

Soli Deo Gloria (Glory to God Alone)

By Vicar Jake Zabel

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen

Sermon text: 1 Corinthians 10:23-33

²³All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. ²⁴Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's good. ²⁵Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; ²⁶for "the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness." ²⁷If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. ²⁸But if anyone says to you, "this was offered to idols," do not eat it, for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake. ²⁹"Conscience," I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience? ³⁰But if I partake with thanks, why am I denounced for what I have given thanks for? ³¹Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ³²Give no offence, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the Church of God, ³³just as I also please all in all, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

Lord sanctify us by your truth, your Word is truth. Amen.

The famous Lutheran classical musicians Johann Sebastian Bach, Georg Friedrich Händel and Johann Christoph Graupner use to sign off their works "Soli Deo Gloria," in English "Glory to God Alone", to signify that their music was written to God's glory alone and not their own.

God is the Creator, Saviour and Preserver of all, the Earth is His and the all of its fullness. He is worthy to receive glory and honour and power, for He created all things and by His will they exist and were created (Rev. 4:11). God is worthy of all glory and praise. Scripture tells us time and time again that our whole lives are to give glory of God. Not just on Sunday, not just at Church, but your whole life should be done in glory to God.

In Romans 12:1 Paul says that our bodies should be presented as a living sacrifice to God, in 1 Corinthians 6:20 Paul says to glorify God in your body and in your spirit, in Colossians 3:17 Paul says that whatever you do, in word

or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him, and in 1 Peter 4:11 Peter says that ministers shall serve with the ability which God supplies, that all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. All glory belongs to God alone, and so as Paul said in today reading, do not seek your own profit but whether you eat or drink, or whatever to do, do all to the glory of God.

As we near the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation I have been preaching through the Solas (Alones) of the Reformation and we have finally come to the last Sola, Soli Deo Gloria, or Glory to God Alone.

But why do we given glory to God? Is it so He will look on us more favourably?

No! The Triune God is not like the so-called “gods” of the Ancient Pagan religions which would reward worship with blessings. No! Our God is a kind, loving, caring and generous God. He gives to us whether we praise Him or not. Ecclesiastes 9:2 says, “all things come alike to all, one event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good, clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice.” And Jesus says in Matthew 5:45, “the Father makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.”

God gives blessings to all people, Christian and non-Christians, those who praise Him and those who ignore Him. Jesus died on the Cross for all. Of course only those who believe in Christ will receive the benefits of Christ’s death, but the fact remains that Jesus died for everyone.

We don’t give glory to God because it will somehow reward us. No, we give God the glory because He deserves it. God is the Creator, Saviour and Protector of all mankind, we praise Him in gratitude. We give all the glory to God alone because He is the only one who deserves that glory.

However, that is not the only reason we give glory to God. For while God is worthy of all glory, honour and praise, He does not need it. God is not starving for praise or glory. God is self-sufficient. He doesn’t need anything from us. Instead, He gives us what we need, without seeking or needing anything in return.

Therefore, we give glory to God not for His need, but for the needs of those around us. Luther said, “God does not need my good works, but my neighbour does.”

Paul tells us that we are to do all things to the glory of God, not seeking our own profit, but the profit of others.

Jesus says that the two greatest commandments are to love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind, and to love your neighbour as yourself. And the best way of loving and serving God is to love and serve your neighbour. As Jesus said, “whatever you do to the least of these, you have done to me.” (Matt. 25:40)

By serving our neighbour we are serving God, and by giving glory to God is all that we do we are profiting our neighbour so that they may be saved. As Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, “let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven.”

Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it to the glory of God for the profit of your neighbour.

In regards to faith and life actions and practices can be divided into three categories. The first is those things that obtain God’s wrath, things like murder, adultery, theft; those things God has forbidden and promised to punish. The second is those things that obtain God’s grace, things like Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution and Holy Communion; those things which God has commanded us to do and has promised to grant us His grace and the forgiveness of sin through them. And the third is those things that God has neither commanded nor forbidden, things that we are free to do which do not obtain God’s wrath or His grace. These things we call adiaphora. In regards to adiaphora, we are free in Christ, all these things are lawful to me.

However, just because you can do something does mean you should. As Paul says, “all things are lawful to me, but not all things are helpful, all things are lawful to me, but not all things edify.” We may be free to do certain things but not everything we do is helpful, either for our sake or for the sake of those around us.

Am I free to wear t-shirt and jeans while leading church instead of this alb?
Yes.

