

DOOR: Enron is publicly held and most public companies have more restrictions about self-expression than privately held companies. On a practical level, how has your faith impacted what you do at Enron?

LAY: First is how it sets the tone for the company. I begin many of our business dinners, and particularly special ones with directors and senior employees and community leaders, with a prayer. I think that sets the tone as to the importance of faith, at least in my life and sets the tone for the entire meeting. I have a retired minister on staff at Enron who does a lot of counseling for our employees. It's at their discretion, at their request, but he's available particularly when employees are going through or experiencing the death of loved ones, or tragic accidents, or maybe depression or whatever. Obviously as he counsels, he also ministers.

My employees know that I take basic religious principles very seriously. Our value system has as its first value, respect for each other. This is really not much more than the golden rule. Our second value requires every one to practice absolute integrity in everything they do. Everyone knows that I personally have a very strict code of personal conduct that I live by. This code is based on Christian values. It's not something I carry around on my sleeve or talk about that much with employees, but they've also read about my life and my experiences and about my dad, so they've heard many of the stories of my life and the role that my faith has played. They just know that's a very important part of my life.

Sam Bowers prayer

What do these two men have in common? Christians, at least by their own admission. And not only were these men Christian, but they put Christ at the center of their work. It seems outlandish and obviously incongruous with the rest of their life. They claim Christ in one breath but advocate hatred in the next. They follow Jesus except when it comes to all consuming greed and deception. This is actually nothing new. Jesus has been co-opted through the centuries, he has been claimed and championed at the heart of causes that have nothing to do with him. The crusaders in the middle ages murdered thousands in order to advance the cause of Jesus. Slaveholders righteously clung to their Christian faith while exploiting and abusing generations of human beings. The church in parts of Europe sided with the work of the Nazi's during the middle of the 20th century. How in the world does this happen?

The heart of the issue is syncretism. We began our series in Colossians last week, and the main issue Paul seems to be confronting is syncretism. Syncretism is not a specific philosophy or faith, instead syncretism is blending, fusion, mixing. A little bit of this and a little bit of that. In Colossae a deceptive philosophy crept into the church and they were mixing it with their Christian faith.

Colossians 2:8

They were blending God's commands with their own inclinations. A little bit of this and a little bit of that. And so Paul is writing to them, reminding them once again to focus solely on Jesus. He is reproaching them as they spiritually drift. The trouble with syncretism is that it can be hard to spot. Countless Christians claim Christ Jesus, but they allow other gods to creep in. Materialism. Capitalism. Politics. Hedonism. A little bit of this and a little bit of that. Today as we continue in Colossians I want to approach one of the most insidious and covert forms of syncretism. It is not as overt as blending Christianity with the god Buddha. Or mixing Christianity with the gods of new age. It is not even the less obvious mixing of Christ with the god of self help. Or mixing Christianity with the God of prosperity. The most

dangerous syncretism a Christian can fall into is mixing Christ with the god of self. When we mix Christianity with the God of self, guess which voice we are more prone to listen to. When we try to co-reign with Christ, when we try to worm our way onto the throne with Jesus, we become dangerous. To ourselves and others. When we begin to elevate our wisdom over Christ's demands, we have a problem. When we begin to elevate our desires over Christ's call to holiness, we have a problem. When we elevate our desire for comfort over Christ's call to mission, we have a problem.

As Christians, we often synchronize, blend, fuse our faith with ourselves. I think this is the common thread to the story of Sam Bowers, Ken Lay, to the crusaders, to the slave owners, to us. To anyone and everyone that follows Jesus Christ but whose allegiance still remains primarily to self, we have a problem. We chart a direction in this life and then we conform Christ to justify where we are going. We seize the wheel of this life, pursuing our flesh, our desires, our prejudices and we relegate Christ to the passenger seat if not the trunk.

Illus- Earnest Kurtz wrote the definitive book on the history of AA. He traced the history and the development of the 12 step program and its success. And he chose a very appropriate title for this book: *Not God*. The first two steps of AA are to admit one is powerless and then come to believe a higher power can deliver one from this addiction. Kurtz notes that at the center of the fallen human condition is a persistent whisper that will not relinquish control, power, or direction. The greatest step an addict can take is admit their problem and coming to grips with the undeniable reality. I am not God.

The same is true for every Christian. The biggest step of obedience and faith happens when we admit our sinful, fallen problem, and come to grips with the fact that we are not god. The problem still is that this is insidious, there are very few people who overtly claim to be God. Rather we usurp his role, his glory, and his prerogative. In false humility we claim to follow Christ while still clinging to the steering wheel of our lives. This is a lifelong struggle and it is an age old struggle. In the Garden way back at the beginning of the story, Adam and Eve heard the whispers of the evil one, and they had a hard time realizing they were not god. They wanted equal footing, equal say.

We are not alone in this struggle and there is a solution.

Colossians 1:15-20

If you walk away with nothing else today: If Jesus is God then I am not.

