

Romans 12:

9 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honor.

¹¹ Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.¹

¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly;¹ do not claim to be wiser than you are.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God;¹ for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

²⁰ No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them;

if they are thirsty, give them something to drink;

for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads."

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Matthew 16:21 From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. **22** And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you."

23 But he turned and said to Peter,

"Get behind me, Satan!

You are a stumbling block to me;

for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

24 Then Jesus told his disciples,

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

25 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

26 For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

27 "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. **28** Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Sermon

Grace to you and peace, from GOD our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

(back to school history lesson..Paul's words are good words for going back to school, they match right up with Jesus' words in the gospel.)

Matthew 16:18 And I tell you, you are Peter,¹ and on this rock² I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

And now, three verses later “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block for me.”

It's a very quick turn around and very harsh criticism for the repurposed rock on which Jesus would build his church. Why dwell on it?

Two reasons, one is history shows Peter's temptation is perennial and Jesus' invitation to cross-ebaring, not all that acceptable. The other, and we start here, is the good news right here looking us in the face. Jesus puts church leadership in this oh so flawed guy's hands. There's sometimes a telling of church history--not one rooted in the biblical account, mind you--where the twelve went from bumbling to super apostle with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. And, without a doubt, the Spirit took hold of not just those 11 plus one but the whole group gathered there and launched the church convincingly and powerfully with signs and wonders and languages and acts of mercy and new community. But from almost the outset, there's also misunderstanding and conflict, Greek widows go unfed, Rich folk feast at Communion but leave the poor hungry, people cheat at the offering plate, Jews at various places have a real hard time sitting down to a meal with Greeks, Jewish men begrudgingly let Greeks into their club if they undergo adult circumcision, the list goes on. The redemption of fallen humanity is by Jesus--true Israel--but through an in progress being redeemed and reconciled humanity. If we see Peter getting it so wrong and still remaining both friend of Jesus and ordained to lead, why should we be threatened when we--either individually or as a church tradition or church community--face rebuke, critique or challenge? The apostle Paul says in Romans 8: If God is for us, who is against us? . . . It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.” If you want to think in law court terms, we have an ideal defense attorney: he's also judge. That's the good news. But its only good news, if you recognize you have need of a defense attorney...otherwise, its not news at all.

Here's what's troubling: the church writ large and Christians individually have been facing and falling into the same temptation as Peter, the Rock on which the church would be built. Its a problem of power, yes. But more, I believe, its a question of imagination, of vision. Which is why we speak of imagination so much. Unless your vision, your goal is re-calibrated on and by Jesus Christ so that it becomes Jesus shaped, you'll never aim yourself along God will or way. This isn't a question of earning your way at all, but whether you'll go the way of grace or strive for righteousness through taking power (over yourself or others.)

In Peter's rebuke, Jesus heard Satan's offer of political power ... The cost was bowing down to Satan. Why should the cost be different today? Oh, but the church has consistently argued it is different.

Mark Charles, a bi-racial (Dutch and Navajo) theologian, pastor, and oddly enough, presidential candidate this year: names three other “get behind me satan moments” missed in the life of the church--where big named Church fathers--not quite as big named as Peter, set their minds on earthly things.

Around the year 314, **Eusebius** became bishop of Caesarea, 300 years earlier the official residence of one Prefect Pontius Pilate. From the 2nd century up until just before Constantine’s death in 337, Christians experienced sporadic and usually rather localized persecution. At some point, religious persecution broke out in Eusebius’ region. And, the fledgling emperor Constantine fought his brother in law Maxentius under whom the persecution had taken place. Eusebius championed Constantine, it seems, in order to free his people, free the church from suffering, to help along God’s kingdom on earth as in heaven. He declared Constantine God ordained. He wrote first a history of the church up until his time which ends with Constantine being enthroned and his enemies on their faces at his feet. (Charles, 67). He then wrote *The Life of Constantine* an even more enthusiastic embrace of empire. “But the teachings of Jesus and his disciples and Paul do not gesture towards Christendom. Central to Christianity is sacrificial love and the laying down of one’s life. Empires are concerned with self-preservation, conquest and expansion.” (Charles, 58)

No one wants to see their flock persecuted or impoverished or abused by bad policy. But then, Peter didn’t want his Rabbi, the Messiah, the Son of God, who was perfectly innocent, crucified. “Get behind me, Satan,” Jesus said. You are a stumbling block to me;

for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

Much sin is the result, not to malice or intention but deformed and malformed imaginations.

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, (informing, reforming their imaginations)

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

25 For those who want to save their life will lose it,

and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

26 For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

27 “For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done.

The way of the cross was and is a political symbol. The legend that Constantine saw a cross in the sky and heard a voice from heaven tell him to conquer in the name of the cross is directly counter to Christ’s example and command and the witness of the earliest church. It’s heretical to accept his telling through Eusebius as trustworthy and faithful interpretation of Christ. To conquer militarily in the name of Christ is antithetical to Christ, nonsense. Blasphemous evil. And, common practice in Western Christianity where resistance to this norm was always by fringe groups.

But as it happened, through Constantine's shrewd manipulation and Eusebius' narration, so-called (un)Christian Empire was formed.

