 says this, do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourself. Do what it says. I love James. He's so straightforward. It's not a gray area. It's black and white. Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourself. Do what it says. It can't just be head knowledge, can't just be academia. It needs to be more than that. We have to experience it for ourselves. If we learn about love and we learn everything there is to know about caring for people sacrificially, but never roll our sleeves up and do it. It's dead. It's empty. It's hollow.

There's a great movie called *Goodwill Hunting* that came out a long time ago. Maybe you've seen it. Matt Damon, Ben Affleck, Robin Williams. If you don't know the story, the story is about Will Hunting, played by Matt Damon, and he is a savant. He's a brilliant guy who grew up in a tough situation and faced a lot of adversity. There was some abuse, was in and out of foster care, and he's got some anger issues, understandably, right??

Well, he's working as a janitor. And at night he is solving these ridiculous equations that took people months to solve. He's solving them on the chalkboard. He's being covert about it, too. But they find out who it is and they send him to a series of counselors as he's trying to work through the pain that he endured as a child.

And at one point, he's with Robin Williams. And Robin Williams, one day takes him out, they sit by a lake. And at first Matt Damon is sort of mocking him saying, is this a Folger's crystals moment? What is this? He's sort of, you know, belligerent and making fun of him. And Robin Williams goes on for the next few minutes to talk about whenever I ask you about love, you might quote me a sonnet. And when I ask you about war, you might quote Shakespeare. When I ask you about this experience of putting yourself out there, you would quote some other reference to a book. Basically, it says, but you've never been in a war. You've never experienced pain and loss. You've never experienced true love because you've never stuck yourself out there and rolled your sleeves up and done it.

And it's this amazing scene about the difference between head knowledge and actually experiencing it for yourself. And stepping out of your comfort zone has to go from your head to your heart. And then actions were what would compel and push your feet forward in sacrificial love. You see head knowledge and study on actively

and sacrificially loving others, it's important. We want to do that. But if you never step out and practice and live out that knowledge, it's just dead.

So, Paul begins his answer, pinpointing the key to this passage and the principle to use when answering all questions. He sums it up in the beginning, and here's how he does it when trying to figure out what to do. So, this is this question that comes to him from the church in Corinth.

We're concerned about this food sacrificed to idols. Paul's main point and his main theme and thread through the whole thing, don't miss this, it is as follows. Consider what is the most loving thing you can do for others. He starts that way and ends that way. Consider what is the most loving thing you can do for others. Do we stop, take a deep breath, and start any moment when we're trying to figure out what to do with that attitude and outlook?

What's the most loving thing I can do for others? Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The author Sakae Kubo says it this way, "Knowledge alone leads to pride, to a lack of consideration, and to exploitation." I think that's an important part for us to highlight as well. We can twist it and pervert it and exploit folks in an effort to make it beneficial for ourselves.

So, is it the knowledge that trips us up? Chili, are you saying that knowledge alone is somehow evil or that's bad? Not at all. Don't mistake this. Is knowledge bad? Is that the stumbling block? No, that's not what I'm saying. Once again, when trying to figure out what to do, consider what is the most loving thing you can do for others.

If we grow in knowledge, will that lead to abounding love? I would argue, yes. As we are growing in knowledge and discernment, it will help us love more effectively. Two, knowing biblical truths allows us to bring the power of God's Word to bearing. The knowledge of knowing God's word will allow us to enact it and utilize it and leverage it. If we just know it and never use it, it's worthless. If we know it and actually practice it, now we're making an internal impact.

Hebrews 4:12 talks about the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword. That when we're reading this book, this is not some old Charles Dickens novel or something. This is a book that is living and active. God's inspired word or getting to experience Jesus when we read it. It's God's playbook for us. And when we read this word and live it out, Isaiah 55:11 will happen which says the word will not return void. So, when I'm actually learning this and putting the head knowledge in, and then I'm practicing it, I'm watching an impact happen.

Not because I'm so great. I'm the opposite of that. But because Christ is so great. His love compels me and impacts the other person in a way that's eternal. Things I can't hold on to anyway I'm using and leveraging for an eternal purpose. The person who enters into study with awe at the mind-blowing depth and intricacy of God's creation, personal love for all His people will have humility take root in their hearts and in their minds as their knowledge increases.

If we approach the throne of God's grace, apart from this humility, like I said before, we will think more highly of ourselves than we ought and we'll end up being egotistical, insecure folks who do things with selfish motives at all times. And that'll be it for us. That'll be our story.

