

## The Reformation of Manners

*I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called... (Ephesians 4:1).*

As a young man of 28 years of age, William Wilberforce (1759-1833) had a passionate desire to know God's will for his life. Why was he here? For what mission was he destined? In the fall of 1787, after much prayer and soul searching, he came to understand what he believed was God's great purpose for his life. He wrote in his diary: *God Almighty has set before me two great objects: the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners.*

What was that again? The "reformation of *manners*"? I understand and applaud the fact that Wilberforce felt called by God as a member of Parliament to rise up and work to put an end to the evil of slavery. Amen! But the reformation of *manners*? What is *that* all about? In his excellent biography on Wilberforce, Eric Metaxas comments on this second "great objective" of his life.

*To our modern ears, the phrase "reformation of manners" sounds merely quaint, but what Wilberforce meant by the phrase was different from what we think when we hear it. By "manners" he did not mean anything having to do with etiquette but rather what we would call "habits" or "attitudes"; there was also a distinctly moral aspect to his use of the phrase, though not in the puritanical sense. He wished to bring civility and self-respect into a society that had long since spiraled down into vice and misery... (Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery. p. 85).*

As a Christian in politics, Wilberforce felt that his great mission in life was to work against the depravity, corruption and perverse behaviors that characterized so much of 18<sup>th</sup> century British culture. Slavery was the worst, but not the only, illustration of such moral decadence. Other examples of societal decay were things like drunkenness, child trafficking, profanity, prostitution, public executions, animal cruelty, inhumane working conditions, disrespect for the Lord's Day, etc. Wilberforce devoted his life to working to improve the moral climate of his generation. What a blessing he was to England and the world!

I don't know about you but I feel our nation today is in dire need of a "reformation of manners." Just as in Wilberforce's day with the issue of slavery, some moral issues are certainly weightier than others (for example: abortion and homosexuality). But this must not blind us to the fact that we need to also address numerous other instances of moral and social decay all around us: vulgar language, inappropriate dress, alcohol abuse, road rage, violence in sports, lewd behaviors, pornography, gambling, course jokes, crudeness in entertainment, treatment of women, taking the Lord's name in vain, respect for Sunday, etc. Where are the modern-day Wilberforces who will work and pray for a reformation of manners today? Paul's admonition for followers of Christ to walk worthy of their calling (Ephesians 4:1 - 5:21) is sorely needed in a day like ours.

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