

## **True Freedom**

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:23 – 11:1 and Psalm 97:1 - 12

For July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023

Let's start with a story:

A man was riding on a train to work. He was also reading a book on the train. While reading, he was highlighting sentences in what he was reading, He even jotted down notes in the margin of the book.

But he overheard a conversation between a mother and her child seated nearby him. He stopped reading and began listening in on her conversation. The mother was correcting her child for doodling in her library book. The man quickly put his pen away, not wanting the toddler to ignore her mother's words. He did not want to set a bad example for the child. He knew the child could not understand the difference between a loaned book and making notes in one you owned.

This man's action on the train, reminded me of the Apostle Paul's inspired words in 1 Corinthians 10:23 -24 – *'All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful, but not all things build up. Do not seek your own advantage, but that of others.'*

The believers in Jesus Christ in the young church in Corinth saw their freedom in Christ. They saw this freedom as an opportunity to pursue personal interests. But Paul wrote that they should view it as an opportunity to benefit and build up others! Paul taught them the true freedom is not the right to do as one pleases, but the liberty to do as they should for God.

Modern day believers in Jesus Christ seem to have forget this idea. We often see our freedom as a way to get our own way. We often see our freedom as a way to insult and punish those we do not like. We often pursue personal interests.

So Paul is speaking to us, today's modern day Christians. We need to view our freedom as a way to benefit and build up others! True freedom is not a right for us to do as we please, but it is the liberty to do God's will!

Hate crime, also known as a bias based crime or bias crime, are crimes motivated by a prejudice towards a person or people who are members of a certain social group or racial demographic. Hate crimes generally refer to criminal acts which seem to have been motivated by bias against one or more social groups. Incidents may involve physical assault, homicide, damage of property, bullying, harassment, verbal assault which includes racial slurs or offensive graffiti or hate mail.

Hate crimes have now reached the highest level since we started tracking them in the early 1990's. In 2021 10,840 hate crimes occurred in the USA which was a 31% increase from the previous year. Of these hate crimes, 65% of them were motivated by a bias over race or ethnicity. 16% were hate crimes because of sexual orientation, and 15% were hate crimes based on a religious bases.

And in 2022 hate crime rose over 50% over 2021. The question we need to ask ourselves is 'WHY?'

Do we not have groups of people who believe true freedom is a right to do as we please? Do we not have groups of people who believe true freedom means 'I am right' and 'you are wrong'?

Let us seek peace! Let us follow in Jesus' footsteps and when we use our freedom, let it be used to build up others instead of serving ourselves.

Ever since I was a child, I have loved fireworks displays! As a youngster, I would gaze at the night sky in awe as I saw the vivid colors, heard the thunderous claps, and smelled the smoke from the fireworks. This year our local fireworks have been postponed due to beach replenishing until Sept. 3<sup>rd</sup>, Labor Day Weekend Sunday night. So we will not see fireworks within our community, but when you see fireworks, you know a celebration is taking place. Fireworks have been called – Praise from the sky!

In our scripture passage from Psalm 97 we read – 'The heavens proclaim his righteousness and all the people behold his glory.' God's reign is exalted above everything else.

This truth is like a burst of light that brings joy to the heart. Nothing and no one can thwart or destroy God's purposes. The greatness of God is proclaimed in our hearts as well as in the heavens. Look at all God has done and respond with praise!

So let me conclude this message with a few questions: Why does it honor God when we are careful in what we say and do around others? And how can we be more considerate of others in the exercise of our freedom?

Yes, my friends, on this week of July 4<sup>th</sup>, let us remember that true freedom benefits and builds up others.

Let us pray:

Thank you O god for setting us free through your most holy son's sacrifice for us. Give us the wisdom and grace to exercise our freedom in ways that truly honor you and bless others.

Almighty God, we praise you for your greatness and glory. You alone are worthy of our praises. Thank you for your sovereign grace and for putting joy in our hearts. AMEN.