

☩ You do you and I'll do me

- *Phrase that's become popular in over the past few years- reflective of highly individualistic nature of western culture... YOU DO YOU.*
- *Affirmation of a person doing what they think is best, particularly when their decision would be in contrast to what others might think.*
- *Blue hair? U do U! Not going to judge- U do U I'll do me.*
- *NOW, this can make some of us good conservative Christians a bit nervous, we like things to fit safely within boundaries of what we deem to be acceptable, be it doctrinally, culturally, politically, behaviorally, or morally. Traditionally don't like it when people color outside lines- whatever we may define those lines to be.*
- *Not advocating moral anarchy- NT worldview is inseparable from a moral understanding given to us by our creator.*
- *BUT, if we are honest, Christian culture & the church can be rightfully challenged for being overly CONFORMIST- you go to an average church- even today, and things are pretty homogeneous- we tend to look alike, dress alike, listen to same music, read same books, listen to same music.*
- *Christian culture has also, at times, been uniform in how we have missed the foundational calling of a true God-centered morality, settling instead for legalistic religion rooted more in tradition- and even fear- than in the radical message of the NT.*
- *THIS IS UNFORTUNATE, because a NT worldview places a HIGH value on HOW WE LIVE being a genuine expression of WHO WE ARE. You may recall Jesus challenging the religious rulers of his time for being like whitewashed tombs- white and clean on the outside, but rotting on the inside.*
- *Likewise, the NT has a decidedly non-conformist streak to it. ROMANS 12:2... Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*
- *Ethics of 1st century church often stood in stark contrast to surrounding culture: not just in terms of theology, but how you lived, how you treated people, rejection of social barriers, and very radical concept of placing the needs of others above yourself.*
- *THIS leads to one of the great – and somewhat ironic- non-conformist ethics of a CHRIST FORMED life...*

One of the great non-conformist ethics of a Christ-formed life is the willingness- at times- to conform to something we otherwise would not, for the sake of others and for the sake of the gospel.

- *In any given situation, instead of initially (and exclusively) thinking 'what is best for me', the NT picture of a Christ-formed life possesses a Spirit- led awareness of how our actions impact others, and – this is key - willingness to change how we act- even to point of surrendering our own freedoms- for benefit of others.*
- *Church- this is COUNTERCULTURAL! It was in the time of Paul, and it remains so today.*
- *This is the attitude of mind and heart Paul describes:*

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 *Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not*

having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

- **We first saw this ethic (way of thinking that informs how we live, make decisions) in Acts 16- First missionary journey, when Timothy joins with Paul. Timothy was half-jew, but raised as gentile and was not circumcised. Timothy consented to Paul's desire for him to be circumcised- WHY? So wouldn't be a barrier for Timothy's witness to the Jews of his regions.**
- **He did something he otherwise would not have needed to do- for the sake of the gospel.**
- **In OUR STORY TODAY it is Paul who is called upon to conform to a cultural expectation he otherwise almost certainly would not have done, if it were not for his desire to see unity in the Jerusalem church.**
- **THIS IS WHERE WE PICK THINGS UP. Paul has completed his third journey and has arrived back in Jerusalem, where he receives...**

✠ **A warm welcome...**

Acts 21:17-20a When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters received us warmly. ¹⁸ The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹ Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. ²⁰ When they heard this, they praised God.

- **Paul and his team first meet with a large gathering of believers. Once again we see centrality and importance of church as COMMUNITY of believers- people bound together in strong relationship because of common hope in Christ.**
- **Next day Paul and team meet with James (most likely half-brother of Jesus) and leaders of Jerusalem church.**
- **By this point the church in Jerusalem has grown to be a significant presence in the region. Even though gentile believers most likely outnumbered Jewish believers by this time, the Jerusalem church was still the largest single community of Christ followers, and James was the leader of this community.**
- **SO, here in the same room, in a broad sense we have the leader of the Jewish church and the leader of the gentile church. What is NOT present is any sense of rivalry or competition. All of these disciples are united in their praise of God as they learn what God has done across Mediterranean world through Paul's ministry.**
- **But as thrilled as these leaders were to hear from Paul, they also knew that many in the city would not be so happy- Paul had received a warm welcome, but there was a big problem.**

