

No Turning Back

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Date: 09 June 2019

Preacher: Vijay Henderson

[0 : 0 0] Here is a question that I'd like to start with you. Would you ever swap an Australian passport for a North Korean one? Would you?

Maybe you are still waiting for an Australian passport for you and your family, but when you finally get it, would you swap it for a North Korean one? Of course not. How silly.

North Korea is not a free country, is it? No free private ownership, no free movement, no free speech, no free elections. The constitution of North Korea says this.

It says it is a dictatorship of people's democracy. I think that's an oxymoron, isn't it? No free internet, no proper infrastructure, no restaurants or cafes, no cafe lattes, no wealth, no private wealth, but only lots of starvation and extreme poverty in the rural areas.

But more than anything, no freedom of religion. No freedom just to roll up at 8.30 in a car and turn up to church at 9 o'clock. No freedom to worship. According to Open Doors USA and the CMS, North Korea is the number one persecutor of Christians, and it has been for 18 years in a row.

[1 : 1 8] What a terrible claim to fame that is. No way, no way would we swap an Australian passport for a North Korean one.

Because life in North Korea is like slavery. But that is exactly what these Galatians are doing in our passage. They were mature Christians, they were going well because they trusted in Jesus.

But some false teachers had fooled them into thinking that they must keep some laws to be right with God. So the false teachers said this, Hey, if you really want to be children of Abraham, if you really want to inherit his blessings, you must observe circumcision and other Jewish laws.

Because after all, that's what all the children of Abraham did. That's what all his heirs did. And Paul has attacked this issue from a number of different angles so far in our book.

But today is the pinnacle of his argument. And he's going to say that going from faith to works, from trusting Jesus to the law, is like going from freedom to slavery.

[2 : 3 4] Like going from Australia to North Korea. The end of his argument, have a look, it's 5 verse 1 over the page. We're going to get to a point where Paul says, Stand firm then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Now, they are Galatia, we are Holy Trinity. But we too are a mature church, we are going well. We don't follow Jewish laws here, we're not tempted to.

But there are so many Christian traditions and habits, things that we might easily turn into laws, into must-dos that we must do to feel more secure with God.

And so standing firm is for us as well. We need to stand firm on the path of faith and not go back to the path of works and effort and performance.

It would be like swapping our Australian passport for a North Korean one. Like going from freedom to slavery. And so what Paul's going to do is show us three reasons, three reasons to stand firm.

[3 : 45] They're the three points on your handout. Please keep that with you. And let me read from verse 8, chapter 4, verse 8. These verses are full of relationship language.

You see, the Galatians thought they had to earn a relationship with God. But Paul says, hang on, you know God. Rather, you are known by God. You're already in a relationship with Him.

See, they received the Holy Spirit, which means God is living inside them. They're in closest relationship with God. They're already right with Him. They're already His sons and daughters, already inheritors of His blessings or whatever else the false teachers were selling.

They've got it all already. They didn't even have to keep laws to earn this status in the first place. They already received it the moment they first heard and believed in Jesus.

Imagine if a son says to a father, hey, Dad, I'm going to go out there and I'm going to work for a relationship with you. I'm going to try and earn inheritance.

[5 : 11] That would be crazy. Why? Because he already has it all. That's how it is with sons. The Galatians were fooled into thinking they had to earn a relationship that they already had.

And even though they were free people, Paul asks verse 9, do you wish to be enslaved all over again? You see, the thing about slavery, apart from the whips and the beating, the thing about slavery is it's a very cruel and never-ending cycle.

Because no matter how hard the slave works, you know, he's not earning a paycheck each day. He's not working towards a retirement or a pension plan. It's a cycle of futility.

Remember Israel when they were in slavery in Egypt? Pharaoh was never going to say, well done, you busy little Hebrews. Here is a house and some money for all your back-breaking labor.

It was never going to happen. They work till they die with nothing to show. No paycheck, no reward. A cruel and futile existence.

[6 : 23] That's how it is with slaves. And in verse 10, we see the Galatians walking themselves back into slavery. Have a look at what they do.

They began observing special days and months and seasons and years. Do you wish to be enslaved all over again? Asks Paul.

Because you'll never observe enough days to please God. His standards are too high. That is the path of slavery.

A never-ending, futile, no reward existence. We will never get to a point where God says, well done, good and faithful servant.

You have kept the Ten Commandments for 50 years. Your church attendance has been fantastic in that time. You've proven yourself worthy of heaven. Come into your master's rest.

[7 : 20] The path of religious works, of keeping the law, it is futile. It's also very cruel. Last week, Judy Frankish, where is she?

There she is. Judy told me this amazing story and when she told me, I thought I have to tell you. I think I've got this right, Judy. You can correct me later. So Judy was telling me about relatives of hers in America where their 92-year-old grandmother is dying in hospital.

And the family told Judy that the grandmother was in hospital terrified. She was terrified that she had not done enough to please God in her life as she now prepared to meet him.

And so Judy straight away told them some of the things we've been talking about in our sermon series, you know, that we are right with God because we trust in Jesus, not because of religious things that we do.

