

“Life-Change” Galatians 1:10 – 24

Intro

“Am I now trying to win human approval, or God’s approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not

of human origin. I did not receive it from any human source, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely

zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.

Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days.

I saw none of the other apostles – only James, the Lord’s brother. I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: “The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.” And they praised God because of me.”

On my bookshelf at home I have a number of auto-biographies. Who here likes biographies and auto-biographies?

So for example I have Graham Henry’s biography and Richard McCaw’s autobiography.

The great thing about these is that you are given a glimpse into someone else’s life story. You get the facts, times, places and

dates that provide insight into the experiences each person enjoyed, alongside their motivations and triumphs and failures.

Alongside these I also have another autobiographical book by a guy called Brother Andrew – “God’s Smuggler”. It’s the story of how he risked his life smuggling Bibles into Communist Eastern Europe in the 1960’s.

During that time he has a car.

It was used a VB. He drove this car literally thousands of kilometres and all the travel took its toll on the poor vehicle.

So every morning he and a fellow missionary would pray together, “Lord, we don’t have either the time or the money for repairs on the car, so will You please keep it running?”

He continues, “One day we were dusting along a mountain road when up ahead we spotted a small truck coming towards us. As it pulled alongside, we also stopped.

“Hello,” said the driver. “I believe I know who you are. You’re the Dutch missionary going to preach in Terna tonight.

“That’s right.”

“And this is the Miracle Car?”

“The Miracle Car?”

“I mean the car you pray for each morning.”

I had to laugh. I mentioned the prayer in a previous meeting, and word had obviously gone ahead. “Yes,” I admitted, “this is the car.”

“Mind if I take a look at her? I’m a mechanic.”

“I’d appreciate it.”

I had put gasoline in that engine, and that was literally all since I had crossed the border. The mechanic went around to the rear and lifted the hood over the motor.

For a long time he stood there, just staring.

“Brother Andrew,” he said at last, “I have just become a believer. It’s mechanically impossible for this car to run. Look. The air filter. The carburettor. The spark-plugs. No, I’m sorry, this car cannot run.”

“And yet it’s taken us thousands of miles.”

The mechanic only shook his head. “Brother,” he said, “would you permit me to clean your engine for you and give you a change of oil? It hurts me to see you abuse a miracle.”

Gratefully we followed the man to his village a few miles from Terna. We pulled behind him into a little courtyard filled with pigs and geese. That night while we preached he took the engine apart, cleaned it piece by piece, changed the oil, and by the time we were ready to leave the next morning, presented us with a grinning new automobile. God had answered our prayer.”¹

What drove Brother Andrew (literally and figuratively) and Paul and many others is this:
the gospel, the good news of King Jesus.

But as we have heard, it wasn't always like that for Paul. I mean, he had reputation. He used to be the guy that raised havoc wherever went in his persecution of believers. He was the guy that when you him coming, you ran for the hills. He was a persecutor of the church, he was zealous, he was passionate and extremely academically trained in Judaism...

And then we read, “But when God...” Paul encounters Jesus on the Damascus and in his encounter with Jesus he encounters God's grace – God's unearned, unmerited, undeserved kindness.

And that can happen for us. You are can brought into an unimpeded relationship with God through Jesus. You can receive pardon. You can receive forgiveness. You are born anew. You are regenerated. You receive a new status; you become a child of God. You receive eternal life; a new quality of life now and new quality of life after you die. Not only that, but one of the effects, the outcomes, the fruit of the Gospel is *life-change*.

In our reading this morning, Paul was a changed man. This guy is altered. He is a different person. He has a different orientation in life. He goes from full-on persecutor to full-on proclaimer: “The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.”

¹ Brother Andrew, *God's Smuggler* (Hodder & Stoughton: London, 1972), 120 – 121.

So my question this morning for us is, how does real life change occur?
How do you get people to be different?

Does it kind of just 'happen'?
Or is there intentionality needed?

You know Cromwell Presbyterian, I'm troubled when I meet someone and they're a grumpy Christian.
Then I meet them 10 years later and they're still a grumpy Christian.
Then I meet them again another 10 years later and they're an even grumpier Christian.

Everyone wants to make progress in their lives; in your relationships, in your education or employment, in your sport and so.
And for Christian it's progress in regards to your walk with God.

So what do you think:

"How does life change occur?"

Tell the person next to you.
If you feel comfortable tell them about your story.

Now, all life-change is brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit.
The ways in which He chooses to do this work may differ.

So there are broadly four modes or means by which life change occurs in no particular order (nd these aren't entirely mine).
There is:

- ***Counselling***

Good counselling does two things. One, it will give you insights into your behaviour, and two, it will give you tools to help in dealing with that behaviour.