✠ **But there's a problem**

Acts 21:20b-22 Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. ²¹ They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. ²² What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come,

- **Let's set this up...**
- **Thousands of Jews in Jerusalem have believed. Miraculous thing! And yet, these new believers are still deeply committed to their Jewish identity, which means the importance of keeping the Mosaic Law.**

- **Heightening tension is what we know from other ancient sources- year is 57 AD, and Jerusalem is filled with a rising Jewish nationalism, political unrest, and a deep resentment of the local Roman Ruler, Felix. The population is simmering with anti-roman, anti-gentile sentiment. Jerusalem is primed to explode, and leaders of the church are afraid Paul might be the match.**
- **Accusations made against Paul seem like a circulating rumor, likely started by enemies of Paul from outside the church, but picked up by Jewish believers within the church. Accusation against Paul was three-fold:**
 - **He was teaching Jews to turn away from Mosaic Law**
 - **To reject the rite of circumcision- core to the law**
 - **To reject the Jewish customs, arising from the Law.**
- **This is interesting- Specifically, Paul did NOT teach the Jews that it was wrong to carry out the Mosaic Law. However, what he taught rang very close to this.**
- **What he DID teach was that the law- other than revealing no-one was able to keep it- no longer had any RELEVANCE in regards to being made right with God.**

‡ So, what *had* Paul been teaching?

Acts 13:38-39 “Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. ³⁹Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.

- **Paul said this in Psidian Antioch, 1st M Journey, in a Synagogue- to Jews.**
- **Your ability/efforts to keep the law does you no good!**

Romans 7:6 But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

- **Paul famously goes on in Romans 7 to say that if you TRY to live righteously by your efforts to keep the law- uses 1 of 10 C’s as example- this actually is counter-productive, and will yield the opposite result. (Jealous)**
- **One of the big accusations was that Paul was prohibiting the act of circumcision- didn’t, but DID say-**

Romans 2:28-29a A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. ²⁹No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code.

- **It’s not your outward acts that matter- it’s what is going on inside your heart!**

1 Corinthians 7:19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts.

- **This will only happen if our obedience is a genuine reflection of who we are inside**

Galatians 5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

Galatians 6:15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.

- **This was Paul’s message- and yet, what his detractors heard was “Paul is denigrating the greatest source of our identity- Paul is undermining the thing that gives us security as a people- Paul is threatening our unique relationship with God.”**
- **WHEN IN FACT, the Gospel Paul proclaimed**

- **Provided a new source of identity based on inner transformation, not external appearance**
- **Provided a secure relationship with God that is based on God's grace and mercy, not our own performance.**
- **Nonetheless, the situation in Jerusalem was tense, and so the church leaders presented Paul with a solution, that on its face, is somewhat confusing.**

✠ **A confusing solution**

Acts 21:23-24 *so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. ²⁴ Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.*

- **Few things here. First, we don't know for sure the content of the vow these men had taken. Many scholars think it may have been a Nazirite vow, which was a vow taken from OT book of Numbers, where a person would voluntarily consecrate themselves to a special service to God for a set period of time. This is something only a very devout Jew would do.**
- **If this is what occurred, then Paul likely only joined in end of the process, as the Nazirite vow usually lasted 30 days, concluding with sacrifices made at the temple.**
- **So while Paul paid for these men's temple sacrifices, his vow may have been one focused on purification due to his extended time among the gentiles.**
- **IN ANY CASE, idea was that Jewish believers would see Paul engaging in this highly devout activity, and this would dispel their fears that he had somehow abandoned, or even betrayed, his Jewish Identity and adherence to the law.**
- **HOLD THAT THOUGHT... James continues, now speaking about the gentile believers**