And in Catholic Church for 92 years, no one had ever told this lady that until two weeks ago on a Sunday when Judy spoke up.

[8 : 29] Ask Judy about the timing of how these things worked out. It's one of those God-only miracles. It's fantastic. And the family said that the grandmother was so happy that after 92 years of slavery, she's free.

Isn't that wonderful? Here is a church already free, already children of God, free from having to keep the law until they were led down or back down the path of slavery into a life of must-dos, into a life of things they could never fully do to please God.

It's a life of uncertainty and terror like this poor old lady. It's a life of slavery. Paul says, stand firm on the path of faith because you're already sons and daughters of God and not slaves.

That's reason number one. Reason number two I'm going to be brief about. Reason number two is all about the false teachers. Now we've never really spoken much about them. They've always been these pantomime villains.

You're like, where is he? He's behind you. Where? You know, like, well actually, what Paul does is give us a little bit of a portrait of what these villains, these false teachers are like.

[9 : 53] So verse 16 suggests that they thought Paul and the truth were the enemy. Verse 17 says they are zealous to win over the Galatians, which means they're really eager to please them, to get their approval.

So they flatter and they use smooth talk. They pander, but Paul says for no good. their mission is to, it says, to alienate you from us.

That is to shut them out from the truth of the gospel, from the Bible. Why? So that you may have zeal for them. So in other words, these false teachers, they appear to be on people's sides, but they're only in it for their own fame, their own prestige.

They use smooth talk and flattery. Paul says they have the right chat, but ultimately they're enemies of the truth. Now, it seems odd that people would welcome false teachers like that into their church, but this is really important.

Remember this, every bit of false teaching has a nugget of truth in it. That's how they get in the door in the first place. No one comes to the church and says, I hate Jesus, and we say, oh, would you like the pulpit?

[11 : 08] No, it starts with a nugget of truth. They all say, Jesus is Lord, and they get into the pulpit and do terrible things. That's how they get in. circumcision, observing special days, they're mentioned in the Bible somewhere, so you must do them to be saved.

That sounds correct, doesn't it? Sounds like a true thing. Maybe it is a salvation thing, but their lies were designed to flatter, to deceive, to tug at our emotions for no good purpose.

Now, today for us, we don't have a powerful group of Jewish people running the Anglican Diocese, or our church council, so we're not going to fall for lies about circumcision and observing Sabbaths, but here's the thing, I wonder what other lies or flattery we might be susceptible to.

We all have long-held Christian traditions, don't we? Many of these traditions are mentioned in the Bible somewhere, we're creatures of habit when it comes to Sunday worship, many things we do we could elevate into salvation things given the right nudge or the right manipulation.

So, we think God is more acceptable of this style of baptism than that, that Jesus actually prefers the wine and not the great juice. We think that the Holy Spirit really loves the hymns and he actually hates all that happy clappy music.

[12 : 39] We have our own ideas about what Holy Trinity must do on a Sunday, which political party Christians must vote for, what our position on things such as relationships and gender and equality and immigration and climate change must be.

It would not be as hard as we think for someone or something to tug or manipulate these Christian opinions and make them into laws, into works, into must do's.

But unlike the false teachers, Paul is willing to be thought of as their enemy. He doesn't care to flatter or smooth talk his way in.

He's willing to be thought of as their enemy if it means standing for the truth. You see, that's how it is with parents. Parents are always willing to be hated by the kids if it means telling the truth and sticking to their guns.

that's how Paul describes himself in verse 19. He says, My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.

[13 : 50] Paul is the best sort of mother. He nurtures his babies with truth, even if they hate him. He's willing to go through the labour pains all over again to teach them about Jesus all over again if it means that Jesus can be formed in them.

Standing firm with Paul and the truth means sometimes having to remain with what's harder to hear. Standing firm with the truth means not twisting the Bible to suit our own agendas or feelings.

When church leaders stand firm, it might mean they can't pander or flatter us the way we like. But standing firm with Paul and the truth is the only thing that grows Christ in us.

Or until Christ is formed in us the way a baby is formed in its mother. Paul says stand firm on the path of faith because you're already in a relationship with God.

Stand firm because the truth grows Christ in us. And finally stand firm because the law only produces slaves. excuse me. Let me read from verse 21.

[15 : 08] Tell me you who want to be under the law are you not aware what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh.

But his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise. These verses retell the famous story of Abraham's family.

The argument is a little bit technical and we won't go through all the verses but what you need to remember is this connection to Abraham is everything. It's at the heart of all the big religions in the world and it's at the heart of this issue in Galatia.

You remember Abraham's story? His son Ishmael was born first because Sarah refused to wait for God to bless Abraham with a son and so Sarah took matters into her own hands and she forced Hagar into sleeping with Abraham and thus little Ishmael was born.

Paul says the incident with Hagar represents the path of works that is trying to earn God's blessings via human effort doing it yourself. Verse 23 calls it according to the flesh.

[16 : 22] Hagar is similar to the law in that way because both are a path of human effort for reward. verse 25 says now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia.

