

TURNING RIGHT ON RED

I CORINTHIANS 8:1-13

EPIPHANY 4-B, JANUARY 28, 2018

If William Shakespeare one day said, **“To be or not to be, that is the question!”** the Christians in Corinth were debating a somewhat similar question: **“To eat or not to eat, that is the question!”**

It's no secret that you and I are living in a world today--**where people are becoming more educated, as well as more discriminating,** about the various kinds of food they are willing to put into their mouths--and those foods from which they also decided--they will now **abstain** from eating completely!

Many people are now cautious against eating manufactured foods that have been created with GMO'S (Genetically Modified Organisms) and in response to this are now eating more of those foods that are labeled in the supermarket as **“organic.”**

Though totally unrelated, more and more people are also committing themselves to **“GLUTEN FREE”** diets.

I did some research this past week and **according to 2016 statistics, of the 245 million** people living in the United States at that time--who were **18 years and old--8 million** of those **245 million** people now have declared themselves to be **“vegetarians;”** and of those 8 million, **3 million are also “vegans;”** people who not only stop eating all meat-products, but who also **abstain from eggs and dairy products as well!**

The Christians in Corinth were at odds with one another as to whether they should be eating meats that were being sold at some of the pagan temples in Corinth--at rock bottom prices--or not!?!

Bible commentators will quickly point out to us--that while animals were sacrificed at these pagan temples--it wasn't the whole body of the animal that was sacrificed or thrown into a fire--but most always--only a portion of those animals. **The rest of the animal would be butchered and sold to the general-public for food consumption!**

Now there were some Christians in Corinth whose tender consciences were no more offended by that possibility, than any of us would be offended---if following this worship service today--others of us were to drive over to **SAMS CLUB** or to **COSCO** to buy some meat products there!

On the other hand, however, there were some Christians who were deeply offended -- at even the thought -- of their returning to those pagan temples to purchase meat as byproducts from those sacrificial animals.

After all, many of these people who were adult converts to the Christian faith, had absolutely left that former lifestyle behind them when they became Christians; when they confessed their sins to God Almighty and were baptized into the Christian faith and made members of the Christian Church--the body of Christ!

They did not want to revert to living in an unchristian way! They heard Jesus say: "If anyone puts his hand to the plow and looks back, he is not fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62)!

Friends, the words of our **Epistle Lesson this morning (I Corinthians 8:1-13)** are all about that **whole SUBJECT OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM.**

And yet, when we talk about Christian freedom--we must distinguish the difference in our own minds--between those expressed commands of God that are given to us in the Bible regarding his law: DO THIS AND DO NOT DO THAT, versus, those areas of our Christian lives where the Bible neither commands us or forbids us from participating in various types of behavior.

Seeking to give God the first place of importance in our lives is never an option. Doing our best to never take God's name in vain--by cursing, swearing, or by our using witchcraft or lying or deceive others in his name is never an option. Remembering the Sabbath Day to keep it holy, is never an option!

BUT THERE ARE THOSE AREAS OF OUR CHRISTIAN LIVES, PAUL IS REMINDING US HERE, WHERE WHAT IS RIGHT FOR SOME IS NOT NECESSARILY WHAT IS RIGHT FOR ALL!

So, having said all of this, let me now ask you: **Have you ever disagreed with another believer something was "allowable behavior" for a Christian or not?**

It certainly is no secret that you and I are living in an American society today where peoples' lives are governed much, much less by societal norms than they have ever been before.

This past Monday I had an opportunity to visit the South Carolina State Museum downtown on Gervais Street; not far from our State Capitol Building to peruse some of the exhibits there; something I have not done in over ten years. Some of the exhibits I saw

were about life in the Old South. One of those exhibits--talked about the fact that when a woman's husband died at the end of the 19th Century--**everyone expected that grieving widow to go into a period of "heavy" grieving for a period of two years!** Women, especially were expected to wear long black dresses during that entire time.

BUT WE LIVE IN A DAY THAT MANY SOCIOLOGISTS HAVE DEFINED AS THE AGE OF "RUGGED INDIVIDUALISM" TODAY. Society dictates that more and more people have to simply do what is right for them!

There was a day when most stores and businesses in the United States were closed on Sundays--out of respect for the Christian Sabbath. And still today, if the research I did on the Internet this past week is correct--out of the 46 counties in the State of South Carolina--*26 of those 46 counties have BLUE LAWS that are enacted every Sunday; or at least they still did in 2014.* There are certain items you are not able to purchase in those counties until after 1 PM or 3 PM in the afternoon.

It's not surprising, however, that those law have been totally taken off the books in those counties where TOURISM brings countless dollars into the State Treasury each year! Most of these counties are located along the eastern coastal waters of the Atlantic Ocean, in addition to **Richland County, Lexington County and Greenville County** in the upstate!

There was a time when some Christians did not believe it was allowable for them to listen to the Radio on a Sunday, or maybe even to watch football games on a Sunday afternoon either.

