



Freedom And Order

Freedom without order leads to chaos. Order without freedom leads to tyranny. Only in Christ can these two warring combatants become creative comrades in the dance of grace.

Freedom is a wonderful and terrible paradox. In its purest sense, freedom means having no boundaries, borders, rules or restrictions. It is the uninhibited will to do or refrain as one desires. Freedom defines, in part, deity. After all, who tells God what to do? Made in his image and likeness, we also were designed for freedom, but our broken and dis-ordered hearts bring only chaos. Whether we're talking about reckless drivers who feel no need to obey the speed limits or the killing fields of Cambodia, human beings strive constantly to break through any barriers that prevent them from doing as they see fit. The pursuit of freedom without order invariably brings chaos and ultimately results in death.

The opposite is also true. Order without freedom leads to another kind of death-tyranny. We are not designed for slavery, and each of us is born with the God-given and God-like capacity to will and to choose. Anything that robs us of that capacity denies us what may be the defining characteristic of our humanity. When humanity experienced the Fall, however, the brokenness of sin infected our conscience. Humans now abuse order in the same way they abuse freedom. Order becomes a weapon of control, a device to simply impose my will upon yours.

A war now rages in every human heart. Reckless freedom claws at the eyes of violent order in a deadly pas de deus. Only in Christ can these two warring factions become creative comrades in the dance of grace. How?

Christ promises life-real life-and that more abundantly than the chaos and tyranny that characterizes human experience. The life he promises is born from the union of both the freedom and order he brings.

Consider biological life for a moment. Science still wrestles with the definition of "life" itself, but at a minimum, all seem to agree that life is composed of increasingly complex structures of inorganic matter that result in behaviors that characterize living things. In other words, if we structure protons, neutrons and electrons in a certain way, we have a soda can-but rearrange the ordering of those same particles, and now we have a cell. Life flows out of the order of structure. In the same way, true life-giving freedom flows out of the well-ordered heart and does not depend upon external structures to either maintain or exercise it.

And it is precisely because we are designed to be free that no one-including God-can force us to be free. God is not a tyrant, nor has he designed us for tyranny. We must freely choose to bring order to our broken hearts if we want true freedom, and we must choose to not allow any one or anything to rob us of that God-given freedom. Only Christ, who freely chose the obedience of the cross, can set us free to be free.

The freedom that Christ brings has two components: freedom from sin, and the freedom to do good works. External forms of order in social relationships-traffic laws, or the Ten Commandments, for example-are necessary because human beings are not intrinsically free to choose good behavior. In other words, external forms of control are necessary to regulate the effects of sin. Without external structures like criminal codes and police agencies to enforce them, the world would be plunged into a hellish chaos. (The evening news suggests, even with those external structures, the world appears to be growing more chaotic.) Yet while external order can regulate the effects of sin, it cannot remove the root causes of it. Only Christ's work on the Cross can destroy the effects of sin in our lives

Christ wants something better for us than the Ten Commandments. He does not want us to refrain from killing others because we will be punished if we do. Rather, he wants us to love those that hate us-just as He does. To move from a place of "abstaining from, under threat from" means moving away from external structures and toward internal ones, from tyranny to freedom. It means becoming more like Him. For me to be able to do this, my heart needs to be re-ordered by the work of the Spirit and his Word.

What is the gospel? It is the good news that what was in the beginning shall be so again in the end. It is the restoration of the image of God in me. We know that freedom and order can become creative comrades in the dance of grace because we see it displayed in Jesus, who died for us, and in whose image we are being made.