How are we to go about this? As a reminder from last week, the only cure for syncretism, for idolatry of any sort including the elevation of ourselves to the divine level is expulsive affection. Our natural tendency when sin crops up, when addiction or idolatry crops up is to wrestle with the struggle. To struggle in the muck and the mire, to wrestle with our sin. More times than not, when obsessively try to conquer a sin, it is a sisyphian task. The key to overcoming sin, addiction, idolatry is expulsive affection. Essentially when we lift Christ higher. We decrease when he increases. The more we fall in love with Jesus the more we long to live holy, missional, righteous lives.

Illus- News story recently, and it said one of the greatest markets for counterfeit merchandise was right here in Dallas. People love having the appearance with none of the cost. Gucci. Prada. You fill in the blank, some people cannot let go of pursuing counterfeits. All of the appearance, none of the cost. Truly, the people who are not caught up in counterfeits are not ones who have studied how bad the counterfeits are. Rather, when someone studies the original- its craftsmanship, its value, they no longer want the counterfeit.

This is a picture of expulsive affection. We are not to become obsessed with ridding our lives

of counterfeits, instead when we become obsessed with the genuine article, we will lose our desire for the counterfeit. And the counterfeit today is our own godlikeness. Our inability to relinquish control, desire, goals for his sake.

The solution then is found in elevating Christ. He will become our expulsive affection. Our obsession with him will help us let loose of our control. Our focus on him will allow us to hand over the reins or get off the throne.

Matthew 12- Jesus speaks of a person being healed from demonic control, and he says if we simply clean the house (purge it of sins) and yet do not fill it with something new, then our state will be worse off than when we began.

If Jesus is God then I am not.

Colossians 1:15-20

Inclusio of sorts. Big word for the simple idea. Think of it like bookends. V.15- He is the image of the invisible God. V.19- it was the Father's pleasure to let all his fullness dwell in Jesus. In between, he states the attributes of Christ and the work of Christ- but the element that holds it all together is simple- Jesus is God. He is the image of God- the incarnational picture. ALL of God's fullness dwells in Jesus.

This is the foundation of Paul's exhortation to the syncretistic tendencies of the Colossian church and also for us. There is no ungodlike thing in Jesus. Whatever Jesus did, what he spoke, how he lived, his love, his teaching- is a perfect manifestation of our God.

The greek word for image here is eikon. Our word icon- is derived from this root. He is the image, snapshot, picture of the invisible God. Our God whom we have not seen hitherto is personified, embodied in Jesus Christ. All that he is, is all that God is.

So back to the beginning there are countless ways that we as Christians usurp the throne of Christ. We blend our desires, our dreams, our pursuits with his, and we use the Bible to justify our behavior. If Jesus is the image of the invisible God, if all the fullness of God resides within the person and work of Jesus Christ then we should be able to hold up any words or actions of Jesus as a litmus test to our life.

We can peruse the scripture looking for loopholes to justify our wealth or materialism, but when you hold up the image of Jesus- he says very clearly beware of earthly riches and greed. He says it is hard for the wealthy to enter the Kingdom.

We can peruse the scriptures and find loopholes for our sexual immorality- but when you hold up the image of Jesus we hear very clearly- if you even lust after another person's spouse, you are committing adultery.

We can peruse the scriptures and find loopholes for our prejudice- but when you hold up the image of Jesus we hear very clearly- love your enemies.

We can mitigate and dilute the Christian life all we want as we crawl up onto the throne of our lives, but when we hold up the image of Jesus there is rarely much wiggle room. If you have to explain and justify your sexual immorality, your greed, your anger or hatred by going on a meandering disjointed proof-text journey in scripture, then you might need to take a look at your life. Maybe you have crawled up on the throne, maybe you have taken the wheel, maybe your ways have become higher than his ways.

If Jesus is God then you are not. That means his teachings are not suggestions. That means his commands are not optional. That means following him does not have an escape clause. If Jesus is God then I am not.

Paul touches on three portions of the work and person of Christ, let's look at them and their implications.