Are we free to replace the organ with an electric guitar and drums? Yes.

Are we free to replace the hymnal with All Together books or Hillsong? Yes. Are we free to replace the candles and flowers with lasers and smoke machines? Yes.

We are free in Christ to do these things. Nowhere in Scripture are any of these things commanded or forbidden. All these are adiaphora.

However, not all things are helpful or edifying. We may be free to worship God how we choose. But there are certain things that will detract from a true worship of God and other things that will enhance our worship of God.

There is an old Latin theological phrase from the 300's called *Lex Orandi, Lex Crendi*. This phrase literally translates to "the law of prayer is the law of belief," or a more simplified version "how we worship shapes what we believe."

As Christians we are free to use whatever liturgy we want. However, there are certain things that are helpful and certain things that are not. How a church worships shapes the church's doctrine.

The historical Christian liturgy which is practiced in our churches is called "Divine Service." We call it this because in it God comes to us and serves us through His Word and Sacraments. Our Sunday services are not about what we do for God but about what He does for us. In this God serves us and we respond in gratitude. And our liturgy and our hymnody reflect that belief. Our Sunday service is structured in such a way that our focus is drawn to the Word of God, given verbally in the readings and the sermon and given physically in the Lord's Supper. The preaching of the sermon and the reception of Holy Communion are the pinnacles of our worship and the rest of our liturgy points to them. And our hymnody focuses on God's work of salvation, it gives the glory to God alone and not man.

However, much of contemporary worship is the exact opposite. To start with, contemporary worship is called a "Worship Service" or "Praise Service." They call it this because their focus is not on God's service of man but of man's worship, praise and service to God. The songs, music and liturgy are all based on me and my service to God. Even their "Communion" is not about God feeding us with His body and blood, but about me sharing myself with God. The songs are so me-focused, many of them literally use the lines, "I stand to lift up my hands," "Lord I praise you," and "I will sing praise." They're all about what I do for God.

We may be free to worship using whichever liturgy we desire, but just because you are free to do it, doesn't mean it is helpful.

Pastor Evan Goeglein of the LCMS said concerning the liturgy, "the question should not be, 'will it win more people over?' The question should be, 'would this deliver Christ in a better way than it already does?' The parts of the liturgy are direct quotes from Holy Scripture and I don't think that you can improve upon the delivery of Christ from them."

When doing something that is *adiaphora*, your thoughts should not be concerned with your own freedom but whether or not it gives glory to God, and whether or not it will profit your neighbour and their salvation.

Paul was dealing with this very issue in Corinth. There was a question concerning whether or not Christians could or should eat meat sacrificed to idols.

The Earth is the Lord's and all its fullness. Jesus had declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19) and nothing was clean in and of itself (Rom. 14:14). The Christians were free to eat the meat. However, all things may be law but not all things are helpful or edifying. Just because they could eat the meat, didn't necessarily mean they should.

Paul says that if you buy meat in a market, ask no questions and just eat it. And again if you are invited to an unbelievers place and he gives you meat, just eat it and ask no questions. However, if you are given meat and someone says, "That was offered to idols," then you should refrain, for the sake of your neighbour's conscience.

Now, many of the Corinthians had objections to this, "Why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience?" In other words, "Why should I give up my freedom because of someone else?"

And also, "But if I partake with thanks, why am I denounced for what I have given thanks for?" In other words, "If I thank God for this food, then should I be denounced just because it was offered to idols?"

Paul's response to all this is, "you may be free, but not all things are helpful or edifying. Do not seek your own, but seek the good of your neighbour. Be concerned for your neighbour's conscience."

Paul says that we should refrain from eating the food for our neighbour's sake. He says, don't give offense to the Jews, Greeks or to your fellow

Christians, instead please all in all, not seeking your own profit but their profit, that they may be saved.

Now, when Paul says, “don’t give offense” and “please all in all,” he isn’t saying that you need to be politically correct and not hurt anyone’s feelings. He isn’t saying that you need to give in to everyone and compromise to make them happy. Paul rejects such ideas in Galatians 1:10 when he says “I do not seek to please men, but I am a servant of Christ,” and in 1 Thessalonians 2:4 when he says, “we speak, not pleasing men, but God.”

Instead, Paul means that we should not give offense in regards to salvation. Our actions are to give glory to God and to point others to Him, not be a stumbling block to their faith. As David said in Psalm 69:6, “Let those who seek You, O, God of Israel, not be confounded because of me.”