Paul continues on navigating through the waters of increased knowledge and freedom and how they relate to love. Back in First Corinthians eight, verses four through six, it says this, "So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that 'An idol is nothing at all in the world' and that 'There is no God but one.' For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live."

The Gods that the meat was sacrificed in this particular example, the gods, lowercase "g" plural, the gods that this meat was sacrificed are fictional. They don't exist. That's what Paul's saying. These aren't even really gods anyway. This is fake, right? These are little idols. The gods who meet with sacrifice don't exist, so even the meat is not a problem. So, let's start with that. He's saying, hey, eating the meat is not a problem. They're not even really gods anyway. Hey, enjoy your freedom that you can eat with a clear conscience. You can eat this meat because they're not even really real gods anyway. So, they're free to eat the meat because they know better.

But it shifts a little bit here in verse seven, Paul says, yeah, that's true. You're free. They're not real gods, but there are some other considerations. Verse seven, chapter eight says this, "But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food, they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat and no better if we do."

Christians who used to worship these false gods may be stumbled. Paul's saying, Yeah, they're not real gods. Yeah, it's not a big deal if you eat the meat. You have the freedom. But consider leveraging that freedom to choose not to because some of the

folks in the room are going to be stumbled by this. It's going to bother him. He's saying you are free to eat the meat, but there are different ways to use your freedom here.

Verse nine. It goes on to talk about a weaker conscience. And this is not the only place where Paul references this weaker conscience. He talks about it in Romans 14. In fact, it's more well known in Romans 14 than even First Corinthians eight. So why does Paul mention this, and why does he consider them weak in faith? It's a little bit weird.

If you first started following the Lord and first started reading the Bible you'd be like, oh, I thought they'd call the weak people the really strict disciplinarian, religiously pious rule followers. But that's not what he says. Paul calls the weak those folks who are kind of focused on the rules and says, those of you who are a little more enlightened, that this is not the major thing, but they're kind of majoring in the minors here. He's like, you're the more enlightened crowd, but let's not make them stumble. Let's be sacrificial in how we love people.

In summary, Paul's main concern, not making either side change their actions, but avoiding division and judgment. Individual freedoms differ from one person to another. Hey, spoiler alert. Any history buffs in the room? The church has had a little trouble over the years with some division. No, really. I mean, it's been a problem. Unity needs to be something that we lean into. And here's where Paul is talking about it. He's dealing with it.

There are matters of conscience that amount to individual moral imperatives. Let me explain what I mean. There are going to be some things that are clearly God's will or against God's will. I love it in Scripture when it starts with, it is God's will if, because then I'm like, okay, I can relax. This is black and white. I know this one. I can build a foundation on it. There's some moral gray area that we're getting to a second, but there are some black and white ones. Those would include, thou shall not kill, thou shall not lie, thou shall have no other gods before me. These are ones that, you know, there's no confusion here.

What he means by this actually, really quickly, this has nothing to do with anything. I was at a conference, a Christian conference, a leadership conference a while back, and there's this woman that got up. She was a really good speaker. But at one moment she had a funny moment where she said, you know, we all struggle with different sins. Some of them, I struggle with the same sins every day. And some of these, you're struggling with every week, and we're like, yes, yes. And she's like, you know, you might lie. And we're all like, mm. Yeah. You know, you might not honor

your father and mother. I'm like, oh, certainly. Yeah, that's true. She's like, maybe, you know, you murder people or maybe you cheat. We were like, wait, can you go back one, murder people? She's like, yeah, every day. No. So we left the conference. We were scared and frightened of her. No, maybe she meant hating your brother or sister, but she said murder.

Anyway, I move on. Here's another one. Don't get drunk. I'm going to stop for a second. I'm going to use drinking as an example. Not because it's the most important one, but because I think we can relate to it. Okay, don't get drunk. So, the morally gray area of that one would be this, having a drink is not usually sinful. Having a drink is not usually sinful. Going to a bar is usually not sinful. Right? However, what if you're an alcoholic? To whom one drink can cause you to spiral out of control. If you even go to a bar, you'll lose it. What if that's you? This may be a sin for you, but not for others. Do you see that? Well, there's no absolute there. For that person that might be a sin because it causes so much pain and heartache and they know themselves and they've been there.

For others, it might not be a problem. I'll have a drink. I might go out with friends or neighbors and have a drink, socially. I will go out and have a drink or two with friends or family with a clear conscience. So, I'll go out and have a drink with a clear conscience. However, I myself have been in situations in my life where maybe I know that this friend of mine went through rehab, or maybe I'm with someone who I know has had abusive alcoholic parents and it's painful for them. Or maybe it's just someone who I know culturally grew up in a situation where consuming alcohol wasn't a thing that was done. And this will be a stumbling block for them.

