

I. Introduction

- A. We all have a faith that is influenced by our culture. God's commitment to us is to transform us to a purely biblical faith.
- B. "What does this mean to me?"
  - 1. Worst question ever because the Bible doesn't begin with me, it begins with Jesus
    - a. We cannot begin with me because I am flawed and can't see accurately.
    - b. The focus of the Bible's meaning is Jesus Christ.

\*\*better question, in light of what this says, how does my life change right now?

- 2. Cultural distortion of faith
  - a. Western, Asian, African, European, South American, Australian, etc. - Sin's distortion effects all cultures.
  - b. Then add white, mid-western, evangelical, middle class (your description of yourself is just as inherently flawed as mine so don't think yours is enlightened)

\*\*What we need is to approach Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and the Body of Christ with humility and surrender so that our faith moves from being directed by culture to directed by Jesus.

II. Philemon's Challenge (17-25)

- A. Welcome him as you would welcome me (v17)
  - 1. Relational vs Transactional focus
    - a. Decision to "welcome" is based not on merit, fairness, or debt, but the relationship he has based in Jesus Christ.
    - b. Practical recognition of this new spiritual relationship
  - 2. Paul leverages his relationship with Philemon for Onesimus.
    - a. "Welcome" first and foremost into the household of faith with all the revolutionary implications - i.e. one anothers
    - b. "Partner"
      - 1) Not a business partner, but a fellowship based in faith (i.e. biblical marriage)
      - 2) If you have any fellowship with me in our common faith or if you believe that one in Christ means anything ...
  - 3. Slave = Apostle
    - a. Paul recognizes that there is no distinction in the kingdom of God between himself, an Apostle, and Onesimus, a slave.

Galatians 3:28

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

b. O Holy Night

"Chains shall he break for the slave is our brother, and in His name all oppression shall cease."

B. Paul's Conviction (vs 18-20)

1. Paul's belief in what God has done is so strong that he is willing to personally invest, sacrifice, and alter his lifestyle - that is how serious he is about "one in Christ."
2. The flow
  - a. I will pay any debts Onesimus owes (v 18)
    - 1) Runaway slaves needed to finance their escape-usually by stealing from their master.
    - 2) Les Mis ...
  - b. There should be no hesitation to believe Paul's offer.
    - 1) I, Paul, write this ...
    - 2) Not to mention my personal, relational, spiritual investment in you
  - c. Refresh my heart by becoming like Jesus as I anticipate you will (I'm sending you my heart, he and I are one)

C. Paul's Confidence (vs 21-25)

1. Confidence in the humility and surrender that characterizes Philemon's relationship with Jesus. (It's my joy to say, your will your way.)
2. Closes with relationship-I'm excited to see you!

III. Implications for me

A. Once useless, now useful

1. Before Christ we were all Onesimi
  - a. Slaves to sin, rebellious, deserving of nothing but death
  - b. In stepped a substitute who guaranteed payment on all our debt and moved us from slaves to brothers and sisters!
2. Our names
  - a. We've been called names and even given ourselves names.
  - b. We bear the scars and even shame of what we've done and what's been done to us.
  - c. But, when we encounter the Gospel of grace, all of that is changed forever. We are now creatures, bearing new names and new identities.

\*\*Useless to useful, our home is in God's family and Kingdom as His heirs. As such, we are now called to welcome home other Onesimi.

B. "My chains are gone ..."

1. In Christ our chains have been broken but like Philemon, we choose to keep and wear the ones that feel comfortable as accessories to our faith.
2. Chains = "Yeah but ..."
  - a. Most of the division in the true Church of Jesus Christ results from cultural chains that we've been freed from but choose to keep and try to place on other believers.
    - 1) Yeah but liberals are more shaped by culture because ...
    - 2) Yeah but conservatives are more shaped by culture because ...

**\*\*Problem:** we describe ourselves with attributive adjectives. "I'm a conservative Christian" or "I'm a progressive Christian" or "I'm a fundamentalist Christian," fill-in-the-blank. We are called to Christ alone, no adjectives welcome. Am I even ...

- b. Foundational parental advice for "yeah but ..."
  - 1) Don't worry about the other person.
  - 2) Pay attention to yourself.
  - 3) Decide upon Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and the Body of Christ to do the right thing.
- 3. Our chains
  - a. Finances: Jesus didn't found the Church on capitalism. He also didn't found it on socialism. Jesus founded the Church on recognizing that all is God's blessing, the call to willful generosity, and most important, gaining and storing treasure where it will lead your heart to Jesus (Not on Earth, but in Heaven).
  - b. Worship: Fighting about worship (songs/singing) is a cultural chain. It's the value of wanting to please ourselves and have our own way.
    - 1) We will never worship just like the early church.
    - 2) Worship is about turning our hearts toward God and is more about my attitude of humility and surrender than what's being done or how.
  - c. Relationships: We tend to gravitate toward people whose lifestyle, race, ethnicity, attitudes, and interests, and especially politics make us comfortable. And we begin to believe that we are the right expression of biblical Christianity - all the while not realizing that we are still in shackles.

Galatians 3:28 (MWV)

There is neither black nor white, liberal nor conservative, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ.

- 4. Without the supremacy of Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and the Body of Christ, we see and believe what we want to rather than what Jesus actually has shown us.
  - a. That's why ...
    - 1) We can vote for a candidate who believes and pursues the "right" to end a baby's life.
    - 2) We can voter for a candidate who belittles and bullies those different from himself and is the epitome of arrogance and pride.
  - b. We conveniently ignore what God says and loves based on the "jewelry" we wear that we've converted from our chains (see Moses and the Children of Israel).

#### IV. Closing Challenge

A. Humility and surrender

B. O Holy Night

- 1. More than just a Christmas song, it's a song about how we have been freed and called to live.
- 2. Short history
  - a. Lyrics written by a wine merchant; composed by an Orthodox Jew

- b. Later banned by the church in France because it was composed by a man who did not believe in Jesus but continued to be sung by the French believers
- c. Ten years later an American abolitionist was influenced and used it during the Civil War.
- d. During the Franco-Prussian War it was sung by French soldiers. The German soldiers were moved to sing their own hymns by Luther that led to a 24-hour truce over Christmas.
- e. 1906, Reginald Fessenden (a colleague of Thomas Edison) was experimenting with a microphone and a telegraph on Christmas Eve. He read about the birth of Jesus from Luke 2 and then picked up his violin and sang *O Holy Night*. It was the first song ever played over the "radio."