Do not let your actions be the cause that leads people away from God and His true Word. Instead, let your actions be helpful and edifying, let them point others to Jesus. Let your light shine so that others may glorify your Father in Heaven. Earlier Paul said, “if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat again, lest I make my brother stumble.” (1 Cor. 8:13)

Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

If an unbeliever gives you food, just eat it and don’t ask any questions. For if you do you may offend your host.

But if someone informs you that the food was offered to idols, don’t eat it. For in eating you may offend someone else.

We can note that Paul does not mention who the informant is who said, “this food was offered to idols.” But further on Paul gives three examples of people who might be offended, Jews, Greeks and fellows Christians.

Paul commented earlier in this Letter, that the food itself is fine, for idols are nothingness (1 Cor. 8:4) and that whether we eat or not, we are no better or worse (8:8). However, he also states that what the Gentiles sacrifice to idols, they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and Paul does not want us to have fellowship with demons (1 Cor. 10:20).

If we eat food that we know was sacrificed to an idol, we give the outward appearance of having fellowship with that idol, and will ruin the integrity of our preaching and teaching.

If a Jew were to see you, he would say, “these Christians claim to worship the one true God and yet they have fellowship with idols.” A Greek would say,

“you Christians claim to condemn these idols and yet you have fellowship with them.” or a fellow Christian may say, “how do I know he is a true believer if has fellowship with idols and demons?”

Paul says, “you cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons, you cannot partake of the Lord’s Table and of the table of demons.” (1 Cor. 10:21).

The table at which you eat gives the appearance of fellowship. It is for this that we practice Closed Communion. There are Lutherans all around Australia and even the world who claim to be one in confession with us. Yet they commune at altars of heterodox churches. As humans we cannot search the hearts of men and we can only make judgements based on outward actions. If a person communes in a heterodox church, this gives the appearance that they are in fellowship with those false teachings. They may claim to hold to true teaching but their fellowship ruins the integrity of their message. As the famous Lutheran dogmatician Francis Pieper once said, “It is self-evident that members of heterodox churches must have severed their connection with the heterodox body and have declared their acceptance of the true doctrine before they many commune with the congregation.” (Christian Dogmatics Vol. III pg. 385)

By giving an outwards appearance of fellowship you damage the integrity of the Christian message. It no longer appears that you are giving Glory to God alone but to God and the idols.

A modern example of food sacrificed to idols in Halal certification, which is done by many companies to show their support of Islam.

Islam is a violent and false religion. Christians need to oppose this heresy which not only harms the body through their acts of violence but also the soul through their false teachings.

If you are unaware of a products Halal certification, then eat it. The Earth is the Lord’s and all its fullness, all foods are cleans, you are free to eat.

However, if someone were to point out to you that that food is Halal, then we should follow Paul’s advice and we should refrain from eating the food, lest we appear to support Islam and thus jeopardise our Christian message.

Refusing to eat Halal food is difficult and you may suffer persecution for such a choice. Around Easter time this year Senator Pauline Hanson suffered a mass amount of backlash when she encouraged people to refrain from eating

Cadbury, which is Halal certified, and to instead eat Lindt chocolates which are not Halal certified.

For this she gained a lot of hatred, but her boldness and integrity also won her a lot of support. Pauline Hanson is against Sharia Law and by refusing to eat Halal certified food and by refusing to back down she strengthened her message.

Now some of you may ask the same questions as the Corinthians, why should my freedom and liberty be hindered? But before you ask such a question stop and think for a moment, is my concern for my neighbour's benefit or for my own freedom?

I am not here to burden your conscience regarding Halal certified food. However, following the example of Paul, let me say this. You cannot partake of the Lord's Table and the table of Allah. By knowingly eating Halal certified foods, you give the outward appearance of support for Islam and Sharia Law. But by refraining you show your contempt for this wicked religion of Islam. You display your devotion to God alone and in turn you strengthen the integrity of your message.

The food in and of itself is harmless; it is lawful for you to eat it. Thus if someone presents you with a meal, eat it without asking questions. But if someone makes a point of telling you that it is Halal certified, do not eat for conscience' sake. And when I say, conscience, I mean not your conscience but the conscience of others.

You are free to eat the food, but remember not all things are helpful and not things are edifying.

Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Do not seek your own liberty, instead seek the profit of your neighbour, that they may be saved.

Whatever you do, give the glory to God alone, in doing so you will point others to Him, who alone is their Saviour. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Heavenly Father, we worship You as the creator of all things and the preserver of our lives. In Your goodness You care for every one of Your creatures. We come before You in prayer with sincere and trusting hearts.

