

Paul tells the Corinthians the same thing in his first letter to them:

For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for? (I Corinthians 10:29-30)

To be sure, the apostle balances this freedom with the duty to love. Luther didn't think up his paradox of the freedom and the servitude of the Christian. He got it from Paul. But the freedom side is really there and we must learn to trust it.

What are the questions in our day? How much time to give your kids on video games? How much to spend on your new kitchen? What books to read? When to pray? What to do for fun? What kind of art to hang in your apartment? What kind of movies to watch? How much of a regimen to be on with natural foods? How to school your child? Whether to marry? How often you should come together sexually, if you're husband and wife? What's the best way to help the poor with their medical needs? Whether to drink alcohol or abstain? How much to spend on clothes? What to be when you grow up? And on and on.

Well, you're free in these things, Christian. Not free to do whatever you want. Whatever is decided apart from faith, faith that before God it is the right thing to do, is sin. But where the Word of God doesn't speak definitively you *are* free to decide these things humbly with God, without being tyrannized by what others think or how they decide these questions for themselves.

This is a rich freedom and we should enjoy it more than we do. When we think of standing before the Lord now to make those decisions which will make our life a glorious "one of a kind" life as his redeemed child or family, it should delight us! As someone once reminded me: "In the day of judgment God won't say to me, 'Why weren't you Moses?' He will say to me, 'Why weren't you Ron Lutjens?'"

--Ron Lutjens

We celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly—and in a circle, at the end of worship. A word of direction is given, and with this everyone stands and moves to the walls. The cup is passed in two forms: in a chalice and then in small individual cups. You are free to choose.

And as this is the Supper of the Lord Christ, please listen to the instructions we give as to what qualifies a visitor to participate. **But whether you intend to take communion or not, please join us in the circle.**

Cover Art: Cover art: flower design by Oldrich Hlavsa (1905-95).

So if the Son sets you free,
you will be free indeed.

John 8:36

Old Orchard Church

November 15, 2009 — 10:15 to 11:45 a.m.

Celebrating the Freedom of the Christian in Jesus Christ

If the Son of God makes us free, we are free indeed!
Free from the wrath of God;
Free from the powers of Sin, Death, and the Devil;
Free from having our consciences bound by other people:
by the church,
by the state,
by our neighbor or colleague,
by a child, a parent, a spouse.

In Christ is gladness, the gladness of a free conscience,
Amidst all the sadness of human judgment and condescension,
whim and prejudice.



Today's Scripture Readings

Old Testament Reading: Exodus 1:8-14

Epistle Lesson: I Corinthians 10:23-33

Today's Sermon

“The Cynical Response to God's Delays”

Matthew 25:14-30

Ron Lutjens, senior pastor, preaching

Free to Be One of a Kind—Before God

A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.

A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.

Martin Luther wrote those words, and his tract in defense of them, The Freedom of a Christian, in 1520, three years after posting the 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. Luther not only rediscovered the Bible's teaching that grace is a sheer gift from God; he also grasped that it is the gospel which guarantees the freedom of the individual person: Christ rescued me not only from the wrath of God and the compulsion of sin, but also from the opinions and judgments of other people. In the cross I have been freed to live for God. I do not do things just because others do them; Christ frees me from a mindless or fearful conformity. I am trying to be myself before my Lord; trying to use responsibly the freedom he gives to me, personally; trying to be “one of a kind,” to borrow the title of the Sunday School study our middle school kids once did.

Most of us know that all this is true, that not the mere opinions of fellow human beings but only the will of almighty God can bind our conscience. But doesn't most of the emphasis usually go on the second half of Luther's paradox, that I am to serve others? We're constantly told we need to make sacrifices for others and give, give, give. And this is what God commands us to be and do! But you can give as a groveling, resentful slave of others, or as a cheerful lord, knowing that Christ has freed you from others' whims and prejudices; from their judgments about what you should be and do.

This freedom is radical, even dangerous. It can turn into self-righteousness and an I-don't-give-a-rip-about-your-ideas kind of arrogance. That turns the freedom of the individual into license and isolation. But even with the risks, we must defend the doctrine of freedom. We must teach not only that we should serve one another but that we are free from one another. It's the truth. It's not only the foundation of our corporate identity as a church family; it is also the greatest bulwark any people can have against totalitarian homogenization of the masses at the hands of the state.

How like a breath of fresh air is the inspired teaching of the apostle Paul, announced in the epistle lesson for this morning! He's talking about all those lifestyle and ethical questions that are not nailed down by God's commandments. Those decisions help to make each Christian's life the unique work of art God created it to be. By giving us vast areas where we are free to make our own choices, God has underscored that he wants us to be “one of a kind” individuals and families. Paul wrote, **So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Happy is the one who does not condemn himself in what he approves.** (Romans 14:22)

—Continued on the back