

There is a death that is good for you.

“You were running well. Who prevented you from being persuaded regarding the truth? This persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole batch of dough. I myself am persuaded in the Lord you will not accept any other view. But whoever it is that is confusing you will pay the penalty. Now brothers and sisters, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. I wish those who are disturbing you might also let themselves be mutilated! For you were called to be free, brothers and sisters; only don’t use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love. For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement: Love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, watch out, or you will be consumed by one another.” Galatians 5:7-15
CSB

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This week Ewen was comparing the old Ducktales cartoon with the new one; the ways the stories are different and the situation of the characters.

It sparked some thinking about the old things that are reclaimed with a new vibe. We see this in so many things, not merely entertainment. Design, works of restoration, interestingly even in the ways we think and the biggest ideas we encounter (they are usually a restatement of something old).

And we need something that will center us and root us, bring us to a healthier place. It has been devastating two years - maybe not experienced in the same way for everyone - but increasingly we are encountering those that are, or find ourselves okay with the descriptors “burned out and restless.”

So I submit to you the thing I think we need to reclaim, not so much with a new vibe but an experience for our time. The Golden Rule.

Do you know it? ‘Do unto others as you would have them do to you.’

We usually teach our children the phrase or something close. I am a bad parent, so when one of the kids does something mean to another I encourage the victim to get even - 'how would you like it if?'

The Golden Rule is so familiar it seems like a fable but it is actually the way of life Jesus invites his people into.

Something so prevalent, you would think we would live by it. But maybe kids get older and lose interest because they see those teaching them the rule missing the point.

After all, it is quite different from the "best practices" of our day. The "me first" mantras we end up repeating and cherishing. If we lived the Golden Rule, "wouldn't we get run over, pushed aside, end up mistreated by selfish people?" Won't it feel like death? Probably. But it is a kind of death that is good for you.

A death that is anchored in what you receive in Jesus, and it is so worth it.

Death - churches don't talk about it enough, the reality of it and preparing for it and being able to grieve it. But it is not physical death that we are talking about today.

In our text there are two ways of death that are spiritual in nature and predict the glory or its opposite to be experienced when physical death comes.

Context: The Apostle Paul is writing to a group of churches in Galatia. They had heard the preaching of the gospel - the good news that Jesus died to give them life, salvation and identity. And they believed and their lives had changed, it was noticeable in the region.

Then teachers came from Jerusalem and started to tell non-Jewish followers of Jesus that they were not really saved unless they would keep some of the requirements of the old law. But if these believers followed this bad teaching, they would be rejecting Jesus and his finished work.

Perilous situation, eternity in the balance. So Paul has written this very direct and clear letter cautioning them back into the gospel, trusting in Jesus and his work for us alone for salvation and life.

Here says that the Galatians have gone off track and he calls them back... away from a death that corrupts to a death that comes from freedom.

Death by Persuasion

‘You were running well.’

Running alone; no one to pace or keep up with. Individualistic. Versus pack running. Where there is nudging and bumping along the way. Motivation from the group.

We might approach Christianity like it is a solitary run but it is actually a pack race.

They had been running well but they let someone trip them up. Send them off course. There were those persuading believers away from the truth.

Instead of looking to Jesus the author and perfecter of the faith, they were persuaded to look to themselves as the source of salvation.

They could be good enough, do just the right thing to trust in a self-salvation.

Paul warns that it is not from God. Giving clear language in opposition to this false teaching going on. It is not merely a different slant on Christianity or following Jesus, it is not just a harmless preference some can embrace. It is death. It is dangerous.

“This persuasion does not come from the one who calls you.” 5:8

They haven't fallen prey to a teaching that put self over Christ. The type of preaching that removes the offense of the cross (who wants to hear that they are helpless sinners in need of rescue?!) The type of preaching that removes the need for the cross.

If you don't need Jesus for it, it's not Christian.

I remember having a conversation with a pastor when I was new to ministry. We were talking about preaching and he said that I need to give people “something concrete to hold onto, something to do.” Between us sat a stack of Dr. Phil books full of plenty to do...

There is nothing more “concrete” than the finished work of Jesus! And if we think we need more than Christ we have abolished the cross among us.

But that is exactly what is happening. Some are following the false teaching, division is taking root and people are alienated from Christ.

There is a penalty to pay - spiritual death - being severed from Jesus.

Paul is rightly angry about it, wishing the false teachers would cut a little deeper on themselves.

These Galatians, and we, are meant for something better than death by persuasion away from Jesus.

Death by Freedom

“For you were called to be free, brothers and sisters; only don’t use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love.” **Galatians 5:13 CSB**

Last week we talked about faith working through love and here it is again as Paul builds on this thought. But you might be confused by it - because isn’t he calling the churches to live in obedience to the law which is the problem he has with the judiaizers?

“Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.” **Leviticus 19:18 CSB**

Obedience here does not earn salvation (as the false teachers are persuading) but it flows from salvation that is won by Jesus for us.

Paul implies that Christians still have a moral obligation to follow the moral standards of God's "law" in Scripture. Obedience is not a means of justification, but it is a crucial component of the Christian life.

"Obedience is the fruit of faith (Rom. 10:16; 15:18; 1 Thess. 1:3); it is not the same as faith, nor is it a required addition to faith. Human effort cannot be added to grace; to attempt to do this brings Paul's sharpest condemnation (Gal. 5:12). The true gospel, when received with the empty hands of faith, makes us "obedient from the heart" (Rom. 6:17).

The freedom brought about by the gospel is not a license to sin but an opportunity for love and service. A true understanding of faith, working through love, is the antidote to self-oriented behavior, and results in service (Gal. 5:13). This service does not merit anything but is the outworking of faith." GTB

It is what those in Christ are meant for.