Counselling is about making you more self-aware.

For example, say someone has an issue around anger. A counsellor will help you see some of the root causes. It could be what was modelled to you as you grew up; it be around feeling powerless, or even a sense of not being respected, or any number of causes. And it's like, you have these "Aha!" moments.

Or the issue screen-sex. A counsellor will say there are ways and means to amend your behaviour and create new habits. And the issue may not be about sex at all. In maybe linked with deep sense of aloneness and need for intimacy.

There is:

- **Choosing**

In other words, "You can do it!"

"God said it. You better believe it. Now just do it!"

You've to make a decision.

You have to make choices.

It's about an attitude adjustment.

Choosing is about an appeal to the will – your stubborn will.

So with anger it's you need an attitude adjustment; you need to sort yourself out and get a grip.

Another way is in

- **Community**

This is a quote I read came across:

"If you want to do something that is really hard, and you want to push yourself to the limits, if you want to be constantly tested in love, if you want to live into your ultimate destiny – if you want to learn to be holy and blameless in love before God – there is no better place to do that than in the local church."

You come face to face with the flaws of others.

You come face to face with yourself.

Not only that though, in community you experience welcome.

You have people cheering you on.

They have your back.

If you fall down they help you back up.

You have people praying with you.

You have people who speak truth and encouragement into your life.

I can say that when I first became a believer, I was so worried about what others thought about me.

I was so scared of being rejected.

Being part of a community called the church I found acceptance.

I suddenly found, oh I can be myself.

It changed me.

Then one more:

- **Connecting**

Connecting with... the Holy Spirit.

You see when you become a follower of Jesus, you receive pardon, you are born anew, you are given a new status as a child of God, you receive eternal life.

But I need you to listen in:

When that happens something else happens, and it's this – another Life comes to live in your life.

This other life is the life of God's third self – God the Holy Spirit.

And for life change to happen in whatever issue you are facing, you need a pray-er.

And in whatever you are facing It will be replaced, overcome, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So this new life replaces the old with the new.

The Holy Spirit will release what's good and replace the bad.

So I would say most of us would be familiar with these.

Do we see these in the story of Paul?

Well yes. I encourage you to look up Acts chapter 9.

When you read Acts 9 you see the finer details of Paul's conversion.

So did he have community? Yes.

In Acts 9 the believers cared for him, looked after him and protected him (twice actually).

Was there choosing? Yes.

Especially here in Galatians Paul is a decision maker.

Was there connection with the Holy Spirit via a pray-er? Yes.

In Acts 9 he was prayed for that might be filled with the Spirit.

Was there counselling?

Not in terms of what we think of today but he did spend with Peter and James and they would have given him pointers and suggestion for this new life he had received.

So my final question is this – in terms of us seeing life-change, growing in our walk with God,

“Which one is best?”

What do you think?

Who would say counselling?

Overwhelmingly, without a doubt, most people would say today would say counselling.

If you have issue, if you are seeking life-change, then counselling is the way to go.

The demand for counselling today is huge.

Who would say choosing?

60 years ago I would say it would have been choosing – *you have to make choices.*

You have to take a stand!

More recently it has fallen on hard times. And today you don't dare suggest that there are certain decisions that are in your hands to make.

Who would say community?

I think from what I've observed younger people and younger generations are discovering the power of community.

How about connecting with Holy Spirit via a pray-er?

So which one is best?

Well, They all are.

They can all be used by God to bring about good, positive life-change into our lives.

They all have their place.

The problem is when we just do one and the expense of all the others.

It will be different for different churches.

It could be exclusively counselling.

Now please hear me: I do not want to disparage counselling in any way.

I've had counselling. (You're probably thinking, that's not surprising – why did you stop???)

It absolutely has its place.

However, you exclusively focus of on counselling as a way forward in your in spiritual life, you can find that you always looking at your stuff, you know, navel-gazing.

If it's always choosing, it's having to just do it!, always depending on willpower alone, can be exhausting.

And can cause to striving in our strength in areas where we simply do not have the power to overcome.

If you exclusively focus on community as a way forward in your Christian walk then you will not develop a relationship of your own with God *and* you will become dependent on the faith of others.

And if your Christian community finds itself in strife you're whole Christian faith is at stake.

And focusing exclusively on the Spirit can create passivity, waiting for God to act when in fact God is waiting for us to act.

So to finish, is there an area where you'd like to see progress, to life-change in you walk with God, and what season are you in?

In other words you have an area that's affecting you Christian life and this is a season to go for counselling?

OR maybe it's been counselling and now you just knuckle and act.

Or you may have done counselling and knuckle down but now it's time to be open to the Holy Spirit through the prayers of others.

Or it's season where the community of believers is vital.