Remember Mount Sinai is where God gave Moses the law so Hagar equals the law. On the other hand Isaac's birth was a miracle. Remember Isaac was born impossibly he was born when Sarah and Abraham were in their 90s.

Verse 23 says as the result of a divine promise. And this is the important bit verse 24 These things are being taken figuratively.

The women represent two covenants. What Paul is saying is this these two women Sarah and Hagar and their two children represent two ways to approach God.

Hagar is the way of works and the law whereas Isaac is the way of faith trusting God. Paul says that approaching God via the law is like being an Ishmael not an Isaac because that's exactly how Ishmael was born human effort not faith in God.

[17 : 36] And this is the whammy bit this is the sledge hammer verse 25 Now Hagar stands to Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem because she is in slavery with her children.

You see these false teachers think that they are making true sons of Abraham they think they're producing little Isaacs if you want to be Abraham's children get circumcised that's what they're saying and you can be like Isaac you can share in Abraham's blessings Paul says they are producing slaves from Jerusalem because their path is the path of law of effort it's the opposite to trusting God and way back then little Ishmael was offended by little Isaac because Isaac's birth meant that Ishmael had lost his firstborn status he was relegated and verse 29 at that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the spirit Paul says it is the same now it's not a one off sibling rivalry it is the same now it's a general principle it's the same now in Galatia they were offended by Paul's gospel that faith alone was the right way to

God and so they turned the whole church against Paul it's the same now in Melbourne to say that only faith in Jesus will save you will be met with hostility can you imagine saying to a religious person well I can see how devout you are but you need to trust in Jesus that's how you get right with God they'll say but why I've been going to mass or to temple or to the mosque all my life I say my prayers I give to charity I'm a good person yes that's how Ishmael think but you see Isaacs that is Christians we know how God counts his family we know what the mark of Abraham is it is faith not circumcision not works of the law it's not a religious resume that pleases God it's offensive for good and devout people to learn that they are Ishmael and not Isaacs it's offensive to suggest that we are in just because we trust in

Jesus it's offensive to say that people can't save themselves and just as Ishmael persecuted Isaac it is the same now people persecute Christians maybe you've experienced persecution in your family or in your workplace just for being a Christian Christians are the most persecuted religion in the world by far in Syria Iran Iraq India Pakistan China Eritrea Nigeria Sudan Somalia England America Canada Australia New Zealand and of course where we started in North Korea where they shoot Christians on the spot for their faith don't expect anything other than hostility if you go the way of faith if you stand firm with the gospel the temptation will always be to soften our stance to avoid some of this persecution to soften our stance to be more people pleasing to those around us to teach that other paths are acceptable too verse 30 what what does the scripture say get rid of the slave woman and her son for the slave woman son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman son you see

Paul is not interested in a superficial unity he's not interested in blending faith and works the way the Roman Catholic church does he says for the slave woman will never share in the inheritance with the free woman son the way of Hagar will never share in the way of Sarah you're either an Isaac or an Ishmael you're either a slave or you're free you're either Australian or a North Korean you can't be both Paul wasn't angry because they disagreed with him Paul was angry because they thought they could blend faith and works that they could teach another path to God other than faith alone in Jesus stand firm he says on the path of faith the way we stand firm is we get rid of that teaching get rid of that temptation in us to want to trust in other things other than the cross Paul says you're already free children that teaching those temptations they only produce slaves

[22:17] Paul says get rid of it chapter 5 verse 1 it is for freedom that Christ has set us free we are free because of Jesus from the demands of the law demands we could never fulfill anyway we are free from the guilt of our sin because of Jesus cross we are free from the wrath of God we are free from the hypnotic temptation of the world the flesh and the devil we are free from looking to our traditions to have hope in them we are free from earning our way to heaven because of what Jesus has done for us is that amazing I was talking to a gentleman at 1030 his family used to be Muslims until last year they came to our church they came to our Christianity explored course actually and they became Christians and he's a lot like you he's a businessman a really great guy great family and he was telling me he said you know these things you keep saying about freedom in

Christ and faith not works he said I look around the church and I see lots of Australians he goes you've all been Christians a long time and you don't seem to be amazed by that and he said until you've been a Muslim for 52 years and you know the slavery of having to keep the laws he goes you won't really appreciate what it means to be free in Christ I thought isn't that something lots of us have been Christians all our lives we take it for granted that we are free imagine if we had to keep laws or moral performance or church anything that you could imagine if we had to do them to be right with God full of must do the only must do in the Bible for salvation is to trust in Jesus I wonder if we take that for granted how easy it is how naturally it's come to us because of where we've grown up and the families we were brought up in

Paul says it is for freedom that Christ has set us free stand firm on the path of faith and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery should I pray that we would stand firm let's do that Father God help us to stand firm help us to stand firm on Christ alone there are so many things in our lives good things things that we tend to trust in to feel more secure with you please help us get rid of them please put our reliance only in the cross of Jesus thank you that we are free from earning our way to heaven please make us more reliant on Jesus as if for the very first time like this grandmother in America like this ex Muslim gentleman at 1030 church please help us be amazed by what

Jesus has won for us in his name amen