

HCC English Service – January 20, 2019
Book of Philemon

Introduction

- For those of you who don't know me, my name is Stanley Chang and I serve at the Youth Minister here. Many of you might not know but I grew up at this church. And lately, ever since coming back, I've been hearing a lot about how I was a bad kid, or at least a rowdy kid, who ran around the cafeteria, ran around the church and hallways. Well, this impression of me continued, as I grew older. I came back to HCC in High School and eventually I was a MS volunteer during my college years. When I graduated from college, I had applied to be the Youth Intern. It was then, I heard comments about me that revealed people's view of me. "The guy with the hair?" – I guess to some I was still immature still. Thankfully, Pastor Fred stood up for me and said he'd disciple me. And he did. It took time for me to reform my image and who I was to some people. Thankfully enough that I was hired again 7 years later.
- We normally have impressions of people and in order for a negative impression to become a good impression, that person would probably need to prove themselves, or do something to change your mind about them. But that's not the case here. Paul is requesting Philemon (and he does so by appealing to Philemon's love for saints) to receive his own slave, Onesimus, on the basis of his newfound faith in Jesus and His new identity he has as a believer. Onesimus doesn't need prove himself to be better or different, like that of my situation. There is an instant transformation because of His new life in Christ.
- Our vertical relationship with Christ must affect our horizontal relationships with each other in the church So this is where we are going today: We will talk about how our salvation transforms our fundamental identity, which then leads to a radical love that. But before we get there, I want to give a quick background of the book of Philemon, which will help us understand what is going on.

Background of the letter to Philemon (A radical request)

- Onesimus was a runaway slave. We're not sure of why he ran away or where he ran to but we do know from verse 10, he finds Paul and becomes a Christian through Paul's witness
- Paul is sending Onesimus back to Philemon and makes a request: To accept Onesimus "no longer AS a bondservant but...as a beloved brother"
- To help us understand what's going on here, I'll have to explain the picture of Slavery in the Bible:
 - Slavery was very common. Different kinds of slaves. For an example, you had slaves who worked in the field, and other slaves who took care of the master's children and even taught them. To be free was not always a good/positive thing for the slave either. Slaves would even benefit from staying under the master's care because it would be hard for slaves to integrate back into society.
 - We see that this is what happened with Onesimus. Paul calls Onesimus a bondservant. A bondservant was someone who had been a slave for a certain amount of time (in the OT 7 years), and after 7 years they would be set free It is at that point the slave can choose to stay and then become a bondservant.
 - The question is...Why would they stay to be a slave?

- “If the servant declares, ‘I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,’ then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life” (Exodus 21:5-6).
 - They have a great master. Better taken care of by this master. Maybe they had a relationship that you wouldn’t normally think of between a master and slave. Or as I have mentioned before, To be free was not always a positive thing.
 - So we can see that Philemon was probably a good master. We do see that Paul spoke very highly of Philemon. At the same time, there is a tension though because the idea of slavery was still not okay. There was still a master and slave relationship. One person being over the other. Slavery still had a dehumanizing tone to it.
- So here is where it get’s a little confusing but it will help us understand the importance of Paul’s request. Paul doesn’t call Philemon to free Onesimus from slavery and one might think: Why doesn’t he ask for Onesimus’ freedom? If slavery is not okay, then say something about it Paul. Speak against it. Even in Ephesians 6, he tells bondservants to obey earthly masters.
- What Paul is doing is that he’s trying to show that there is a deeper importance here and what’s important is the new reality in Christ that believers live in. What does he do? He says that this relationship that Philemon has with Onesimus through Jesus Christ is way more important.
- So because of this...Paul makes a radical request of Philemon. One more thing we need to know about slavery is that runaway/fugitive slaves are deserving of death. This is so critical because Paul’s writes this letter to ask Philemon to receive Onesimus back as a brother. So he’s asking...don’t kill him even though he deserves to be killed but receive him. Do what the world is not expecting you to do. What’s more important is your witness to the world. The world would have assumed Onesimus’ death, but if Philemon were to forgive him that would be radically different from the world. The question is how can Paul make this radical request? but Paul has a basis for his request.
- “The beauty of imputation leads to the beauty of reconciliation.” – Leonce Crump