We thank and praise You for all Your goodness, but especially for the gift of Your only Son Jesus, whom You sent to suffer and die to rescue us from sin, and to rise again to guarantee the final crown of life for us in heaven. Through Him, we are Your children, enjoying the fullness of Your goodness and care. Give us firm faith in Your power and guidance, that we may continually trust You for all our daily needs, and carry out our daily tasks without worry about the future. No matter what may happen, give us the conviction that You direct all things in heaven and on earth by Your Word, and care especially for Your children.

Grant us Your grace that we may not live for the worthless values of this world or for the accumulation of wealth. We thank You for Jesus Christ, our most priceless treasure. Teach us to seek above everything else the blessings of Your kingdom in a life of loving obedience.

Make Christ's Word in all its richness live in our hearts and make us wise. Increase our love toward all people. Give us a special concern for those of the family of faith, and make us eager to help one another with our burdens and weaknesses. Fill Your Church with Your Spirit, that the compassion of Christ may be evident in the love and kindness we show to the fallen, the erring, and the heavy-laden. Let us never grow tired of doing good.

Grant that we, whose ears have been opened spiritually to hear Your Gospel, may speak it plainly to those who should hear it from us. Let Your light shine among the nations, so that the very ends of the earth may see Your glory, and people everywhere may learn to worship and serve You alone.

Bless our own country. May those in positions of government and authority honour You. May Your truth hold sway in politics, business, industry, education, and the mass media.

In every day's needs and crises, help all families with Your presence. Be with them in sorrow or joy, sickness or health, disappointment or success, and make them safe and content in Your love.

Continue to direct our lives in your loving providence. Give us opportunities to use your gifts as Your grateful stewards. Keep us in the faith by Your grace and power, that we may attain to eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

16th Sunday after Pentecost

Isaiah 55:6-9

⁶ Seek the LORD while He may be found! Call on Him while He is near! ⁷ Let the wicked person forsake his way, and the sinful man his thoughts! Let him return to the LORD, that He may have compassion on him! Let him return to our God! For He will abundantly pardon.

⁸ “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹ “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts are higher than your thoughts.

Philippians 1:12-14, 19-30

¹² I want you to know, my fellow-Christians, that what has happened to me has really turned out to advance the Good News. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear to the whole palace-guard and to all the rest that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴ So my chains have given most of the brothers in the Lord the confidence to speak the Word more boldly and fearlessly...

¹⁹ For I know that this will result in my deliverance, through your prayer and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, ²⁰ as I eagerly expect and hope that I shall in no way be ashamed, but that, by speaking very boldly, I shall now, as always, glorify Christ in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

²² If I live on in my body, that will

mean results from my labour. Yet I do not know which I should choose. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far. ²⁴ However, it is more necessary for you that I should remain in my body. ²⁵ Since I am convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all, that you may progress and be joyful in the faith, ²⁶ that my coming to you again may cause you to rejoice more over me in Christ Jesus.

²⁷ Only let your conduct be worthy of the Good News of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am away, I may hear how you are, that you are standing firmly in one spirit, and striving together with one mind for the faith of the Good News! ²⁸ Do not let those who oppose you frighten you in any way! This is a sign for them that they will be destroyed, and a sign that you will be saved, and this is from God. ²⁹ For it is God’s gift to you concerning Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, ³⁰ since you have the same struggle as you have seen me have, and as you now hear that I still have.

Matthew 20:1-16

¹ “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ² He agreed with the workers to pay them a denarius a day and sent them into his vineyard. ³ About the third hour he went out and saw others

standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, ‘You also go into the vineyard! I shall pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵ So they went.

“He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶ About the eleventh hour he went out and found some others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why are you standing here all day long doing nothing?’

⁷ “They answered him, ‘Because nobody has hired us.’

“He told them, ‘You also go into the vineyard!’

⁸ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard told his manager, ‘Call the workmen, and give them their pay! Begin with the last and go on to the first!’

⁹ “Those who began working about the eleventh hour came, and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ When the first ones came, they expected that they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ Although they took it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² They said, ‘These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who have endured the burden and the heat of the day.’

¹³ “He answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. You agreed with me on a denarius, did you not?’ ¹⁴ Take what is yours and go! I want to give this last man as much as I have given you. ¹⁵ Or do I not have the right

to do what I please with what is mine?
Or are you envious because I am generous?’

¹⁶ “In this way the last will be first and the first last.”