What it really is - death to self. Death to preference, rights, opinions. It is honoring as we want to be honored whether we receive it or not. Putting others ahead of ourselves.

This is where the whole law is fulfilled.

"Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." **Matthew 7:12 CSB**

Love your neighbor as yourself. The opposite of using our freedom as an opportunity for the flesh (self ahead of others, immorality, idolatry, hatred, strife, jealousy, anger, selfish ambition, division, envy, drunkenness), the opposite of all of that is serving one another through love.

We don't like it because it has the taste of death to it... but it's death that is good for us.

We get healthy living for others. It brings us out of our self-centered wallows, our obsession with being first, frees us from the weight of our narrow perspective.

Serving and loving others is the route to escaping bondage and fulfilling the ultimate content of the law.

The best way, the only way, finally, of expressing the life of freedom is in an act of love. Only love expresses freedom in ways that enhance rather than destroy, in ways that enliven rather than deaden.

We know what it looks like. Giving of our time, treasure, and talent for the good of others. Speaking less, listening more. Putting others first. Making decisions based on the care for others over self. Giving ourselves away.

If you are looking for something to do in response to Jesus' rescue of you, this is it. Christians, this is how we live.

We can read Galatians and get the sense that this is the better death. We can see the lure of attempting to be justified before God by our own actions, and how that mentality closes out others. We can rejoice with Paul as he is convinced that these Christians won't go down that path. And we can determine to steer clear ourselves, endeavoring to serve one another through love because it is the better way.

What gets us there? How do we find motivation for it? We dish up what Paul has been serving. Get more grace.

The gospel frees us from the law, for the law. It does away with the old, selfishly motivated and unloving law-obedience. And it motivates us to obey the law out of love.

“Sanctification happens to the degree that we “feed on” or “orient to” ... the pardon, righteousness, and new status we now have in Christ, imputed through faith.” G.C. Berkouwer

“Faith literally energizes love. And neither religious moralism nor licentious non-religiosity can do this, because both are essentially selfish and insecure. Selfishness and insecurity cannot produce love, because love is joyful self-giving. But faith in Christ can, because by it we are certain of our righteousness and

welcome with the Father... “The more joy we have in our gracious salvation, the more we are driven by love and gratitude to do good for the sheer beauty of good, for sheer delight in God, for sheer love of others. If we are reminding ourselves and living in light of our certain hope, we will have a heart overflowing with love. We don’t need to seek righteousness and welcome from others, since these things are already ours; we are free to love others, seeking their good.” Tim Keller

The deeper we go into the grace of Christ, the more our inclination is toward this kind of love - toward this death by freedom for the good of others. A love refined and added to in community as those rescued by Jesus are formed into a family so they can be used to unleash renewal in our world.

“Growth in love always involves movement beyond the hardened boundaries of the isolated self to the selves-in-relation that make up community. Conversion always points us towards fellow human beings, not simply towards God. Like the grain of wheat that must fall into the earth and die if it is to flourish (John 12:24), the person who is becoming love leaves behind the broken husk of their isolated self and embraces the new possibilities of life in the human community.... When love draws me from isolation into community, your life touches mine—your pain touches me, your afflictions touch me, your anxieties touch me.” David Benner

This becomes more and more our reality because it is the way of Jesus.

The Way of Jesus

Jesus died to establish a kingdom of those willing to die for others. This is freedom.

That he would rescue us and grant us real life - while we were still sinners. What glorious grace. What beautiful mercy. All who believe in him are saved, and are given his righteousness and life.

This is the good news that had the Galatians running well and that which will get them back on course. This is the good news that we need to free us from the delusions of self, the good news that carries us through the highs and lows of this life. The good news that invites us to die.

Give yourself away to this. Loving your neighbor as yourself can be a hard pillow to swallow at times, but it is for our good and the glory of Christ. Where else can we go?

There is a death that is good for you.

We can experience death by persuasion, becoming isolated, insecure, angry. Or we can live a death by freedom, that is actually life and purpose, the way of Jesus.

Say yes to the invitation of Jesus.

“And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.” - Luke 6:31

“The Golden Rule

So simple

So quaint

An eternally helpful reminder

To be nice to everyone

Because,

At the end of the day,

You'd appreciate it if they were nice to you.

But what if Jesus

The Great Physician

Knew his patients

A tiny bit better than that.

What if Jesus

Our Advocate

Knew his friends

His brothers

Even better than we know ourselves.

What if the Golden Rule

Was not so much a rule

But an invitation?

An invitation to,

Of all things,

Die.

What if hidden under that quaint rule
Was the razor of truth
That cuts to the very heart
Of my desires-
My secret pride
That says:

“Dear neighbor:
Don’t just be nice to me,
That’s the least I expect.
What I really want from you
Is worship.
Serve me,
Praise me,
Honor me,
And humble yourself before me.”

So is it surprising then
That, knowing our desires,
The Master would invite us
Not to a cozy exchange of niceties,
But to the horrifying
Overwhelming
Unimaginable task
Of loving our neighbor as we’d like to be loved?

Lord, did you really mean
We ought to love our neighbor
As we truly
Honestly
Desperately
Want to be loved?

Do you intend
That I should honor
Serve

Humble
And defer
For the sake of my stupid
Unrepentant
Hard-hearted
Ungrateful
Unlikeable neighbor?

Do you intend to invite me
Into a life of slavery
To my neighbor
To my Lord
To my enemy?
Would you have me end up like you?

The Golden Rule:
Nothing less
Than an invitation to die.
Nothing more
Than an invitation to live.”

Let's live.