Christian salvation transforms our fundamental identity

- Paul argues for five things that happened with Onesimus once He became a Christian:
 - v10 – Child of mine - Onesimus becomes family
 - v11-13 – Useless to Useful
 - v16 – Onesimus was a bondservant and now is a brother
 - v17-19 – Onesimus goes from in debt to having his debt paid.
 - v17 – Onesimus is to be received as a partner
- There is a radical change in identity for Onesimus. Paul is asking Philemon to see Onesimus for who he is now, and not his old self. Not his slave status. Not him as the fugitive. Philemon’s identity immediately transforms when he became a Christian. Paul is asking a lot from Philemon. “Unparalleled generosity” - Brotherhood over fugitive slave. There’s no more master or slave. They are both on the same side now. The slave if brought up to the level of the master. There is a lot of forgiveness that is given. As a runaway slave, Onesimus feared seeing death and punishment...and now he is free from any penalty. All because of his transformation in Christ.
- What exactly is this transformation?? In the Youth group, I’ve been trying to push hard that the Gospel is more than just “Jesus dying for my sins.” I’d like to explain the

doctrine of double imputation. Many times, youth students are familiar with the first part of double imputation. We know that Jesus has taken our sin. Our sins have been imputed onto Christ. But what I always want to show the youth is that there is a second part. Not only do our sins get imputed onto Christ, but Christ's righteousness, His perfect life, is imputed into us! Because of that, God does not see us for who we are, but He sees Christ. Our identity is fundamentally changed because of Christ and His righteousness being over us.

- We have become heirs. We are now Sons and daughters because of Christ and Him being the Son of God. This is who we are now. Just as Onesimus was brought from the level of slave to master, in the same way, we are brought from death to life. We have a status of that of Christ!
- Maybe some of you feel like you are so far off from God but you're not. A lot of times I like to ask the question: What do you feel when you sin? "Guilt and shame" are usually the top answers...My response: No guilt, no shame, no more condemnation or those who are in Christ Jesus.
- God cannot disown you because He cannot disown Jesus Christ. We might be rebellious or have walked away but he has not disowned you. It is the same with you father's and mothers...as much as your son or daughter might frustrate you, you might feel like you want to BUT you would never disown them. You and I have the imputed righteousness in Christ, which fundamentally transforms our identity and how God see us!
- If this is how God see you and me, this must be the way that we must view each other.

Christian salvation produces a radical love for all saints.

- "The beauty of imputation leads to the beauty of reconciliation." – Leonce Crump
- v5 – "Because I hear of your love and of the faith you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints" – Now this read a little weird, but what Paul is connecting together is 1) Love for all saints and 2) Faith in the Lord Jesus. In Colossians: Paul uses the same a similar introduction: Heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you show to all God's people.
- Paul uses the word ALL – but Paul could have said "love for the saints" Again, Paul is appealing to Philemon's love for all saints to make his request. If Philemon got to choose which saints he got to love, then Paul would not have been so confident (v21) in Philemon's obedience, following through with the request. Also, it has been said that Philemon did follow through with the request. Well, it's speculated that he did, otherwise this letter would not have been circulated, and second, others were included in the introduction so Philemon would have been held accountable to this request. We have to ask, So why ALL the saints?
- Our lack of love for the Saints exposes our self-righteousness because if the Righteous One, God, who forgives sinners then who are we to not forgive our brothers and sisters if we are the same... SINNERS. The only way that we can even think about not forgiving others and loving them is if we have a righteousness greater than that of God's. Obviously we don't.
- I think there is self-righteousness in us if we choose who we want to love, who we want to accept, who we want to welcome and reach out to. The Gospel does not discriminate, all who confess and believe will repent...it doesn't matter who or what they have done. They come and be transformed. They are forgiven. If God see us as sons and daughter, forgiven people, why do we see each other differently? Has not Christ taken care of their

sins, that we can't accept them? Exactly the opposite...Christ HAS paid the penalty for their sins and so we must not hold that against them for it was taken care of on the Cross.

- As Christians we proclaim a Gospel that saves sinners who repent and it frees them, and yet, sometimes our actions do not reflect this Gospel that we proclaim. We don't forgive those who have wronged us even though we have been forgiven of our trespasses against God. Other times, we don't forgive the people that Christ has forgiven. There's no acceptance when we do that...we are not showing the acceptance of Christ.

Conclusion –

- Our being adopted into the family of God is only the beginning. Take a look at verses 6-7 with me.
- Paul prays that as Philemon share his faith, which means, as he lived out his faith, as he lived out in love, when we have love for all the saints, then we will begin to see the fullness of all that we have that is in Christ.
- We have access to all that Christ has and is. This is the picture. Wouldn't it be refreshing if we all began to live in the kindness that Christ showed? Wouldn't it be refreshing if we welcomed the outcast as Christ did? Wouldn't it be refreshing if the broken were comforted as Christ showed us? People just started to serve in ways they wouldn't have ever thought they would. Wouldn't it be refreshing if the love, patience, kindness, and gentleness of Christ and everything else he is was lived out among us in this room?
- I think we all want to be refreshed, and some of might need to be refreshed.