

Who cares about the Reformation? To the Glory of God Alone (November 26, 2017)

1 Corinthians 10:23-33

Let us pray. Holy Spirit, make us realize that these scriptures are meant to draw us nearer to God and seek our salvation from Christ alone. Rescue and redeem us with these precious and sacred words. In Jesus' Name, we pray. Amen.

When I was in university in my early twenties, I worked for 2 summers in a meat packing plant. We processed and packed meat for major fast food chains including hamburgers, filet of pork, and bacon bits – vast buckets of bacon bits! Yuck! It was a tedious and boring job, but I made good money that helped pay for my studies. This experience also gave me an appreciation for the food production industry and I probably have a better sense than many people about what it takes to prepare the food that we buy in the grocery stores. In the ancient world, food was not prepared in this way at all - in large cities, you purchased your food in the market square for the most part. But the temple was also a place where you could purchase meat. Yes, the temple. People brought animals to the temple for festivals, rituals, and sacrifices to the pagan gods – and what meat was not used by the priests was sold off to the worshippers. It is hard for us imagine bringing live animals into a house of worship, but this was a very common practice for Jews, Greeks, and cult groups in the ancient world.

Paul's letters to the Corinthians are full of practical advice about how this new Christian community was to live such in a diverse society. They needed to be instructed on how to behave, how to worship, and even what to eat. But this really doesn't apply do us



today...or does it? We may not be having discussions in the Church about where to buy our meat, but Paul's instructions still speak to us today because Paul is talking about 3 very relevant things in this passage – freedom, choice, and how we are to glorify God. The freedom that we are talking about here is not the same type of freedom that we talked about during our Remembrance Day service. Paul is not talking about national freedom from tyranny and oppression, but personal freedoms and what we CHOOSE to do with these freedoms. We have

more freedom today in our society than any previous generation. We can do more things than ever before. Just think about the grocery store that you normally shop in. Did you have that variety of choice when you were growing up? I certainly didn't! One of our daughters is a vegetarian and she does not need to eat meat for protein because there are many other forms of protein available today. She has the freedom to choose NOT to eat meat. Our wide range of freedom of choice goes far beyond the grocery store, doesn't it? If you have access to the Internet and a credit card, the possibilities are endless. I can do all my Christmas shopping without leaving my home. I can book every aspect of a vacation – flights, hotels, car rental, and attractions. I can donate money to my favourite charities. So far, not so bad – but I also have the freedom to choose to go online and talk to men who are not my husband. I could go home and do this tonight...and no one would ever know.

Paul is challenging us to think about the freedoms and choices that we have. In the opening verse of our reading for today, Paul says – all things are lawful. (1 Cor. 10:23) Does that mean that Christians have a perpetual 'get out of jail free' card? Now that we have been saved by grace alone through faith alone, can we do anything that we want? Absolutely not! Not all things are beneficial, Paul goes on to say. The freedoms and choices that we have been given provide us with opportunities to reflect the saving grace of Jesus Christ to others so that they might be saved. It would not be beneficial to my relationship with my husband or the wellbeing of my family for me to go online for the purpose of cheating on my husband. I have the freedom to do this, but it is not beneficial. Indeed, I would break my marriage vows, my ordination vows, and last but not least - the commandments of the Lord. Exercising such 'freedom' would not be beneficial to help others grow in their relationship with the Lord.

When making decisions about how we use our freedom and choices, Paul reminds us that a key question should be - do our choices offend or hurt others? Paul mentions three groups of people in this passage that we need to be mindful of – Jews, Greeks, and the Church of God. (1 Cor. 10:32) We may not live in the same society as the first century Christians, but these groups

are still relevant for us today because they refer to believers of other faith traditions, people with no faith at all, AND our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. In other words, we need to be mindful and sensitive to the conscience of others. This is not an easy thing to do because it requires humility, respect, compassion, wisdom, and an awareness of the needs of others. Folks – this is not about political correctness. We are Christians and we should declare ourselves so – but Paul is encouraging Christians to be flexible in how they interact with others, not for our own advantage, but FOR THE GLORY OF GOD.



Glorifying God in all that we do is the last of the 5 solas of the Protestant Reformation. This sola is perhaps the hardest to put into practice in our daily lives because it tells us something that we do NOT want to hear – we are not the centre of the universe. The world does not revolve around me or you. At Helen Duggan’s service on Friday, we concluded with a graveside service at Greenwood Cemetery which is off Lakeshore Road and is quite close to the QEW. As we were gathered at the graveside, the noise from the traffic was quite loud for Friday at 1 p.m. in the afternoon. There was a PA Day in the Halton District School Board and of course, it was Black Friday. People were out shopping for a good deal while a family stood in a cemetery to lay their beloved mother to rest. I was struck by these polar opposites and I was sadly reminded that the world keeps spinning even in the midst of grief and sadness. We are not the centre of the universe – God is. And our lives should reflect this truth so that God may be glorified in all things. SDG – *Soli Deo gloria*. To the Glory of God alone.

No matter who you are or what is going on in your life right now, you each have opportunities to glorify God every day. It doesn’t matter if you work or if you are retired – God gives you these opportunities in your interactions with people every day. The choices that we make in how we treat others – especially those outside the Christian faith – reflects the grace of God that we have received through Christ our Lord. As Christians we are called to build people up, not tear them down. The choices that we make about how we spend our time and money can and should glorify God. We glorify God, not for our own gain or advantage, but to let the

light of Christ shine into the darkness of our world. Paul's practical advice to the Christian community in Corinth echo what Jesus said to the crowds who were listening to the Sermon on the Mount - *You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.* (Matthew 5:14-16)

As we conclude our exploration of the Protestant Reformation this month, we have so much to be thankful for – for the grace of God, for our Lord Jesus Christ, for the teachings of Scripture, and for our faith. And our response to all of these wonderful blessings? To be a blessing to others in the name of Jesus Christ. To glorify God and enjoy him forever.

To God be the glory. Now and always. Amen.

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