A short time later--also in the 300's-- **Augustine of Hippo**--in modern day Algeria--argue against the Donatists. They were a movement who were upset that priests who'd denied Christ during a local persecutions--this started in Carthage, also Africa, were just let back into the fold...The Donatists were concerned with purity of the clergy, they had at times resorted to violence, and were largely folk from the lower classes. The folks who denied Christ and who were now again enjoying privileges tended to be higher classed, it seems. Augustine argued that though the Donatist didn't hold to any heretical views when it came to Christology or the Trinity, they should be physically coerced by the state to bring them into line so that order may be restored in the City of Man and the City of God (the established church??) could continue to march on. (61) His argument against the Donatists is the seed of Just War Theory, that idea that in certain circumstances the evil of war/coercive violence is necessary the duty of a Christian leader in order to mete out divine punishment. (59) Mark Charles calls this a Get behind me Satan, moment. "for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." Jesus did not take up the reigns of history by force, but rather by costly love.

Augustine was an amazingly talented theologian. In a separate book I'm reading about Christian formation, one of the key tenants the arguments is based on--that you are what you love--comes from Augustine. Its hard to swallow. He's gotta to be taken with a grain of salt--that is prayer and critical eye--but he was beloved of God, and put his talents to work.

Fast forward 900 years, Europe has experienced 5 centuries of invasions by Muslim armies.

Thomas Aquinas, another brilliant theologian, writing about heretics--Christians who teach/espouse wrong belief--suggests they should be excommunicated (as was already the general rule) and executed quickly. (Charles, 63)

Put together, the 1)forfeiture of life for wrong belief and the 2) threats to European stability and 3) redefinition of the category of pagan and infidel from one who hasn't accepted teh good news of Jesus to an enemy who can be killed, enslaved, and their lands and possessions taken.

And you have, the logic that gives us the Doctrine of Discovery and the papal bulls of the 1400's. And, thus the discovery of America becomes logically possible.

Because, remember, tens of millions of people in distinct language groups and civilizations lived from the Artic circle way down into S. America. You can't discover new lands, if they're inhabited.

My daughters were playing in Walter and Betty's yard and found this blue bouncy ball attached to a string. They come running to us all excited about their discovery. Wow, a new toy just waiting for them! Where did they find it? In the trees just off the neighbor's back yard fence. That neighbor has 3 boys a bit older than Maeve. My girls didn't discover a new toy, they found, they came across someone else's. And unless, they could come up with some technicality that broke their relationship with this someone else, they'd have to admit this bouncy ball wasn't ours to keep. Now, they'd played with the ball for half an hour before we noticed. Does

that change whose it is? Anais is really too young to get the idea of stealing, especially from an unknown, unseen neighbor kid. The scenario is really a bit abstract for her. Does that change whether the ball rightfully belongs to her? I get it...as the situation creeps closer in to us we get defensive.

You can't discover new lands, if they're inhabited. Unless you either uninhabite them. (The word for this is mass murder, genocide, or forced migration, exile is the biblical word for it or simply greivous evil.) The more palatable option is to take the human out of the inhabitants, dehumanize them. Say, call them infidels and pagans. Use Aquinas' reasoning to make their human lives forfeit, so that whatever was left to them--slavery, cultural genocide, a place on the bottom rung of European society could be called a benevolent gift. The pope saw this. The kings...and queens saw this. The explorers counted on this. Our founders saw. And, we've mostly gone along with this. Pretty much everyone, since the beginning knew it was a kind of legal fiction--these admissions are in the record--and this violent lie affects us to this day. This is the Get behind me Satan. Moment... or rather Western Civilization we find ourselves born into. Don't get me wrong, there's lots of good--and there always has been with empires: stability, scientific innovation (often during wars), roads and infrastructure, etc. But Jesus didn't clap Pilate or Herod on the back and give a few pointers, he took up his cross.

The good news is the same it was before. Jesus didn't give up on Peter, he wouldn't (and hasn't given up on the church). In fact, he says the Gates of Hades will not prevail against the church...no matter the mess it gets itself into. Jesus hasn't given up on us. And, Jesus hasn't given up on you. Struggle all you want. Run all you want. As soon as you give up your life, your claims, your justifications, your way: you find life. As soon as you take up the cross--that's not generalized hardship--its Jesus' way of being in the world. When you take up the cross, you follow Jesus and jesus accompanies you.

In 2016, while with Heather and I in attendance MC Canada via an Assembly resolution repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery. This briefest sketch of one line of church history is part of that repudiation. To repudiate means to refuse to accept or be associated with. It comes from latin where it means to divorce or to cast off. We and the Doctrine of Discovery need a divorce. The relationship is abusive. Get behind us, Satan.

(went off script here)

Paul's counsel in Romans 12 is about perfect and *timely and practical* as a response to Jesus' rebuke and challenge in Matthew 16 and in our way forward in the messy divorce from Doctrine of Discovery and its Euro-centrism.

We'll end with Paul's words again: (Romans 12:9-21)

Excerpt from Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*

Under Constantine the Roman Empire has been restored “to its ancient state of one united body; extending their peaceful sway around the world.”

“All things were filled with light, and all who before were sunk in sorrow, beheld each other with smiling and cheerful faces. With choirs and hymns in the cities and villages, at the same time they celebrated and extolled first of all God the Universal King, because thus they were taught, then they also celebrated the praises of the pious Emperor, and with him all his divinely-favoured children. There was a perfect oblivion of past evils, and past wickedness was buried in forgetfulness. There was nothing but enjoyment of the present blessings, and expectations of these yet to come.”

Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilius*, trans. C.F. Cruse (London: George Bell & Sons, 1908), 419. (quoted in Charles)

Bibliography:

Charles & Rah, *Unsettling Truths: The ongoing dehumanizing legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery*. IVP, 2019.