

## **COS Sermon Study**

### **“Free of Charge”**

**Preacher: Pastor Joel**

**Study Writer: Pastor Joel**

**Fifth Sunday After the Epiphany - February 4, 2024**

**Opening Prayer:** Blessed Lord, You have given us Your Holy Scriptures for our learning. May we so hear them, read, learn, and take them to heart, that being strengthened and comforted by Your holy Word, we may cling to the blessed hope of everlasting life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

**Warm Up:** What are some of the hardest things about being a Christian? What are some of the best things?

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 9:16-27

### **1. Takeaway 1 - Christians are Free AND Bound**

- First, a bit of history... Very early in the Reformation, in 1520, Martin Luther sent a letter to Pope Leo X. This letter was a plea to the Pope to convince him that Luther was only acting in good faith and not to attack the Catholic Church. Attached to this letter was a pamphlet which got to the heart of Luther's theology and became a best-seller straight off Johannes Gutenberg's own printing press: *The Freedom of a Christian*. In the first few pages of this pamphlet, Luther presents this paradox of two seemingly contradictory statements:
  - “The Christian is a completely free lord of all, subject to none.”
  - “The Christian is a completely dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”
- It seems like it'd be impossible for these both to be true, but Luther shows that they are exactly how Scripture speaks (especially using 1 Corinthians 9:19!).
- By faith, we are given the greatest freeing gifts of God—forgiveness, salvation, eternal life, the riches of Heaven that we don't deserve! And as people who have faith in our generous and self-sacrificing God, we live not for ourselves but for our neighbors—serving them, sharing our joy and hope, not asserting what we “deserve” but seeking to show them the love of Christ.
- Mature Christians likely don't even need to hear these statements out loud to know that they're true; Christians experience this tension every day of our lives!
- **Q1:** This section in 1 Corinthians speaks to both sides of this paradox. Read through our reading again. Which verses or phrases speak to Christians having freedom in the Gospel? Which verses or phrases speak to Christians being bound to serve our neighbor? Are there any verses or phrases that speak both at the same time?

- (Sometimes the difference depends on the person! At some points in this chapter, Paul talks about how he is bound so that others may experience the free Gospel.)
- **Q2:** Who are some people in your life who have exemplified this sort of Christ-like service?

## 2. Takeaway 2 - All Things to All People

- Paul uses his ministry efforts as an example of how he binds himself to his neighbors' needs. He "becomes all things" so that he and his Gospel message don't seem so foreign or off-putting.
- This may sound like Paul is advocating for Christians to be spineless people who adopt every cultural norm around them. There certainly are things among the unbelieving world that a Christian cannot accept.
- **Q3:** Where should we draw the line? How do we make these decisions?
  - (Remember, Paul is becoming all things to all people so that he might speak the Gospel to them. If that is ever endangered, we certainly have gone too far)
- Erring on the other side is also dangerous. If we are paralyzed in our missional efforts so that we don't speak the Gospel to the world, then we are ignoring Jesus' commands to us!
- **Q4:** What often keeps Christians from speaking the Gospel to the world? What often keeps you from speaking the Gospel to the people around you?

## 3. Takeaway 3 - It Takes Training

- In the last few verses of our reading (v. 24-27), Paul is honest that living in this tension of freedom and bound service is hard! It's not natural to our sinful nature. So, it takes practice. Paul makes the comparisons to athletes. If athletes are willing to strictly discipline themselves through diet, exercise, and practice all for a perishable prize, then shouldn't we be willing to hone our skills at being a servant?
- **Q5:** What are the skills that Christians should be honing? Hint: Paul's list of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-26 might be a good starting place.
- Verse 26 is especially powerful: "I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air." Practicing the disciplines of the faith is not like practicing for an athletic competition. If you practice for an athletic competition, then your practice is meaningless compared to doing the "real thing" at the competition. We practice the disciplines of the faith by doing them. When we practice them, we're not just puffing ourselves up, but we are serving the people around us just as God called us to do.
- **Q6:** What are some practices you have found helpful in your walk with Christ?
- **Q7:** Think back to the people you mentioned in Q2 above. Have you noticed them practicing these disciplines before? If not, ask them when you get a chance!

- **Q8:** Think about your household (whatever that may look like). What are some ways that you could practice more of these disciplines at home?

### **Suggestions For Further Study**

- God gives his Gospel "free of charge" through the Holy Spirit. Open up the Small Catechism to Luther's definition of **the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed** to see more about how the Spirit does this.
- **Galatians 5** doesn't just have a list of fruits of the spirit; it also talks about the freedom we have in the Gospel! Read through it and note similarities and disciplines between that chapter and 1 Corinthians 9.
- **Acts 13:13-41** and **Acts 17:22-31** are two examples of Paul's preaching to non-believers. Acts 13 to Jews and Acts 17 to Greeks. How do they differ? What from these two speeches show you that Paul is doing his best to be "all things to all people"?
- Of course, further study could be done by reading Martin Luther's *The Freedom of a Christian!* You can find pdf's online if you're interested.

### **Closing Prayer**

Heavenly Father, you have made us your children simply by your grace alone. Lead us to dwell in that grace more richly, and lead us to do whatever possible to share that grace with others. Use the Holy Spirit to shape our hearts more into the hearts of your servants. And as your servants, hear our prayers on these issues that are near and dear to us... [Your group's petitions can be spoken here].