✠ **As for the gentiles...**

Acts 21:25 *As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality."*

- **This refers back to the incredibly important Jerusalem Council, which we covered in-depth in Acts 15.**
- **This is when the church leaders considered the question- Do the gentiles need to follow the law of Moses to become followers of Christ?**
- **Resounding answer, given by Peter and James, as that NO, they DO NOT. Not only that, even us Jews are not able to keep the law- and so even for us- just like the gentiles- our hope to be made right with God is FAITH IN CHRIST- THE GRACE OF GOD- NOT THE LAW.**
- **They concluded by sending a letter to the Gentile churches- almost all of which also included Jews- telling them to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, blood, meat from strangled animals, and sexual immorality.**
- **WHY DID THEY PICK THESE ISSUES? In the case of the food sacrificed to Idols and the treatment of meat, they were asking the gentile believers to humbly accept cultural norms that were of great sensitivity to the Jews, for the sake of UNITY IN THE CHURCH.**
- **This wasn't about adherence to the law, it was about LOVE FOR YOUR FELLOW BELIEVER.**
- **This is the same dynamic at play now for Paul.**

✠ **What Paul did, and why**

Acts 21:26 *The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.*

- **So, out of a desire to work toward unity, and a deep love for his Jewish brothers and sisters, Paul agrees to do something he otherwise would NOT have done, something that may have even been offensive to him.**
- **Don't want to miss significance here! While true Paul never taught Jews it was wrong to keep the law, HE DID- with GREAT PASSION- tell them the law DIDN'T do what they thought it did. It did NOT make them right with God! In fact, if their primary focus was keeping the law, this would push them further from God's Grace.**
- **On top of this, if the ritual Paul undertook was one to cleanse him from being around the unclean gentiles, contrast this with what Paul emphatically proclaimed in Galatians 3- "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"**
- **If his gentile friends back in Ephesus had witness this, they very well might have thought "Paul! Wait a minute! You are contradicting everything you taught us!"**
- **But Paul wasn't in Ephesus- he was in Jerusalem, and he was sensitive and aware of his context- of his audience. Remember, this was before the age of quick communication and social media. An analogy today would be like being invited into someone's home who had cultural traditions very different from your own- and for the sake of your friendship, you participated in their tradition, even though it had no meaning to you.**
- **Look again at what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 9...**

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 *Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. **To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.***

- **In other words... "At times, I am setting aside my own liberty for the sake of others"**
- **So, why did Paul take this action? He did it for...**
 - For the sake of **UNITY**
 - For the sake of the **GOSPEL**
- **Paul was willing to surrender his personal rights- and he taught other believers to do the same- in cases where the exercise of his freedom could have been a cultural barrier to the gospel.**
- **This is a tremendously important lens when we are reading Paul's letters- there are places where we read Paul's instructions to the church, and we ask... WHAT IS THAT ABOUT- answer- for the sake of the gospel.**
- **And ultimately, as the foundation of who Paul was IN CHRIST, and who WE ARE IN CHRIST, he did it for...**
 - For the sake of **LOVE**
- **OK, let's go back to where we started. Idea of YOU DO YOU.**

- **YES- NT places HIGH VALUE on our external expression (how we live) being a genuine expression of our HEART- WHO WE ARE, and WHOSE WE ARE.**
- **And so, for the believer- as people who have been brought from DEATH TO LIFE... life is no longer just YOU DO YOU... it is YOU DO CHRIST IN YOU.**

† You do **Christ in you**

- **If we strip away all the trappings of Christian culture- The Christian life- becoming a disciple of Christ- is about the presence- the nature and character- of CHRIST IN US... changing us, transforming us, so that God's nature and character are increasingly expressed in HOW WE LIVE.**

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 ^(NASB) *Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ But we all, with unveiled faces, looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.*

- **And church, one of the great ways we are transformed into the image of Christ- the Glory of God in us- is the awareness, and willingness, AT TIMES and when appropriate- to set aside our own rights...**
 - **For the sake of others**
 - **For the sake of the gospel**
 - **For the sake of love**
- **May it be said of us.**

† Was it all for nothing?

- **Teaser. After all of this, the plan to diffuse the tension surrounding Paul will fail. On the very day he will complete this ritual, the city is going to explode, Paul is going to be seized and beaten, and would have been killed if not for the protection of the Roman guards.**

We see that and ask “was that all for nothing.” NO, IT WASN'T.. and we will see why NEXT WEEK.