There was a time when many Christians, even as some still believe today, that it was not **permissible for them to attend the showing of an R-Rated Movie.**

Christian on the **"MAY" side of such disagreements** usually argue that these types of **activities are not strictly forbidden in the Bible.** Christians on the **"SHOULD NOT" side either point to a passage of the Scriptures they believe settles the dispute--** or they contend that the activity is prohibited by Biblical principle!

In the words of our epistle lesson today--the Christians in the Corinthian congregation were in great disagreement with one another--whether or not it was permissible for them to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols in pagan temples!

Bible scholars teach us that while animal sacrifices were made routinely at these pagan temples--only part of that animal's body was offered up to that idol in a sacrificial way. The rest of these animal's bodies were often butchered up and sold as meat to be purchased by people at discount prices--meat products that they could share with other family members in their homes, or sometimes large quantities of these meat products could be purchased by those in a **CATERING BUSINESS WHO WILL THROW PARTIES FOR THE UPPER-CLASS, MORE EDUCATED, MORE HIGHLY SOPHISTICATED PEOPLE.**

Some of these Christians who were Gentile converts to the Christian faith had come to believe that there is **ONLY ONE TRUE AND TRIUNE GOD--THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB, WHOM YOU AND I HAVE ONLY COME TO KNOW, AS ST PAUL SO OFTEN REMINDS US, AS THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST!**

Others in the congregation, were horrified by the thought of their engaging in what they believed would have been for them a very despicable practice. **THESE PEOPLE WERE TO A LARGE DEGREE--ADULT CONVERTS TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH--WHO ONCE WORSHIPED THOSE IDOLS THEMSELVES.**

How in the world could they--who had come to faith in Jesus Christ through the Gospel--ever seen themselves returning to such practices again!

Here St. Paul makes a powerful statement: **KNOWLEDGE PUFFS UP BUT LOVE BUILDS UP!** The acquisition of knowledge can certainly be a good thing, but sometimes people make use their acquisition of knowledge to put other people down!

Like that young person several decades ago who was the first to attend college throughout the whole history of their family tree--who becomes much more polished and erudite in their use of the English language, but whose parents and grandparents had little more than a 3rd grade or a 4th grade education; parents and grandparents who never had the opportunity to learn about the various parts of speech or English grammar, who when they come home from school are always correcting their parents' and grandparents' poor usage of grammar in a very embarrassing or humiliating way!

Both St. Paul and St. Peter have directives in the New Testament for women and the way that they should dress in that first century world! In **I Timothy 2:9-10**, Paul writes: **"Women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness--with good works!"**

In **I Peter 3:2-5**, Peter writes: **"Do not let your adorning be external--the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear--but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands..."** Both passages were probably the apostles' attempt to avoid scandalous behavior on the part of women being exercised in the church.

TWO INSIGHTS TO THE EXERCISE OF OUR CHRISTIAN FREEDOM:

- 1. Refrain from judging or condemning believers whose opinions differ from your own (Romans 14:1-2).**
- 2. Refrain from exercising your freedom in was that would pressure, embolden, or encourage another believer to sin by going against his own conscience (Romans 14:13-23).**

The bottom line for Jesus and for St. Paul was always love. On the night before he died, our Savior took up that basin full of water and towel and went around and washed the disciples' feet. "If I your LORD and MASTER have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. Blessed are you, not only if you KNOW THESE THINGS, BUT ESPECIALLY IF YOU DO THEM!

John Maxwell -- "No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care!"

It certainly comes as no NEWSFLASH to anyone here that motorists in the State of SC can make a right turn on red at most traffic lights; provided that they make a full stop first. It can help them to get to their intended destination sooner and prevent traffic jams. But you have to make sure that your turning right on red will not harm anyone in another car or in your own car.

Sometimes, the snarl of traffic is so severe that the DOT decides to put a "NO RIGHT TURN ON RED" in that Intersection, like the one at the corner of St. Andrews Road and Lake Murray Boulevard.

BUT YOU CAN'T JUST TURN RIGHT ON RED FRIVIOUSLY. YOU HAVE TO STOP FIRST...LOOK...AND SEE IF THERE ARE ANY OTHER CARS COMING IN YOUR DIRECTION---THAT COULD MAKING YOUR TURNING RIGHT ON RED EXTREMELY HAZARDOUS!

SOME INTERSECTIONS WHERE THERE IS ALWAYS SUCH A BIG SNARL OF TRAFFIC, THERE ARE THOSE SIGNS THAT SAY: NO TURN ON RED, corner of St. Andrews Road and Lake Murray Blvd.

NO WERE DOES THE BIBLE SAY THAT IT IS A SIN TO DRINK WINE, FOR AFTER ALL, JESUS' FIRST MIRACLE WAS TURNING 60 GALLONS OF WATER INTO HIGH QUALITY, FRESH VINTAGE WINE.

BUT IN MANY PLACES IN THE BIBLE IT DOES TELL US THAT IT IS A SIN TO GET DRUNK ON WINE!

EPHESIANS 5:15-21, "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the best use of the time you have available to you, because the days are evil.

Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord in your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ!" Amen