So, I will have moments where I literally will say, I'm going to bypass drinking in this particular circumstance because it'll trip them up. It's a silly example, but it's an easy way to sacrificially love and consider the other person. Take the freedom that I have, those things are not inherently sinful, and leverage them and sacrifice that freedom for the betterment of the other person.

The book *Messy Spirituality* is one of my favorite books by a guy named Michael Yaconelli. It's a fantastic book. He tells the story of John Mackay. I want to read it to you now. The story goes like this. "John Mackay was the president of the Church of Scotland after World War Two. With two other ministers from a rather severe and pietistic denomination, he traveled the summer, remote parts of the Balkan Peninsula to check on missionaries they supported in rural parts of the country.

The three clergymen called on an Orthodox priest in a small Greek village. Excited to see the visitors, the priest offered the clergyman a glass of rare and expensive wine.

Horrified, the two pietistic ministers refused. Dr. Mackay, on the other hand, took a glass full, sniffed it like a wine connoisseur, and sipped it and praised its quality. He even asked for another glass.

His companions were noticeably upset by Dr. Mackay's behavior. Later, when the three men were in the Jeep again and making their way up the rough road to the village, the two pious clergymen turned on Dr. Mackay with a vengeance. Doctor Mackay, they insisted. Do you mean to tell us that you are the president of the Church of Scotland and an officer of the World Council of Churches and you drink?

Doctor Mackay had had all he could take, and his Scottish temper got the better of him. No, I'm not a drinker, but I thought someone should be a Christian. My hunch is that Doctor Mackay didn't convince his condemners the rules of their faith were much more important than showing grace. They were much more excited about condemning the faith of Dr. Mackay and the priest than they were about living their own faith."

Chapter eight ends like this, "For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall."

Being a Christian is about freedom, not restriction. There might not be a bigger misconception in Christianity of the entire thing than that. Being a Christian is about freedom, not restriction. John 8:31 through 32, really famous verses here in the Gospels. John 8:31 and 32 reads this way, "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'" The truth will set us free. And then the Lord says, yeah, now leverage that freedom, sacrificially give it up for the betterment of other people. Consider how you would love them properly and in the best way.

I'm going to close with this. In summary, the principle of servant love suggests self-denial without judgment. Self-denial without judgment. We should enjoy our freedom. Enjoy it. This is hard enough to follow Christ without making up rules so enjoy our freedom. Two, what we do in the gray areas can differ from one situation to the next. Keep that in mind. Three, we should accept differences without judgment. Four, avoid pushing the gray area matters into the absolute category. We see that too.

Here are some potential pitfalls of not avoiding this. If you don't avoid this, here are some potential pitfalls. They would include fear of contamination by the world leads to withdrawal. I've seen so many Christians who are so afraid of being contaminated by the world that they withdraw and become a little hermit and they're ineffective at best. At worst, they come across as really arrogant, and self-righteous. Two, Christians lose touch with their non-Christian friends. Who does Jesus hang out with? Sinners, the world, everybody, his neighbors. Christians become detestable to the non-Christian world. And finally, it draws attention away from what really matters. It majors in the minors.

If you're thinking, I'm being way too liberal on this, let me bring it back a little bit. Potential pitfalls of unrestricted freedom. There are also those. These include people who will misunderstand our actions if we have unrestricted freedoms and just say whatever. People will conclude that right and wrong do not matter. That's not where we're going either. And finally, we'll lose our freedoms due to excess. I've seen it happen. Finally, in conclusion, living for Christ gives us true freedom.

Two, don't use your freedom as a way to satisfy your selfish desires, yours and mine. Three, rather use your freedom. What would it look like Orchard Hill Church if we used our freedom to serve in love? If we truly leverage the freedoms that we have with a wonderful attitude of I'm going to fix my eyes on the eternal, not the temporary, and I'm going to leverage these to serve and love.

And finally, we need to resist any attempts to go beyond what God has revealed in His written word. We don't need to add more stuff to restrict us when trying to figure out what to do. Consider what is the most loving thing you can do for others. I'm going to pray, Lord Jesus, thank you so much for this opportunity this morning. I pray that we leave here knowing you better than when we walked in. And Lord, I pray that we lean into this. What does it look like to leverage our freedoms to sacrificially love others? We thank you for giving us your word and giving us your truth. Your name we pray. Amen. Thanks for being here. Go Pens. See you soon.