- If Jesus is the creator then I am not.
- v.16-17 All things were created through Him and for Him. Through Him all things hold together. He made this world and he is the glue that holds it together.
- I sometimes forget my place in this world. We sit humbly and sometimes tenuously on a small blue marble in a relatively small solar system in a relatively small galaxy. We circle one star in our galaxy that by some estimates holds up to 200 billion stars. That sounds enormous until you consider one of the closest galaxies to our own the Andromeda galaxy that is estimated to have some 1 trillion stars in it. If that doesn't make you feel small, consider the fact there are some 30 plus galaxies, all hosting billions of stars in our local group of galaxies, which are but a blip on the massive radar of the entire universe.
- Illus- universe- guesstimate- From here to Arlington and then up to frisco and then 100,00 feet or 20 miles high. Earth would be the size of the speck of sand in one corner of this building. And on that speck, there is an atom sized being walking around- that's you.
- John the Baptist in the Gospel of John- says He must increase and I must decrease. If this snapshot of the universe and your place doesn't help you decrease, then I don't know what will. If Jesus is the creator then you are not. If Jesus is God then you are not.
- And Jesus created all of it. By him and *for him*. We exist for his pleasure- we exist by his grace.
- So what we do with our bodies, this creation, has Gospel implications. When we sit on the throne, we have a problem.
- If Jesus is Lord then I am not
- V.18- He is the head. He is the beginning. He will come to have first place in everything.
- The phrase Lord is bandied about in Christian circles so much so that it has lost its luster, its power. Lord is not an English title bestowed upon Jesus. He is not a worthy dignitary. He is the head. The beginning. The first of all things. A better word would be boss.
- If Jesus is the boss then I am not. If he is in charge then I am not. We live in such an individualistic/ autonomous society that submission is a lost art. Subjecting yourself to anyone's will is rarely seen. Especially to our bosses at work- while we may honor them with our words while in their presence, deep in our mind echoes the reoccurring phrase- "you aren't the boss of me." You can't tell me what to do. Because we often drift towards becoming gods or demi-gods, it becomes more and more difficult for us to follow instructions. From our days as a toddler, to our days in the workforce, to being pulled over by the police, to ignoring our spouse, or whatever the case may be we cling to our own self-importance- "you are not the boss of me."
- Illus- OBU- asking for spices for a campout for a few friends. Said it was a class campout. Technically we were sophomores and this was a camping trip, but this was a white lie. In order to avoid purchasing \$8 worth of spice at the store, I chose to be a bit deceptive. Some 30 minutes later I was talking to some friends, and something unexpected came up and I cried out "Jesus Christ." I had never taken the Lord's name in vain in that way before- it was shocking to me. But in that instant God gripped my

heart, I was so worried about verbally taking his name in vain, but I hadn't realized that I had done the same thing with my actions. I had sullied his name as I wore it. The whitest of lies, the most benign obfuscation- and yet I was choosing my way over his. I uttered in that moment something much more dangerous- you aren't the boss of me. Not for this special situation, not for this thing that I want or need. I feel inclined to circumvent your headship for the sake of my benefit.

- Daily, we are inclined on a large scale or a small scale to cry out, "you aren't the boss of me." Not overtly with our words- we would never be so standoffish against God, but with our actions. For every little white lie, for every sexual indiscretion, for every time fudge the truth on our taxes- we are asserting our Lordship. We are crawling up on the throne.
- If Jesus is savior then we are not
- V.19-20 By His cross, he is reconciling all things to himself. Essentially- this is pointing to the salvific work of Christ. He is creator, Lord and savior. He alone saves. At the heart of this truth is the reminder that we have very little control. Jesus says in Matthew, in the sermon on the mount, who of you by worrying can change anything. You can't save a hair on your head, you are not in control. In fact you are so out of control that you need a savior, you need one who will reconcile all things to himself. He made this world, he is in charge of this world, and he will reconcile it the way he sees fit. All you can do is trust in his saving grace.
- We have bought into the illusion of control. We have 10 year plans for our professional career, we vote certain ways to put in policies of how we think things should work, we follow certain diets or take certain pills to avoid certain diseases. In all situations of control, we are hoping to save ourselves. We are hoping to reconcile things on our own, to get a desired outcome.
- But we live in fallen world where you can have a 10 year plan and still get laid off in when a recession hits. We can vote a certain way only to be disappointed when our country continues to spiral downwards, we can take pills and follow diets only to die at a young age from cancer or even natural causes. We need a savior, a reconciler because we have no control.
- Illus- This becomes clear to all of us at different points in our lives. A team meeting I began to weep. I came to grips with the fact that I had no control. Many of you prayed that next day, and staff surrounded me to pray for me. We went to the specialist the next day- and He saw nothing. I praised God in that moment- only he can reconcile things in this life- only he can save, the illusion of control is tempting but it never pans out. If Jesus is the savior, then I am not. If Jesus is God then I am not.

Conclusion: I have fond memories of the house I grew up in. Mainly because of everyone that lived there, my parents, my 3 brothers and I. And for quite a while my grandma and grandpa moved in. My grandfather had parkinsons, and so he couldn't communicate well and he had little strength. In the middle of our living room was an old green chair. It was grandpa's chair. It was his throne. He would plop down in it as a place of comfort and calm. It was perfectly contoured to his body. As a little boy, I was drawn to this prized chair. I loved to crawl up in it, I liked the feeling of power being in such a prominent position. Sometimes my grandfather would mosey into the room while I sat in his green polyester throne. But because of his inability to communicate and his lack of strength, he would not remove me from that chair. I would see his gaze, but he wouldn't say a word. He wouldn't force me out. But I learned

something beautiful overtime, if I would relinquish the green polyester throne, I would get an even better perch. Whenever I relinquished the throne I could crawl up in his lap. While it was comfortable in and of itself, it was so much better to sit in the lap of the one who it rightfully belonged to. This is the picture I want to leave you with this morning. Many of you are sitting on a throne that does not belong to you. It might feel comfortable, but it isn't right. You don't fit there, you don't belong there. If you will relinquish it today, you will get the best seat in the house, You can crawl up into the arms of Jesus and watch as he does something beautiful with your life. If Jesus is God then you are not.