

**“No Turning Back”**

Galatians 1: 10-24

Rev. Ed Hoekstra

**The Most Important Question:** When you ask teenagers what is the most important thing in their life, the answer will often be, “What will I become?” Another question would be, “Where will I go to university?” As life goes on there is the question about who I will marry, or whether I will get married. Those who are older and getting closer to retirement, the question often is this: “What will I do in my retirement”?

**Who will you believe?** As we are in worship today, I want to suggest to you that the most important question is the same for all of us. The question is “who will you believe” or “who do you belong to?” This question is actually the starting point because the answer to that question will shape your life, guide you in determining who you will become, and have an impact on your relationships, your employment, etc.

**<sup>11</sup> For I want you to know, brothers and sisters,<sup>[a]</sup> that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; <sup>12</sup> for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.** Paul is asking the people of the Church of Galatia the same question: “Who will you believe?” Will you believe the one who gives you human wisdom, or will you believe the source of wisdom-Jesus Christ. Paul is pleading with the congregation at Galatia to not turn back to the old way – the human contrived belief which leads to abuse of power and control. Rather live in the freedom of Christ who loves you by his grace and not because of good works you may have achieved.

**<sup>15</sup> But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased <sup>16</sup> to reveal his Son to me,<sup>[b]</sup> so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being....** Paul saw his conversion experience not as a last minute idea from God to use Paul for spreading the Good News of the Gospel. Paul understood from the experience that God’s will for him was already in action before he was born.

**“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before I was born, I consecrated you; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations (Jeremiah 1:5).”**

These words applied to the prophet Jeremiah, then to Paul, and to us today! Theologian Eugene Peterson explains that we are not random until one day God takes notice of us. We are not merely the result of a sexual union and therefore by chance we are alive. The Bible teaches us that we are set apart and pre-loved by God. The statement ‘Through his grace’ (as Paul puts it in verse 15) - does not mean God looks at a group of people and decides who will best ‘do the job’ and get it done. ‘Through his grace’ means that God has a capacity so large in love and purpose that he calls us in order to do something for us – in order to give us something. That gift is Grace!

One could say that God confronted Paul and said to him he had it wrong. It is like God saying to Paul that he had some good ideas, he was sincere and had some intelligent theology, but he had it wrong. Paul thought religion was about the knowledge of things and doing things. That is not the case. Rather, it is about allowing God to do something for you – letting God love you and bless you and letting God guide and direct your life. In seeing the grace of God in Christ, Paul was changed from having his life be about what he had done and was doing, to being about God and what God has done and is doing in his life and in the world. Paul realized through the resurrected Christ that God is the living centre of life. In other words, we live not by our own will but by obedient faith. Paul wanted the people in Galatia to live in the freedom of God's grace and not be restricted and manipulated by human religious teaching which focuses more on human accomplishment and less on Christ. In Christ alone, our hope is found – do not turn back to religion which focuses on human will.

**Conversion and Commission:** Certainly, the benefits of being a Christian are abundant. In accepting Christ, one becomes more aware of the gifts God provides in everyday life. That awareness provides a wonderful epiphany and joy. Theologian Karl Barth cautions Christians, however, to not stop with the benefits of God and thereby not respond with God's commission of sharing the Good News with others. Paul, for example, does not focus on the benefits he received of joy, peace and security when he met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. Instead, Paul points to the mission he had been directed to – “...to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim Him among the gentiles (vs. 16)”. Through the sharing of the Good News, the benefits are multiplied.

Paul came to realization that he was not his own, but belonged to God and desired to be obedient to God who's nature is grace. Paul came to understand that Christ alone was where his hope was found, and not in human achievement, world fame or success.

Theologian Henri Nouwen asks the question: “To whom do I belong? Do I belong to God or to the world?” Too often a little criticism can make us angry, and a small amount of rejection can make us depressed. A little praise and success raises our spirits. Nouwen shares that it takes very little to raise him up or thrust him down. Like a small boat on the ocean, completely at the mercy of its waves, too much time and energy is spent in keeping some kind of balance to prevent the boat from tipping over. Is your life mostly a struggle for survival? Too often our struggle is not a Holy one but an anxious one coming from the mistaken idea that the world defines us. Remember, in God's steadfast love, He defines you!

Paul emphasised very strongly for the people of the Galatian church to live in freedom of the Grace found in our Lord Jesus Christ. Do not turn back to the false human Gospel. Receive the gifts of God's unconditional love (God's grace) today and allow the Holy Spirit to assure you of your identity in His grace. Amen.