

THE FREEDOM OF CONFORMITY

INTRODUCTION

- A. I used to think there was freedom in nonconformity.
- B. Personal background
 - 1. College in the late 60s and early 70s.
 - 2. Crazy clothes, long hair, rock music.
 - 3. Such non-conformity more often than not leads to slavery not freedom.
- C. Religious zeal - conformity
 - 1. A specific Bible translation required.
 - 2. Only one style of music or form of worship is acceptable.
 - 3. There is always an emphasis on gray areas of doctrine - majoring on minors not majors.
 - 4. Such conformity leads to slavery not freedom, cultic not relational

CONFORMITY TO CHRIST BRINGS FREEDOM

- A. How can conformity give freedom?
 - 1. Conformity requires the right object, Jesus Christ
 - 2. Romans 8:29, *For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son.*
 - 3. Freedom comes when I choose to be what I was created to be, a child of God, conformed to the likeness of Christ.
- B. How can I be conformed to Christ?
 - 1. Conformity demands self-evaluation
 - a. Let's take a moment and look back on 2006 from a biblical perspective, Galatians, 5:19-23, *Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*
 - b. Slavery to self
 - 1) Impurity-absence of restraint
 - 2) Idolatry-lack of gratitude to God
 - 3) Enmities-hatred of others
 - 4) Strife-outworking of hatred, rivalries in church
 - 5) Jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, factions, envying-desire to deprive someone of what he has
 - c. Conformity to Christ
 - 1) Godward acts
 - a) Love - primary object is God expressed in obedience to His commandments and evidenced in our relation to others.
 - b) Joy - again, God is the object of our joy not our circumstances.
 - c) Peace - contentment in ones' position in Christ.
 - 2) Manward acts
 - a) Patience - self-restraint in face of provocation.
 - b) Kindness - gracious attitude toward others
 - c) Goodness - gracious actions toward others
 - d) Faithfulness - dependable toward God and man
 - e) Gentleness - concern for others.
 - 3) Inward act: self-control, conformity to Christ
 - d. I didn't measure up. Did you? Chrysostom, *"...runners don't think about how many laps they have finished, but how many are left. We, too, should think not about how we are advanced in holiness, but about how much farther we have to go."*

2. Conformity is a choice
 - a. Seek His kingdom and righteousness, . Matthew 6:33,*But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*
 - b. submit yourself daily to God, Romans 12:1, *I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*
3. Conformity takes help
 - a. I try to seek Him and too often get redirected.
 - b. I attempt to consciously choose God. *"I could summarize my entire spiritual pilgrimage as an effort to move the operating center from myself to God."* Philip Yancey
 - c. Yet, I am always refreshed by Philippians 1:6, God will complete the good work He has begun in my life.
 - d. Mark Bailey, *"Jesus is the Master. He's the one who wrote the music. All He asks is that you let Him play His music in the cathedral of your life."*

C. What is the goal of being conformed to Christ?

1. We could imagine many things,
 - a. The Lord's well done, Luke 19:17, *He said to him, 'Well done, good slave! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small thing, take charge of ten cities.'*
 - b. The unfading crown of glory, 1 Peter 5:4, *And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away.*
 - c. The privilege of serving the Lord face to face, Revelation 22:3-5, *Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.*
2. Paul expressed his goal in several passages.
 - a. Philippians 3:14, *"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*
 - b. His goal was to know Christ.
 - 1) It is relational, Philippians 3:8-9, *More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.*
 - a) It begins at salvation.
 - b) It is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ based on faith alone.
 - 1] Grace
 - a] Heaven is a free gift.
 - b] It is not earned or deserved.
 - c] Ephesians 2:8, 9, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast."*
 - 2] Man
 - a] Man is a sinner.
 - b] He can not save himself.
 - c] Mat. 5:48, *"Therefore, you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*
 - 3] God
 - a] He is merciful - He doesn't want to punish us.
 - b] He is just - He demands punishment for sin.
 - c] Exodus 34:7b, *"He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished..."*
 - 4] Christ
 - a] Who He is - the infinite God-Man
 - b] What He did - He died on the cross and rose from the dead to make payment for our sins and to purchase a place in heaven for us.
 - c] Isaiah 53:6, *"But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him."*

5] Faith

- a] What it is not - mere intellectual assent or temporal faith.
- b] What it is - trusting in Jesus Christ alone for eternal life.
- c] Acts 16:31, *"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved..."*

c) It is a transfer of trust to Jesus Christ alone.

2) It is experiential, Ephesians 3:10, *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death,*

- a) The power of His resurrection - Jesus was raised from the dead and believers are raised from death to spiritual life.
- b) The fellowship of His sufferings - Paul was willing to suffer for the cause of Christ.
- c) Conformity to His death - our lives in Christ are based on death to self.

D. What is the means of conformity, Colossians 1:27, *Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

1. It was a mystery.

a. Paul was referring to the church which joins Jews and Gentiles in one body.

b. Also, the mystery is that the transcendent, holy God would choose to dwell in man.

1) John 14:23, *"Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him."*

2) 1 Cor. 3:16, *"do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you."*

2. It is amazing.

a. Until Jesus Christ tore the temple veil in two from top to bottom, only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and then, only once per year.

b. Now, believers are the temple of God.

c. We can know Him - He indwells us.

E. What is the result of conformity to Christ?

1. Go back to point B, Romans 8:29, *"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son."*

1. David Hubbard, *In a massive conspiracy of grace Father, Son, and Spirit have plotted together to turn our lives around.*

2. J. A. Motyer, *...for every converted person there is an identical goal: to be satisfied with Jesus and to grow into His likeness.*

3. Every Christian will be conformed to the image of Christ.

CONCLUSION

A. How can I make knowing Christ my greatest purpose?

1. Know Him by relationship based on faith in God's grace revealed in the Son of God, John 17:3, *And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.*

2. Know Him by experience through His indwelling presence, Psalm 105:3-4, *Glory in His holy name; Let the heart of those who seek the LORD be glad.*

3. Know Him by obedience through personal choice, Hosea 6:3, *So let us know, let us press on to know the LORD.*

B. Isn't serving God and people enough?

1. *The proportion in which I know my Lord is the proportion in which I am prepared to serve Him. Is it not certain that when I know as I am known I shall be more perfectly prepared to serve?* G. Campbell Morgan

2. *A heart for God produces a life for God.* David Robinson

3. Service must be an outgrowth of Whose I am not what I do.