

“Dying to Live Like Christ Lives”

Message by DD Adams

Providence United Methodist Church

4th Sunday After Pentecost

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Today’s epistle lesson is from the book of Galatians, chapter 2, verses 20 through 21. I’ll be reading from Eugene Peterson’s translation, *The Message*. What actually took place is this: I tried keeping rules and working my head off to please God, and it didn’t work. So I quit being a “law man” so that I could be *God’s* man. Christ’s life showed me how, and enabled me to do it. I identified myself completely with him. Indeed, I have been crucified with Christ.

My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me. The life you see me living is not “mine,” but it is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I am not going to go back on that.

Is it not clear to you that to go back to that old rule-keeping, peer-pleasing religion would be an abandonment of everything personal and free in my relationship with God? I refuse to do that, to repudiate God’s grace. If a living relationship with God could come by rule-keeping, then Christ died unnecessarily. This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God.

Let’s pray. El Shaddai, Almighty all-sufficient God who protects and provides, bless the reading, hearing, understanding, and doing of your words today. Show us the living relationship you’ve modeled for us. Stir within us your Spirit. Empower us to embrace the life that comes from dying to self. Bless the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

Peace be with you! The book of Galatians was written by the Apostle Paul from Antioch around A.D. 49. The primary question is whether salvation comes by following rules. Can we earn our salvation? Or is there something that needs to be added to the work of Christ to improve on what he accomplished as a finished work?

Paul would travel from city to city preaching the good news. There was a group called the Judaizers who would follow Paul wherever he went. They believed it was a combination of the grace of Christ and one's adherence to the Law of Moses that was needed for salvation. They constantly harassed Paul.

A Christian disciple at some point will discover that they can't follow rules. Something seems to get in the way of perfection, and we all fall very short. How can we possibly improve on the perfection of Christ? How can we add anything to the grace? If it's Christ who lives in me then I'm no longer my own, and trying to follow the rules simply shows me I can't do it! And it takes away the freedom I have in Christ and says that grace isn't enough!

Dying to our selfishness can't be accomplished without Christ's power. Our ego and sense of self-importance inflates itself and then short circuits how we relate to God and each other. We can be self-absorbed and preoccupied with what we want and think we need. There's a great opposition that goes on.

In the verses that Mac read we can see the importance of putting to death the ego and the constant drive to live for self. Let me read the verse again. "I tried keeping rules and working my head off to please God, and it didn't work. So I quit being a "law man" so that I could be "God's man." Christ's life showed me how, and enabled me to do it."

Rules for behavior to win the heart of God don't cut it. The success isn't in the doing and following of a rule; it's our heart that God wants to change. Only the Holy Spirit can empower the inner person to be changed. As *The Message* puts it,

we're changed from a "law man" to a "God man." We can't be God's man until we see we can't live for Christ without God's power enabling us.

What's the solution, and where can we put our trust. Can we trust in our ability and own strength? No we can't, but Christ has already proved his faithfulness to the Father. He never came up short, and he always hit the mark bullseye. To rely on the faithfulness of Christ and his power within us is what kills our selfishness and ego. To join in and be fully committed to change as we take part in Christ's divine nature. Our inflated sense of self-importance and self-absorption should drive us less and less as we learn to embrace the Spirit's power.

Listen again to verses 19 and 20 from the NRSV. "For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

The key to overcoming is knowing that it's *Christ's faithfulness* that empowers us. Then we're able to fully trust Christ as we let go of self and ego. We pursue a faith and trust in Christ who *is* faithful in all things. We're no longer the king-pin. Our self-importance no longer sits on the throne of our lives.

As Paul said, it no longer matters that you think well and approve of us. We're no longer obsessed to impress God with what we do or don't do. Matthew Henry, a Nonconformist minister and author said, "Believers see themselves living in a state of dependence on Christ. Hence it is, that though he lives in the flesh, yet he does not live after the flesh."

Christ died and was raised again so all who would believe and trust in him would be set free from what enslaves them. Pride, anger, alcohol, jealousy, drugs, materialism, or the hoarding of anything that makes us feel safe. What truly enslaves us is self and ego—serving and pleasing ourselves. What frees us is living for Christ.

Bottom line is this. When we rely on our own strength, our hard work, our intellect, our consistency, or on our charm we'll fail. If we rely and trust in our money, our pension, our children's love, our family, we'll miss the point of this life in Christ. The life we live is not our own; it's not *about* us or what we want. If it was, then Christ died for no purpose.

Our eternal security is not based on what we've done, it's based on the faithfulness of Christ. Our faith goes up and down like a yo-yo on a string, but the faith of Christ is a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul. Take hold and embrace the life that comes from dying to self—for Christ lives in you to provide the power *for you* to live as he lives.

Let's pray. God teach us that part of being born anew and wanting to change our heart and lives is being willing to die to self. Help us to not turn away from you, but convince us by your grace that your faithfulness makes it possible for us to live in freedom. Amen.